

*This book is dedicated to all the cheerleaders in my life -
you know who you are and I'd be lost without you.*

Thank you.

*You are also my darling family – Terry, Beth, Eva and
Nancy – whose love underpins everything.*

Be Confident

Your 100 day guide

JO EMERSON



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been removed.

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Introduction

So, Why Are You Here?

I want you to imagine that you've just arrived at my coaching practice for your first in a series of confidence-building sessions. This is a big day for you because you're finally doing something about your low self-esteem. Your feelings are mostly positive but, if you're like the majority of my clients, you'll also be feeling slightly nervous and a little cautious about what the coaching process might involve. 'What is she going to ask me to do? How much should I tell her? Will this really work?' you ask yourself.

After an initial chat I ask you, 'So, why are you here?'

Your answer will likely sound something like one of these statements:

I struggle with self-doubt and question myself all the time.

I'm not doing as well as other people.

I'm stuck – I want to change but I don't know how.

My boss says I need to be more assertive, and I need to talk more in meetings.

I've got the job, the partner, the house, the kids, the cars and the holidays but I still don't feel right.

I worry what people think of me all the time.

I can't make a decision for fear of making the wrong one.

I lose confidence with strangers and small talk.

I don't look right.

My ex-partner (ex-boss/ex-best friend/parents/teachers) destroyed my confidence.

I just feel like I'm not good enough.

As you're a new client, I'm keen to hear how this low confidence, overwhelm, inertia and/or self-doubt is manifesting in your life. So, we spend a little more time exploring exactly what happens when you clam up in meetings or precisely what it is that you feel isn't 'good enough', for example.

In my experience, it's likely that the real reason you have arrived at my coaching practice to work on your confidence is not the thing you have just described. So, I go on to suggest that your answer to my question, 'So, why are you here?' is the symptom not the cause, and that my job as your coach, if you'll let me, is to dig about in your mind using a series of questions and exercises to find the root of the problem. Then, once we've identified that root we can, again only if you wish, dig it up, chuck it and replant your thinking in some fresh, new, healthy soil.

That's what this book is all about: helping you to identify exactly why you lack confidence so that we can fix it at the root. And just to be clear from the start, the root of everyone's confidence issues lies in the mind, so be prepared for some challenges to your thinking. No amount of stuff out there in the world (by stuff I mean compliments from other people, financial security, status, dress size, possessions, social media success, food, booze, popular opinions or numbers of friends) will fix your confidence problems. Confidence is an **inside job** and so my first piece of advice to you would be to stop asking the world to give you confidence. It can't – but you can.

I'm not coaching you face to face, but this book contains all the instructions, inspiration and ideas you need to find your own

way out of the bog of low self-esteem. In fact, the reason I started writing this book was because I wanted my techniques to be accessible to as many people as possible. I will teach you how to change the negative tape that's playing in your head and replace it with a healthy, confident narrative. I will encourage you to take certain steps and I will challenge you to let go of certain habits. Taken together, the powerful suggestions, ideas and exercises in this book comprise everything you need to become a genuinely confident person.

The very best coaches are those who know that their clients have all the answers inside them, and I know that includes you. The whole point of this book is to plug you back into your most confident self because, when that happens, you will be free to live the life you want and to fulfil your purpose. Nothing gives me more joy than to see someone released into their powerful, authentic, assured self. After well over a decade of doing that face to face and with groups of people, I have written this book to help you achieve this freedom for yourself.

If you lack confidence, it will be manifesting in all kinds of wonky, unhealthy behaviours in your life; some subtle and some glaringly obvious. We will start our work together with what I call the foundational steps in which we address your imposter syndrome, people pleasing, co-dependency and constant comparing. During these first four chapters you will learn the very best mind management techniques I have; those I've honed and developed over the past fifteen years. We will then tackle your propensity to worry, your fear of conflict and your lack of body confidence before ending our time together learning how to handle rejection, a crisis and, finally, public speaking with assertion and self-belief.

Be confident in 100 days

This book has been designed to help you deal with all the manifestations of low self-esteem within 100 hundred days, which means that you could have a brand-new life in three months' time. Imagine if you committed to this process and gave yourself the time you deserve, you could spend the rest of your life as a confident, self-assured person. This may sound too good to be true, but I promise you that this is possible if you are willing to put the work in. I will be your guide, *but you have to take the steps*, and I guarantee that if you do so you will soon feel differently about yourself and your life before you've finished Chapter 3.

I used to be a very unconfident person. You wouldn't have known this because I was really good at hiding it behind a shiny mask, but I was terrified of what you thought of me and was the ultimate chameleon, changing myself to match who I thought you wanted me to be. It was only after a series of life-changing events that culminated in me training as a coach that I began to see how inauthentically I'd been living, how plugged into fear I'd been and how worried I was all the time. Being coached as part of my training helped me to see just how low my self-esteem had been and, crucially, how to change that. A genuine sense of confidence was growing within me, and I wanted to share this with as many people as possible, so when it came to choosing what area of coaching to specialise in, confidence coaching was the obvious answer. Since then, I've been obsessed with working out what causes our confidence issues and low self-esteem, and how to fix it. I've won an international award for my work and have been a leading UK coach for over a decade. You could say that confidence has been my life's work.

The ten chapters you are about to read will revolutionise your life and each step builds on the one before. If you take ten days per chapter you will be on track to change your life in 100 days. However, each chapter also stands alone as a complete piece, so if you feel that body confidence, for example, is your main issue, you might want to dip into that chapter first if you prefer.

Let me be clear: you are a confident person. Hiding beneath your fears and doubts and neuroses is a confident, self-assured version of you just waiting to be rediscovered. I'm as excited for you as you start this journey as I would be if we were sitting opposite each other in my consulting room.

So, I invite you now to set aside your doubts, trust in the process and allow the power of coaching to really change your life.

Things to know before you start

- Confidence is about your abilities and self-esteem is about how you regard yourself, so they are subtly different, but I deliberately use the terms interchangeably in this book because one begets the other. Building up your self-esteem helps with your confidence and vice versa.
- Confidence is not arrogance. I can't tell you the number of people who've told me they don't dare work on their confidence because other people will think they're arrogant. To my mind, arrogance and low self-esteem have the same root because they are both concerned about the opinions of other people. Genuine confidence, on the other hand, is a

self-fulfilling state and one that wants the best for everyone, which is the very opposite of arrogance which sees life as some kind of crazy competition where one-upmanship and back-biting rule.

- Confidence is a muscle that you have to exercise and so those of us who you see with genuine confidence are simply exercising that part of our minds on a consistent basis. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that some people are born with confidence and some aren't. We're all born with confidence, but some people have lost touch with it along the way. I promise you that yours is still there; we just have to do a bit of digging!

A note about the exercises

If you're anything like me, in the past you've read many self-help books and skipped over the exercises thinking either, 'I'll do those later,' or 'I can't be bothered; I'll just wait for my lightbulb moment from what I read.'

I get it.

But, of course, not doing the exercises meant I did not get the results I wanted, and the bulbs did not light up. What I've learned is that the only way to change is through *practise* and *application*, and so the exercises in this book are not optional if you want the gift of a new, confident life. If you want to change then no amount of reading and nodding in agreement will produce lasting results. However, practising this work will bring about the changes you want to see in your life. These are exercises I have done and some I continue to do because they work, but only when I practise them.

Some of the exercises you will try once, learn what you need to from them and move on. Others you will pick up and continue to use throughout your life, but each exercise should be tried at least once as you go through this book if you want to really do business with your low self-confidence.

Each chapter includes a series of affirmations for you to use to address that particular topic. As this is a 100-day guide divided into ten chapters, I would suggest using each set of affirmations for the ten days you are spending on each topic and then moving on to the next set with the next chapter. Affirmations are simple sentences you repeat to yourself to rewire your brain, and they work with consistent application. Another trick you could use would be to record all the affirmations slowly onto your phone and play them to yourself as you're falling asleep each night. The subliminal messaging will penetrate the deeper parts of your mind while you rest.

You will need

If you wanted a six-pack, you'd expect to be doing sit-ups fairly regularly, right? Well, likewise, as I've said, if you want to be confident you will need to practise. For this process to work you will need:

- A journal.
- A good pen or pencil.
- 10–15 minutes each day for the exercises (some take longer and may need a little more time but 10–15 minutes dedicated practise each day will really pay dividends).
- An open mind. Allow yourself to be teachable; you can always go back to your old ways of thinking if you don't like

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these new ways. Open your mind and see what this amazing process brings to you.

Your first exercise: Why are you here?

Let's start as we mean to go on and return to the question I asked at the top of this introduction. 'Why are you here?' In your gorgeous new journal with your shiny new pen, please write a paragraph or two on:

- Why you bought this book.
- Why confidence is a problem for you.
- How a lack of self-confidence is manifesting in your life.

Days 1–10

Is There an Imposter in the House?

*If they knew what I was really
like, they'd sack me!*
Sam

When you look back on your life and the things that you've achieved, do you feel happy and proud of yourself, or do you feel like you just got lucky? Can you allow yourself to own your successes or, deep down, do you feel that you're a fraud? This is the essence of Imposter Syndrome: the feeling that you don't deserve your successes and that you're not the real deal, coupled with the worry that if other people knew who you really were there would be dire consequences for you to face.

As a specialist confidence coach, I would say that I've probably dealt with Imposter Syndrome more than anything else and it tends to show up mostly, although not exclusively, at work. Now, you'd be forgiven for thinking that this Imposter Syndrome was mostly prevalent in people who are at the beginning of their careers in more junior roles due to natural inexperience and the

overwhelm of everything there is to learn when we first start work. But the evidence from my professional practice paints a different picture. Most of the people I coach are in senior leadership roles, with years of experience behind them, and many of them have struggled with Imposter Syndrome.

Why is this? What my clients have consistently shown me is that yes, there is an Imposter and it lives in their own heads as a critical, nagging, doom-laden voice of fear (often described as the inner critic). As a result, these people often have extremely high levels of perfectionism, they are riddled with self-doubt, and they are afraid of both failure and, sometimes, responsibility. In essence, you will be susceptible to Imposter Syndrome if you're a high achiever who believes that you must take on a lot, get everything right and never, ever fail at anything. However, because of the perfectionism inherent in Imposter Syndrome, you will never feel like you're actually achieving anything because it's not 'perfect', which just feeds the narrative from the (internal) Imposter telling you that you need to achieve more in order to be acceptable or that you're not good enough. Exhausting! And couple this with the very real dread of your cover being blown and everyone finding out that you're not perfect and you can easily see how the vicious cycle repeats on a loop.

If you, like much of the population, suffer with Imposter Syndrome, you will be certain that you've fluked your way into the position you have. To the outside world you are getting along just fine but internally you believe that you're not as capable as you seem to other people. You wear a competent mask and do well in your tasks (certainly enough to convince everyone else that you can do your job well, which you do) but inside you question yourself all the time and worry constantly that one day someone will reveal you for the fraud you are.

Journalling prompts

- In which situations do you feel most susceptible to the Imposter?
- When was the first time you felt Imposter Syndrome creeping in? Or did it suddenly strike at a certain point in your life?
- If you could put into words what the Imposter says, what would you write? Give the Imposter control of your pen and allow it a stream of consciousness.

Case Study – Sam

Sam was a senior leader in a large business. For a decade, he was regularly promoted, and he climbed the ranks in quick succession. The calm, strategic-thinking, level-headed leader that everyone saw on the outside belied a man who, on the inside, daily panicked about 'being found out'. Here is a snapshot of one of our conversations, about three months into the coaching journey.

- SAM: If they knew what I was really like, they'd sack me, Jo!
- COACH: That's a big statement to make. What are you 'really like'?
- SAM: Well, I'm just not the brilliant person they think I am.

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COACH: In what way?

SAM: I have no idea what I'm doing half the time! I'm just winging it. It's terrifying.

COACH: [nodding] Yeah, I hear that a lot.

SAM: What do you mean?

COACH: I mean exactly that. Many, probably most, of the senior people I coach feel like they're winging it. Some of them all the time, others from time to time. It comes with the job.

SAM: [looking confused] But no one admits to it...?

COACH: No, because, like you, they're afraid of what the rest of you will think if they let on that they've spent much of their careers muddling through rather than following a carefully planned and linear path to perfection.

SAM: [shaking his head] I thought it was just me.

COACH: No, Imposter Syndrome is very common.

SAM: Is that what this is? Imposter Syndrome?

COACH: I suspect so; you have all the hallmarks. You're a high achiever who worries a lot about being exposed or rejected. You work exceptionally hard to 'make up' for what you perceive to be your faults, and you find it hard to accept praise when it comes your way.

SAM: Yes, but that's because I don't deserve it.

COACH: Perfectionism.

SAM: [silent, thinking, face flushing]

COACH: Sorry to come at you with another label, Sam, but usually what's underneath our Imposters is the idea that we're not perfect and therefore don't deserve our successes in life. We feel we've just been lucky

Is There an Imposter in the House?

or were given promotions because there was no one better at the time. It never occurs to us that we don't have to be perfect. That perfection is, in fact, impossible and unachievable.

SAM: I don't think I'm perfect enough to be a perfectionist.

COACH: [allowing for silence, for the penny to drop]

SAM: Wait. I just heard myself. I don't think I'm perfect enough to call myself a perfectionist. That's perfectionism right?!

COACH: Right!

Over the course of many months together Sam and I began to challenge the lies from his Imposter, by doing the following (see the steps we followed in more detail on page 30):

- a. We looked at the facts of his life and his successful career. He was able to establish that his successes were genuinely his and that no one else was responsible for the hard work he'd put into his career.
- b. We dismantled some of the limiting beliefs he had around what successful people should look like/wear/sound like and so on by coming up with examples of successful people and describing them. The examples he came up with were all people who'd failed at times, bounced back and/or created careers out of nothing. We also challenged his deeply held belief that getting a 2:2 at university meant he wasn't 'good enough', again by looking at the evidence of what he'd managed to achieve with that 2:2 and accepting that what a 21-year-old gets at university has little bearing on what a 42-year-old-man accomplishes on a daily basis.

- c. We did some deep work on his perfectionism, with Sam recognising that this was what his inner critic used to scare him into action. His lightbulb moment was realising that perfection is subjective and different for everyone. You will learn more about managing your inner critic later in this chapter.

Sam has since been promoted again and this time, when he called me to tell me he'd got the job, he said, 'I'm so proud of myself, Jo!' In owning his success, he showed me just how much he'd been able to overcome the lies from his Imposter. Of course, the Imposter still strikes in his life, but he is able to separate what it says from the reality of his life today by looking at the facts. Complete the exercises at the end of the chapter (see page 33) to be able to do this for yourself.

Your Imposter

Diagnosing yourself with Imposter Syndrome is a very difficult thing to do because it's a condition that tells you that you don't have it. Recognising that you have Imposter Syndrome means waking up to the fact that you have a cruel and negative narrator in your head, but this is a hard thing to do when you've spent half your life believing what that narrator tells you or not even being really aware that it's there.

The voice of the perfectionistic Imposter is so convincing that it often takes an intervention from someone else, such as a decent boss, a trusted coach or a concerned friend, to help you

see that you're stuck in a vicious and negative cycle, and one that's based on lies. So, for this part of the work I want you to try and keep an open mind as you consider the hallmarks of Imposter Syndrome listed below. Do they – or at least some of them – apply to you?

Are you a perfectionist?

Do you set yourself extremely high goals and standards, and still feel disappointed with yourself even when you've achieved them? Do you feel you could've done more, could've done better? Is nothing but the very best good enough for you? Do you focus mostly on the things you've done wrong rather than those you've done right? Do you find it hard to accept a compliment? Do you feel an intense need to always be working, be that at your job or at home? Do you find it hard to let go of small mistakes you've made, often ruminating on them months after the event? Do you feel a sense of shame over past imperfections? Do your high standards also apply to other people, meaning you often view them through a critical lens?

Are you riddled with self-doubt or consider yourself to be lacking?

Do you find it hard to trust yourself and make a decision for fear of it being the 'wrong' decision? Do you believe that you're not really equipped to do what's in front of you? Are you convinced that you're 'winging it' and think everyone else knows exactly what they're doing? Do you feel the need to hide your self-doubt behind a capable mask? Do you question yourself all the time?

Are you headed for burnout?

People with Imposter Syndrome often feel relieved when they've achieved something rather than being proud of themselves. This relief is because they've pushed themselves so hard to get the job done that they've neglected themselves in the process. Is this you? Do you feel a sense of relief rather than pride when you achieve something? Do you overwork, over-stress, over-exert yourself to the point of exhaustion, all to avoid failing at something?

Are you afraid of being 'found out'?

Are you convinced that you're only in your position out of luck and that if people knew who you really were they'd fire you? Are you constantly worrying that other people are waiting for you to screw up so that they can pounce saying, 'We knew it! We knew you couldn't do this! We knew you were winging it!' Do you feel the need to justify everything you do and every decision you make? Or do you overwork to prove your worth? Do you think everyone else knows exactly what they're doing whereas you don't have a clue really?

Do you belittle yourself and your own achievements?

When you have achieved something do you dismiss it as being 'down to luck' or 'being in the right place at the right time'? Do you think that you're only where you are in life because you're a good liar or because there was no one better to take the job you have so you're 'better than nothing' for your employers? Or

do you know you've worked really hard to get here but assume that's because you're naturally less clever than everyone else and therefore have to work doubly hard to stay afloat? If someone compliments your work, do you feel a sense of shame, 'If only they knew how much I winged it' running through your head?

Do you live small?

Sometimes the Imposter can cause people to underachieve and avoid responsibility. Have you denied yourself the chance to go for a promotion because you're convinced you couldn't do it, even though your boss is really keen for you to apply? Have you stayed in a junior- or mid-level job so that you don't have to face making impactful decisions and potentially get it wrong? Has the Imposter convinced you to live small so that you can't be shamed for wanting more than you're capable of? Are you riddled with negative self-talk? Can you even hear this voice, or it is like the sky, simply always there, meaning you've been unaware of it all these years?

A consideration

Sometimes, rarely but it happens, we can think someone is suffering with Imposter Syndrome when they are simply in the wrong job. I had what I thought was Imposter Syndrome in my mid-twenties when I worked as a journalist and researcher at the BBC. I'd landed the job off the back of some work experience and was being given contracts on some amazing national radio shows. It was incredible to me to be brushing shoulders with some of the biggest names in broadcasting, researching and writing stories for them to be used on their news shows. My friends kept saying how

brilliant it was that I had such a fabulous job, but I sometimes felt lacklustre about it. Don't get me wrong, I was grateful for the opportunity I'd been given but every time I was asked to write about something political, I felt the shutters coming down in my mind. Give me human interest any day but politics – I just couldn't muster the enthusiasm for it I knew a journalist needed. And then my boss said he wanted to send me to Northern Ireland to report on the formal power devolvement to the Northern Ireland Assembly and I panicked.

Some soul-searching revealed that while it was true that I didn't know enough to confidently get over the Irish Sea and file a report, it was more true that I didn't know enough because I wasn't interested enough on a political level. I was in the wrong job!

What that experience taught me is that sometimes we are doing a job because it sounds impressive and seems right but maybe it's not. Maybe the job you're doing is one you've taken on because other people said it was a good idea? It's worth considering this as you do this work on Imposter Syndrome.

The root of the problem

I believe that the root of the problem with Imposter Syndrome is believing a liar in our heads, believing a negative story about ourselves and about life.

It's helpful to imagine that inside every one of us are two characters: **an Imposter Self** (you might have seen this referred to as your ego/critical voice/false self) which tells you a negative, fear-based story over and over and **an Authentic Self** (which can be called your soul/true self/objective truth), telling you a kinder,

more trust-based version of events. Most of us are unaware of what the Authentic Self says because the Imposter Self (with masses of help from our culture) has done an absolutely brilliant job of drowning it out. But I promise you your Authentic Self is in there and when you access it (I'll show you how later, see page 33) your confidence and your life will improve exponentially. There is no space for Imposter Syndrome when you are plugged into your Authentic Self.

Let's look at this a little further.

After qualifying as a coach, I chose to specialise in confidence. The process of becoming a coach, and being coached repeatedly as part of my training, had left me with a tentative but growing sense of authentic confidence that had been completely absent from my life until that point. What was so interesting was that my clients all said they felt so much more confident having worked with me, so I knew I was onto something. My training also coincided with a time of deep spiritual, philosophical, scientific and psychological exploration during which I started seeking answers to the great questions of life.

Firstly, I learned about the brain. Having felt at the mercy of my emotions and my past for my life thus far, it was completely revelatory to understand that I was being driven by:

- a. my reptilian brain (responsible for keeping us alive and physically safe and where the Imposter Self lives)
- b. my limbic system (responsible for unconscious value judgments and beliefs based on emotional memories)
- c. a flexible prefrontal cortex (front brain), from where abstract thought, rational analysis, consciousness, executive functioning and imagination derive. The Authentic Self lives here.

I found that if I accessed this frontal part of my brain more frequently (through meditation, journalling, enquiry work, coaching and fact-finding), I was more confident. I also learned that the reptilian and limbic brains always fire a millisecond before the frontal brain. They ‘get in’ with their viewpoint first, so to speak. But just because they speak first, it doesn’t mean they speak the truth.

The real game-changer was discovering that we also have what’s called a Reticular Activating System (RAS) in our brains, which constitutes a group of nerves at our brainstem whose job it is to filter out unnecessary information so that the important stuff gets through. But, and here’s the exciting bit, *it’s us who tells the RAS what to let through.*

The RAS is the reason why, when you decide you want to swap your old car for a new red Mini, you start seeing red Minis everywhere. In the same way if you tell yourself (and your RAS) that you are not good enough, the RAS thinks this is important information and it will only allow information (evidence) through to you to back up this premise. If you tell yourself that you’re great, the RAS will let information through to back this up. So, self-doubt breeds self-doubt and self-confidence breeds more self-confidence, and it all depends on what you’ve trained your brain to focus on.

In short, your Imposter Syndrome is a result of you believing the lies from your fearful little ego or your reptilian brain, which is great at keeping you alive but has no business narrating your life back to you. In a moment I will teach you how to differentiate between the two parts of your brain so that you can plug into the prefrontal cortex much more frequently.

Core belief: ‘I must be perfect’

Not only are so many of us with Imposter Syndrome at the mercy of our reptilian brains, but we are also disabled by deep-seated perfectionism stemming from the lies of the Imposter Self. The need to be perfect, the belief in perfection as a concept, the idea that we are being judged against a standard of perfection drives us and, as we’ve seen, can send us into dangerous levels of burnout and chronic self-doubt.

The issue with Imposter syndrome is not your abilities or lack thereof, it’s your core belief that you have to be perfect – this is what you need to deal with.

No one is perfect. It’s easy to say and you know it in your head, but have you allowed that belief to penetrate to your core, to your guts, to your soul? Is there a little voice in there saying, ‘No one is perfect but that’s just what low-achievers think?’ or ‘Some people are perfect, but I am nowhere near even trying to achieve perfection!’

Think about it. If perfection is an unattainable standard for humans, then being perfect is a pretty tricky goal for you to set for yourself (or add to – or to imagine is available to other people who have acquired the elusive and magical ability to attain perfection for themselves). To my mind perfection is a myth because it’s completely subjective. I might think the sunset outside my house is perfect, but you might disagree because you saw a better one in Portugal last summer. My husband might think a meal out we’ve just had was perfect because the food was amazing, but I might disagree because I had a banging headache. Perfection is a myth!

Perfection is a subjective analysis at best. What's perfect for you won't be so for the other eight billion people on the planet, so your quest for perfection is a false quest with no ending. Unless you choose to get off the path to seeking perfection.

The solution

If some or all of the above sounds familiar to you, then you are probably suffering with a level of Imposter Syndrome. Just let that truth sit with you for a second. You've been listening to and believing a negative voice in your head, possibly for all your life. That's okay. It's how you've survived this far. But I'm here to tell you that that voice is a liar, and you don't have to believe what it says any more. When you are ready, I have a solution for you; a solution to deal with that voice and free you from your perfectionism and fear of shame and rejection. It's a deep piece of work and it will change your life if you allow it to. My clients love it. Are you ready?

I want you to imagine you are with an old friend drinking tea in her kitchen on an early-September afternoon. It's midweek and the country is enjoying a gorgeous Indian summer. Bedsheets flap on the washing line and butterflies dance among the late-blooming flowers, making the most of the unseasonal warmth. You are mid-conversation when her youngest daughter, Nell, rushes in from junior school and without even taking off her shoes or dumping her bag, delights in announcing excitedly, 'Mum, you'll never guess what?! I've been made House Captain at school! Can you believe it? I'm going to get a badge, and I'll have to take assemblies!' She is buzzing with pre-teen excitement.

And now I want you to imagine there is a silence before your friend responds.

'*You?* They've made *you* a house captain! Why would they do that? There must be some mistake. There are so many kids in your class who'd be much better at that. Kids who get high grades. You don't work hard enough at all, what *were* they thinking?'

At which moment her phone rings and you watch as she excuses herself into another room to take it.

Shocked and appalled, you turn back to the kitchen and see that Nell has taken herself to the swing in the garden and is sitting, head down, twisting her new badge between her fingers. Not being able to quite believe what you've just witnessed you go to her and sit on the second swing beside her.

'Are you okay?' you ask

'Yeah,' she replies, not looking up and not looking okay at all. 'Mum's right, I would be a bad house captain, I'm going to give back my badge tomorrow.'

Torn, now, between not wanting to interfere but also not wanting to leave this poor child feeling so dejected, you think for a moment about how best to reply.

'Nell, I think that giving your badge back would be a very bad idea. You've been chosen for this job because you are the best person for it. Your teachers want you to do it. What do you think it is about you that meant you were chosen?'

She stops twisting her badge and thinks... 'Well, they said I was very kind and very polite, which means I'm a good role model.'

'That's amazing!'

'Yes, but Mummy thinks you have to get high grades to be a house captain.'

'Well, maybe that's how they picked house captains when she was at school?'

‘Yes, maybe. I thought she’d be so proud of me.’

‘I did too. I felt incredibly proud of you!’

‘Then why isn’t my mummy proud of me?’

‘I don’t know, sweetheart, but I promise you this. Your mummy not being proud of you is all about how she is feeling about herself, not you. Maybe she has had a bad day, or she’s worried about something. The most important thing is whether you think you would be a good house captain.’

‘I really want to do it. I love this badge, and I am kind and polite.’

I have told this story at many of my workshops, and it stops everybody dead. You can hear a pin drop in the uncomfortable silence when I tell it, and yet *it so brilliantly illustrates what’s going on inside you every minute of every day.*

Inside you are all the characters in my story.

- You have a mean voice (the mother in the story).
- You have a kind voice (you in the story).
- And you are the receiver of those voices (Nell in the story).

If you, like Nell, believe what the mean voice says you will feel dejected, crushed and not good enough. If you believe what the kind voice says you will feel more able, more peaceful and more confident.

Exercise: The cabinet reshuffle

This exercise is so powerful that I’ve used it with hundreds of clients over the years and it never ceases to produce results. Try this capsule version below to really start freeing yourself from the clutches of your Imposter by finding yourself a new internal leader.

1. Start by taking five long, deep breaths to connect to yourself and your body.
2. Now, draw a simple stick person in your journal.
3. Close your eyes and listen to that Imposter (sometimes called the inner critic/critical voice). It’s the voice that’s constantly narrating your life back to you. Where does it live on your body? Usually, people find it around the head area but not always. Make a mark on your stick diagram and write *Imposter* next to the mark.
4. Close your eyes again and locate your Authentic Self. This can be trickier for some people but it’s the part of you that you would use to comfort a child or a vulnerable person. Where does this voice live? Some people find it in their guts. Others find it in their hearts, a different part of their heads, their arms, just outside their body. Where does yours live? Make another mark on your diagram and write *Authentic Self* next to it.
5. Now, spend some time writing about your Imposter. Touch the part of your body where you located it and consider the following questions, recording your answers:
 - What colour is it?
 - How does it smell/taste?
 - Who or what does it remind you of?
 - If it were an animal, what would it be? Or something else in nature?
 - How big is it?
 - What tone of voice does it use when it speaks to you?
 - What’s its primary objective?
 - What does it want?

6. Next, spend some time writing about your Authentic Self. Touch the part of your body where you located it and consider the same questions:
 - What colour is it?
 - How does it smell/taste?
 - Who or what does it remind you of?
 - If it were an animal, what would it be? Or something else in nature?
 - How big is it?
 - What tone of voice does it use when it speaks to you?
 - What's its primary objective?
 - What does it want?
7. Now (using the first or third person) please write down five familiar judgments your Imposter makes about you on a frequent basis. E.g. 'I don't deserve this job!' or 'You can bet everyone's still talking about that stupid thing you said in the meeting last week.'
8. Go back over each judgment and ask yourself how each one makes you feel. Write this down. Really connect to how listening to your Imposter leaves you feeling. Notice the impact this voice has on your life.
9. For each judgment that you wrote down ask your Authentic Self what it would say instead and write that statement next to the corresponding original judgment. Some good enquiry questions to access your Authentic Self are:
 - Is it true?
 - What evidence do I have for this judgment?
 - Who do I sound like when I'm making this harsh judgment?
 - What could I believe if I wasn't scared of what other

- people think?
 - What's the opposite thought to the original judgment?
 - What would the kindest, wisest person I know do or say right now?
 - If I was my own best friend, what would I be saying to myself right now?
 - Who would I be without this judgment?
10. Go back to the previous step and next to each counterstatement from your Authentic Self write down how that makes you feel instead. How does plugging into something kinder and wiser affect your confidence, your mood, your sense of self, your belief system? Again, take time to really connect with how listening to that alternative voice leaves you feeling.
 11. Repeat this exercise frequently until it becomes something you can do in your head, live in the moment. I have practised this so much on paper that it's now an auto-response for me and I would be lost without it. The sooner you can start doing this for yourself, the quicker your confidence will grow, so repeat the exercise as much as you can over the next few weeks until it becomes alive in you.

Overcoming the Imposter step by step

Step 1: Let's get factual

In this step I would like you to collect as much evidence as you can to prove to yourself that you can do your job. I'm talking concrete facts – training and qualifications, years of experience, 360 feedback from peers, positive things said about you by your boss, your achievements. Write it all down. Now, conduct a stocktake

– is there anything missing from your skills or experience that you think you need to feel more confident in the job? Might there be any training or courses you feel you need to do the job better? If so, talk to your boss and specify your needs.

Step 2: Knowledge is power

Imposter Syndrome can often strike because someone feels put on the spot or inexperienced in a subject. The antidote to this is simple: do your research. It may seem laborious at the time, but it will save you stress and worry in future. However, if you do get put on the spot its perfectly okay to say, ‘I don’t know a lot about this right now, but I can tell you what I know now, go away, do some research and come back to you with more detail.’ This is a good and valid response and much preferable to making stuff up and fudging it.

Step 3: Let good enough be good enough

To overcome perfectionism, I would like you to write down five areas in your life that you would like to have done perfectly and then ask yourself what ‘good enough’ would look like in these areas. Practise letting good enough be good enough for a few weeks to loosen the hold your addiction to perfection has over you. Examples could be: instead of making your bed absolutely perfectly, just throw the cushions on more randomly when you’re in a hurry or, instead of forcing yourself to do five hours hard training a week in the gym, have a walk on one of those days. If you can loosen the hold of your perfectionistic mindset, you will feel much less afraid in your life.

Quick Tips to Challenge the Imposter

- Real frauds, don’t worry about being frauds so if you’re worried that you’re not the real deal it’s likely to be your Imposter at play. Deal with it by repeating to yourself, ‘Real fraudsters don’t worry about being a fraud.’ Remember, the Imposter is a liar and Imposter Syndrome is the condition that tells you that you don’t have it. It hides in plain sight, so ‘out it’ by saying ‘Thanks for your opinion, Imposter – today I’m going to ignore your lies.’
- Imagine your Imposter has a sign above its head saying, ‘I am a liar, don’t believe anything I say!’ Draw this somewhere if you can. Keep it on the mirror or the door of the fridge.
- Tell someone how you feel. Find someone you trust and say, ‘This is the story my Imposter is telling me right now. I don’t want to believe it. Please help me tell a different story.’ Imposters tend to shrivel in the light of ownership and truth.

Affirmations for Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

Repeat daily for at least ten days

I am more than enough.

There is nothing about me to 'find out'.

The Imposter is a liar.

I am honest about my successes and failures.

I can be vulnerable.

It's okay to make mistakes.

I do not have to be perfect.

Perfection is a myth.

My best is always good enough.

*I listen to my Authentic Self and it tells me
the truth.*