

OVERCOMING IMPOSTER SYNDROME THURSDAY 3 MARCH 2022

SPEAKER

Lisa Orbé-Austin, Founding Partner of Dynamic Transitions Psychological Consulting, LLP

HOST

Lucy Colback, Editorial Director of FT Women in Business Asia Forum

FT WOMEN IN BUSINESS ASIA FORUM 3 MARCH 2022

WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?
IT'S WHEN YOU'VE NOT INTERNALISED YOUR QUALIFICATIONS & STRENGTHS
DRIVES YOU INTO a FEAR of BEING DISCOVERED as a FRAUD
DRIVES US TO OVERWORK or SELF-SABOTAGE to AVOID being 'FOUND-OUT'
HAVE a TENDENCY to:
+ DISCOUNT PRAISE & COMPLIMENTS
+ ATTRIBUTE SUCCESS to OTHER THINGS
+ FEAR of FAILURE

LEAVES a DEEP IMPACT on your CAREER!
- DECREASED JOB SATISFACTION
- DON'T FEEL DESERVING of SALARY NEGOTIATION & ADVANCEMENT

IS IT WORSE for Women than Men?
RESEARCH shows INCONCLUSIVE RESULTS! BUT BOTH GENDERS feel it DIFFERENTLY

- WOMEN**
↳ FEARS of FRAUDULENCE
↳ WORK HARDER to 'MAKE-UP'
- MEN**
↳ TEND to AIM for MASTERY
↳ TAKE LESS RISK
- MARGINALIZED GROUPS**
↳ EXPERIENCE DOUBLE the IMPACT!
↳ CONTENDING with INTERNAL & EXTERNAL FORCES

IT HELPS to HAVE COMMUNITY TO RELATE & IDENTIFY WITH WHO WON'T GASLIGHT YOUR EXPERIENCE!

HOW DO WE DISCUSS IMPOSTOR SYNDROME with our LINE MANAGERS?
→ MOST TIMES, THEY WANT to HELP but DON'T KNOW HOW TO
PROVIDE them CONCRETE WAYS / PLANS that THEY CAN USE to HELP YOU!

HOW to DEAL with IMPOSTER SYNDROME THE 3C MODEL

- 1. CLARIFY**
• KNOW YOUR TRIGGERS!
• WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?
• WHAT'S the NARRATIVE I'M COMMUNICATING about, MYSELF?
- 2. CHOOSE**
• APPROACH with a GROWTH MINDSET
• SELF-CARE is ESSENTIAL!
↳ YOU HAVE to MAKE SURE YOU'RE OKAY
• RATIONALLY APPROACH your THOUGHTS
• SILENCING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS
- 3. CREATE**
• CHALLENGE YOURSELF to BREAK OUT from YOUR 'ROLE'
• HAVE GOOD MENTORS / COMMUNITY CHEER YOU ON!

ALL Successful stories HAVE FAILURE!

4 HALLMARKS

1. DILIGENCE & HARDWORK
2. CHARM & PERCEPTIVENESS
3. INTELLECTUAL INAUTHENTICITY
4. SEEKING MENTORSHIP for EXTERNAL VALIDATION

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?
EARLY CHILDHOOD ROLES & FAMILY DYNAMIC

3 CHILDHOOD ROLES

1. **INTELLIGENT**
↳ WHEN THINGS DON'T COME EASY FOR YOU, YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE FOOILING EVERYONE
2. **HARDWORKING**
↳ REQUIRES HARD WORK, TALENTS & SKILLS NEVER GET DISCOVERED
3. **SURVIVOR**
↳ NO AFFIRMATION or FEEDBACK, NEGLIGENCE DRIVES YOU TO SEEK SUCCESS ELSEWHERE

SPEAKER DR. LISA ORBE-AUSTIN

MODERATOR LUCY COLBACK

March's FT Women in Business Asia Forum heard Lisa Orbé-Austin, a psychologist, executive coach, organisational consultant and the author of *Own Your Greatness: Overcome Impostor Syndrome, Beat Self-Doubt, and Succeed in Life*.

A co-founder of Dynamic Transitions Psychological Consulting, LLP, Orbé-Austin has also served in various teaching roles at post-secondary institutes in the US, including Columbia University, Fordham University, Brooklyn College and Baruch College.

Orbé-Austin explored imposter syndrome, a psychological pattern that commonly occurs in the workplace, hindering people from higher achievement and taking over new duties.

Bear in mind that there is no conclusive evidence showing that imposter syndrome is exclusive to or worse among women, it just manifests differently in males and females.

In the one-hour forum, she also studied the way in which employees and senior leadership teams, especially when in a competitive environment, can be "an observer of [their own] thought" and address stresses, differences in expectations and team cohesion through combating imposter syndrome.

What is imposter syndrome?

"It is an experience when you have credentials, qualifications, certifications, competencies, strengths—all of those things—but yet, you haven't internalised them. You feel like you are a fraud," Orbé-Austin said.

"As a result of that fear of being fraudulent, or not competent, or not good enough, you then either overwork or self-sabotage, trying to cover up the perceived fraudulence from being found out. And that, in essence, is what the experience of imposter syndrome is," she explained.

She outlined nine qualities that may indicate the presence of imposter syndrome: (1) high achieving, (2) denying their abilities and their successes, and attributing success to luck, mistake, overwork or a result of a relationship, (3) discounting praise, feeling fear and guilt about success, (4) fear of failure and being discovered as a fraud, (5) not feeling intelligent, (6) perfectionism, (7) overestimating others while underestimating oneself, (8) difficulty internalising feelings of success and (9) overworking or self-sabotage to cover the feelings of inadequacy.

Where might it come from?

Imposter syndrome can come from social media, or the different experiences faced by the sufferers when they are exposed to the current environment, Orbé-Austin said. "But typically, what happens is it comes from early experiences of childhood. Early childhood roles and family dynamics are usually what sets imposter syndrome in motion," she added.

People who easily fall victim to imposter syndrome may have undertaken one of three childhood roles, Orbé-Austin concluded. They are (1) those considered the intelligent ones in their families, (2) hardworking kids and (3) survivors in their families.

"The family dynamics are often strict family rules that conflict that wasn't well managed in the family, narcissistic parental figures or codependent family dynamics where you had to suppress your needs and your feelings in order to feel like you could get attention in the family," she explained. Therefore, imposter syndrome is "really hard to change," she added.

Some of the typical triggers of imposter syndrome generally are new jobs, new projects, complicated projects which could go wrong from several aspects, roles that are highly visible and when you are doing something that you haven't done in a while and where your skills are rusty.

Studies have shown that there is a “strong correlation” between imposter syndrome and anxiety, said Orbé-Austin. “Anxiety presents a lot of rumination, a lot of worries, a lot of doubt about how others are perceiving you.”

Sufferers of imposter syndrome may often regard themselves from other people's point of view after those people have approached them or said something about what they might have done wrong, Orbé-Austin said.

Prevalence of imposter syndrome

A [study](#) done by accounting firm KPMG in 2020 showed that 75% of female executives had experienced imposter syndrome over the course of their careers. “If you don't deal with it, you'll carry it throughout your career. There is no level that you'll ever get to that will make it go away,” Orbé-Austin said.

Special hallmarks of imposter syndrome

1. Diligence and hard work
2. Intellectual inauthenticity
3. Charm and perceptiveness
4. Eagerness to seek mentorship for external validation

Potential impacts of imposter syndrome in the workplace

Research shows that imposter syndrome can decrease job satisfaction and affect salary negotiation and advancement. Sufferers may easily get stuck in toxic work environments and experience chronic burnout, anxiety and depression, leading them to lose track of their own dreams and plans for their future. Their academic and vocational self-efficacy may decrease. Due to high organisational loyalty, they tend to stay at an organisation longer than they should.

Differences between men and women

“There is no conclusive marker that women do experience [it?] more,” Orbé-Austin remarked. However, there are differences in how imposter syndrome is expressed between men and women.

Women usually struggle from a constant fear of fraudulence, spend more time on tasks and work harder when receiving negative feedback. Meanwhile, men would choose to affiliate with peers with less advanced skills, and avoid taking risks or pursuing certain careers altogether.

Marginalised groups may suffer the worst, which Orbé-Austin referred to as “double impact” as they have to contend with imposter syndrome from both internal or external forces—for example, discrimination or other people's feedback that further undermines the person's sense of belonging.

Orbé-Austin concluded that there are six potential triggers of imposter syndrome in marginalised groups: (1) discrimination, (2) microaggressions, (3) isolation, (4) lack of mentorship, (5) inequitable treatment and access and (6) gaslighting.

For example, higher discrimination-related depression is seen among Black people who experience imposter syndrome.

In Asian culture, very high value is placed on achievement, so when Asians feel they are not as bright, or not as capable, or potentially fraudulent, there can be an intense amount of shame. Asian people might see correlation between shame and imposter syndrome, Orbé-Austin explained.

Imposter syndrome manifested when managing a team

Managers or executives may resort to micromanagement to avoid being seen as incompetent, leading to overworking or over-functioning. They may also experience difficulties delegating tasks or have trouble articulating team members' value, especially among peers. They also tend to undervalue themselves and their team members.

Solutions to address imposter syndrome

The condition can, however, be overcome. When working intensively with sufferers, "We've been able to show a 30% decrease in imposter syndrome over 12 weeks," said Orbé-Austin. "People often think they've got this forever, it's never going to change. But we've been able to show it can change and really quickly."

It is important that people suffering from imposter syndrome understand that they can deal with the situation on their own through self-examination. Orbé-Austin recommended several key questions to ask yourself for self-diagnosis.

1. How did I get this?
2. Where did it come from?
3. What are my unique underpinnings for this?
4. What are my present-day triggers?

It is also important to be able to identify the triggers so that we can choose different behaviour to deal with the situation. People should also try to understand the narrative that they are communicating in terms of their skills and competencies—both with other people and with themselves. By identifying their narrative, people can choose to change it.

When dealing with mistakes, Orbé-Austin suggested that people should recognise that mistakes are an opportunity for learning and growth and acknowledge that perfection is never achievable.

Instead of looking for comfort and appreciation from employers and peers, Orbé-Austin said it was essential for those experiencing imposter syndrome to try to "internalise their own sense of success and achievement."

"The danger of relying on [feedback from your boss] is: when they are great bosses and giving lots of positive feedback, it is going well," Orbé-Austin said. "When they are mean or toxic or horrible, it destroys you and it can really ruin a career."

Orbé-Austin said it was important for sufferers to work on "divesting" their sense of self of other people's evaluations and to look for their own values. "Really work on finding your own definitions for that and do your own moments of celebration, your own moments of internalisation of the things that you do well and be proud of yourself. I think that's so critical practicing [that]," she said.

When dealing with managers who suffer from imposter syndrome, Orbé-Austin noted it was critical to be equipped with different approaches to managing them.

"Don't play checkers when you should be playing chess," she remarked. People ought to figure out their [superiors'] trigger points, try to avoid being influenced by their insecurity and step away in time to have a conversation with a mentor or someone senior.

Self-compassion and growth mindset

It is of utmost importance that people take care of their well-being when they are handling imposter syndrome.

“You have to make sure that you are okay. It is very, very central. And also that part of recovering from imposter syndrome is your self-care process,” Orbé-Austin remarked.

She, therefore, recommended that they should ask themselves the following questions.

1. Are you sleeping well?
2. Are you eating?
3. Are you exercising?
4. How are you taking care of yourself?

Sufferers of the syndrome should also realise that they are not required to be omniscient and competent but should turn fields with which they are unfamiliar into opportunities to learn something new.

“Approach it with the [growth mindset](#), which is recognising that mistakes are an opportunity for learning and growth. We are humans, and we all make mistakes,” Orbé-Austin said.

“What did I learn from this? How do I grow from this? How do I move forward without beating myself up?” she recommended people ask themselves.

“In heightened states of anxiety, when you are feeling like you don’t belong, you’re not learning as well,” she explained. “So, you really want to be able to modulate that anxiety so that you can take in the learning to be eventually really solid at your job.”

The 3 C’s model

Orbé-Austin invented the “3 C’s model” to help people walk away from their imposter syndrome.

The first is to clarify. People should understand their imposter origin story, get to know their triggers and trap doors in order to change their narrative.

The second step is to choose. By choosing to speak your own truth, which Orbé-Austin said is about “finding people you can tell that “I have imposter syndrome””, people can decide to silence automatic negative thoughts and start to value and care about themselves.

The final step is to create. People should not be afraid of experimenting with new roles. It can be achieved by building your dream team in order to provide yourself with the conditions for optimal performance. “If you’ve had a failure, you need people around you to put it in perspective,” she explained.