



IMPOSTER SYNDROME

WHY IT HAPPENS AND
HOW TO STOP IT

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HOW TO OVERCOME IMPOSTER SYNDROME

We've all been there: that gnawing feeling in the back of your mind that you're not good enough in whatever it is you're doing. We have all felt this at some point at school, at work, and in our everyday lives.

Imposter Syndrome feeds on self-doubt and negative self-talk. This happens when you compare yourself to others and feel like everyone else knows what's going on, while you feel lost or clueless.

That's when **you start attributing your success to luck instead of hard work.** Or you stop raising your hand in school because you think everyone else is smarter than you.

EVERYONE EXPERIENCES IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Everyone experiences this feeling - and I mean *everyone*. Most successful, high-achieving people are haunted by their own imposter syndrome.

The more successful someone becomes in their job, life, or relationships, the more they doubt their greatness. They look around and think, *"How did I get here? I don't deserve this. I'm not smart/talented/skilled enough to be here."* That's imposter syndrome, and it's debilitating to your confidence and professional development.

CAUSES OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Imposter syndrome happens when your brain works against your ambitions. It says things like, *"You don't have the experience. You don't have the skills. You can't do this."* It's trying to keep you small and safe in the cave and not venture out into the big "dangerous" world.

THE AMYGDALA

Our brains tend to exaggerate the negative and assume the worst, thanks in part to a small piece of our brain called the amygdala. It's largely responsible for our fight-or-flight instinct, which is triggered by fear, anxiety, and situations when we feel threatened.

When you're challenging yourself to do something new, **your amygdala can't tell the difference between what's life-threatening or just an exciting new adventure.** So it tries to talk you out of it in an effort to keep you safe. And this tiny part of your brain is a big contributing factor to imposter syndrome, negative self-talk, and harmful inner dialogue.

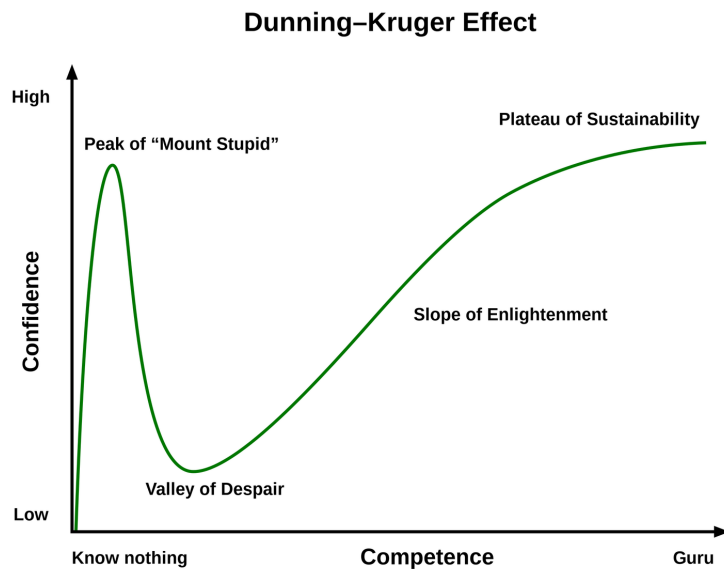
THE DUNNING-KRUGER EFFECT EFFECT (DKE)

Imposter syndrome is directly correlated to the Dunning-Kruger Effect (DKE), which states, "People suffering the most from ignorance or incompetence fail to recognize just how much they suffer from it." In other words, **you don't know what you don't know.**

THE LESS YOU KNOW, THE MORE CONFIDENCE YOU HAVE IN YOUR ABILITIES.

Why? Because **people who know very little don't realize how much more there is to learn.** However, as you gain more knowledge and experience, you realize there is much more to learn, you become humbled, and your confidence plummets.

Here is the Dunning-Kruger Effect, which a BU student once accurately described as "their college experience."



The Dunning Kruger Effect starts with **low competence and high confidence**, otherwise known as "**The Peak of Mt. Stupid.**" At this point, you don't know what you don't know.

As you move along and gain more competence, **your confidence plummets** because you see how much more there is to learn. This is the "**Valley of Despair.**"

As you move further along the x-axis and gain more knowledge, your confidence starts to improve. Then you're on the "**Slope of Enlightenment.**"

Finally, as you continue to gain even more knowledge, your confidence grows and you've entered the "**Plateau of Sustainability.**" In this stage, you know enough to feel good about yourself, but you realize you're not the world-renowned expert on the topic and *that's ok.*

So here's the bottom line - **imposter syndrome is a good thing!** It means you're gaining more knowledge and moving your way up the graph in the Dunning-Kruger Effect.

HOW TO STOP IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Let's talk about ways to quiet the negative self-talk in your brain.

- 1) **Recognize that everyone feels like a fraud.** Even the most accomplished people.
- 2) **Stop comparing yourself to others.** When it comes to other people, you only see a small part - they are struggling too. Forget everyone else; focus on your own journey.
- 3) **Understand that imposter syndrome is hardwired into your brain,** and the amygdala doesn't know the difference between a threat and an exciting opportunity.
- 4) **Recognize the amygdala's voice.** It often results in negative self-talk ("*I could've,*" "*I should've,*" "*I can't.*") Practice shutting it down. Think, "*Oh, there goes my brain again, trying to keep me safe and small in the cave.*" Then pause, take a deep breath, and reframe the narrative - what potential positive outcomes can come from your activity?
- 5) **Check where you are on the Dunning-Kruger Effect.** Are you moving up or down the curve? You'll experience some natural growing pains and imposter syndrome along the way; it's a natural part of your career development and it's a good thing!