

# How Women Escape the Impostor Syndrome Trap



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I give speeches and seminars on “The Power of Presence for Women Who Lead,” and after one of my sessions, I was asked by the head of Human Resources to coach Sandra. Introduced to me as a talented business professional with exceptional leadership skills, Sandra was being groomed for a top executive position, and she sounded perfect for my favorite kind of coaching assignment. I love working with accomplished women who are looking to become even more successful.

It should have come as a shock when, at the end of our first

session, this talented woman turned to me and said, “I want you to know how nervous I was meeting you. I was afraid that you wouldn’t find me worthy to work with.”

It should have been a shock – but it wasn’t – because I’d heard this before – but *only* from female clients.

I blame the Imposter Syndrome.

The Imposter Syndrome is the fear of being exposed as a fraud, of feeling unworthy of your success, of not being as capable as others. Both genders experience the Imposter Syndrome, but women are more susceptible to it and more intensely affected by it.

A female’s self-doubt can negatively impact her career when, as studies show, she pushes less often than her male counterparts for a raise or a promotion.

The good news is that if you have fallen into the Imposter Syndrome trap, there are strategies to help you escape. From my book, *STAND OUT: How to Build Your Leadership Presence*, here are three of my favorite:

## **1. Keep a success log**

On a daily basis (preferably at the end of the day) write down all of the things you are proud of – goals you achieved and situations that you handled well. You’ll see how even small successes, when recorded and reviewed on a regular basis can make positive changes in the way you evaluate yourself

And stop downplaying your achievements. No one gets to your level without talent and hard work. Even if luck played a role in your career, it was no accident or quirk of fate that prepared you to take advantage of the opportunities presented. So the next time someone praises you, don’t brush it off. Simply smile and say “Thank you.”

## 2. Turn your inner critic into an inner coach

Of all the negative feedback you may receive, I'll bet none is as damaging to your self-confidence, as what you tell yourself. Or as one of my clients admitted, "If I talked to my friends the way I talk to myself, I wouldn't have any friends."

Your inner critic notices the things you do wrong, or poorly. It takes to heart – and dwells on – any critical comment you hear from others. It magnifies your weaknesses and ignore your strengths.

Instead of automatically criticizing yourself, think of how a supportive coach would react. While your inner critic might say: "You are never going to be a good presenter, you might as well stop trying" your inner coach would tell you: "Every time you speak, you learn something that makes you a better presenter the next time. Stay with it and your speaking skills will get better and better."

## 3. Fail forward

Recently, when I asked a CEO how she handled setbacks, Suzy replied, "I don't believe in setbacks. I try to fail quickly, learn from it, shake it off, and move forward."

That's what I call the "3 Rs technique":

The first R is **Review**: Acknowledge the situation by examining what happened.

The second R is **Redo**: Think about what you learned from this experience and make a clear mental image of what you would do differently the next time you were in a similar situation.

The final R (which is often the most difficult) is **Release**: Let it go. There is nothing more of value than this failure

has to offer – so release it and move on.

These are my three strategies to escape the Imposter Syndrome trap. Which one works best for you?

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