



TRANSCENDING THE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME: A PATHWAY TO AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP WITH THE ENERGY LEADERSHIP INDEX

Unmasking Impostor Syndrome

Can you recall a time when you downplayed your accomplishments or felt unworthy of your success? I do, and I experienced it recently as I was joining a new program.

The Impostor syndrome, first identified by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in the 1970s, is marked by chronic self-doubt and a fear of being exposed as a fraud. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent among women leaders who, despite clear evidence of their



**Schedule Your Complimentary
Call Now**

by Belinda MJ Brown,
Executive Coach & Women Success Expert



WhatsApp : +1 (321) 527-6317



belinda@equanimityexecutive.com



Global

TRANSCENDING THE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

competence, struggle to internalize their successes. It is often experienced by my clients who transition from being an expert to becoming a leader. Expertise feels safe and tangible, leadership is truly subjective.

Many of us have been there receiving praise and immediately dismissing it, thinking, "If they only knew the truth," or "I was just lucky." These thoughts can be incredibly debilitating, creating a cycle of self-doubt and underestimation of our true capabilities. When we constantly question our worth, it affects not just our mental well-being but also our performance and satisfaction in our roles.

The Energy Leadership Index: Your Pathway to Transformation

Have you ever wondered how your energy levels affect your perception of yourself and your leadership abilities? The ELI, developed by Bruce D. Schneider, is a unique assessment that measures your energy levels and identifies how you perceive and approach work and life. The ELI categorizes energy into seven levels, ranging from catabolic (negative, draining) to anabolic (positive, constructive).

By understanding where you fall on the ELI spectrum, you can gain insights into how your energy levels impact your feelings of self-worth and confidence. Imagine the possibilities if you could transform catabolic energy, which fuels impostor syndrome, into anabolic energy that

supports authentic leadership. I mentioned this framework in [The Most Common Fears Women Face in the Corporate World Today](#).

The seven levels of energy described by the ELI provide a comprehensive framework to understand our default responses and behaviors:

1. Level 1: Characterized by feelings of victimization and helplessness. If you often feel overwhelmed and powerless, you might be operating from this level which means you wear those lenses to react to situations and relationships in your life.
2. Level 2: Marked by conflict, anger, and frustration. This level is dominated by a fight response, leading to constant inner and outer battles. Your perspective and even language reflect the multiple wars you are fighting.
3. Level 3: Associated with rationalization and coping. Here, we start to take responsibility but still see problems as obstacles. You process information with your mind and miss to acknowledge how your heart feels.
4. Level 4: Driven by compassion and service to others. This level focuses on helping others but can sometimes lead to self-neglect. Your outlook involves care, compassion and you can also at times make excuses for



TRANSCENDING THE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

others or become a savior.

5. Level 5: Characterized by reconciliation and acceptance. At this level, we see opportunities and are more flexible and innovative. You see others as complementary, you seek and appreciate diversity and welcome different points of views.

6. Level 6: Marked by wisdom and joy. We experience a sense of connection and synergy with others, leading to collaboration and creative problem-solving. You embrace each experience as an opportunity to feel joy and you read your environment with your heart, and all other senses.

7. Level 7: Associated with complete passion and a non-judgmental perspective. At this level, we are in a state of creation and connected to our deepest purpose. You are fully involved in the precious experience of the present moment. You need no filter or lenses.

Understanding your primary level of energy helps in identifying the areas where you can make the most impactful changes.

Case Study: Janes Journey

Meet Jane, a senior executive at a Fortune 500 company, who, like many of us, struggled with impostor syndrome despite her impressive track record. Can you relate to Janes experience of feeling like an impostor even when her achievements

were undeniable? Janes ELI assessment revealed high levels of Level 2 energy, characterized by conflict, frustration, and self-doubt. Through coaching, we worked on shifting her perspective and increasing her anabolic energy.

Jane's initial assessment showed she spent most of her time in Levels 1 and 2, feeling stressed and constantly on edge. She often felt like she was fighting against an invisible force, trying to prove her worth but never quite feeling validated. We began our work by addressing her internal dialogue and helping her recognize her negative thought patterns.

Through a series of coaching sessions, we focused on:

1. Self-Awareness: Jane began to keep a journal, noting instances when she felt like an impostor. This helped her identify triggers and recurring themes in her thoughts.
2. Mindset Shifts: We used cognitive reframing techniques to help Jane see her achievements as a result of her skills and hard work. Whenever a negative thought crept in, she practiced self-compassion and cared for herself. In the past I was used to supporting clients to replace it with a positive affirmation. Nowadays, I invite my client to choose when the time feels right and if this is really needed.



TRANSCENDING THE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

3. **Energy Shifts:** Jane learned techniques to shift her energy from catabolic to anabolic. She practiced mindfulness and meditation, which helped her move towards Level 4 energy, where she felt more empathetic towards herself and others.

4. **Feedback Integration:** Jane actively sought feedback from trusted colleagues and mentors. Hearing their perspectives helped her see herself more objectively and understand her value from an external viewpoint.

As Jane's energy levels shifted towards Level 5, she started to view challenges as opportunities rather than threats. Her confidence grew, and she began to embrace her role as a leader, not just in title but in mindset. This transformation not only alleviated her impostor syndrome but also enhanced her leadership effectiveness and job satisfaction.

Strategies to Overcome Impostor Syndrome

1. **Acknowledge and Validate Feelings:** Have you acknowledged that impostor syndrome is common among successful women? Understand that many share these feelings, and it's important to validate your emotions without letting them define your self-worth.

Recognize that these feelings are a normal part of the human experience, especially in high-pressure environments. By

acknowledging them, you take the first step towards addressing them. It is important to separate feelings from facts; just because you feel like an impostor doesn't mean you are one. Most of my clients have experienced it in their career.

- **Reframe Negative Thoughts:** Are you aware of how often you engage in negative self-talk? Use the ELI framework to identify negative, catabolic thoughts and consciously shift towards anabolic thoughts. Practice self-compassion and recognize your accomplishments.

Start by identifying your inner critic. What does it say? How does it undermine your confidence? Challenge these thoughts by gathering evidence of your successes and abilities. Practice self-compassion by treating yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would offer a friend.

- **Seek Feedback and Mentorship:** Do you have mentors or peers who can provide honest feedback and support? Surround yourself with a supportive network that can help you see your strengths and areas for growth objectively.

Building a network of trusted advisors can provide you with perspective and encouragement. I call it your dream team. I have many of them. One for my



TRANSCENDING THE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

health, another one for my career and I have my own professional coach to support me. Regularly seek feedback to understand how others perceive your contributions. This external validation can counteract your internal doubts and help you see yourself more clearly and support you in seeing a different perspective.

- **Set Realistic Expectations:** Are you setting realistic goals for yourself, or are you striving for unattainable perfection? Understand that perfection is unattainable. Celebrate incremental progress and set achievable goals.

Perfectionism can be at the heart of impostor syndrome for some of you. Recognize that perfection is an illusion and that striving for it can be paralyzing. Instead, set the bar where it is needed to be (double check with peers or mentors) and celebrate your progress. Each step forward is a success worth acknowledging.

- **Continuous Learning:** How committed are you to continuous personal and professional development? The more you learn and grow, the more confident you will become in your abilities.

Embrace a growth mindset by viewing every experience as a learning opportunity. Invest in your personal and professional development through courses, workshops, and reading. But also join a

network of women, group coaching sessions or entitle an executive coach. The more you expand your knowledge and skills, the more confident you will become in your abilities, and the less room there will be for self-doubt.

The Impostor syndrome can be a significant barrier for women leaders, but it is not insurmountable. By leveraging the insights provided by the Energy Leadership Index and implementing strategies to shift from catabolic to anabolic energy, you can transcend self-doubt and step into your authentic leadership potential. As a senior executive coach, I have had the privilege of guiding many women through this journey, witnessing their transformation from feeling like impostors to embracing their roles as confident, effective leaders.

Remember, the journey to overcoming impostor syndrome is continuous and requires dedication. By recognizing your value, challenging your inner critic, and harnessing the power of anabolic energy, you can lead with authenticity and leave a lasting legacy.

References

1. Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention.



2. Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice, 15(3), 241-247.

3. Schneider, B. D. (2007). Energy Leadership: Transforming Your Workplace and Your Life from the Core. Wiley.

Tewfik, B. A., & Weisinger, H. (2020). Overcoming Impostor Syndrome: Learning to Own Your Success. Harvard Business Review.

