



## HOW LEADERS CAN ELIMINATE IMPOSTER SYNDROME ON THEIR TEAM

When Frances Hesselbein was named CEO of the Girl Scouts, she instituted a structure that looked like no other. It was circular, and it was bold! When asked to describe it she put a glass at the center of a lunch table, surrounded it with plates and said:

“I’m here,” she said, pointing to the glass in the middle. “I’m not on top of anything.”

When Alan Mulally, former CEO of Ford, was asked how he turned Ford around, rather than taking credit, he pointed to the power of teamwork and shared purpose:

“Everyone is part of the team, and everyone’s contribution is respected,” he said.

Two things we can tell you about Frances Hesselbein and Alan Mulally as leaders with 100% certainty, based on direct and repeated observation:

- Both were inherently humble and other-centered.
- Neither suffered from anything remotely resembling imposter syndrome. More than that, the way they led others all but eliminated imposters on their teams.

Imposter syndrome is a psychological condition that creates and permeates personal insecurity. That insecurity varies from person to person (of course) and can manifest in a variety of ways. Here are three common mindsets of imposters:

- **Fear of success:** Hitting targets and achieving goals only means the bar gets raised. So when you win, you

are really losing. How can your most recent accomplishment possibly be repeated or surpassed? There’s no time to celebrate, no time to take pride in your achievement and very little room for anything remotely resembling joy.

- **Fear of judgement:** Imposters are typically obsessed with perfection because they proactively seek to eliminate the opportunity for others to offer critique. This inevitably creates work-life balance challenges for them and conflict with the other people on their teams.
- **Fear of Help:** Asking for help is a sign of weakness. It is also a signal that somebody else would probably be a better fit for your position. Just work harder and keep your challenges to yourself.

The Hesselbeins and Mulallys of the world develop and sustain work cultures that make it difficult (if not impossible) for imposter syndrome to persist. These cultures are natural, logical extensions of their personal beliefs about who leaders are and how people should treat each other. They nurture the idea that leadership is a foundational responsibility of every employee, every day. And they help those with imposter syndrome think differently about the following:

- **Success:** Make no mistake about it, real leaders chase dreams that can make a true difference. But they do so in a manner that positions the journey and the opportunity as the primary reward. Their mindset is, “Isn’t it fun to be doing something this important?”

- **Judgment:** Real leaders point you inward. You are the only person that can honestly assess whether you are thinking through difficult problems to the best of your ability and executing with consistent effort. You can’t make everybody happy, but you can get a thumbs up from the person staring back at you in a mirror.
- **Help:** Asking for help becomes a recognized badge of courage. Mulally was famous for orchestrating this. He held weekly meetings that became the cornerstone of an amazing culture where surfacing problems was seen as a strength, not a failure. Once obstacles are identified, everyone can focus their attention on providing useful suggestions. As a result, problems get solved.

AS A LEADER, YOU CAN HAVE A PROFOUND IMPACT ON THE CONFIDENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THOSE AROUND YOU.

As a leader, you can have a profound impact on the confidence and psychological development of those around you. The antidote for imposter syndrome is to become a humble, other-centered leader who aspires to chase a worthwhile dream.. 🌱

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