

# Why Imposter Syndrome Can Be a Good Thing

Let's say you're 19 years old. Your entire experience so far has been in reporting to other people and learning the very basics of marketing.

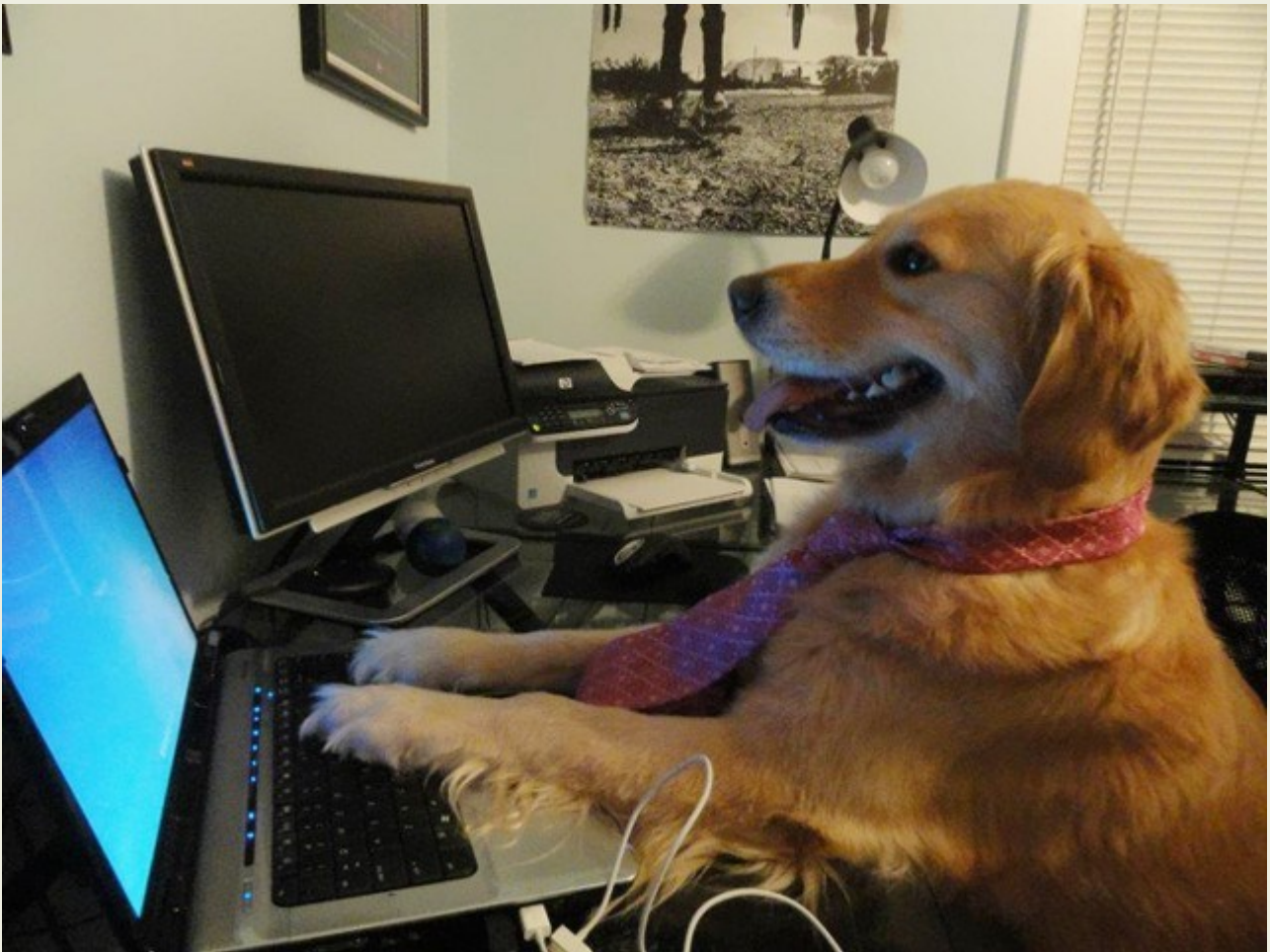
Then let's say your entire team gets laid off. Then let's up the ante and say you're now responsible for figuring out how to run a company's marketing and communications.

In this *completely hypothetical* situation, you might feel what's called "imposter syndrome."

***Impostor syndrome (also known as impostor phenomenon or fraud syndrome or the impostor experience) is a concept describing individuals who are marked by an inability to internalize their accomplishments and a persistent fear of being exposed as a "fraud".***

- Source: Wikipedia

In meme form, a person with imposter syndrome feels sort of like this dog:



Imposter syndrome can be crippling.

If, say, I was this hypothetical marketing and communications manager at one point, I know I'd feel completely clueless about half of the time. Even if I did what I needed to do, I might still feel out of place. I'd be 19, inexperienced, and all of a sudden thrown into a role of communicating with experienced journalists, executives, and clients.

My own doubts about whether I **truly** belonged in that role would hold me back from actually growing in to that role. The more I thought about my insufficiency, the more I would be insufficient to the role. And I'd be attributing a power and status to my counterparts and colleagues which they also lacked. Like me, they were humans who had to figure things out every day.

So imposter syndrome is bad, mmmkkayyy? Given too much power, it skews your reality.

BUT.

There is actually a good side to (temporary) imposter syndrome. It can teach you an important lesson if you let it.

**When you feel most vulnerable about your position, you're going to be able to see the root of position most clearly. It all rests on a fragile foundation: your own ability to make wise choices, courageously.**

If you're our *completely hypothetical* young marketer, imposter syndrome will shake you and smack you and remind you that you are a human who makes mistakes, not a special magic marketing wunderkind. Nothing about **you** guarantees you the privileges or responsibility or ability you currently have.

Imposter syndrome will help you see that you were lucky to keep your job. It will help you see that you only continue to keep your job to the extent you choose wisely and act boldly. If you struggle with arrogance or any feeling of entitlement to power and influence, imposter syndrome will quickly disabuse you of them.

This is a wonderful thing. And, yes, I know what you're thinking right now.

**“What the hell, James? I just read a bunch of articles that were going to help me overcome imposter syndrome. Now you tell me it's a good thing?”**

I guess this is a good case of finding wisdom in a weakness. You should shake off your imposter syndrome, but you shouldn't shake off the truth that's hidden within it.

Imposter syndrome is a necessary waypoint on the way to owning a role. If you don't feel it, you should be frightened. You never want to identify so much with your role that you forget where it comes from.

I am a manager due to chance + occasional wise decisions + courage in carrying them through. But when I leave my office, I am just another human being. And when I leave my company, I will continue to be just another human being. Nothing is permanent or deserved.

You are playing a role on a stage – always. Play it well – always.

*Now that I've told you to hug your imposter syndrome closely, I guess I owe you another tool to get over the crippling kind. Check out Isaac Morehouse's argument that we are **all** imposters. Oh, and here's why being clueless can actually make you better at your job.*