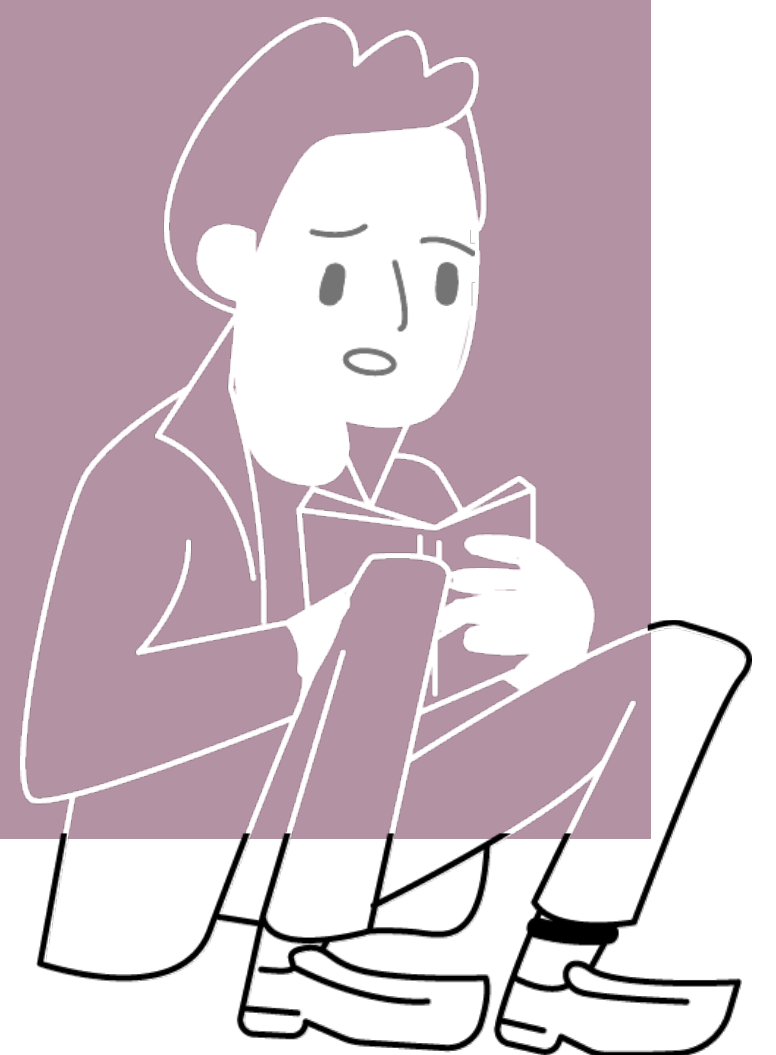


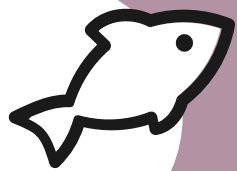
The **Leapers** Little Guide to...

# Imposter Syndrome.

From the insights and wisdom of our members.

Curated by **Matthew Knight**





## **Imposter Syndrome affects over 70% of people, but what is it, and how can you tackle the phenomenon?**

Based upon conversations in the Leapers community, along with tested tangible behaviours and techniques which help - this **Leapers Little Guide** helps you understand and tackle one of the common stressors of the self-employed.

### **About the Author**

Matthew Knight is a community host at Leapers, and advocate for the mental health of the self-employed. Based in London, Matthew is a father of two, and drinks an inordinate amount of coffee.

[www.leapers.co](http://www.leapers.co)

# Contents.

- What is Imposter Syndrome?
- Why is it a common issue for the self-employed?
- Techniques for tackling Imposter Phenomenon.
- Worksheets
- About Leapers

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Matthew Knight hereby asserts his right to be identified as the author of “The Leapers little guide to Imposter Syndrome”

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# “I just got lucky”

No matter how talented, confident or experienced you are - you've no doubt had days where you have felt like you're not able to do something, despite whoever asked you to do the task believing you can.

If this happens frequently to you, you might be struggling with **Imposter Syndrome** or Imposter Phenomenon: the feeling that you're going to be exposed as a fraud, that you've gotten a job based upon perception of your skills being stronger than they are, or your successes are down to luck and you don't warrant the praise, despite evidence to prove otherwise.

The term was coined by clinical psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978, when they found that despite having adequate external evidence of accomplishments, **people with imposter syndrome remain convinced that they don't deserve the success they have.**

## STORIES FROM LEAPERS

One of the brilliant things about the Leapers community is the hundreds of people who 'get it'. They've been here, they've done it, they've felt it. When you join our community, you're not only finding a support network, you're not only tapping into the wisdom and experience of others, but you're also reminding yourself that you're not the only one feeling this way.

Even if there's not a piece of advice or suggestion that 'solves' your problem, being reassured that you're not alone can help - just because you work for yourself, doesn't mean you're by yourself.

So in each of our Leapers Little Guides, we share stories from our members, real experiences from others. You'll find them scattered through this book, and there are plenty more online at [leapers.co](https://leapers.co)



Whilst it isn't just a self-employed issue (indeed, it is estimated as high as 70% of people experience this) as we are often working on our own, the **feelings, thoughts and behaviors attached to it can become a bigger problem.**

There might not be someone sitting next to you, who can help you challenge the thoughts, you might be missing a cheerleader who reminds you of the great things you're capable of, or even just someone pragmatic who can help point to examples of where you have already done something similar - so **in many instances, it can lead to people turning down work, not applying for roles, and downplaying their own commercial value.**

# 76%

**of our community say that not feeling talented causes them stress**



## STORIES FROM LEAPERS

When I got my first big role I was really scared I would not reach expectations and shouldn't be there.

My mum, who ain't a brain surgeon, simply said ' your boss is a smart man, he sets himself up for success, he never would have put you in that position if there was even a small chance you would make him look bad'.

I have carried that with me for years in a number of situations. It's given me the confidence to get through some mentally tough times.

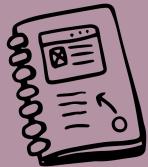
-- Victoria

Even though it might not be justified, **the feelings of anxiety and self-doubt are very much real, and can be crippling.**

So, if you're responding to someone who tells you they are struggling with imposter syndrome - you'll need a mix of **empathy** (I understand how horrible it can feel) and **practicality** (what can you do to reduce the impact of the feeling?).

**Especially if that person is you.**

There are a few things which we suggest trying when you're dealing with imposter syndrome, found in the following pages of this guide.

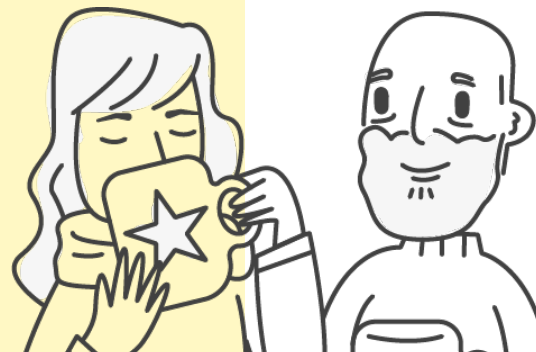


**Whenever you see this icon**, you know there's an exercise or activity to try. Whilst they might not all be right for you, it's worth trying them out to see if they feel like they positively help in some way.

And if there's stuff you've tried before you think we could include, do let us know - we update these guides regularly.

## Eight techniques for challenging Imposter Phenomenon

1. Accepting you don't always know
2. Recognising and Reframing
3. Build up your evidence
4. Slow down, Buddy up
5. External Feedback
6. Be Objective
7. Focus on the right wrongs
8. Talk about it



## ONE

# Accepting you won't always know.

You're not going to know the answer immediately to every question, and recognising this is a good starting point.

Imposter syndrome often comes from **the fear of being caught not having the answer** - and sometimes (lots of times probably), you're not going to have the answer, but that's okay! There's a first time for everything.

The best people I've ever worked with are those who say "I don't know, but I'm going to go and find out and let you know". The best clients are the ones who recognise that a considered answer is better than an immediate one.



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**Use a journal when you start a new project, and write at the top of the page "I don't feel like I can do this", and then add the simple word: "yet".**

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## STORIES FROM LEAPERS

"I think I have learnt - over a very long period of time - to just accept who I am, that my own unique combination of skills, experiences (work and life), interests, character traits, and yes, anxieties and fears, make me who I am.

So yes, I look around and see someone over there who's far more knowledgeable at X than me, BUT...they can't do all the things that I can do. I once had a real hang up about the fact that I wasn't creative. But someone convinced me that I was, but my definition of creative was wrong.

It took me a long time to actually work this out, but once I did it was kinda transformational."

— Ross

## TWO

# Recognising and reframing thoughts.

Notice when the thoughts occur, and write them down, so you can reframe the concern, or question it objectively.

Turn the voice asking “What will happen when they find out I have no idea what I’m doing?” to “What steps can I take to make sure I do have the right things in place, and ensure I have time to work out the right way to do this?”



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**Use your journal to capture the thoughts as they come along. Write down your immediate concerns, and then park them for a while, perhaps overnight. Return to the journal after a while, and re-read what you wrote. Try to reframe the concern.**

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### STORIES FROM LEAPERS

“When it comes to lack of self-confidence in a specific area or situation there are three things that help me the most:

1. keeping a tangible list of all the things I've done that were hard so I can go back and look at it
2. trying to 're-classify' the feeling I have as the adrenaline of learning rather than the fear of being found out
3. looking around at what other people are doing who are apparently expert and reminding myself that it's not that great!

If I am totally honest, whilst it's the most cynical, it tends to be the third one that works best for me! 'If not me, then who...?!'”

— Matthew H



## THREE

# Build up your evidence.

Keeping track of the achievements you've made. It's simple but important part of the process.

Track all of the things you do in a notepad, a google doc, a file on your computer - somewhere centralised.

It doesn't matter how large or small, just keep track of your worries, achievements, feedback and comments on your work, any successes you've had [like being asked to do a job or featured on a website].



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**Highlight the things you are proud of, and even encourage yourself to pick one thing each month you'd put a gold star against. Get into the habit of allowing at least one piece of work each month to deserve your own praise.**

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## STORIES FROM LEAPERS

“Even though I try and collect as much evidence of my achievements, I’m always very keen to ignore, forget or discount it.

I’ve had to trust in the process somewhat, and rather than making my own judgements, I try and let my clients make their own decisions on whether what they see is enough for them.

Even if I don’t believe it, at least there’s a list of the things I’ve done, and that’s useful for when I’m feeling like I haven’t done anything valuable, I can just pass the examples to my client.”

— Matthew K

## FOUR

# Slow down and buddy up.

When the feelings rise up, take a moment - not to react and make decisions, but rather to talk through the concerns you're having with some else.

They can help you question the feelings, and help you objectively step through your worries. It's remarkable how a good night's sleep can change your perspective on things.

Whilst you're collecting your evidence too, let your buddy help you to discuss your work, so they can find the brilliant aspects in it, the things to be proud of.

Oftentimes, we can skip over the aspects of a project we think were basic stuff, but to others are well-worth shouting about.



### STORIES FROM LEAPERS

“It can help to acknowledge and understand the gremlin who is sitting on our shoulder saying the negative thoughts, understanding its voice, why it springs up, the history perhaps of where it is coming from - and then learning to be aware but not overcome of that voice.

I've had a full on week of imposter syndrome and found talking to my gremlin and focusing on what I might lose if I'm overcome by what they are saying has really helped... the what if.. thinking through the steps ahead...

The support and feedback of others is so important but I think so too is spending some time to have a little chat and focus for yourself with yourself.”

— Eleanor

## FIVE

# Get external feedback.

As a freelancer, it can be rare to get feedback - often the only way you know if your work was good enough is if they ask you back.

This means you can very easily end up relying only upon your own thoughts and feelings about your work.

Break this cycle by asking for feedback. Find a structured way to get input from the client on what they liked, what impact the work had, and what you could do better next time.



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**Before you ask your client for feedback, consider what questions you're specifically going to ask for feedback on, and then answer the questions for yourself too.**

**When you get the feedback back, compare the two and see if there are differences externally to your internal perception.**

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## STORIES FROM LEAPERS

“Knowledge, experience & competence are always relative - on a continuum. We can always learn more & become more capable, even from people who seemingly have less experience.

If we have a thirst for growth & we're always evolving...think we need to find a peaceful acceptance of our limits. Maybe by reframing, we stop self-labelling ourselves as impostors. We don't have to 'fake-it-till-we-make-it' because we'll never arrive at a finished expert place.

I'm not saying it's easy...but somehow that vulnerability is what connects us all as human beings. When we accept it & quit fighting against it...life becomes richer and we learn more."

--Donna

# Get objective.

If you can't accept praise like "that was great!" it can be easier to accept the objective facts of a situation, and the tangible outcomes which your work led to.

These will vary depending on the type of work you do, but focusing on numeric, objective and measurable results can help, over more subjective ideas. Look for this type of data on the work you've done.

Not only does this add colour to your portfolio, and you can use it when clients are looking for work, it also acts as a reminder of the things you've done, as evidence of the impact of your work. Even if you're not willing to accept the results - you can provide them to new clients to make their own judgement.



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**Get into the habit of writing up your projects: what was the problem, what value did you bring to the project, what were the outcomes?**

**Structure it like an award entry or a case study. Try and find really tangible numbers that you can attach to the project. How many designs did you create? How many products did you sell? How many positive reviews did it get? How much money did you save them?**

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## STORIES FROM LEAPERS

“One way to remind yourself of your worth is to find a way to be aware of your skills and assets. Write down all your achievements in a year, write a bio for yourself, enter an award.

If all of that is too much then there's an exercise I found helpful: Ask 3-5 of your mates what they value about you. Ask what they always turn to you for advice on. Then ask two current or former colleges the same thing.

You'll start to see your unique value more clearly, and that's what I keep in my pocket when I'm worried that I'm not where I should be... So I can remind myself I'm actually right where I need to be.”

— Rachelle

## **SEVEN**

# **Focus on the right shortcomings.**

There will be times where things are not as good as they could be, and plenty of times where you'll be not willing to say "that was okay".

Again, reframe the "losses" as useful feedback of where to focus, and build your skills for next time - but do it guided by feedback from others, rather than your own take on how things went. Focus on the consistent feedback points, and don't add too many 'things to improve'.

Focusing on one at a time, as a personal development objective over the year is more effective and beating yourself up over several.



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**Use your journal to write a 'post-mortem' on projects, get your thoughts on what went right, what didn't go so well, and areas you'd like to improve next time.**

**Force yourself to just pick one area of improvement from your post-mortem, and then let the others go.**

**Don't forget to highlight the things which went well.**

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### **STORIES FROM LEAPERS**

"I combat it by accepting I will never be more knowledgeable in the business domain than the clients who live and breath it every day (and being open about that with them from the beginning), instead focusing on what I can bring that adds value.

I'm not trying to know more than them, but I can help them choose or validate a path (or maybe discover a new one) and/or remove the blockers which are preventing them from making progress. That said, having time to prepare thoroughly for a new client also provides much confidence.

When the client says "Wow, I can't believe how quickly you have understood our business and challenges" I know I'm in a good place."

-- Ian

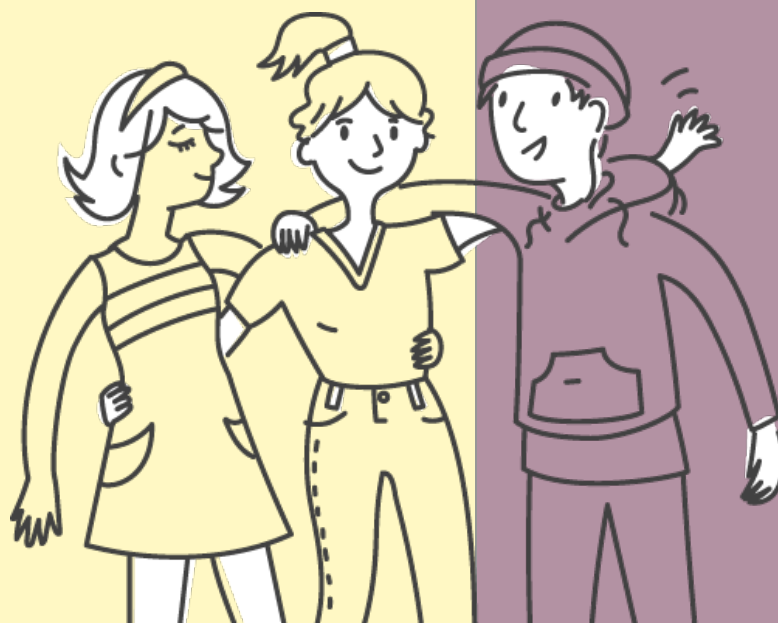
## EIGHT

# Join a community and talk about it.

If you're not already, join a community of other freelancers where you can share your work, so that others can give you feedback, praise and support.

When you work for yourself, it can be quite isolating at times, so build yourself a team of cheerleaders.

The Leapers community, for example, has a channel called #littlewins, which is all about celebrating the things you've done. It can be great to scroll back and see what you've shared, but also there's a lovely little rush when you see everyone clapping, sharing and cheering your work.



# Worksheets and more.

In the following section are a number of journalling worksheets you can print off and use daily, weekly and monthly, based upon some of the techniques in this book.

In addition, we've collected a number of resources, links, articles, videos and books on the topic of Imposter Syndrome, along with the latest edition of this ebook, as well as downloadable versions of the worksheets.

Visit <https://leapers.co/go/imposter>



**Daily Journal**

**Date:**

List the things which happened today, and mark the positives.

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1.

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2.

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3.

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4.

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If you experienced a feeling of self-doubt, explain the reasons behind the thought.

Now, write how you might mitigate against that situation happening.

Finally, who did you discuss this thought with, and what feedback did they provide?



Worksheet

**Weekly Journal**

Review your daily journal, and write up one thing you're proud of.

**Date:**

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**What were you proud of?**

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**Why did this work stand out?**

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**What feedback did you get for this work?**

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Worksheet

**Monthly Journal**

**Date:**

Capture some of the feedback you've gathered this month.  
If you haven't had any, ask for some now.

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**What feedback did I receive  
this month?**

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**What questions should I ask to get  
feedback this month?**

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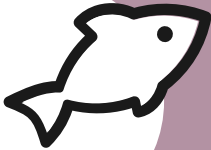
**What one area do I want to  
develop?**

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**What areas am I "good enough" in and  
don't need to worry?**

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# Leapers supports the mental health of the self-employed.



We're a **free, open and inclusive** community for anyone who wants to work differently. Founded in 2017, we've welcomed over 1600 members, and supported over 10,000 visitors.

We offer a **community of peer-support, create tangible things that help, and guide those who hire freelancers** to help us all work well together.

We're the team for people without a team - if you're looking for a supportive group of people who understand the self-employed experience, join us.

<https://www.leapers.co/>