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Managing impostor syndrome in the workplace

What is impostor syndrome?

Impostor syndrome is when an employee doesn't feel able to do their job as well as they believe others at the organization think they can. They often fear they will be seen as a fraud. In a professional sense, this individual may feel as though they do not fit into their new role.

Any worker can experience impostor syndrome. Although it's most prominent in new hires, trainers, managers, and supervisors may also experience these feelings when in an unfamiliar or new situation.

What can an organization do?

During the onboarding process and when assigning tasks to employees, give clear business expectations as soon as possible. Without these expectations, individuals may have doubt about their role and what they should be doing.

A buddy system during onboarding can help alleviate impostor syndrome in new employees. They can build connections and ask questions, reducing uncertainty during early employment.

Takeaways

- Impostor syndrome is very common in workplaces; it is estimated that as many as 70% of the workforce experience it at some point in their careers.

- Organizations can set expectations early in the onboarding process and assign a buddy to help prevent impostor syndrome in new hires.

- Although it's most common in new hires, impostor syndrome can happen to anyone in any stage of their career.

5 types of impostor syndrome and what to do about them

1. The Perfectionist | Their work must be perfect or it's a failure. They have micromanaging tendencies. They are rarely satisfied with others' outcomes because they think the work can always be better.

What you can do | Recognize that mistakes are a natural part of the process. No one's work is ever perfect. Try pushing yourself to act before you feel ready. Start that project you've been planning for months. The "perfect time" to begin is now. Celebrate your achievements, find contentment, and cultivate self-confidence.

2. The Superhero | They put work first, sacrificing personal time. They feel as if they have not earned their title and feel pressured to work harder to prove themselves. However, they tend to believe they can have work-life balance.

What you can do | Remember: No one should have more power than you to make you feel good about yourself. Learn to take constructive criticism professionally, not personally. Nurture your inner confidence and rely less on others to give you praise.

3. The Talented and Gifted | If a task is not completed successfully on the first try, they experience shame. They often experience insecurity when trying something new. They believe they need to be naturally good at everything.

What you can do | Try seeing yourself as a work in progress; learning is a lifelong endeavor. Identify behaviors that can help you improve over time.

4. The Overly Independent | Can feel shame when asking for help, so they refuse assistance from others. They ignore personal needs over work needs. They firmly believe they need to accomplish things on their own to prove their worth.

What you can do | Realize there is value in asking for help. Not knowing how to do something is an opportunity to learn something new. Seeking advice from supportive leaders, teammates, and friends can widen your support base and knowledge.

5. The Self-Doubter | They fear that they may be exposed as inexperienced or unknowledgeable if they don't know something. Even if they've been in their role for some time, they still think they don't know enough. They often refuse acknowledgment of their expertise.

What you can do | Consider learning as you go. The self-doubter can get bogged down by endlessly seeking information. Apply new information as you learn it – making learning more meaningful and increasing retention. Share your knowledge. Mentoring is a great way to discover your inner expert while benefitting others.

Activity ideas

- **Group discussion |** Each participant can share their experiences as a new employee. Have you ever experienced impostor syndrome? Do any of the above descriptions resonate with you?

- **Evaluate onboarding process |** it be improved? Are there ways to prevent or acknowledge impostor syndrome at your organization?

- **Learn more |** Research impostor syndrome individually.