

Am I a Fraud? Dealing with Imposter Syndrome

- *Chance Morgan*

We all face moments of doubt. It's a part of being human. Some of us experience it more often, and there are countless reasons why that may be. Sometimes the doubts are over minor things ("did I really want the salad?"). Sometimes they can be much larger, even going as far to make us question everything about ourselves. Sometimes they take the form of thoughts like "people are going to realize that I'm a fake" or "I'm not good at what I do, and I'll never be as good as I want to be." This is better known as imposter syndrome, and it's more widespread than many of us realize.

I'm no stranger to imposter syndrome. I routinely question my abilities, my talents, my prospects, and my creative potential relative to the industry. I frequently wonder if I'm practicing enough, learning enough, applying myself to the right opportunities. I also often wonder if I deserve it. That's the big one, and I had an experience with that quite recently.

Not long ago, I was fortunate enough to attend *Hadestown* on Broadway, the first performance after the Tony Awards where the production had won eight. My girlfriend had had the incredible foresight to buy tickets weeks prior, and I will never forget how lucky I was to be there. The show was breathtaking from start to finish, and it was probably the most powerful night of live theatre I have ever witnessed.

Even then, in the wake of an extraordinary performance by remarkable artists working at the top of their game, I felt doubt sneak in. As a writer and director, I began to wonder if I would ever achieve something on that level. I also wondered if I was good enough to achieve something like that, or if I had the capability to become so.

THAT is exactly what imposter syndrome looks and feels like. It is insidious, it is toxic, and it will absolutely sneak up on you when you least expect. I'm quite bothered that it intruded on a truly incredible experience, and I know it will be back. That's why I'm going to ask something of the artistic community: we need to acknowledge imposter syndrome, and we need to find ways to support one another through our experiences with it. There are a lot of mindsets in our world

that can feed imposter syndrome, such as “[person X] is the [artistic specialty Y] of the generation” or searching for “the next Hamilton/Dear Evan Hansen/whichever popular show of the moment.” Attitudes such as these practically force people to compare themselves and their works with wildly successful creative juggernauts, which is hardly fair.

We need to be better to ourselves and each other. Actually, Andre DeShields said it beautifully in his acceptance speech at the Tony Awards, referring to the secrets of career longevity:

“One- surround yourself with people whose eyes light up when they see you coming. Two- slowly is the fastest way to get where you want to be. The top of one mountain is the bottom of the next, so keep climbing.”

It’s perfectly healthy to have role models and aspirations, but it’s important to remember your own capabilities and to keep a clear perspective. Remember: if you only ever look up, you can’t see how high you’ve already climbed. Also, look around you to see who you’re climbing beside. Offer a helping hand if you can, because you can never know how much that might mean for either of you and be willing to accept help as it comes.