



February is the month for love. As we look forward to celebrating Valentine's Day with friends and family, it's also a good time to check in with how we are treating ourselves. Read below for an informative article on how our self-esteem may influence our overall quality of life.



Self-Esteem: The Imposter Syndrome

Alexander Dhand, R.Psych.

Many people in their professional lives suffer from the 'imposter syndrome', the belief that they are unworthy of the position they hold, do not have the necessary skills or education required for the job they do, and will lose their jobs as soon as the secret is out.

A recent client with this issue underscored the depth of this problem and was particularly notable because of his impressive resume and his high position in one of the larger oil companies in North America. However, despite his laudable achievements, this gentleman suffered from crippling anxiety about his abilities. He had suffered self-doubt and fear throughout his life, ironically, even as he had continued to climb the corporate ladder to the top.

It is true that we all have some self-doubt lurking in our minds somewhere, however, the problem, in this particular case, goes beyond a nagging doubt concerning one's capabilities. In this specific situation, the issue is of clinical import causing distress in a person's daily life. Indeed, it can be difficult to live life covertly, hiding away everyday, living in fear, in threat of being found out, agonizing over losing one's position or struggling with oneself over one's perceived deficiencies.

From a superficial standpoint, what appears to be a simple maladaptive belief can, in fact, generate much turmoil in real life. Some examples of these repercussions:

- It can sap mental energy, leeching attention away from other important tasks, becoming a hindrance in getting things done.
- The person, because he is constantly insecure, has difficulty asserting himself; which, in turn costs him respect and standing in his workplace.
- The constant second-guessing immobilizes a person so that he has difficulty making a decision.

- Heightened emotion resulting from self-doubt tends to cloud rational decision-making, costing the person advancement while costing the company money.
- Sustained, the problem tends to lead to dissatisfaction with employment.
- Sustained further, the situation can result in depression.
- Overall, the problem can lead to poor job performance that can cost the person his job and a further compounding of his already distorted self-worth.
- Having limited faith in his abilities, a person tends to become paranoid about others' intentions and opinions of him. This tends to interfere with his work and creates problems in his personal life, as well. The situation could make it difficult to mix with others as an equal and, as such, it could impact a person's ability to be part of a team, socialize, build relationships at work, and get ahead.
- The problem can prevent a person from speaking up and contributing his point of view, which translates into talent lost for his company.
- The person feels demoralized because he has been unable to live up to his potential.

The issue, therefore, is more complex and sinister than might initially appear, and it comes with costs.

The underlying psychological issue is one of self-esteem. The gentleman I had referred to earlier, despite the obvious success in his career, had suffered emotional distress because of this problem. The issue was finally resolved after he took action to deal with it and that allowed him to finally enjoy the success he had worked so hard to achieve.

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About the Author



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Alexander is trained as a Counseling Psychologist. He has been in the field of mental health for approximately 25 years. Over the last decade or so he has worked extensively with people who have repetitive strain or traumatic injuries resulting from workplace or motor vehicle accidents. The psychological problems for which Alexander provides treatment include: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, addictions, anxiety, stress, self-esteem, chronic pain, workplace issues, and disability management.