

NSW YOUNG LAWYERS

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

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Forever Playing the Part: How to Recognise and Overcome Self-doubt in Young Lawyers

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What is imposter syndrome?

- a pervasive feeling of self-doubt and inadequacy experienced by many legal professionals. Despite accomplishments, individuals feel like frauds, fearing exposure.
- often manifests as self-doubt and anxiety. Legal professionals may feel they do not deserve their success, attributing it to luck or external factors.
- recognizing these feelings is the first step towards overcoming them and fostering a healthier self-perception.

Imposter syndrome is an insidious challenge, especially for young lawyers stepping into a high-stakes profession. It thrives on self-doubt, amplifies insecurities, and convinces many that they don't belong—even when they've proven otherwise.



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Feeling like an imposter
- Fatigue
- Stress

IMPACT ON WORK

- Lawyers with imposter syndrome may feel the need to prove themselves constantly, often leading to perfectionism. This can result in long hours, overworking, and burnout as they strive to meet impossibly high standards.
- Fear of being "found out" or not being "good enough" can cause lawyers to avoid taking on new cases, assignments, or leadership roles, limiting their growth and career progression.

IMPACT ON WORK

- Those experiencing imposter syndrome may struggle to advocate for promotions, raises, or even fair workload distribution, as they feel unworthy or fear negative judgment.
- In an attempt to maintain control and avoid mistakes, lawyers might micromanage or avoid delegating tasks, leading to inefficiency and increased stress.
- Lawyers with imposter syndrome might downplay their expertise, leading them to hesitate in asserting their legal knowledge, which could undermine their effectiveness in negotiations or court.

Introversion and Extroversion

- introversion and extraversion are stable personality factors
- we all have a dominant hand – doesn't mean we can't use the other hand - we may just feel awkward and it will get tiring after a while

EXTROVERTS

- Gain energy from socializing and engaging in activities with others; being alone for long periods can feel draining.
- Enjoy larger gatherings and are often energized by being around lots of people. They tend to thrive in high-energy, social settings.
- Tend to be more spontaneous in conversation, thinking out loud and engaging readily with others. They may talk more and often lead discussions.
- Extroverts process outwardly

INTROVERTS

- Recharge by spending time alone or in quiet environments; social interactions can drain their energy.
- Prefer smaller, more intimate gatherings or one-on-one interactions. They tend to avoid large groups or loud, stimulating environments.
- Often reflective and may take longer to respond in conversations, preferring to think before speaking. They're generally more reserved in expressing their thoughts.
- May deeply focus on internal thoughts and feelings, often preferring solitary activities like reading or writing.

BLINDSPOTS:

EXTROVERTS: not allowing enough space for introverts to provide their well-thought-out insights

INTROVERTS: may hold back too much due to their discomfort in speaking publicly or on the fly - and miss opportunities to contribute

STRENGTHS INTROVERTS BRING

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graph TD; A[STRENGTHS INTROVERTS BRING] --> B[active listening]; A --> C[empathy]; A --> D[deliberate and considered thinking and insightful writing]; A --> E[integration of a range of ideas due to preference to listen first and take information in];
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active listening

empathy

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FAMOUS INTROVERTS WHO STOOD OUT



Difference between introverts and extroverts

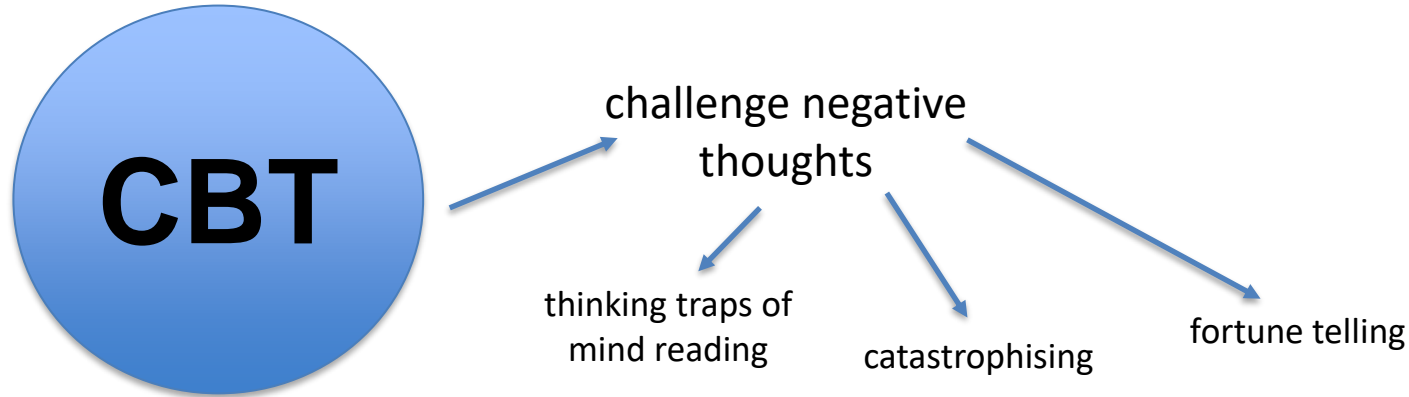
- Originates from the work of Carl Jung and further developed by Isabel Myers and Briggs (her daughter)
- Includes the core differences between them – energy, decision making, structure, thinking and feeling preferences
- Introverts tend to struggle more with larger social events and public speaking in general

Are introverts more likely to experience extroversion?

- Does not mean that extroverts don't experience stress/arousal when speaking or being in a crowd at times
- Introverts more likely to feel like imposters in the law but depends on the nature of their work – research, litigation etc
- Extroverts can suffer from imposter syndrome just as much as introverts

*Do extroverts also feel imposter syndrome?
The answer is YES!*

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy



triggers create automatic negative thoughts (ANTS) and then emotional and behavioural reactions

MENTAL / EMOTIONAL STRATEGIES

Meditation



before exerting self socially
and to recover afterwards

Mindfulness



mindful eating, showering, walking
bringing self into the present
moment rather than thinking about
it critically

PHYSICAL STRATEGIES

Good sleep hygiene

Good diet

Exercise

Breathing techniques

CONNECTION

Building a supportive network, both in personal and work settings, can buffer against feelings of inadequacy and imposter syndrome. Knowing that you have people who understand and appreciate you can increase confidence and resilience.

WORKPLACE CONNECTION

- Engage in professional communities, mentorship programs, or peer groups within the legal field.
- Having colleagues who understand your challenges can be an important source of guidance and camaraderie.

Talk to Others in the Same Boat

- Imposter syndrome is common, especially in high-performance fields like law. Sharing experiences can normalize these feelings and help you recognize that many others feel the same way.
- Find trusted peers or mentors who you can be open with. Vulnerability can foster stronger connections and even help others feel comfortable sharing their own experiences.

Balancing Connection and Disconnection (Especially for Introverts)

- While connection is important, introverts in particular need downtime to recharge. Honor your need for solitude as well as connection.
- Create a personal routine that includes both social engagement and alone time. This balance will help maintain energy levels and reduce burnout, helping you stay grounded.

Have Some Down time and Have Fun


- Find things you used to enjoy and do them!
- Allow self to spend some time each week not doing anything important or “productive”
- Get a massage, manicure, yoga, swim in the ocean or swimming pool – just for fun not exercise




PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION



Be kind to yourself.



Treat yourself with the same kindness you would over a friend.



Promote a healthier self-image.

REMEMBER YOUR SUCCESSES

- Acknowledge your achievements.
- Create a list of your successes and skills.
- Regularly reviewing this list can help reinforce your capabilities and combat feelings of inadequacy that often accompany Imposter Syndrome.



Imposter Syndrome

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