

Imposter Syndrome: What is It and What to Do With It!

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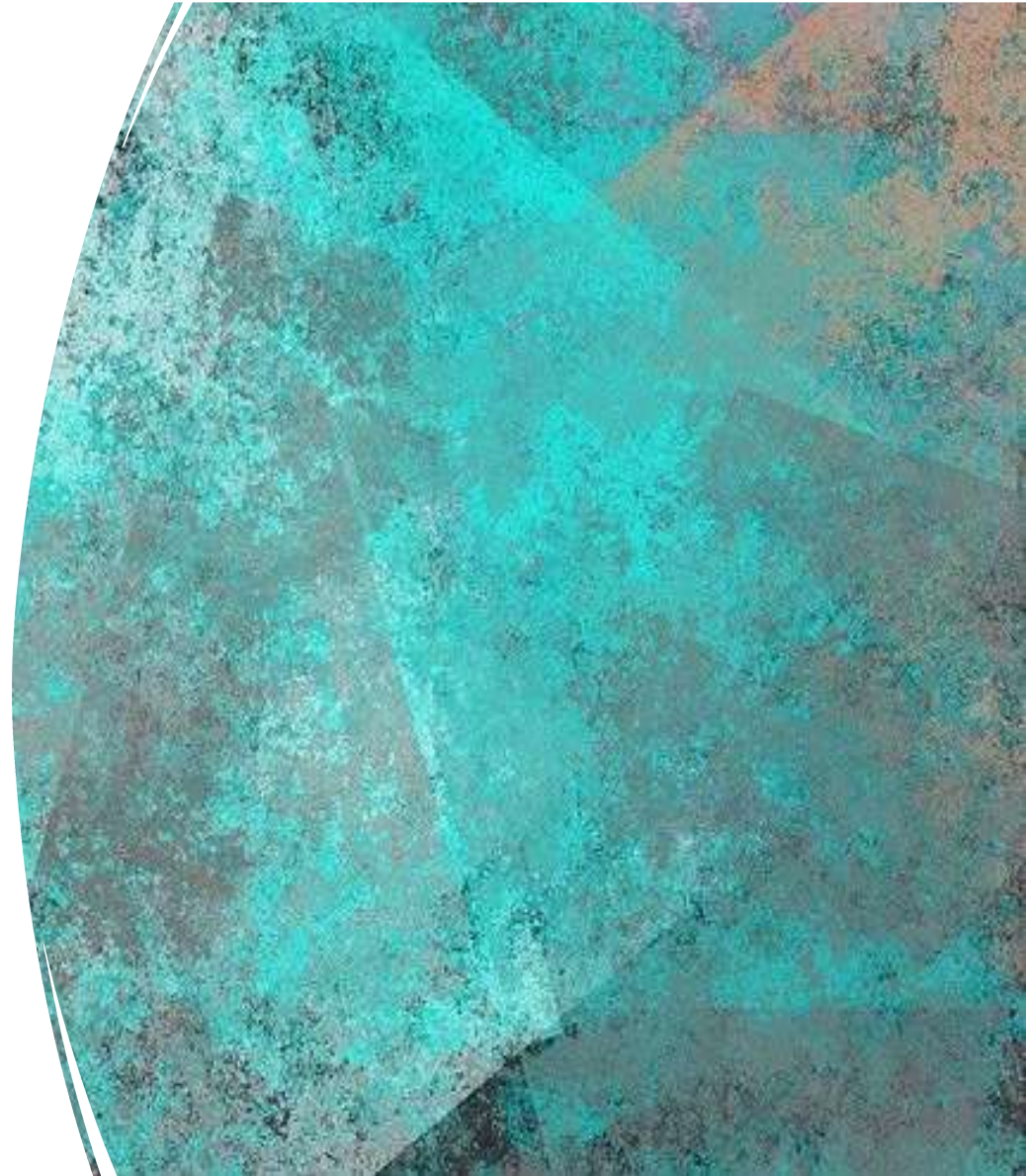
for ACE Women's Network - Florida



October 8, 2021

Learning Outcomes

- Participants will be able to
 - Define Imposter Syndrome
 - Identify Elements of an IS Cycle
 - Develop Strategies to Manage IS
 - Distinguish Between IS and Workplace Issues





Imposter Syndrome – What is it?

- *The Imposter Syndrome is the fear of being exposed as a fraud, of feeling unworthy of your success, of not being as capable as others (Gorman).*
- *Used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phoniness which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women (Clance & Imes, p. 241)*

Clance Imposter Syndrome Scale

From The Impostor Phenomenon: When Success Makes You Feel Like A Fake (pp. 20-22), by P.R. Clance, 1985, Toronto: Bantam Books. Copyright 1985 by Pauline Rose Clance, Ph.D., ABPP. Reprinted by permission. Do not reproduce without permission from Pauline Rose Clance, drpaulinerose@comcast.net, www.paulineroseclance.com.

1. I have often succeeded on a test or task even though I was afraid that I would not do well before I undertook the task. *

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I really am. *

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. I avoid evaluations if possible and have a dread of others evaluating me. *

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. When people praise me for something I've accomplished, I'm afraid I won't be able to live up to their expectations of me in the future. *

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. I sometimes think I obtained my present position or gained my present success because I happened to be in the right place at the right time or knew the right people. *

Not at all true	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very true
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<http://www.surveymizmo.com/s3/1363176/Imposter-Syndrome-Scale>

An Ongoing Research Topic!

- Especially prevalent during times of transition and uncertainty (Ramsey and Spencer)
- Particularly common among women, minorities, immigrants - people who may not fit the common norms in a given community (Medina)
- Cross-cultural and cross-discipline studies
 - Young Saudi adults (Alrayyes, et al.)
 - Pakistani medical students (Qureshi, et al.)
 - Librarians!

2021 Research Study

(Muradoglu, et. al)

Surveyed > 4,000 in nine research one universities

Assessed imposter syndrome, belonging, self-efficacy, and whether or not "brilliance" (raw academic talent) was required in their field

Imposter feelings significant in graduate students/postdoctoral fellows; not in faculty. Possibly faculty who remained never suffered from IS?

Findings – the more that success in a field was perceived to require brilliance, the more that women - esp. Minority women and early career academics - felt like imposters

Imposter Syndrome – What Causes It?

- *Highly demanding families and professional environments, psychological traits, such as perfectionism or insecurity, and social inequalities, are all putative contributors . . . (Chrousos, et al.).*
 - Derives from fight/flight response?
 - Fear of failure drives improvement?
- Links between Imposturism and psychological distress such as anxiety (Sakulku and Alexander)
 - Family environment
 - Personality traits such as perfectionism



How Do I Recognize Imposter Syndrome?

- *I spend a lot longer on projects than I probably need to trying to over prepare and be perfect*
- *I didn't think my skill set was that great. My last job told me they should pay me more based on my skill set but I felt what I did was normal. Anybody could do it. It felt wrong to think of myself as worthy of a good salary because of my ability to network and communicate with people.*
- *I fell into a routine of responding by saying “Even a blind squirrel finds a nut” when I received a compliment.*

Chat log comments from Vibbert Webinar

An HCC Faculty Member's Contribution

The next day at 2 o'clock sharp, the student entered my office.

"Thanks for requesting this meeting," I said. "How are you liking the class?"

"I wanted to talk to you about that... I'm just going to come right out and say it. I'm not learning anything..."

I swallowed dry air and gripped my pen. My heart started racing as images of me running out of the office entered my mind. As I stiffened my body to conceal my trembles, all that came out of my mouth was a high-pitched, "Really? Nothing?"

<https://medium.com/the-faculty/we-belong-regardless-of-what-our-impostor-voice-claims-8279fd93c157>

An HCC Faculty Member's Contribution

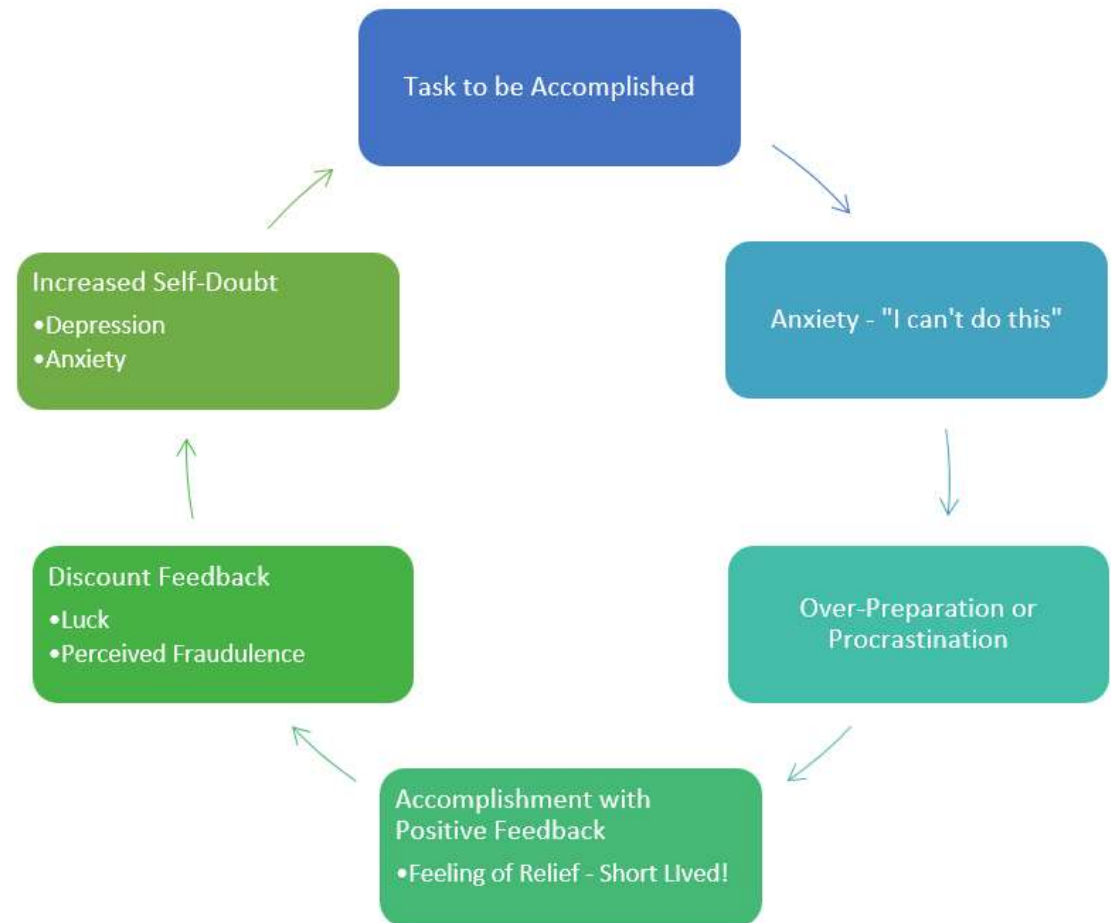
Suffering from impostor syndrome, this scenario was what I feared most. This syndrome is a psychological pattern in which we doubt ourselves and our accomplishments, and we have a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud. It is the idea that success has only found us because of luck, not because of talent, qualifications, and hard work.

In that moment with my student, my mind dumped my four business degrees in the dumpster; struck a match and threw it onto the above average teaching reviews from my students and dean; and rapidly clicked “delete” on the hundreds of emails from students thanking me for helping them to get a job, for being there for them when times were tough, and for motivating them to be more than their past.

<https://medium.com/the-faculty/we-belong-regardless-of-what-our-impostor-voice-claims-8279fd93c157>

The Imposter Cycle

Adapted from Sakulku and Alexander, p. 78



For Impostors, success does not mean happiness.



Myths

The diagram consists of two blue rectangular boxes, one on the left and one on the right. The left box contains the word 'Myths' and the right box contains the word 'Facts'. A blue double-headed arrow connects the right side of the 'Myths' box to the left side of the 'Facts' box, indicating a reciprocal relationship between the two concepts.

Facts

Brené Brown (2018) might ask what stories are we telling ourselves about ourselves?

The Stories We Tell Ourselves . . .

- *The story I'm telling myself is that I'm not good enough. I only got my job because of luck. I only ever succeed because I over-prepare. When I get compliments, the people giving them are just trying to be nice.*
 - People suffering from Imposter Syndrome have trouble distinguishing between the stories they tell themselves versus the facts.
 - More than a lack of confidence – a committed sense to feeling like a fraud in their roles.



Strategies to Combat Imposter Syndrome

- Vibbert: At any point in the cycle, pause for self-talk
 - Anxiety → I can do this!
 - Procrastination → Get started!
 - Over preparation → Set a timeline and a goal!
 - Discounting praise → Why do I do that?

Task Name	April	May	June	July
Planning				
Research				
Design				
Implementation				

Give Yourself the Advice
You Would Give to Another
Person!



What Are Some Other Ideas?

- Collier-Plummer
 - Show up and stay – feel the feelings and then take action
 - Distract yourself – write down three skills or talents
 - Reframe fear into excitement
 - Reach out for support
- Bacon
 - *Define an objective set of metrics for how you define success and get a sanity check on them from friends and colleagues.*
 - Build a team of mentors
 - Set realistic goals

Collins, Price, Hanson, & Neaves

- Vertical mentoring (graduate students with undergraduate students)
- Service learning project

Ramsey and Spencer

- Orientation for Interns that included **role-playing** and facilitated discussions.
- Scenarios included questions related to feelings and asking for help





Medina

- Turn IS into a positive motivator
- Be proud about overcoming challenges
- Know that you will make sacrifices
- Build a support network

Thompson and Gomez

- Build a support network
- Avoid contributing to IS in your colleagues
- Be aware that gender biases and societal expectations contribute to IS
- Confront your inner voice – acknowledge your value
- Don't compare yourself with others

- Gorman
 - Own your successes!
 - Create a success log.
 - Don't downplay your successes.
 - Take your place at the table
 - Speak up at meetings
 - Learn how to interrupt
 - Don't use qualifiers!
 - Power up your body language
 - Sit up straight; hold head high!





- Clark
 - Remind yourself of who you are – I *am* a professor – I earned this!
 - The epiphany - I *must* be a good teacher if my student felt comfortable coming to me.
 - Spearhead conversations with students around imposter syndrome so that you can support each other throughout the semester

You Can't See Your Own Ears . . .



Sometimes you
need someone else
to tell you what
is real and what is
make-believe!

When is it NOT Imposter Syndrome?

Imposter syndrome directs our view toward fixing women at work instead of fixing the places where women work. (Burey, J. & Tulshyan)



Environmental Microaggressions

*Even if women demonstrate strength, ambition, and resilience, **our daily battles with microaggressions**, especially expectations and assumptions formed by stereotypes and racism, often push us down.*

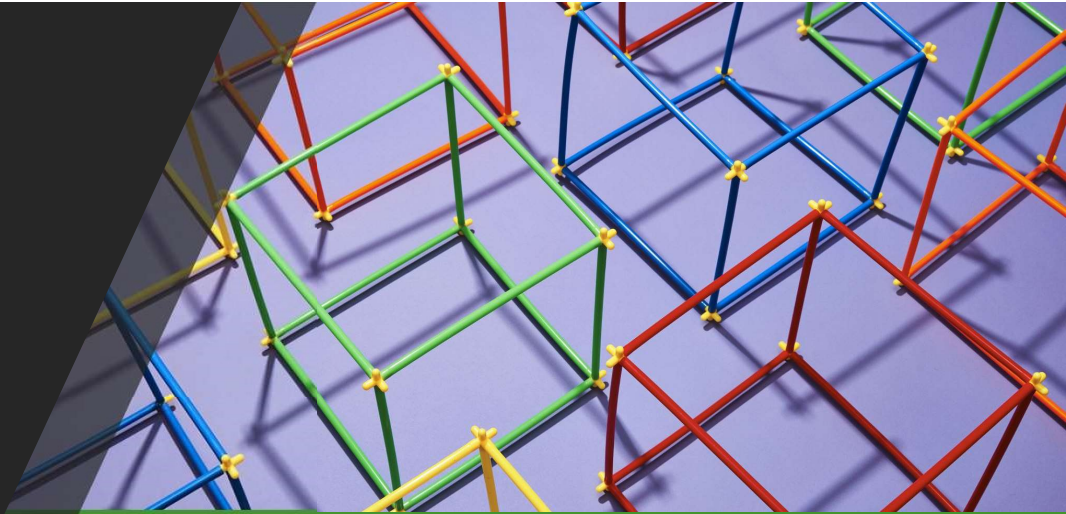
***Imposter syndrome as a concept fails to capture this dynamic** and puts the onus on women to deal with the effects.*

***Workplaces remain misdirected toward seeking individual solutions** for issues disproportionately caused by systems of discrimination and abuses of power. (Burey, J. & Tulshyan)*

Don't make the assumption that women need to get out of their own way – that they are to blame for the IS phenomenon.

It's also critical to consider whether your workplace is contributing to these feelings due to a culture that fosters unhealthy competition, diminishes worker contributions, or displays a lack of sensitivity to cultural differences (Collier-Plummer).

If the causal mechanisms that lead to IP are not just located in the individual but are also found in her environment, then we should look not just to individual interventions, but environmental ones as well (Slank).



Muradoglu, et. al

- Brilliance-oriented fields fail to create a supporting environment for women/URM/early career academics
- Target improvements institutional and climate related factors that are associated with imposter feelings.

Could It Be Imposter Imposter Syndrome?

*If you still need to attribute the anxieties of yourself or your colleagues to imposter syndrome, rather than critically examine the culture of your workplace, I have a suggested diagnosis: You may have what I call **imposter imposter syndrome**.*

***Imposter imposter syndrome** is when someone maintains a chronic belief in the inherent shortcomings and discomfort/imposter feelings of individuals, in order to maintain their own comfort and ignore or diminish societal and institutional patterns of injustice and oppression. (Andrews)*

When are we going to stop signalling that fear and anxiety is normal within our profession, and instead examine how these narratives are the result of institutions deflecting the need for change? (Andrews)

How Can We Promote a More Inclusive Workplace?

<http://inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/andrews-institutional-ip-test.pdf>

Part A: Supervisor Questions

Onboarding

1. I actively mentor new employees, including connecting them with people, and consistently letting them know of opportunities that may interest them.

5	4	3	2	1
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)
2. I take the time to understand my employees (including name pronunciation and pronouns) and actively work with them to understand their needs, goals, and interests.

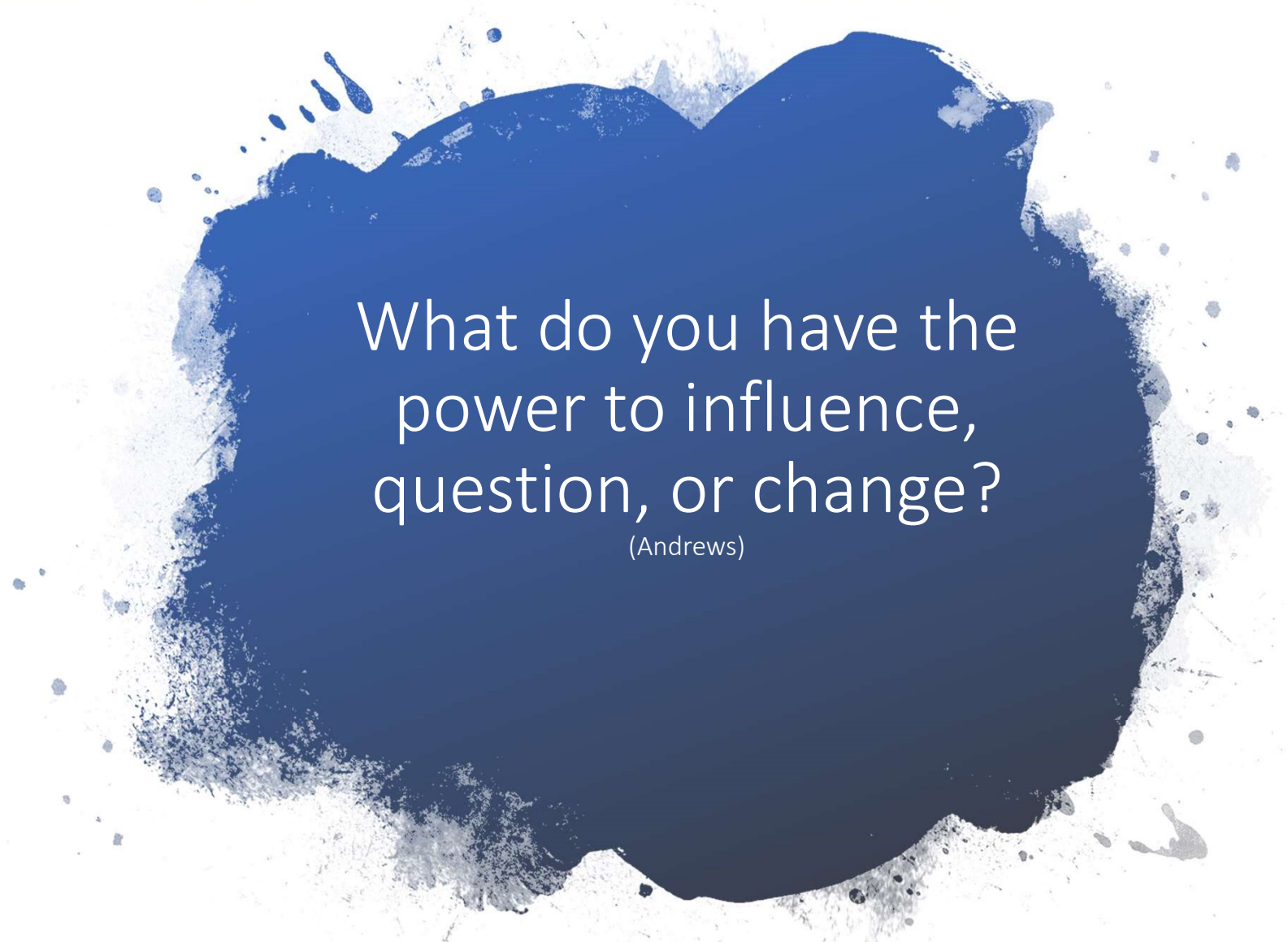
5	4	3	2	1
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)
3. New employees seem to transition into their roles with ease and certainty.

5	4	3	2	1
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)

Communication

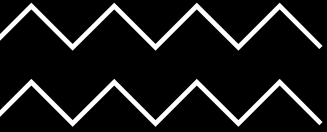
4. I announce meetings and agendas with enough notice to prepare and receive feedback.

5	4	3	2	1
(not at all true)	(rarely)	(sometimes)	(often)	(very true)



What do you have the
power to influence,
question, or change?

(Andrews)



We are "hard-wired" to seek belonging . . . but seeking belonging should not be at the expense of being ourselves.

Being ourselves means sometimes having to find the courage to stand alone, totally alone . . . Once we belong thoroughly to ourselves and believe thoroughly in ourselves, true belonging is ours (Brown, 2017, p.32)



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