

Miriam Meima:

Well, shall we talk imposter syndrome?

Ali Schultz:

Let's do it. It's Impostor Syndrome Day. I feel like it might be Impostor Syndrome Day for a lot of people.

Miriam Meima:

Right? Isn't aren't most days imposter syndrome days for a lot of people?

Ali Schultz:

Some days might be worse than others. We always got to take the glimmers when they're not imposter syndrome days or moments, but yes.

Miriam Meima:

Exactly. That's exactly right. Take them where we can.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah. So, yeah, I hear that you have this really lovely way to kind of like help us unpack imposter syndrome so we can understand it maybe a little bit better and then we can look at ways to strategize around the days that it's rearing its ugly head.

Miriam Meima:

Yeah. Okay, let's do it. And I hear about imposter syndrome a lot. So I like the idea of unpacking it because I feel like it's now it's become like the boogeyman. Like we just talk about imposter syndrome, like it's hard to wrap our arms around and wrap our mind around. And so therefore it's bigger than us. And it kind of evokes the sense of, it's inescapable. I think a lot of people feel that way. So I'm excited to unpack it and help people feel a little bit more control, hopefully, over this thing that we call imposter syndrome.

Ali Schultz:

Dun dun dun.

Miriam Meima:

Exactly.

Ali Schultz:

I know, it's so insidious, it's so insidious. All right, where should we start?

Miriam Meima:

I believe that imposter syndrome lives in the gap between our perceived capacity and perceived expectations and whatever we think other people are expecting of us in a certain role or a certain moment and however we're judging that compared to how we're judging or feeling about

our own capacity in that moment, that gap or the delta of the two is usually the amplitude of someone's imposter syndrome.

Which is great news because that's something then we can increase our perceived capacity and decrease the perceived expectations and start to essentially close the gap so that we feel more well-equipped which is more often the case. Very rarely are we actually in a position that we aren't capable of executing well and that's not how it feels it feels like oh my gosh i'm not set up for success or there's no way that i can, that I can succeed here.

Oh my gosh. I'm flashing back to moments of just almost debilitating imposter syndrome. I haven't had that a lot, but I've had it enough that I can flash back. And all of those moments, there were a few where I just didn't want to get out of bed. I just felt like the thing that I'm going to go do, or I'm asked to go do. I'm going to experience such anxiety all the way through that I'm, I will probably survive, but if I could opt out of this, I would.

Ali Schultz:  
Yeah.

Miriam Meima:  
That's no fun. No. And really it was, it was, there was a combination of energy or emotions. And I guess in that there was a sense of inadequacy, but it was mostly anxiety mixed with dread. No fun. No fun at all.

Ali Schultz:  
No fun at all. Whenever I hear folks talk about imposter syndrome, whenever I'm in my own moment, like, there's always the story I tell myself about what's happening, what the situation is, what the scenario is, what the setup is, and like the reality.

So like what I hear you saying is like breaking those things down can help us get out of bed in the morning and face these things.

Miriam Meima:  
Yes, exactly. Yeah. Because in those moments, I really, I had blown up what was expected of me. I had this sense of outsized expectations of myself, of like showing up, proving myself, quote unquote. I think embedded in that was a sense of perfectionism and wanting to do my absolute best, which is a wonderful desire, but when we're not feeling our best, we can't necessarily do our best.

So if I had, if I could rewind time, I would have probably lowered the expectations of myself and helped me feel like, you know what, what you're going to do is you're going to show up and you're just going to do your best you can. And that's enough rather than feeling like the best I could do was never going to measure up. So definitely decrease my level of perceived expectation. And I would just remind myself of this isn't a first time.

Ali Schultz:  
Right.

Miriam Meima:  
That's the thing I personally I get in my head about firsts. Like, oh, this is the first, this is the biggest audience or this is the most important person or the fill in the blank. Like, and it feels so new and different and novel and that does not help. That just puts me right in my head feeling inadequate. So I would probably remind myself of what I have accomplished, my readiness for what was right in front of me while decreasing expectations at the same time.

Ali Schultz:  
Yeah, yeah. It's like every onstage performance or facilitation doesn't have to be like the final Ted talk, you know?

Miriam Meima:  
Yes, exactly. Yeah.

Ali Schultz:  
Yeah, or even broadcast anywhere, you know, like, but it's amazing, like the expectations that we, like you spoke to the expectations that you were holding for yourself, you know, and whether they were fueled by perfectionism or just like, whatever shape your ideas took around this is what it means to be successful or, you know, the best at this thing, you know.

Miriam Meima:  
Mm-hmm. Yeah. Just yesterday I was talking to a client who she says that she suffers from just chronic imposter syndrome that most days, and this is a very accomplished senior leader, but that most days she's in her head about what she doesn't know and feeling she doesn't measure up. That's how she's judging herself. And so when we started to put that under a microscope, it goes back to what we were talking about in our last episode. She's so focused on the voice in her head that it's not enough or do this better, or you could have done that better. And so she's so focused on the inner critic, and she hadn't yet really grounded into her strengths. And she wasn't orienting towards that as her true self.

So as we even just over 30, 45 minute conversation, she started to reorient towards who she really is and how much she's already done in her career. And it was amazing to see her come to life. I literally could see her dropping out of her head. Her body started to soften up and she started to, her posture just naturally got straighter and she was speaking with ease and grace and confidence without having to think about it. That's just what was coming out of her when she remembered what she had accomplished over her life and her career.

Ali Schultz:  
Yeah, it's so potent. It's so potent, how we, in a really healthy way, it's how we fill up with

ourselves and start to take up space in a true and authentic and healthy way when we can really internalize the all of ourselves, right? Not just like the...tragic and terrifying story that we tell ourselves in our head, which is like, Oh my gosh, I am not enough or not worthy or non-deserving or whatever. Right. That story that really is you just listen to it. Like you just kind of contract and like shrink. But to, to really like to literally embody that felt sense of like, Oh, I am okay.

I can feel my ground. I have not only my wits about me, but like this giant, courageous heart who can lean into hard things and the ground beneath me, you know, in a sense of that.

Miriam Meima:

Yeah, right. And trusting, trusting yourself in that moment. Exactly. Yeah. So often I'm in front of someone and I trust them more than they're trusting themselves in that moment. And I think in part, that's our job as humans is to trust one another. Until we can trust ourselves. I mean, like really on behalf of other people who are deserving of that trust, we have to hold space for that for one another until we can do it for ourselves.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah, yeah. And also what a great reminder, right? Like, I just think about being with good friends and even, you know, beloved colleagues when they're having a moment, but just to be able to see what they're not seeing in the moment and be able to reflect back, you know, and remind them like, hey, like, you have more space to take up here, more ground to stand on.

I see all of you is a really, really powerful thing.

Miriam Meima:

Yes, exactly. Yeah. I don't know about you, but for me, I see imposter syndrome a few, show up a few different ways. I see it sometimes as free floating energy and sometimes it's someone's outside their comfort zone and that's uncomfortable and sometimes that they're truly not set up for success and they're realizing that and they're not sure what to do about it. So I think imposter syndrome can be any of those three things and depending on which one it is I approach it differently and there's probably others. Are there others that come to mind for you?

Ali Schultz:

Well, I mean, I love how you kind of frame the free floating. I was like, oh, it's like you mean how any of us might approach any moment in our given parental life or work life or other life. So that free floating sense like, oh my god, am I really cut out for this being human thing? Yeah, I don't know. I've never really thought about framing it in other ways.

But the latter one, or the last one you mentioned, right? Where someone's just really realizing like, oh wow, like I either got handed something that is way out of my skill zone, or I bit off more than I could chew. Like that's a really real, that's like a real moment to me. Like that's like, that's someone realizing their own, like, I don't know, limitations and like, oh, this is bigger than I

thought it was.

Miriam Meima:  
Mm-hmm. Exactly.

Ali Schultz:

But in those situations, if the situation isn't changed, I can see where it would totally erode, one's sense of self or whatever, but it takes the skills to be able to navigate, okay, how do I reset expectations here? How do I name what I can do and ask for support for the rest? How can I get this across the finish line, but I don't have to be the one bearing all the responsibility or doing all the things to do. The whole.

Miriam Meima:

Exactly. Yes. So it's that is usually something that people are not doing. They're not pausing, taking in that breath, realizing that they're not alone. Remembering they're at choice. That's the main thing when we're in that third category of feeling like, oh my gosh, I've been dealt a hand that is just impossible or I've bitten off more than I can chew. Most people forget that they're at choice. They could just, they could just not. It's actually okay. You can actually get yourself out of those situations.

If we can remember that we have a choice to keep going or not, then we start to get out of victim mindset and into a more empowered place and feeling more in control and we can start to sort out, okay, what needs to happen? Which pieces of that do I feel clear about? Which ones do I not? Who in my network can help me here? Or who in my company can help me here? Or what do I need to be able to close those gaps and relate to it more two-dimensionally rather than it feeling like this, that's a huge monster.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah. I kind of like jumped the gun there, but I feel like there's really important stuff in all three examples. I think we should, you know, well, obviously come back to this one. But like that middle one was also really important.

Miriam Meima:

Mm. Of being outside our comfort zone. Yeah. And those moments, I just celebrate the heck out of people. I'm like, you've taken something on, you can do this. It's just new and different. And therefore it's outside of what you've known as your comfort zone. And you probably did this intentionally as an ambitious, driven, eager human.

You took on something you haven't taken on before, and it's hard. Cool, you're gonna learn a lot from this, but how do we help your nervous system feel at ease as you're moving through these new moments of learning so that you can actually expand to tolerate it, but usually we need to do that by celebrating it, breathing, maybe distract our brains, focus on something that, or really revert to our comfort zone when you're at work or you're not doing the thing that feels so hard

and so outside our comfort zone. Just like do the things that are so comfortable. So so familiar.

Ali Schultz:

Mm-hmm. Yeah. I love how you pull out the celebration card on that because...It really, it's a beautiful reframe for anyone who does suddenly feel like they're outside, you know, their known realm, and things start feeling really uncomfortable. It's like, okay, cool. Somehow you arrived here, by choice or otherwise. And maybe this is a really good thing. You know, some part of you feels confident enough that you can do this. And there may be other parts of you that are not fully on board.

Miriam Meima:

Yeah and that's okay.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah, it's those growth edges.

Miriam Meima:

Yeah those are the yes exactly those are the moments where it's like okay I'm feeling fear I'm gonna do the thing anyway. I'm not gonna feel the fear and stop. I'm gonna feel the fear. I'm gonna take a breath. I'm gonna celebrate that I am doing the thing and I'm gonna keep putting one foot in front of the other and giving myself pats on the back each step of the way.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah, yeah. Being with the nervous system, I think, is so important in those moments. And you were speaking to breath and breathing because our fear reaction is so contracting. But to be able to, you know, A, recognize, oh, here I am at the edge. I am not breathing anymore. It's so huge for folks and then to just bring breath into that situation. Like you're telling that part of your brain that really cares about survival. Like, no, it's okay. Like we can survive this thing. We can survive this presentation. We can survive this strategy planning session. Yeah.

Miriam Meima:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So even when you're literally labeling what is the thing strategy presentation, I love that because I think when I hear it, it helps me in my mind, right size the thing that's happening and in a helpful way. And again, I think we need to feel bigger than the thing that's in front of us. And therefore we feel like relatively speaking, feel quite capable of moving through it. So that's a great suggestion.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah, well, even that right sizing exercise is fantastic that you just spoke to, right? Like, if someone was to visualize the thing or put some expressive energy to it, right, whether it's movement, voice, sound, whatever, and to say, oh, it just feels like this big and it makes this noise and whatever. But, you know, to give it some expression from like a fear place and then to also then find your own ground as you know, yourself in the fullness of yourself in that healthy,

you know, authentic way. And to then look at that thing in your, you know, imaginative eye again and say, okay, what does it feel like now? What qualities, what expressive qualities would you give it? I mean, it's such a beautiful reorientation.

Miriam Meima:

Exactly. Is I love that being able to interact with it and that everything I feel like we're talking about points to that of rather than it being something that's just amorphous start to find all the different ways to relate to it consciously so that you can start to leverage your conscious brain, your, your smarts, your experience, your intuition, your strengths.

And it's like, Oh, okay. There I am and there is this thing in time and space and therefore let's interact. And I remember, oh, that's right. And I'm an adult and I'm a capable adult and therefore what am I going to do here?

Yeah. The first dream I ever remember having, I was probably about six years old when I had this dream. And in the dream, I wake up in a lion's cage and I'm on one side of the cage and the lion is asleep on the other side of the cage. And I think I had the appropriate reaction. I was freaking out. I remember feeling in the dream very scared and helpless and there was no way out of the cage and trying to squeeze through the bars and that not working calling for help and no one was around and in crying for help I woke the lion so the lion wakes up and then like yawns and then starts salivating and looks at me and starts like stretching like taking its time is that and I hurry and then it starts to come towards me and my heart rate just started going through the roof. And I just remember feeling dread and panic. And then all of a sudden the lion is right, probably one step away from me. And I opened up my mouth and I ate it. Ha!

Ali Schultz:

Whoa, that's so good. It's like the best image and oh my God, what a hairball. What a hairball.

Miriam Meima:

What a hairball, totally what a hairball. And then I woke up and I'm like, where did that dream come from? But whatever part of me that was like, okay, you're scared and okay, that lion's big, okay, eat it. I mean, I actually lean on that in moments and like if there's part of my brain that even at six years old knew that I could take on something huge. And so where is that part of me now? And how can I eat this lion?

Ali Schultz:

Yeah. How do you make it into bite-sized pieces?

Miriam Meima:

Yes! Put a little salt on it.

Ali Schultz:

Oh my God, I love that image. That was such a great dream. Well done, well done.

Miriam Meima:

Yeah, hopefully everybody listening can figure out how to eat whatever the line is. Right size it, I'm gonna eat it. Yeah, so we haven't talked much about the free-floating fear version of imposter syndrome. And I think that's, maybe we can just rattle off some of our favorite strategies.

Ali Schultz:

Well, let's talk about this more. So how would you like locate the free-floating fear? Like what is like one quality where you're like, well, I think this is like kind of it, like this would describe the thing just so people could maybe like find it for themselves.

Miriam Meima:

What's interesting is it's very difficult to locate. So it's this feeling of anxiety, but when you go to figure out, how do I problem solve my way out of the anxiety? You can't even figure out what the original problem is. So doing, engaging our brain or doing some sort of like root cause analysis of like, where's this coming from? Or it doesn't work or you think, Oh, I just need to get through this and then I'll feel better. Or just there's this sense of, uh, you can't quite gain traction.

Um, and so it's quite difficult to locate and my experience. And so me or anybody experiencing this type of imposter syndrome, I think we label it as imposter syndrome out of an inability to label it anything else. Maybe some people would call it anxiety, but it specifically translates in my mind from anxiety to imposter syndrome when we add in a self-evaluation. So it's like, I'm feeling anxious. And so therefore I'm not really cut out for this. So it's the one, two of it that in my mind make it the imposter syndrome.

Ali Schultz:

Yep. The word self doubt came to pop to mind popped into mind, I guess, when you were when you were naming all that, like, yeah, all of a sudden, I'm anxious. And I just suddenly just start doubting what I at one point in my life may have known to be incredibly true and solid about myself.

Miriam Meima:

Right. Isn't that interesting? It's like I will remember having that thought, but I can't get myself back there in those moments. And I think that's common. Like I remember that this hasn't always been how I felt or thought, but I can't feel or think any differently right now.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah, which is, it's like, it's kind of a hijack moment, you know, because we get really stuck in that emotional brain. And it's a matter of like, what do we need in those moments, I think to like, and it could take cycles, it could take hours, who knows, but like, what do we need to calm the anxiety to come back to our body to remember our breath, to let the anxiety cycle out so that we can, you know, I keep coming back to the image of like finding more ground, but it could be so

that we could right size the problem and like eat the lion, you know what I mean?

Miriam Meima:

I think we've got to move that energy. That's the only thing that I've ever seen work for me or anyone else who is experiencing this free-floating stuff. We can't think our way out of it. We need to move our way through it. So some people in those moments can meditate. I think I personally need to exercise. I need to get into nature if I can get into an ocean or some wind or something that will help me reset, uh, energetically that really helps. Um, boxing, um, something that feels more physical that requires me to exert myself, um, is usually the type of thing that will help move through that. I know for some people, if they, if they're runners, I say run further or get like, just keep pushing yourself physically. And so that can start to move the energy out.

And then some people like to use literally energy clearing strategies to like reset. Yeah, see, yeah, exactly.

Ali Schultz:

Like Sage and Palo Santo.

Yeah, I think I'm with you there on the moving, moving my body, like moving the issues through the tissues, so to speak, but to just really like, get out of my head and get into my body more fully and like, let my breath like, become like a big focal thing, whether it is through physical exertion or some other form of, you know, manual labor, in my case, if I need to clean the barn, but, yeah, sometimes, I mean, I wonder if you would agree with this, but like, it seems to me that free floating fear can be just when we get a little mind bottled. And when we get mind bottled, like there's no way out of that bottle, but like to get back into your body. And then it's like more solutions and more possibilities are not only available to you, but like hopefully alive for you.

Miriam Meima:

Exactly. Yes. And then I like to start with micro needs and those ones like getting back like, what do I want or what do I need? And, but start small. I want to, am I thirsty? Am I hungry? Am I hot? Am I cold?

Sometimes it feels like it's momentary and you can move the energy and then you've reset. And other times it feels more sustained and it's still this free floating energy. And it's like, what the heck do I do with that? And again, the only time that becomes imposter syndrome is when we couple it with that moment. I think you said self doubt, which I think is the right way to think of it.

And so that's happening on a sustained basis. I believe there's usually some sort of unmet need that's more macro or some unfulfilled desire that we have and that we aren't really paying attention to it. And it's getting harder and harder to move through our life without attending to that thing. So once we build a little bit of strength in terms of the micro needs and micro wants and feeling a little bit of momentum, then hopefully with someone's support, but sometimes it just with a journal, it's like, okay, no, what are the more medium sized or what are the more

extra large sized wants and needs that I have that I haven't really been attending to and how can I start to integrate that into the wholeness of my life? It doesn't mean I have to pack up and move or change my job. It's just like, how can I start to orient towards the thing that's my, that I'm wanting or needing?

Ali Schultz:

Yeah, yeah. And what I'm hearing in that process too is like just anchoring in those, what you're calling those micro needs, those micro wants to kind of help us then anchor more clearly within ourselves. Like what's part of the inventory here that I do need to look at and I do need to process?

Miriam Meima:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, the inventory. Exactly. Yeah. Do you think it's possible for people to...I don't know quite the right word here. I would say live, well, live life without imposter syndrome.

Ali Schultz:

I think it's possible, yes, to experience life, more, maybe not free of it, but to experience it with it well managed.

And I think it does require the full human experience of arriving at the point where you're able to identify in your own inner landscape, oh, this is my inner critic, and this is where my imposter syndrome shows up.

Um, because I am, I'm quite unsure that even if there was a human being in a Petri dish and probably even more so, there's a human being grown in like some sort of Petri dish environment, especially because of like contact nourishment needs and just like what social creatures need to thrive and survive. Um, I don't think there's any way to like totally avoid it. And it's like the way that the brain is wired, at least how I understand it is like, you know, there's, there's some bugs in there. And it's all like, kind of part of the makeup so far, we haven't evolved past those. And so like the parts of our brain that want to keep us safe. I mean, that's really what's, what's active in our inner critic and where the imposter syndrome shows up, right, whether it's self doubt, or this, you know, awful sense of inadequacy that people carry around or have in really critical moments and yeah, I mean, our experiences are, you know, gonna shape the magnitude and volume and texture of our personal unique experiences of how we carry that and live through that. But, um, I don't know if we can be free of it. I don't think, I mean, I have maybe wishes and hopes for some well-evolved future human 100 years from now, but, um.

Miriam Meima:

Mm-hmm.

Ali Schultz:

I don't know, I think the best of us have it. Like I was pulling up quotes for this episode in like Lady Gaga, Meryl Streep, you know? Why would anybody wanna see me on the screen? Like

I'm not a good actress, you know? Like to hear her say something like that, you know, we read it and we're like, oh my God, that is absurd. But I just think it's a widespread phenomenon. No one's alone in this.

Miriam Meima:

No, no one's alone in this. And as I was, I agree with what you're saying. And I also think it's a privilege. It's a privilege to feel imposter syndrome because it means we are in a place where we're not actually in true survival in terms of food and housing. I think when we are reduced in moments of either natural disaster or certain societies that are just underprivileged, they're not thinking about, they're just not thinking about it. They're thinking about their next meal, they're thinking about survival on a more basic level. And only once we are in a position where we aren't thinking about those things, now all of a sudden we have brain bandwidth and we have energy in our bodies and it isn't being completely consumed by the most basic needs. And so therefore, are these very...

Complex brains that we have get busy can do in something and it's not always helpful and I guess I hadn't necessarily realized that that in and of itself, it's not exactly what I would call first world problem but it is a privilege to worry about things like am I enough?

Ali Schultz:

Yes. Yeah, yeah, or to run into it, you know, in ways like you were saying before, like it, it's really a mark of a growth edge, you know, and the ability to like have space for self reflection and self awareness, you know, so as we as we are growing in our own self awareness and able to grow and expand, you know, in our

Miriam Meima:

Mm-hmm.

Ali Schultz:

I guess on our way to self-actualization, right, if we even look at Maslow's hierarchy, you know, it's a sign of growth, it's a sign of, you know, expanding beyond.

Miriam Meima:

Progress. Exactly. Expanding beyond. It is growth.

Miriam Meima:

And I think the work that we do, it's as cumulative the word that I'm thinking of. The little things that I'm doing are always adding to everything that I'm doing is additional to what I've done in the past and it gets stronger and stronger and stronger. And so my ability to take on big things without feeling self doubt gets easier and easier because it's something that I've practiced and it's something that I have tools for and strategies for.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah, cumulative is...is a good word. I think with that work comes this expression of emotions and living that in a healthy way. And I think imposter syndrome and dealing with our inner critic and these crippling feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy are kind of right in that bucket.

Miriam Meima:

Yeah. Well, hopefully everybody listening feels like we're normalizing imposter syndrome and also moving beyond it. Like, let's find, let's figure out the strategies that help us find our ground in the midst of imposter syndrome. Figure out what type of imposter syndrome is this? What do I need to do in order to support myself? What support do because I really believe it's so much more fun to be moving through life when we're not in our head.

I guess we all have a choice. So if we notice that we're feeling imposter syndrome, we shouldn't just accept it. We should find our way out or find our way through and remember that we have a choice and that we can reclaim the state of mind that we are in, the state of our being and return to a place where we feel capable and set up for success. And that can be sustained if we keep using the tools.

Ali Schultz:

Yes, I love that.

Miriam Meima:

Thanks for talking about imposture syndrome with me.