

# Navigating Imposter Syndrome: Taking on New Roles

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Having the opportunity to serve as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Athletic Training Education Journal* is an experience that comes with humility, pride, and some self-doubt. I remember drafting my cover letter and gathering my materials to apply for the open call for the position and thinking “am I really qualified to assume this role?” I had the experiences and the training to step into the role, but I knew there would be a learning curve, and I had some insecurities about my ability to handle the expectations.

There is a name for feeling this way: imposter syndrome.<sup>1</sup> Although imposter syndrome is thought to impact those with less experience, many professionals navigate imposter syndrome at various stages of their professional careers.<sup>1,2</sup> New responsibilities or a change in role can also stimulate these feelings. Imposter syndrome is almost always hallmarked by a lack of confidence, self-doubt, and a feeling of being a fraud.<sup>2</sup> As I tried to challenge those self-defeating thoughts, I shifted my thinking to what advice would I give to one of my students or mentees if they were feeling like an imposter. As educators, we have all had students who talk about their insecurities, lack of confidence, and trepidations regarding their pending transition to a certified athletic trainer for the first time. We should remember to give this same advice and encouraging words to ourselves while navigating our professional careers regardless of if we are 5, 10, or 30 years into it.

Transitioning to any new role is a process that requires a person to have patience as the process can take 6 months to 1 year.<sup>3,4</sup> During this transition period, uncertainty is inevitable, but over time, with experience, one can find rhythm in the chaos.<sup>3</sup> Over the last year, I have taken the time to reflect and embrace the journey I have been on as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Athletic Training Education Journal*. Although I still have self-doubt, my confidence has grown. I can attribute my ability to navigate imposter syndrome to the following strategies.

*Do not do it alone.* The transition to practice literature is rich with recommendations around the importance of mentorship and support networks.<sup>4-6</sup> I remember reaching out to my mentors, including a past Editor-in-Chief of the journal, to gain perspective. I was given great advice and a reminder of my strengths as a reviewer, section editor, and researcher. I

have relied on my support network, which includes the leadership within the journal as well as my peers. Their feedback and confidence in me have helped me gain traction in my role and quieted those trepidations on my leadership capabilities.

*Trust the process and those around you.* Role transitions take time to navigate as you learn the “ropes,” gain a sense of the expectations or workload, and come to appreciate the complexities that may accompany the role.<sup>3,4</sup> Gain assurance in traversing the transition as it will be overwhelming and a bit chaotic and yet oddly exciting, as with the new roles comes growth, opportunity for self-reflection, and the chance to gain new skills or knowledge. Trust that you will find rhythm,<sup>3</sup> as you give yourself grace and have faith in those individuals who are in your circle.

*Address the elephant in the room.* Be honest with yourself and your mentors on what you are feeling and why you might have self-doubt and uncertainty. Acknowledgement of these feelings with yourself and mentor can alleviate the weight of those feelings but also begin a reframing opportunity<sup>2</sup> for you with the support of your mentor.<sup>3,4</sup> Admit to yourself that you are feeling like an imposter and struggling with the new role.<sup>2</sup> Allow your mentor to redirect your thoughts, establish goals, and have them validate your feelings while reframing them more positively.

*Sometimes you must be okay with being uncomfortable.* In those moments when we are uncertain, trial and error can lead to learning the ropes. Transitioning athletic trainers identify the need to engage in trial and error as it facilitates on-the-job learning more efficiently.<sup>6</sup> Often this is because we are sponges soaking in new information, processing it, and reflecting. Over the last year, I have found that being uncomfortable has allowed me to be vulnerable asking questions to seek answers but also to share that I do not always know the answers. Without curiosity and transparency, I would not have gained the answers and the knowledge to be successful.

Although taking the role of Editor-in-Chief for the *Athletic Training Education Journal* was the trigger for me, something else might be the trigger for you. I hope that the strategies I shared that helped me quiet those doubts and negative self-appraisal will assist you if you too are experiencing imposter

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syndrome. Regardless of the trigger, we have had to navigate those feelings to succeed in the new role that we have assumed. When these moments occur, be reflective, solicit guidance from your mentors, and capitalize on the support surrounding you.

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