

00;00;00;00 - 00;00;28;15

Cale

Welcome to Grin and Bare It, a show that uncovers the remarkable stories from one of the most demanding industries in the world— health care. From inventors and trailblazers to frontline workers and scientific experts, we explore the biggest challenges faced in healthcare and how these brilliant people have solved them. I'm your host, Cale Donovan, an award-winning entrepreneur and co-founder of Bare, one of Australia's largest end of life providers.

00;00;28;17 - 00;00;53;06

Cale

On today's episode, we're speaking about imposter syndrome. If you've ever felt undeserving of your achievements, or you aren't as competent or as intelligent as others might think, even when the evidence says otherwise, there's a really good chance you've experienced this phenomenon. To learn more, I'm speaking with Doctor Valerie Young, who's widely considered the world's foremost expert on imposter syndrome.

00;00;53;08 - 00;01;23;19

Cale

Valerie is to imposter syndrome what Brené Brown is to vulnerability. Her list of accomplishments over the last 40 years in the field are incredible. She's worked with organisations like NASA and Google, and has been cited in publications like The Wall Street Journal and New York Times. On this episode, Valerie discusses the five types of imposter syndrome, how current trends are amplifying this issue, and importantly, how we can suffer a little bit less

00;01;23;22 - 00;01;32;22

Cale

by becoming a humble realist. I'm so excited to have Valerie here with us today. Let's get into it.

00;01;32;24 - 00;01;42;07

Cale

Valerie, it's an absolute honour to have you on the pod. I've had many people request that you come in and speak to us. I mean, I'm really excited to hear your insights, so thanks for joining.

00;01;42;09 - 00;01;44;02

Valerie

Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

00;01;44;04 - 00;01;51;28

Cale

So let's start with the absolute basics. If you could just define what is imposter syndrome.

00;01;52;01 - 00;02;25;25

Valerie

That's actually a great starting question because a lot of people misidentify it as a fancy term for low self-esteem or sometimes they confuse it with just normal anxiety before giving a presentation or a job interview. And it's more than that. The original term, this imposter phenomenon, was coined in 1978 by two clinical psychologists, Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes, and what they found was this kind of persistent sense that indeed, we're not as intelligent, capable, competent, qualified, talented as other people seem to think we are.

00;02;26;01 - 00;02;49;23

Valerie

Professors, managers, folks who interview us audiences, etc. The interesting part is that we have concrete evidence to the contrary that says, indeed, you know you are capable and qualified. But what happened is people who feel like imposters, we externalise that evidence. We say, well, it's just luck or timing. They just like me, you know, personality. I had great connections, it was a great team.

00;02;49;23 - 00;02;56;17

Valerie

So we kind of push it away and minimise it. And then as a result, we're left with this fear that sooner or later we're going to be found out.

00;02;56;19 - 00;03;08;09

Cale

It's really interesting because in the many people that I spoke to, they actually made a similar comment, which was, I think everyone experiences it at some point in their life. Is that actually correct?

00;03;08;15 - 00;03;32;11

Valerie

No, they're almost right. It's very common. There was one study found, you know, up to 82% [of] people experience it. You know, it can also vary based on the occupation that someone is in or the feel that they are then. So in creative fields, you're going to find it much higher. Right. And people who write it— writers, actors, singers, their work is being judged by subjective standards, by people whose job title is professional critic.

00;03;32;13 - 00;03;53;09

Valerie

So it really can vary, but it is extremely common. I think the part that people miss, Cale, is that it's also on a continuum. There are people who experience it, you know, it's kind of a blip on the screen, like low amounts, kind of moderate. And then there are people for whom the feelings are very intense and that can be, you know, very, very problematic.

00;03;53;14 - 00;04;06;07

Cale

Yeah. Before we jump into some of the specifics, I'd love to hear just your story. You've been, your journey started in researching sort of over 40 years ago now. What actually led you down this path in the first place?

00;04;06;09 - 00;04;28;21

Valerie

I was sitting in a class. I was a doctoral student at the same university where my mother also worked. She was a second shift janitor, a custodian at the time. And somebody brought in a paper by Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes, and this is in the early 80s. So the paper had been out for a few years and started describing how all these bright, capable, competent people felt like they were fooling folks and they were going to be found out.

00;04;28;23 - 00;04;46;21

Valerie

And I was just nodding my head, you know, like a bobblehead doll being like, oh my God, like that's me. Instant recognition of these feelings and having this name suddenly for these feelings. So as I often told the story, you know, I looked around the room and all the other doctoral students were nodding their heads. And this was stunning to me.

00;04;46;21 - 00;05;07;19

Valerie

Remarkable, because I knew their work. I knew they deserved to be there. So we started a little imposter support group, and we started meeting after class talking about our intellectual fraudulence, how we're fooling all of our professors. And after a few weeks, I started to have this nagging sense that even though everyone else was like saying they were an imposter, like I knew I was the only real imposter.

00;05;07;20 - 00;05;14;05

Valerie

So now I, you know, I look back, it's like I was the Beyonce of the imposters, the Taylor Swift of the imposters, if you will—

00;05;14;08 - 00;05;17;25

Cale

And so what's

00;05;17;27 - 00;05;27;04

Cale

What's the importance of— you made a very critical point there of your mother being a janitor. How does that have any relationship to imposter syndrome?

00;05;27;06 - 00;05;49;08

Valerie

You know, in my own personal case, I honestly can't say, looking back, that I felt like I was, you know, different from other people because I went to a state university where the majority of my colleagues had come from working class roots. If I had been Harvard or Stanford or Oxford, then I probably would have been much more aware of that.

00;05;49;14 - 00;06;07;28

Valerie

That said, you know, for a lot of people, there is a connection between the first generation, your family to go to university or to be, you know, have a white collar professional job and imposter feeling, especially if you're in a field where you're surrounded by people who went to very elite schools or came from, you know, much more wealthy origins.

00;06;08;00 - 00;06;28;04

Cale

Yeah, you mentioned 80 plus percent of people probably experienced that at some point. Before we dig right in, it would be helpful context for others who don't experience it. What impact can it have on people? Be it physical, psychological, emotional, socially? What's the actual impact that it has when people are suffering from imposter syndrome?

00;06;28;11 - 00;06;49;28

Valerie

That is a great question because, you know, it's not just an interesting self-help topic. You know, I spoke in over 100 universities around the world. I speak to major corporations all the time, and they're not, again, interested in self-help, per se. They understand, you know, as I do, that feelings lead to behaviours and those behaviours have costs and consequences.

00;06;49;29 - 00;07;13;20

Valerie

Yes, for the individual, whether that's a student or faculty for that matter or, you know, a professional in the workplace, but also for the organisation as well, because imposter feelings show up. One example might be, I describe it as flying under the radar. The person who holds back, who doesn't speak up and share ideas in a meeting. If they're in a class and they're confused, they're not going to ask questions.

00;07;13;23 - 00;07;30;25

Valerie

They stay in a job. Maybe that they've long outgrown, or they don't go for more challenging promotions or opportunities. If they have a business, they don't scale or grow their business. A sense that if I can keep my head down, you know, do my work, I won't be found out. But if I pop up and I put myself out there too much, then I'm at risk of being found out.

00;07;30;29 - 00;07;52;09

Valerie

And again, this happens on a very unconscious level. On the other extreme are people who whose response to imposter feelings is to overwork, overprepare the sense that I'm not well, I don't mean like good old fashioned hard work, right? We all have to work hard, but the sense that I have to study longer, stay longer, work harder to kind of cover up for my supposed ineptness.

00;07;52;15 - 00;08;13;12

Valerie

This belief that for everyone else, it's easy. But because I'm not as intelligent, capable, you know, I have to overcompensate in that regard. For someone else, it might be chronically procrastinating on important things. And let me be clear — we all procrastinate, you know, hard wired to avoid things that are big, hard, difficult, not very fun, don't know where to begin.

00;08;13;15 - 00;08;35;17

Valerie

Where it really matters is when it can kind of undermine our ability to achieve our major job or life objectives. So quick example, [a] young woman wanted to get this very prestigious internship. To get it, she had to complete a multi-step, in-depth process and take like six months to complete it. So if it's due, you know, June 15th, when do you think she starts it?

00;08;35;17 - 00;08;36;17

Cale

June 14th.

00;08;36;20 - 00;08;53;17

Valerie

June 14th. Exactly, she did it at the end of time, but she didn't get the internship. So she she has a built in excuse. Right? She can say to herself, I'm disappointed, but I'm not surprised because I know it didn't represent my best effort. But if the results are good, when she shows up, she's going to think, you know, fool them again.

00;08;53;19 - 00;09;12;03

Valerie

They don't realise I just whipped it off [at] the last minute. I'm going to be found out. And sadly for a lot of people that turns into never starting or finishing the book, the business plan, the degree because something is always in progress. No one, no one can judge you. So in an organisation, it can impact productivity

00;09;12;05 - 00;09;20;27

Valerie

it can impact retention, advancement, innovation, and certainly health and wellness in terms of burnout and anxiety.

00;09;21;00 - 00;09;40;29

Cale

It's a really interesting example you gave there where it becomes a really vicious cycle. In many ways, it becomes self-fulfilling. You know, some of these behaviours are hype, which is I work too hard, I procrastinate— whatever that behaviour is. And I told you so is the answer. You kind of never can quite get out of feeling that way, regardless of the outcome.

00;09;41;00 - 00;09;48;00

Cale

Super interesting. In your research, who typically is most affected by imposter syndrome?

00;09;48;03 - 00;10;12;27

Valerie

You know, it really varies. You know, sometimes there are family sources, the messages that and this could be obviously for any of us – messages we got from our family growing up. So if you're the kid who came home with, I don't know— is the grading system in Australia ABC? So if you're the kid who came home with four A's and one B and your parents only responses like what's that B doing there, Cale?

00;10;13;03 - 00;10;29;22

Valerie

Alright. You got this very clear message that the only thing that's acceptable is perfection. Or you might have been the kid who came home with outstanding grades and you got no praise at all. This many reasons why a parent might not praise a child for academic achievement. But again, when you're a child, it doesn't matter, because for kids, praise is like oxygen.

00;10;29;24 - 00;10;53;26

Valerie

And then you might be the kid who got too much oxygen, right? Well, you were told everything you did was remarkable. So there's that dynamic, but there's also situational factors. Being a student, especially a graduate student, a PhD student, a medical student makes you much more likely to have imposter feelings because your your knowledge and intellect is literally being tested and graded day in and day out.

00;10;53;28 - 00;11;21;21

Valerie

You know, people who work alone might be more susceptible. People in STEM fields: science, technology, engineering, maths, and very information dense, rapidly changing fields where you feel like you should be able to keep up when no human could. And then there's people. There's certain cultures, organisational cultures. And I mean, like overarching cultures, like universities, medicine, where it doesn't matter what workplace you go or employer you go to, that culture is going to follow you.

00;11;21;23 - 00;11;46;20

Valerie

So one of the culture critique, where all you're being told is what's wrong and how to fix it. And in academia and in medicine, it's kind of a culture shaming, especially when you're a medical student and a couple of years out, you're doing your residency. Those can contribute. And then there's societal factors. Again, I spoke in a lot of universities, and the biggest group to always show up are the international students, which I think makes perfect sense.

00;11;46;20 - 00;12;09;20

Valerie

They've got the same pressures everyone else has, but they're doing it in another culture and often another language. And let's face it, we all feel smarter in our first language. If you belong to any group on the receiving end of stereotypes about competence or intelligence, was based on class, was based on disability, you know, or gender or race or age, right?

00;12;09;23 - 00;12;29;24

Valerie

Where you feel underestimated cause you're the youngest or the oldest, and there's some susceptibility there, especially if you feel this pressure to kind of represent your entire group because there's not a lot of you. So look at Michelle Obama, you know, she talked about her own imposter feelings, which people were just shocked, like, how could Michelle Obama have imposter syndrome?

00;12;29;24 - 00;12;48;13

Valerie

She, you know, she had two master's degrees. She was accomplished in her own, right, before she got a really good connection and married Barack Obama. Go on to be the future president, you know, and was discouraged by guidance counsellors in school and so on. And I look at it like, not how could Michelle Obama have imposter syndrome—but how could she not?

00;12;48;16 - 00;12;54;16

Valerie

Like unleash that intense pressure to be, you know, the first black first lady in the US.

00;12;54;18 - 00;13;18;27

Cale

So you touch on the parents there. I'm really interested. I'm taking a detour. I'm really interested in— is this nature or is it nurture? You know, you sort of born into this and then it becomes situational throughout your life. Or is this nurture actually playing a really, really huge role in how you're set up to confront sort of situations which may impose this feeling of being imposter?

00;13;19;00 - 00;13;43;01

Valerie

Yeah. You know, I do think, I think it's a combination. I think there are children who just kind of show up on the planet predisposed to like being a little perfectionist. For example, you know, you have two siblings in one. You know, right out of the gate, you know, at five years old is just a

really fussy perfectionist about things or, you know, maybe predisposed a bit to anxiety or what have you or being a highly sensitive.

00;13;43;01 - 00;14;07;00

Valerie

So, anything that feels like critique or criticism might, you know, feel kind of wounding and proof that I'm not whatever. There's, there's that. So, I don't want them. And I say that because I'm not a big fan of it's not one thing, it's your mother. Right? Where we kind of lay everything on the parent's feet. That said, I think, as I was gonna say, as a society, but I think globally, we need to do a better job.

00;14;07;03 - 00;14;34;27

Valerie

and I understand why parents do this, but less emphasis on the grades and more emphasis on the effort and also on resiliency around failure, setbacks, mistakes. Carol Dweck, who's a Stanford psychologist, wrote a wonderful book, Mindset, and she has a chapter for parents. And there's a wonderful exercise in there, which is in contrast to the typical dinnertime conversation with young children

00;14;34;27 - 00;14;54;23

Valerie

parents will say, what did you learn in school today to which the children say nothing, right, or. I don't remember which is what we said. She said, wouldn't it be more useful if every day, once a week, you said, let's all go around and say, talk about something that was difficult or challenging or we failed at and how we dealt with it? I'll start.

00;14;54;23 - 00;15;08;01

Valerie

So really, model resiliency and overcoming setbacks because we don't—we can't avoid them. It's how we, how we deal with them that really count. Yeah, I think parenting can make a huge, can make a huge difference.

00;15;08;03 - 00;15;17;12

Cale

Hmhm you touched on specifically this feeling of shame in medicine? Can you unpack that a little bit more? Yeah. And what you meant by that.

00;15;17;16 - 00;15;36;14

Valerie

Yeah, absolutely. You know, I was speaking at Stanford University to graduate students and postdocs. And on my slide all it said at the top, I was going to all the perfectly good reasons why you might feel like a fraud. And all it said in the slide was, you're in a culture that fuels self-doubt. And this young man raised his hand.

00;15;36;14 - 00;15;57;24

Valerie

He said, what if you're in a culture where there's a lot of shaming? And I said, are you in medicine? And he said, yes, because I know, you know, they call it pimping when you're on the rounds in the hospital, like the attending physician will call one student out and just barrage them with questions. I don't know why they call it anything, but that's what it's known internally and kind of humiliate them in front of other people.

00;15;57;24 - 00;16;16;02

Valerie

You're shamed and, and, look, I get it. You're dealing with life and death, so you want to make sure people you know are prepared. But I was on another podcast for the British Medical Journal, and there was a, was a medical student who just graduated. And the second year, I forget what they called them in the UK—here we call them a resident, right?

00;16;16;02 - 00;16;36;11

Valerie

That a few years into their residency and the student especially was lamenting the lack of positive feedback. You get nothing right. You work so hard and there's like zero feedback. The best you can do in the UK on your final exam is no concern, no concern about you. There's a point that I made to them – that sucks, right?

00;16;36;11 - 00;16;58;18

Valerie

You're working so hard you get nothing positive back. On the other hand, I wanted them to understand that even though you didn't know this was the culture you were signing up for when you went into medicine, this is the culture you're in. When you know that you can do less personalising, make it far less about you, and do more contextualising.

00;16;58;24 - 00;17;14;19

Valerie

This is the culture I signed up for. Same thing with academia. Nobody's writing in the margins. When you submit a grand proposal, you send an article and it's peer reviewed. Nobody's saying great paragraph, well-crafted analysis. All they're doing is telling you what's wrong.

00;17;14;23 - 00;17;37;09

Cale

Yeah, it's leads to my next point, which is, I know you focused a lot on, and correct me if this is incorrect, that education rather than therapy, and this idea that you're talking about now of understanding the context in the environment they're operating in. So this doesn't become, know inherently, a personal problem. Why did you focus on education versus therapy?

00;17;37;14 - 00;17;41;07

Cale

And when I say therapy, I mean probably most going down the psychological path.

00;17;41;10 - 00;18;16;19

Valerie

Yeah. And certainly there are people who yeah, I've gone to therapy over the years for various things in my life say I'm not at all opposed to therapy. I'm not a psychologist, for one, although my degree was in education and adult education, and we were working with a lot of concepts and tools and frameworks to help people. I was working with people whose goal was to democratise their therapy so that we could, we could like, explore our own patterns and look for solutions, you know, in lieu of therapy, if that wasn't accessible or an option or what have you.

00;18;16;21 - 00;18;38;01

Valerie

So my impulse as soon as I got my findings from my research was just to immediately, because I'm an educator, turn it into an educational intervention. And I created a day long program so people had a chance to understand what is imposter syndrome, where does it come from? How does it show up in your life? You know, how does it serve you in terms of the behaviours?

00;18;38;01 - 00;18;55;23

Valerie

At what cost? What are the alternatives? You know, like what do we do about it? And people, you know, it's more of a deeper dive in a, in a different kind of way. And you get to communicate with other people who are going through the same experience, which you don't get in therapy. And I'll give you a quick example.

00;18;55;23 - 00;19;10;17

Valerie

I have a very, very good friend I've known forever who's a therapist, and she has a doctoral student as a client, and she's been working with him for months and months and months on imposter syndrome. I said, Lynn, why don't you just say to him, you're a doctoral student? Like, of course you feel like an imposter. All doctoral students do.

00;19;10;17 - 00;19;15;23

Valerie

And here's the reasons why, put it into a context that is a better one in and of itself.

00;19;15;25 - 00;19;38;16

Cale

Yeah, it must be liberating to have that moment with people to almost release the burden from them. Yeah. Versus again, the context. So the, you know, the workplace or the environment that they're operating in, it's obvious. Right? Of course you're going to have that. Over the past 40 years, is there a story that really sticks out in your mind of someone that has just overcome really debilitating imposter syndrome?

00;19;38;19 - 00;19;59;03

Valerie

Yeah, I couldn't tell you a lot of her backstory. It is a woman who, she was an administrator at a university here, who had me come in and speak, and then she saw me speak on two other occasions. And she had said to me recently, I don't feel like an imposter anymore. I'm finally like, I heard you three times and I don't feel that way anymore.

00;19;59;05 - 00;20;15;26

Valerie

I would put myself in that category and I would have never thought I would say this. I mean, for decades. I said, you know, I don't know that we ever, you know, completely cure it. But, you know, we can talk ourselves down more quickly, which I still believe, but that's part of the process. Or should I say process to be bilingual.

00;20;16;01 - 00;20;18;15

Cale

And we accept both. We accept both.

00;20;18;22 - 00;20;40;06

Valerie

Okay, I'm bilingual, but so you know it. I know, I know, I completely lost my train of thought. But it's funny, I did a TED talk and I lost my train of thought in the Ted talk. It was a six minute TED talk at TED headquarters in New York. The entire audience were Ted speakers and Chris Anderson and all the senior people at Ted were in the audience.

00;20;40;08 - 00;20;59;27

Valerie

Bright lights, big cameras. The people in the front row were like, I could touch them. They were so close. It was a very intense experience. I spent hundreds of hours writing that six minutes and six minutes is harder than like 18 minutes. So I actually had to have a beginning, a middle, an end in six minutes. Timing it over and over and over.

00;20;59;27 - 00;21;20;12

Valerie

Very stressed. So I got up there and I forgot. I lost my train of thought. I couldn't remember, like, where do I go next here? And so I kind of threw something in, and then I got back on track. So I was telling that story on a webinar that I was delivering for university, and my client said, "Oh, so you felt like an imposter" because I said I was so disappointed afterwards.

00;21;20;12 - 00;21;38;27

Valerie

I was like crushingly disappointed. I was depressed for like three days because I wanted that feeling. I'm sure you've had that feeling right where you kind of walk off stage or you walk out of

a room and you're like, nailed it, right? Like, I know that feeling. And I did not have that feeling. So to work that hard and not have that feeling.

00;21;38;29 - 00;21;58;22

Valerie

So she said, "Oh, so you felt like an imposter?". I said, no, I didn't feel like an imposter. Let me be clear. I didn't think I fooled anybody. I didn't like, think I was less capable, competent, talented or knowledgeable than I am on this subject. And, you know, I just didn't feel like I'd fooled anybody. I wasn't dismissing my accomplishments and so on, I was disappointed.

00;21;58;25 - 00;22;12;07

Valerie

Now I can really kind of separate like no this is normal disappointment. Like why wouldn't you feel this way. You're not always going to nail it. You know, you're not going to win the Academy Award every time you make a film. So I have things in perspective in a way that I didn't used to.

00;22;12;10 - 00;22;15;21

Cale

Sounds like there's a little bit of 'perfectionist' in there as well. I must add.

00;22;15;24 - 00;22;32;24

Valerie

Honestly in that example, I think it was more that the stakes were very high and that I had worked so hard on it. But if that was just it, you know, doing it, giving a talk to JP Morgan or, you know, some client where I lost my train of thought, like, again, it would have been not a big deal, but this was a big deal.

00;22;32;26 - 00;22;54;15

Cale

Yeah. It leads me into another question here, which is, it's really important that people listening sort of get application and, you know, advice. And so, I would love your advice for two different types of people. And, you know, a singular really like critical piece of advice. The first is obviously someone who is suffering from imposter syndrome in that moment.

00;22;54;17 - 00;23;12;29

Cale

And then someone who knows a person suffering that they don't kind of know what to do with that. They've been told it, but they don't know how to approach or help in any particular way. So for those two people, what would be a singular piece of advice that you would provide them to, to help them?

00;23;13;03 - 00;23;32;01

Valerie

Yeah. An, an advice is really kind of related. And I can speak to the second one in a moment, but it's to recognize that people who don't feel like imposters, I mean, think about, you know, let's let's take that common 70% that's always thrown around, like 70% of people have had these feelings at one time or another. My question is, what's up with the other 30?

00;23;32;05 - 00;23;55;09

Valerie

Like, why are we studying them? One part of that 30 has a whole different issue going on irrational self-confidence syndrome. Like their faith in their knowledge and abilities, far exceeds their actual knowledge and abilities. So that kind of proverbial narcissistic, smartest guy in the room who really doesn't know what they're talking about. So let's put them over here because we don't want to be them.

00;23;55;12 - 00;24;16;27

Valerie

But there is a, a minority within that minority, that 30% who we do want to understand and learn from. There's no difference between them and us. They are no more intelligent, capable, competent, intelligent. It's just in the exact same situation where you and I might have an imposter moment. They are thinking different thoughts. That's it. Right. And but it's, it's not a pep talk, you know.

00;24;16;27 - 00;24;31;16

Valerie

They're not it. You said, you know, what do you say to yourself in that moment? It's not like you've got this and you can do it. You deserve to be here. Like, if all it took was a pep talk, there would be no imposter syndrome. And so, you know, again, it can be a little bit helpful, but it's not going to move the needle in any lasting way.

00;24;31;18 - 00;24;51;10

Valerie

And especially for that manager or that friend, like their inclination is to tell you how great you are. You're going to be great. Oh, you're worrying about nothing. But again, like the person feels like an imposter. They don't believe you, right? So that's not going to be very helpful. To me, it's about shifting how we, we think, but not by rebranding it.

00;24;51;14 - 00;25;20;07

Valerie

There's, it's been rebranded as a superpower. It's been rebranded as a sky positive thing. And the people who are in that camp say it. It's actually positive as a good thing because it motivates us to work harder. Well, two things. Research shows women are less propelled by self-doubt, more likely to pull back. But also, personally, I don't want my motivation to work hard to come from trying to outrun the no talent police.

00;25;20;07 - 00;25;43;23

Valerie

They also say it's a good thing, so it means we're learning and growing. So are we saying we have to feel inadequate and inept to be learning and growing? I don't think so. The third reason they say it's a good thing is that because it keeps us humble. Cale, I've been doing this for 40 years. I have never heard a single woman ever say, you know, I think I'm going to keep my insecurity and my self-doubt, my fraudulent feelings because it keeps me humble.

00;25;43;25 - 00;26;05;23

Valerie

Like never. Right? Hubris is more of an issue for men, culturally speaking. So I think instead of like this false choice, you know, you can be an arrogant jerk or you can feel like an imposter. I really advocate a third path, which is to become what I call a humble realist, somebody who is genuinely humble but just has never had these feelings.

00;26;05;25 - 00;26;33;22

Valerie

And they think differently about three very specific things. So this is where that friend or person can be helpful. People who are humble, humble realists, they have a realistic understanding of what it means to be competent. They have a healthy response to failure, mistakes, setbacks, and constructive feedback, which, let's face it, feels like criticism for folks who feel like imposters, and they understand that a certain amount of fear and self-doubt are part of the achievement journey.

00;26;33;22 - 00;26;36;27

Valerie

In other words, they don't conflate confidence and confidence.

00;26;37;00 - 00;26;44;08

Cale

And so how would someone sort of work themselves through those three key things to think about?

00;26;44;11 - 00;27;05;21

Valerie

It depends [on] what's happening in the moment. But, but in other words, it's about reframing. In other words, in that moment to kind of pause just for a second and hit the pause button to become consciously aware of, like, what is the conversation going on in my head right now? And then, how can I reframe it the way a humble realist would?

00;27;05;27 - 00;27;26;22

Valerie

Because again, they're no more intelligent or capable. They are just looking at this situation completely differently. So you might be walking into a new situation and going, "oh my God, all these people are brilliant", you know? And the message is "and I'm not". Right? So you're,

you're overwhelmed by how brilliant everyone is and you're comparing yourself. Somebody who's a humble realist is going to walk in and go, "Wow, there's so many brilliant people here.

00;27;26;22 - 00;27;47;01

Valerie

This is amazing. I'm going to learn so much in it" or around constructive criticism. For example, there was a young woman at NASA when I was there who— she was an engineer. She just had a performance review. Her manager told her five ways she did an excellent job. And she said, is there any place I could improve? And I said, that's great.

00;27;47;01 - 00;28;05;09

Valerie

That's exactly what you should be asking. Just. Yeah. But then he criticised me and I was depressed for weeks. I said, do you mind if I ask what the criticism was? And she said, yes. He said, I could have delegated more on my last project. I said that wasn't criticism, that was information. Humble realists, they see constructive feedback as a gift.

00;28;05;16 - 00;28;26;19

Valerie

They seek it out. They want information about how they could improve. Even if they're given a compliment. They're going to say, what's one thing I could have done even better? So it's not about even believing the new thoughts. People aren't going to believe it. Like if you got the old script in your head. But the more you can just imagine what somebody who is humble never felt like an imposter might think.

00;28;26;22 - 00;28;32;08

Valerie

Think that thought. But importantly, take action as if you actually believed it.

00;28;32;10 - 00;28;57;10

Cale

I want to dig a little deeper here and give you a couple of scenarios, Valerie. Based off your five types of imposter syndrome that you've sort of articulated, and there's two scenarios. The first scenario is often healthcare workers pressure themselves to have all the answers. And in terms of your type of imposter syndrome, you probably frame this up as the expert and crazy sense of I don't have the answer for that.

00;28;57;10 - 00;29;02;15

Cale

Therefore, I have failed. If I'm a humble realist, how would I approach that kind of situation?

00;29;02;19 - 00;29;21;13

Valerie

Yeah, and just to be clear for your listeners, the five they often get described as the five types of imposter syndrome, when in fact there are five ways that people who have imposter feelings measure their competence based on these unrealistic, unsustainable expectations. So to your point, one of them is the expert, you expect to know 150%. The perfectionist,

00;29;21;13 - 00;29;43;01

Valerie

you, obviously as it sounds, expected [to] nail it every single time—flawless. The soloist who believes it only counts if they do it themselves. The natural, natural genius who, who is judging their competence based on ease and speed to the fact that they may have to struggle to understand or master something, proves in their mind they must be an imposter.

00;29;43;01 - 00;30;05;28

Valerie

And then the superhuman who expects to excel, not just, let's say, in their practice in the medical field, but also, you know, in leadership and negotiations or maybe also be the perfect parent, partner, homemaker, etc. So certainly a lot of people in the medical profession for good reason, you know, they might lean into the expert, you know, where they feel like they do need to know 150%.

00;30;06;03 - 00;30;33;22

Valerie

My, you know, what I would like them to understand is, yeah, you want to do the best you can and to know where to go get the information that you don't know. But new information is being added. You know, as we've been on this podcast and if I've been, you know, a million new bits of information that if, you know, been logged into the medical field and all the research that's coming out, so the expectation that you are going to stay on top of everything in your field is like the equivalent of trying to get to the end of the internet.

00;30;33;25 - 00;30;53;17

Valerie

You know, it is simply not possible. You know, you want to clearly be competent and knowledgeable, but you are never going to know it all. And similarly with perfectionism. And you know, I often joke that if you're my airline pilot or you're my surgeon, like, please be a perfectionist, right? So you do want people to be, you know, have these standards of excellence.

00;30;53;17 - 00;30;56;25

Valerie

But excellence and perfectionism are two different things.

00;30;56;28 - 00;31;19;11

Cale

Great. And the second scenario that I want to put to you is, is the superhuman. And, you know, primarily this inability to switch off and work so hard it starts impacting things outside of their profession. So hobbies, passions, relationships. What would you say to people who fit into that superhuman category?

00;31;19;14 - 00;31;42;18

Valerie

Yeah, it's the idea that we can be at the top of our game 100% of the time, and everything they do, it's just a recipe for, for failure. I'm a big fan of sports analogies, and it's like at the Olympics expecting to get a ten, like every single time from all of the judges for everything you do right at anything less than a ten or gold medal, you know, you feel like a failure.

00;31;42;20 - 00;32;00;18

Valerie

It's simply not realistic. And again, I think sports is an incredible analogy. Going back to criticism, who do you want as your tennis coach? Somebody is going to say, well, you know, Cale's holding his racket wrong, but I don't want to say anything because I don't want to hurt his feelings. Right. Or do you want somebody who's going to give you information?

00;32;00;24 - 00;32;17;24

Valerie

Failure. Right. Somebody is going to be crying on the bench after every game or an end. Somebody is going to be celebrating in the locker room. The athlete or the team who loses – they don't hang their uniform up and go home, they go watch the game tape. They get more coaching, they practise more, and they say, we'll get them next time.

00;32;17;24 - 00;32;23;22

Valerie

So it's always what you do with failure, mistakes and constructive feedback that really counts.

00;32;23;25 - 00;32;49;15

Cale

So again, specifically for the superhuman or the impression example is working so hard to the detriment of maybe home life. Is your advice that you're not going to get perfect tens across the entire spectrum of all the aspects of your life. That's just the way it is. And so therefore, don't be so hard on yourself? Or is there something else there about finding some semblance of balance within that?

00;32;49;17 - 00;33;15;18

Valerie

Yeah. Well, it's interesting that you're talking about the impact at home, because I don't do a lot of coaching, but I was coaching a male executive, and for him it wasn't about his home life. He's like, oh, I've got somebody there taking care of that. So he wasn't that wasn't where his

superhuman stuff showed up. Whereas there are a lot of women who, in addition to feeling like they have to excel [at] everything at work, they also are judged by their parenting, partnership,

00;33;15;18 - 00;33;32;11

Valerie

the house has to look great, [and] they have to look great. So there's a lot more pressure there. But this particular guy, he had kind of come in on the ground floor of a company started by two brothers, had grown into like a \$500 million company. And he was, he was almost like a third partner. He was a star.

00;33;32;11 - 00;33;46;17

Valerie

He kept referring to himself as a star. Like if they have to close a big deal, they'd fly him out to LA to close the deal. But he had these imposter feelings. On the one hand, he knew he was a star, but he also had imposter feelings. And I said, so. So, Mike. So you know, you're a star, right?

00;33;46;17 - 00;34;07;05

Valerie

He said yeah. I said, but it sounds like what you're expecting of yourself. And I'm going to use a baseball analogy, so feel free to translate it to cricket or football or what have you. But I said it's the equivalent of you expecting yourself to be the star pitcher, the star batter, the star catcher, the star base runner, the star you know, fielder.

00;34;07;07 - 00;34;17;10

Valerie

It's simply not possible. And the guy looked at me, Cale, and he's like, oh my God, I'm a sports guy. I just got it. What he was expecting is not reality.

00;34;17;14 - 00;34;32;20

Cale

The imposter syndrome. How do you see it playing out in future years? Think it will be more prevalent in society? It will improve? Is there any trend that you're seeing in terms of what the future kind of looks like?

00;34;32;24 - 00;34;56;25

Valerie

Well, the two trends are on the one side, framing it as a superpower. The other trend is denying that it is even real, and dismissing it and saying it's just it's a function of systemic bias, specifically racism and sexism and classism, which that's certainly – I don't think you can look at imposter syndrome without in part looking at it through a societal lens.

00;34;57;00 - 00;35;23;23

Valerie

But it's that and more and some of the other sources that we talked about today. You know, it's funny because on the one hand, I think it might increase because we have this culture of comparison with social media. And so it appears that everyone is living their best life. Or you go to LinkedIn and for the most part, people are only sharing the wins, but you're not seeing the setbacks, the losses.

00;35;23;23 - 00;35;47;10

Valerie

You know that the, the hard work you know that went into it. So in that way it could become more common. I think also for the reasons I said up front, it's often misunderstood. And so we think everything is imposter syndrome. There was a couple of women who wrote an article. They went to a nudist hotel, and they were uncomfortable walking through the lobby naked.

00;35;47;10 - 00;36;10;06

Valerie

And so they had imposter syndrome. I'm like, no, you are naked in a hotel lobby. And there was a guy in Florida. In Tampa. I hope you know who Tom Brady is. This – okay, the GOAT quarterback. And so he left my beloved New England Patriots and he went to play for Tampa. And so this fan had imposter syndrome because he didn't feel like

00;36;10;06 - 00;36;38;10

Valerie

they deserve to win the Super Bowl. They only got it because of Tom Brady, I'm like no that is not football imposter syndrome. So, and two warring factions in some African country just accused the other one of imposter syndrome over like something like nothing to do with anything related to imposter syndrome. So I think the more this misinformation is out there about what it means, you're going to hear more people saying they experienced imposter syndrome

00;36;38;10 - 00;36;40;08

Valerie

when they're not even quite sure that they do.

00;36;40;10 - 00;37;01;05

Cale

A follow-up question that I typically ask would be, what are going to be the biggest challenges to realising that future? I think you've kind of already touched on, which is this rise of comparison by nature and also this almost binary view. This is totally a structural issue, a very big issue that we need to get a hold of.

00;37;01;07 - 00;37;18;01

Cale

Or it's, you know, very discrete. And we have to be super optimistic that, you know, that's a good thing. You've got imposter syndrome, it's going to drive and fuel your growth. Is that a good

summation of the sort of the challenges? And is there anything else there that you would say—it's going to be difficult to change people's mindset on this?

00;37;18;01 - 00;37;49;11

Valerie

Yeah, I do think those are the two big challenges. And it's kind of interesting because they're just two very, very different ways of looking at the same thing. There is maybe another challenge in: there's a lot of especially coaches out there who are promoting themselves as experts on imposter syndrome and a lot of people now are experts on imposter syndrome, based on, I think, frankly, you – you know, their claim to fame is, you know, for \$2,000 and three sessions, I will help you find that wound from your childhood.

00;37;49;11 - 00;38;08;12

Valerie

That one thing like when your father said this thing when you came home with your science experiment, you know, that is the, the source of all imposter feelings to follow, and they're going to find it and they're going to heal it. And I think that, that's very, that's very concerning to me because that's it's not always wound based.

00;38;08;12 - 00;38;47;03

Valerie

I would say for the majority of people, it's not about this thing, this one kind of thing that happened more this overarching, more societal messaging around, you know, success and failure. You know, I think we don't spend enough time talking about failure in a healthy way. If your listeners Google 'Princeton Professor Failure CV', this guy posted his clearly very impressive tenured Princeton University resume CV, but he also posted his failure CV the jobs he didn't get, the publications that rejected his submission, and the grants he didn't get.

00;38;47;03 - 00;39;05;27

Valerie

And it really rocked the academic world because people don't talk about the challenges and the setbacks and the difficulty, you know? And so, you know, we think success is like this. But it was a great demonstration of, you know, success is like this. And I think if they had a more realistic understanding of that, that would help a lot.

00;39;05;29 - 00;39;20;12

Cale

Because as you're describing it, it's having increasingly more people model humility in some way. So this idea of, you know, being humble, it becomes contagious, right? And normalised in many aspects.

00;39;20;15 - 00;39;37;16

Valerie

Yeah. I think sometimes it can get hard to parse out, am I being humble? Because certainly there's certain cultures where humility is very important. Am I being humble? I really don't think I deserve this, so that the person kind of you – say you did a great job, like, “Oh no, no, it was nothing. You know, anybody could have done it.”

00;39;37;18 - 00;39;56;08

Valerie

Something that's hard to tell— is that really humility, or do I not really think I deserved the compliment. So, you know, that can get a little bit tricky I think as well. I mean, I do think humility is important, but also, you know, one piece of advice people often give around imposter syndrome is to make a list of your accomplishments.

00;39;56;11 - 00;40;14;28

Valerie

I don't think Tom Hanks needs to write down that he got an Academy Award or any of the other, you know, very accomplished people who talked about imposter. I don't even think they forget those things. I don't think that's the issue. And what happens when you go down the list of your accomplishments, and you really did have a bit of luck.

00;40;15;00 - 00;40;34;12

Valerie

You really were in the right place at the right time. You really do have a great personality, right? Because personality is a legitimate skill set, then you're going to kind of negate that. But, but I think more importantly, Google has this program called “I am remarkable” and it's open source. Anybody can go, become an ‘I'm remarkable’ facilitator.

00;40;34;12 - 00;41;03;01

Valerie

They created it because, especially internationally, their female employees really specifically were having a hard time talking about their accomplishments in a performance review for socialisation reasons, cultural reasons. So they created this program to help them talk about things in bragging and talk about your accomplishments. But a key to it is you, everyone takes five minutes, they write down all their accomplishments, and then you go around the room and you say, I'm remarkable because

00;41;03;01 - 00;41;23;18

Valerie

and you say, one reason why you're remarkable. My feedback to Google – I've worked with Google 3 or 4 times – is they need to change the name of the program to “I'm remarkable, and some days I suck”, because you're not always going to be remarkable, we're not always gonna [be] brilliant. And it's like this, this huge set up I think. I'm really good at 3 or 4 things.

00;41;23;18 - 00;41;31;21

Valerie

I'm pretty good at 4 or 5 things, and I suck at everything else. Right? So I think we also have to have a healthy appreciation for our limitations.

00;41;31;24 - 00;41;34;14

Cale

Did they pick it up, by the way? Did Google take that on?

00;41;34;17 - 00;41;37;12

Valerie

No, no no no no they would never.

00;41;37;15 - 00;41;42;02

Cale

That quote is catchy, that, that, that line I've got to say this is just remarkable.

00;41;42;04 - 00;41;45;07

Valerie

That might be my new book title.

00;41;45;09 - 00;41;52;00

Cale

Hey, a couple of final questions. You've been so gracious with your time. What are you excited about? What gets you up in the morning?

00;41;52;04 - 00;42;15;24

Valerie

You know, I sat down with my business partner. We co-founded something called Imposter Syndrome Institute, and we were doing, like, our seven year plan. We use this book called traction, and it has a series of steps that we went through. And I, I came up with, you know, what I want in terms of like a big vision is I want my approach to be like the standard approach within organisations, whether it's universities or whether it's corporations.

00;42;15;24 - 00;42;34;01

Valerie

So, you know, I'm not going to be around forever and you can only have so many people. I mean, I do webinars for like, for big companies for like 3000 people on the webinar, but still that you'd have to do a lot of webinars to reach a lot of people. I'm really excited about a self-paced program that we're creating that we can licence to organisations.

00;42;34;03 - 00;43;03;23

Valerie

So if you're a new hire, you're a new manager, you're [in] the new student orientation. You know, anybody can go to this program whether they experience it, imposter feelings or not. It's about being imposter syndrome informed. So we'll have the imposter syndrome informed student,

imposter syndrome informed faculty manager, professional or attorney because I've worked with all these groups, positions, etc. and there's, you know, nuances and differences for each, but something really kind of tailored to those audiences.

00;43;03;23 - 00;43;07;22

Valerie

So that really excites me because of the bandwidth that we might possibly be able to get.

00;43;07;25 - 00;43;36;13

Cale

Yeah, it's very exciting. And the impact of doing it at that level, for sure. The reason for the podcast being named Grin and Bare It, Valerie, is that it's often the piece of advice that people get when they're faced with something challenging. So other people will say, well, just get on with it. Just grin and bear it. If people are going to take away a single thing in listening to this pod, what advice would you provide them if they are having these imposter feelings?

00;43;36;13 - 00;43;58;07

Valerie

You know, I think I would tell them that it's not all about you. You know, when we play small or burnout or any of the other kind of repercussions around imposter syndrome, that there are costs and consequences, certainly to ourselves, but to other people as well, whether it's colleagues or our internal or external clients or, you know, our family or society, community.

00;43;58;10 - 00;44;03;09

Valerie

So, you know, my mantra has always been "everybody loses when bright people play small".

00;44;03;13 - 00;44;17;01

Cale

Words to live by, Valerie, incredibly valuable. I've, I've enjoyed this, [an] hour has flown by and I really, really appreciate you joining us. So many insights for our listeners to take away. Thank you again for joining the pod.

00;44;17;05 - 00;44;23;25

Valerie

Great. Thank you.

00;44;23;27 - 00;44;54;03

Cale

Thank you so much for listening to this week's episode. Hope you enjoyed it. As always, I would love your feedback, questions, or any suggestions that you have for someone that I should be speaking to next as our guest. You can find me on LinkedIn, or you can find the Grin and Bare It podcast on TikTok and Instagram. Now the best way to support this show, if you did like it, is

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00;44;54;05 - 00;45;02;05

Cale

Thank you so much again. See you next time on Grin and Bare It.