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LEGACY

TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

**Navigating Leadership Transitions:
Overcoming Guilt, Self-Doubt, and
Imposter Syndrome**



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The Context

As a school leader, it's often assumed that leaders either have all the answers or are well-rounded individuals; from balancing day-to-day operations to ensuring emotional balance among the members they lead, this perception is valid. But within those perceptions, leaders may experience the same emotional roller coasters as teachers: guilt, self-doubt, and imposter syndrome. As an educational leader and advocate, I can say I have fallen victim to these emotions during my most recent transition.

Stepping into a new leadership role is often accompanied by a sense of accomplishment and anticipation. Yet beneath the congratulations and family excitement lies a quieter, more complex reality. In 2025, my fiancé and I decided to move our wedding up by a year. In doing so, we discussed my staying at my current job in Temecula and commuting for the 25-26 school year. The plan was set, and we purchased a new car, but months into the new norm, reality slowly crept in, and the relocation cloud loomed. After nine months of commuting 174 miles a day, five days a week, the decision was made to begin searching for a job closer to home.

As an educational leader with years of experience and multiple degrees, the thought of job searching was not frightening, as I was under the impression that I would find something quickly. However, life had a different path. Rejection letters and multi-step hiring processes that took months to complete and ended with "Thank you for your time" began to arrive, with no light at the end of the tunnel. Self-doubt in my skills and education began to settle. But after 15 applications and multiple interviews, a callback and offer were made, and a small shimmer of light began to appear. The congratulatory text message alerts rang my phone, but reality began to hit; I am officially leaving a school community I love.



Leadership transitions are not simply professional shifts; they are deeply personal journeys that challenge identity, confidence, and one's sense of belonging. While these emotional hurdles are common, they are rarely discussed openly. Understanding and addressing them is essential for leaders who want to move beyond survival and lead with clarity, confidence, and purpose.



The Challenge

The day had finally come to begin at my new school. As I parked in the school parking lot in Costa Mesa, California, the thought of being a school admin starting at the end of March was already stressful enough. But what came next was something I had heard many people share, but had little experience with: imposter syndrome. Merriam-Webster defines imposter syndrome as a psychological condition characterized by persistent doubt about one's abilities or accomplishments, accompanied by the fear of being exposed as a fraud despite evidence of ongoing success (Rosenbaum, 2022). While imposter syndrome can affect anyone, it is particularly prevalent during periods of transition and growth. As the first Director of Academics at my new school, my internal imposter thoughts grew as the day continued. Navigating the observation and understanding of multiple team dynamics and organizational operations, and making preemptive decisions, led to feelings of inadequacy, causing me to question my experience and knowledge.

The impact of these internal struggles on leadership effectiveness is significant. Leaders experiencing self-doubt may become overly cautious in decision-making, delaying action to avoid mistakes. Others may overcompensate by working excessively hard, striving for perfection to validate their role. This can lead to burnout, emotional fatigue, and a diminished capacity to think strategically.

However, these challenges are not purely obstacles; they can also serve as powerful catalysts for growth. When approached intentionally, the discomfort associated with leadership transitions can deepen self-awareness and strengthen leadership capacity. One of the most important shifts a leader can make is reframing imposter syndrome not as evidence of inadequacy, but as a signal of growth. Feeling uncertain often means stretching beyond one's comfort zone and developing new skills.



Overcoming Techniques

After several weeks at my new site, I gained confidence in the day-to-day operations, the teachers and staff, and the school's layout. However, I could not shake off the persistent feeling of self-doubt and the growing sense of impostor syndrome. So I put myself in the role of mentee and reached out to support groups and mentors. The following techniques helped me chip away at the links in the chains that were fostering self-doubt.

Self-reflection leads to self-awareness:

Taking time to reflect on your thoughts and emotional patterns can better equip you in managing triggers that lead to moments of self-doubt.

Reframing negative self-talk:

Internal narratives can undermine confidence, such as "I'm not ready," "I don't have enough experience," or "Someone else would do this better." Instead, question these thoughts and replace them with phrases like "I was chosen for this role because of my skills and potential," or "I am still learning, and that is part of leadership" (MCDA, 2023).

Document and internalize success:

Keeping a record of achievements, positive feedback, and meaningful experiences can contribute to the shifting of belief systems, making confidence more grounded and sustainable (MCDA, 2023).

Mentorship & Feedback:

Mentors can provide perspective and offer guidance based on experience. They also provide affirmation of strengths and abilities.

Opportunities for honest feedback will help calibrate self-perception with how others actually perceive them.

Lead with authenticity and vulnerability:

Acknowledging challenges and uncertainties can strengthen trust within teams. Leaders who are transparent about their growth create space for others to do the same, fostering a culture of openness and continuous learning (MCDA, 2023).

Next Steps

As I am now months into the role, I will not say I have overcome my interpersonal challenges, but I have made daily progress. Leadership transitions are as much about identity as they are about skill. The process takes time and intentional reflection. Leaders who anchor themselves in purpose, values, and vision are better equipped to navigate uncertainty.

In the end, effective leadership is not defined by the absence of doubt, but by the ability to lead through it. Guilt, self-doubt, and imposter syndrome are not signs that a leader is failing; they are signs that a leader is growing.



References

MCDA CCG, Inc. (2023). [Imposter Syndrome in business: Recognizing and overcoming self-doubt.](#)

Rosenbaum, J. (2022). [Literally Jesse.](#)



Dr. Joshua Medrano holds an EdD in leadership focusing on systems thinking and educational policy, dedicated to fostering innovation in education. With years of experience teaching science and math, he successfully spearheads numerous STEM-based programs that inspire students to engage with complex scientific concepts. Now, as Director of Academics, his passion for educational leadership and hands-on learning empowers administrators, teachers, and students to further enhance their learning and practice.



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