# Transcript: Imposter Syndrome with Julienne Koch and Jessica Galterio

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## [Opening music with voiceover]

WGU's IT audio series, flexible, portable, profound.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Hello, night owls. Welcome to this episode. My name is Julianne Koch. I'm a program mentor at WGU in the College of IT.

I have been here for about eight-and-a-half years and I've seen many experiences with many different students. Today, we're going to use some of that to talk about academic confidence and a phenomena that occurs among many students and professionals, something called imposter syndrome. Today, I've got with me Jessica Galterio.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Thanks Julienne. As you said, I'm Jessica Galterio. I'm also a program mentor here in the College of IT. I've been here for six years so I have seen various ways that imposter syndrome can present itself within both our students and even sometimes here within ourselves at WGU.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Great. Well, welcome today. I look forward to chatting with you about academic confidence and imposter syndrome.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Julianne, what is imposter syndrome?

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

That's a great question. Imposter syndrome is a phenomenon where someone who is qualified, who has experience, someone who deserves their accomplishments, but they just doubt it all. They may believe that they've gotten to their position by fluke or by luck or circumstance and that one day they're going to be found out.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Wow.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Wow.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

That's what they're feeling. How this might pertain to IT is, this is a fast-moving industry and a lot of people who are in this industry really do experience something like imposter syndrome because experiencing come from many different avenues. We have professional experience, traditional formalized education, but there's also a lot of informal training that a lot of my students do, a lot of professionals in the IT field do and as a result that informal-ness of your experience and your training, a lot of people in this industry just feel like they don't deserve their spot and that they're not qualified or able to hack it in the IT field.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

That's a tough feeling for sure.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Absolutely. There's certain people that experienced this maybe a little more frequently, or there may be some just reasons that might add to why you might be feeling this way. A lot of times, especially in the academic realm, somebody who's maybe a first-generation college student, they may be completely lost, maybe feel like they don't belong there. That academia is not something that anybody they know has experienced and so when they get to college, they have difficulty navigating it, may just feel like, maybe I don't belong here.

Another example might be a person of color who's in an industry that is overwhelmingly not and that can often be an experience that's really difficult to be. Say the only Hispanic person in an office that is dealing with their job. There's some research out there. When people first started investigating the concept of imposter syndrome, it suggested that women might experience it at a more frequent rate than men. I feel like from what I've read about it and researched, this is really highly dependent on the field. For example, a woman in the IT field may experience it at maybe about the same rate is like a man in the nursing field.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

How interesting.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Yeah. Some other examples might be like your first job when you get there and you're using a lot of those skills that you learned at school, but you're not necessarily super experienced with them yet and you're feeling out the ropes. You may not feel like, "Oh my goodness, how did I get this job? How did we get here and who did I fool in the HR Department with this. Is this degree that I earned is a real or they go to find out that maybe it's not." I don't know.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Those are all valid feelings, for sure. I've definitely heard students express these before.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Yeah, I felt that way in my first job for sure. I definitely experienced that like, one of these days, my students are going to realize that I just finished college just a couple weeks ago and what they're going to do to me. It was definitely something that I experienced in my first job.

Another example that I've actually seen quite frequently with my students are students who have taken a long break from college.

Maybe they started traditionally and then maybe they joined the military and they stopped doing school for a while or they realized that they weren't in a good place yet to be a college student so they've taken a long break. They haven't been in school for a long time. Coming back and learning the ropes again on especially something like math or writing can often be something where people are really nervous, and they don't have that confidence in their skills even though they're there. It's a lot like riding a bicycle sometimes, getting back into these things, people just need to feel confident.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Absolutely. I can understand that too. If there are large gaps in your are transcripts that it would only feel natural, especially that first course that gives you a tough time. You're going to feel like you've made the wrong decision, you don't belong here.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Yeah, I see it happen a lot.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

When we started talking about this, Julienne, I wanted to find some examples, because a lot of times it's easy for us to feel certain ways, but we convince ourselves that no one else feels this way. This is just me. Probably the best example I came across was the great Maya Angelou. Easily one of the best writers of the modern American time, very decorated, lots of awards, but quote - ''I have written 11 books, but each time I think, oh, they're going to find out now. I've run a game on everybody and they're going to find me out''. As someone who's looked up to Maya Angelou, I couldn't believe that those were words that would come from her; so natural, so pointed, it seems to flow from her. To hear from someone like her that these are feelings too that she feels, it really gave me a lot of pause and made me think. Our grads have those moments of doubt.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Absolutely. That's comforting.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Exactly. I also found another quote from Mike Hondorp , the CMO of currently a company called Whalar but he used to work at Facebook. When he worked there, he felt like an impostor. He felt like he was surrounded by crazy smart, high achieving young people and he couldn't understand what he had done to get there. Again, he was able to move on and create his own company and certainly continue to build his resume. But even sometimes just our environment can make us feel that way, even if it's something we've never experienced before.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Yeah, absolutely. I believe that. That's a culture shock.

I think that a lot of our students experience that culture shock as they move through their career both professionally and academically. This is something that I've actually seen quite a bit with my students. I've seen it happen time and time again where I'll have a student when they started WGU, who's been working in the IT industry for quite a while, but they're just stuck there. They're not necessarily happy with the job that they're in or their pay rate and so that's part of why they're here at WGU. But as these students progress through their degree program and they earn certifications and they become more qualified. I often have this conversation with them about, well, you're still in this job that you hate that has you working these hours you don't like. Why don't you take some of this experience, take some of these certifications, put them on your resume, get out there and take a look at what else is out there.

Even though a lot of these students often meet all the qualifications for these positions, they're really reluctant to apply for these jobs because they don't feel like they're ready yet. They don't feel like they deserve that job at Google yet or at Amazon yet. They think that they're just not quite there. Once they get the degree, then they'll feel like they're ready. But oftentimes, especially in the IT college, you're earning these certifications and developing those skills that you can use right away, and you don't have to wait till you check off that last part.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

I'm always telling my students to keep their resumes and CVs and their LinkedIn's all very, very current because you never know who's on a hunt for a new employee.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Absolutely. Have you seen any of your students who might be experiencing something like academic confidence issue?

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Yeah. But I definitely have seen it with certificate exams, especially tougher certificate exams that come with their own reputation.

CCNA, for example, it can be really difficult sometimes to convince the students that they're truly ready to take the exam and they have gone through all the content. We may have hit every practice test. We may be nailing everything, but sometimes it can be really hard to convince themselves that they're ready, and then, that turns into this cycle of practicing, and practicing, and practicing, and you're getting further and further away from your target and test date, which sometimes a little extra practice is good, but when you really start to spiral like that, it can be really hard for both the academic and confidence side of things.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Absolutely. Yeah, I've seen that happen quite a bit as well, where I'll have a student who just waits to take a test, and finally I convince them to take it and suddenly, all of their results are blue. And they realize oftentimes, I was ready three weeks ago. Sometimes they can take that experience and move forward to have that confidence a little earlier, but it's absolutely something that I've seen impact my students in the same way. It's probably pretty common.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

What do we do about all this?

We've identified imposter syndrome. It affects us on all different levels. How do we move forward?

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

There's lots of good articles in the Student's Success Center. There's actually even a tag specifically for academic confidence and there's about a dozen articles, they're discussing strategies for overcoming it. But really, the first step is just being aware of it and be aware of your own self-doubt, admit to yourself, "Hey, I shouldn't be feeling this doubt. I know that I am though so why," and to really go in there and think about it.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Absolutely, and I think your program mentor is a great place to start with that. They're never going to judge you, never going to think differently of you, but they might be the person that you can speak freely about this with, identifying that there's a problem, I'm feeling insecure and anxious about this, how do I move forward? And a program should be really good at helping separate those feelings from the facts and reality of the preparation that you've done and the time that you put in.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Yeah. That's a large part of what I think both of us do with our students as they take that doubts and they take those feelings and look at it with the facts instead. You may be feeling this way, but you have these five certifications and they line up exactly with this job that you're thinking about applying for. They build together to prepare you to start looking at this tougher certification that you're ready for.

Absolutely, if you're feeling insecure, if you're feeling like you're not in the right place, talk to your program mentor because they have some ideas. They hopefully know you, have an idea about what your skill level is like, and can really help boost you up if you need it.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Help you to get in touch with reality.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

One other thing that's really important that has to do with reality is unrealistic expectations as we hold ourselves to high standards, and I see it so often when I have students come into the program at the very beginning and they spent their time going through things like orientation, but they also maybe look at places like Reddit. But what I see sometimes in some of the WGU or the IT college forms, there is a lot of people who talk a lot about how many CUs they're able to do in one term. My experience with my students is that those are flukes, those are very infrequent.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Few and far between.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

My goodness, yes. Maybe one percent of students are able to go at the speed that I see people regularly talking about on Reddit. I'm not going to call them liars, it's just that they're not in this forum. Who knows what their experiences are like? I absolutely know that it is possible to go through your program at a speed that some of those Redditors are going at, but feel confident and feel good in yourself about your success. Don't compare yourself to these other people who are out there. You're not in a traditional program where you're competing against anybody for anything here at WGU, this is you and yourself.

Set a goal for yourself and aim for that. Set realistic goals for yourself, and don't compare yourself to what other people are doing.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

If your really looking to grow, the best thing you can do is compare yourself to yourself, and that can be difficult too. Let's say you have failed an exam, and now we're on this third attempt. Now we do have a pool for that doubt. We have a reason to feel like we may not be good enough, but that's where your program mentor can be really helpful too to point your face in the right direction to look at all the extra study time you put in. The fact that all of your practice test scores have improved, you've done better with the various tools that we've presented. Now, it is a different experience, and that can be tough to let go of that negative feeling or experience that you really did have when we're trying to move forward and make progress.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

What we can do as we're wrapping up about this topic is like you just talked about, connecting with your program mentor is a huge tool that you have as a student at WGU, somebody who is a good sounding board, somebody who can help you to recognize that self-doubt and help you to let go of it.

We also have some great resources in the Student Success Center, like I mentioned earlier, about academic confidence, but also things like the writing center and the math center and some other tools that are there. Check those out and then there's some other tools as well.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Yes, we also have Well-Connect, which is a fantastic resource. It offers in the moment, counseling, which I have already used, and I recommend. Also, there's a bunch of other resources that can help you deal with some of the issues you may be facing in your regular life and that might help alleviate some of the noise in your head so that you can clear your mind when you attack this academic stuff and really shoot for your goals.

## Speaker #1 (Julienne Koch):

Absolutely, yeah. It can be super helpful to have somebody who is a neutral observer to talk about some of these feelings with and help move forward through them.

Well, we really hope that you enjoyed this episode and that you found something useful to help you to be the most successful you can be here at WGU. I hope you have a great day.

## Speaker #2 (Jessica Galterio):

Take care.

## [Closing music with voiceover]

Schedule time with your program mentor to explore more deeply.

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