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Brains Don't Know Any Better

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Leadership coach and speaker Olivia Fox Cabane discusses how the insecurities that fuel our negative self-image and lie behind what we commonly know as the “impostor syndrome” hinders breakthrough thinking. She shares tips for how to convince ourselves that we can be more creative, based on research she did for her new book, “The Net and the Butterfly: The Art and Practice of Breakthrough Thinking.”



Transcript

that you should embrace failure and failure is good, and that's great. The problem is that they don't tell you how. And what is it that we, when we fear failure we fear of course the consequences, but we fear even more the actual experience of failure itself. And fear plus failure can manifest in your mind as a couple of things. One, the Imposter Syndrome, which you may have heard of. The Imposter Syndrome is this unfortunate feeling that so many people have that you're just waiting. You don't really know what you're doing and you're just waiting for the other shoe to drop, for someone to find you out and expose as a fraud. Have any of you ever felt this, ever? That's pretty confident people, okay. It turns out that since the Imposter Syndrome was first starting to be studied in the '70s a vast majority of the population has felt this way at some point or another, but what's fascinating is that the higher up the level of education you go, the worse it gets. Current theory is that the more you know the more you're aware of how small, the sum total of knowledge, the more you're aware of how small your own knowledge is in comparison.

But however that may be, the Imposter Syndrome is caused by a self image of yourself as not fill-in-the-blank. And for us, with breakthroughs, it's usually a self image of yourself as not creative, not a genius, not, in the Valley, Steve Jobs. So, you can, you can rebuild your self image. And you've got a couple of ways to do this. The easiest one is going to be to decide which self image you want. In this case let's say that you want to see yourself as creative. Second, gather past evidence. There's a couple of limitations in the brain that are gonna come in handy here. It doesn't have a great sense of imagination versus reality as we've said, it also doesn't have a great sense of time or scale. Have you ever heard of the Science of Small Winds? So that is, the fact that, okay, have you ever had a day where lots of little bad things happened one after the other? And you get the feeling that it's just one darn thing one after the other? And somehow, that's harder to live through than one big thing, have you ever had that experience? That's because our brain doesn't prioritize super well.

It doesn't realize instinctively what the different importances are. So, small acts of creativity stacked up. If there's lots of them, it can seem the same to your brain as one big creative breakthrough. And we're just trying to change your self image of how you see yourself with regards to breakthroughs.