

321 Imposter No More with Jill Stoddard

Jill Stoddard: the cost of staying in your comfort zone is essentially like not having a big bold life. If that's something that you want and so, of course, like, if you're satisfied with your life the way it is, there's nothing to be done here. But what we're talking about is people who have goals and dreams and aspirations that they really want to move toward, but they're not doing that because they're afraid, they're insecure, they're feeling inadequate, they have uncertainty, and they're afraid that they have no business doing this and they'll be outed as a fraud.

. That was our own Jill Stoddard on psychologists off the clock.

Yael Schonbrun: We are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile high Denver, Colorado, author of ACT Daily Journal, the Act Daily Card Deck, and the upcoming book ACT for Burnout.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the book Work Parent Thrive.

Jill Stoddard: And from Coastal New England. I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, author of Be Mighty, The Big Book of ACT Metaphors and the upcoming Imposter No More.

Debbie Sorensen: We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Jill Stoddard: Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

Well

Debbie Sorensen: our guest today Jill Stoddard probably needs no introduction here on Psychologists Off the Clock because she is one of our cohosts and well known to our listeners, but she's had a really amazing and inspiring career, and so we are going to go ahead and brag about her a little bit.

She's

Yael Schonbrun: Dr. Jill Stoddard is a clinical psychologist who is passionate about sharing science backed ideas from psychology to help people thrive. She got her PhD in clinical psychology from Boston University and has worked in medical settings, academic institutions, and private practice. Jill is the director of the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management in San Diego.

She is a psychologist, writer, TEDx speaker, award winning teacher, peer reviewed ACT trainer, and co host extraordinaire right here on Psychologists Off the Clock.

Debbie Sorensen: also the author of three books. The Big Book of Act Metaphors, Be Mighty! A Woman's Guide to Liberation from Anxiety, Worry, and Stress Using Mindfulness and Acceptance, and her brand new book hot off the presses, which is called Imposter No More!

Overcome Self Doubt and Imposterism to Cultivate a Successful Career.

Yael Schonbrun: So we're here to discuss Impostor No More, but let's just also make mention that Jill's writing has appeared in Psychology Today, Scary Mommy, Thrive Global, The Good Men Project, and Mindful Return, and she regularly appears on podcasts. Other than psychologist off the clock, and is an expert source for various media outlets.

She lives in Newburyport, Massachusetts with her husband, two kids, and very disobedient French bulldog. Jill, congratulations on your new book. Debbie and I are so excited to talk about it with you.

Jill Stoddard: Thanks you guys, I'm excited too. This feels really surreal. It's been a long time since I've been in the guest seat, being interviewed on Psychologists Off the Clock. It's kind of fun! Haha!

Yael Schonbrun: And we'll talk a little bit about your entry into Psychologists Off The Clock because you share some imposter stories in your book related to coming on as a co host. Well, coming on first as a guest and then as a co host.

But I just wanted to ask, you know, how much have imposter thoughts been coming up for you as you've been approaching the book launch?

Or are you over them entirely as a result of this book?

Jill Stoddard: Oh, gosh, I wish. Yeah. Wink, wink. Yeah, that would be nice. But no, I am definitely not even remotely close to being over them, even after writing the book. But, you know, the book is really all about how you don't have to be over them in order to, Cultivate the life and the career that you want and I think I'm like a pretty good, pretty good example of that, you know, and as are you guys, like, I think we all do a good job of really going after the things that feel meaningful for us, even when we feel uncertain and, you know, self doubt and, and have those kinds of imposter thoughts.

Debbie Sorensen: I have to say, Jill, you know, you mentioned that you're such a good example of how you can have an amazing career. I mean, we just heard your bio and even as I read the book, there were things you've done that I didn't even know about and ways that imposterism has shown up for you before. We've talked a lot about imposterism before on the podcast, and in fact, you and I did an episode together, episode 189 about imposterism. We were calling it imposter syndrome back then, which we'll get to, so stay tuned to hear about the controversy around that. But,

I love, Jill, that you Write so openly about your experience with imposterism, because I think you are a beautiful example of that. We just heard this super impressive bio, and there's examples in the books that I didn't even know about before, and I know you really well.

We did episode 189 together about imposterism, and that was before you even had your book contract in place. And so that was, that was a while ago. I think you just, you've done so many things that kind of illustrate what you can do with your career, even as this is showing up in a profound way in your life.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, and I made reference when we were reintroducing you to the audience about some imposterism that you share in the book that really came up the first time that you came on as a guest on POTC and then when we invited you to be a co host. So maybe you can start our conversation off with your story of imposterism and joining the POTC team.

Jill Stoddard: Oh, goodness, yes, I will say that I had reached out I had listened to an episode. It was the first episode with Feather Burkauer, where she talked about keeping kids safe from sexual abuse. And I went on to have a like fairly

traumatic experience where I observed an adult man grooming my daughter and it was because I listened to that episode that I knew what I was seeing and I was able to intervene and keep her safe and it was pretty profound, I've talked about it on the podcast before, and I just really felt compelled to reach out to you guys, to thank you and to share the experience.

But I was like such a super fan and, you know, POTC was my favorite podcast. And I thought of you guys as these like big celebrities, which is funny now that we're such good, such good friends to think of it that way, but I really, I was really like starstruck. And so at first it was just feeling insecure that I was being like a silly fangirl.

But I did it anyway, which is a big part of what I talk about in the book, is how can you have those, like, really uncomfortable thoughts and feelings and still do it because it really felt deeply important to me in my heart to share this with you. And I did and at first you didn't write back, so that, like, confirmed all of my biggest fears that I was, I was being silly.

But really it was just emails, like, taking a little while to be addressed. So I think it was Yael who wrote back saying that they were so touched by this email and, you know, just a really, really kind, kind response. And in that saying and by the way, you wrote one of our favorite ACT books, which was the big book of ACT metaphors. Do you want to come on the podcast and be a guest? And I've never had like a full blown panic attack, but I had a very strong panic response that was like, I mean, I was like really freaking out.

And the only way to not feel like a total fraud and imposter would have been to turn it down. And I just knew that this was a huge opportunity for me and I want to live values of being brave and courageous and It's really important to me to disseminate the word about ACT and psychological flexibility and this would be a platform to be able to do that.

So, the values were really clear. I was just terrified. And so, of course, I did say yes. And I will never forget doing that interview. I was, like, so physiologically activated. And when I get anxiety, it's usually more cognitive worry stuff, not a lot of physiological anxiety. And when I was doing this interview, Oh my, I was so physiologically activated.

I was so, so, so anxious. And then when Be Mighty came out, you asked me to come back on, and I was definitely still nervous, but less so because the interview was a great experience, and I really liked you guys. So that was me as

a guest. And then when Be Mighty came out, I thought about starting my own podcast.

And because I felt like I knew you guys a little bit at that time and really valued your opinion, I reached out to ask whether you thought this was a crazy idea, is it a lot of work? Well, is it crazy? And you guys said, well, it's so funny that you're reaching out because we've been talking about asking you to be a co host and that was like triggered the most imposter syndrome because who am I? I'm nobody like I don't know anything about podcasting. How can I be a podcast host? And I'm certainly not going to reach out to like big famous authors who are way smarter than me and ask them to do interviews with me. You know, I mean, it just triggered all of that doubt and insecurity and imposter thoughts, and it's been one of the best most valuable professional experiences I think I could have because it gives me an opportunity to challenge those thoughts through experience like reaching out and sometimes getting rejected, but often having people say yes and like what an invigorating experience and how much vitality happens when that occurs.

Debbie Sorensen: I can relate so much to that. I think even from the very beginning of the podcast, because I was one of the people who started it out first thing, there was a little bit of this sense of, Who do we think we are? You know what I mean? And the beauty of podcasting, I mean, what's so amazing about podcasts, anyone can start a podcast.

You don't have to apply for anything. You just do it. I mean, there's a lot of pieces to that of course, it's not, I'm not saying it's easy, but it's so accessible. And yet there was that voice in the back of my head, like. Why would we put ourselves out there? Like, what do we have to say?

Who's going to care what we think and yet, if you want to start a podcast, you just do it. You can't hold yourself back. And there's no real reason to, except for your own feeling of... Imposterism around it.

Yael Schonbrun: And I think this gets to the next question that I have because Jill, what you talk about in the book and what this conversation is about is something that's really different than other professional books who are advocating various skills to help people become more successful. So Jill, what is the difference between this professional book, Impostor No More, and other professional success books?

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, that's a great question. I'm so glad you asked that because I do think it's different in that you know, you could just do sort of a Google

search and look up all the advice is how to build confidence, how to improve your self esteem, basically teaching you how to think positive, like take those thoughts of insecurity and feel good about yourself.

And, you know, it sort of suggests that we have all this work that we need to do to feel ready, to feel like we're expert enough. We have enough expertise before we move forward with doing what we want to do. And if people are able to change their thoughts and change their feelings, and that helps them to go after the stuff they want.

Great. Like, all the power to you. If that works, there's nothing wrong with that. But in my experience, and I'm sure it's true for you guys too, that often doesn't work. You can read my bio and tell me all the great, in fact, the whole time you were like, Oh, you've had this, you know, great career and done all these things.

And inside at that time, I was like, what? No, I haven't. Like, I'm mediocre. I haven't done that many great things. That's just how our brains work. If you were to list off all my accomplishments, my brain would be going. Yeah. But yeah. But yeah, but, and sort of listing all the ways in which I don't think that I'm good enough.

And that's how we're wired. And I don't know if you wanna talk about this, but there are lots of reasons why our brains are wired that way. The bottom line is it's just normal to feel that way. And sometimes you can get trapped in like more of a battle trying to fight it and then stay stuck when really what my book suggests is, you know, it's an act based book. It's all about building psychological flexibility, which means can you have all this stuff going on and still choose to go after the life and the career that you want even in the middle of what often feels like crushing self doubt and insecurity.

And I feel like there's some liberation in that. There's not so much work that needs to be done before you go after what you want in your life.

Yael Schonbrun: that is what makes this book stand out and why it's such a powerful read, because you can really gain insight into the fact that it's okay to have all those self , doubting thoughts and those insecurities and that, confidence that you're not the right person to do this, but to, to be able to connect to, you know what this matters to me. I want to do it. And I think all three of us are really good examples of having that uncertainty about whether or not we should be doing a book or a podcast or a talk in front of an esteemed audience and yet going for it. And that is the reason that the three of us have been successful.

I think that is the main reason. You know, hopefully we have some other attributes that also establish our expertise and credentials and all that. But it really is about that psychological flexibility piece.

Debbie Sorensen: and this idea of going outside of your comfort zone and maybe we'll get more to this later, but your book starts with a really nice exploration of imposterism, what is it, and then what to do about it, and so much of it is about finding what's important to you, and then Doing courageous things that are outside of the safety zone because that's what you have to do if you want to take these risks and do these amazing things, it's, you know, it's, it's often it is uncomfortable.

Jill Stoddard: yeah, a hundred percent, and I think that's such an important message that it feels obvious to me now, but there was a time where it didn't feel obvious to me, which is we're sort of built to believe that if we encounter something that's scary or painful, We ought to avoid it, right? If you put your hand on a hot stove, you want to remove your hand to avoid a dangerous burn.

But then we sort of apply that rule, that logic, to all these other areas of our lives, when really the opposite is true. Because we only feel scared and worry about being outed as a fraud when we're doing things we care about. I tell a story in the book That's a true story that you know when they say it's just like riding a bike meaning you could not ride a bike for 10 years get on a bike and you'll know how to do it and I got on a bike after literally not riding it for 10 years and I immediately crashed and fell right off of it and in the book I said like guess how long I spent worrying about that And the answer is zero seconds.

I didn't worry about it at all because I truly couldn't care less about my ability to pedal a two wheeled bicycle. But that actually triggered some anxiety in me about the fact that I hadn't taught my kids how to ride a bike yet. And that made me feel like a really bad mom. And, if you look at that example, what's there to learn?

Well, where we worry are the places we care. And so, I think when something is scary or we're afraid we're going to be outed as a fraud, it's a sign that we're exactly where we're meant to be because if we didn't care about it, then we wouldn't be worrying about it and feeling fear.

Debbie Sorensen: So you're saying that those types of imposter thoughts will probably arise most in circumstances that are important to you.

Jill Stoddard: exactly.

Debbie Sorensen: Can you say a little bit about how those kinds of thoughts are trying to maybe help or protect us? Like, what's the function of that if you're trying to look at what's driving them?

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, I mean, I think that this really, like, we can look back to so many of these things, evolutionarily, that early humans, didn't have sharp teeth or sharp claws or run at fast speeds, they had each other. And early humans who hunted and gathered and traveled together had a survival advantage.

And so it would make sense that there would be a sort of constant checking in. Do I add value? Am I measuring up? Am I adding something to this group, because if not, I'm at risk for being ousted, and if I'm ousted, I'm dead. And of course being alone isn't literally life or death now.

But, you know, evolution hasn't really caught up. So I think it was helpful, life or death helpful in prehistoric times.

And we just haven't evolved to let go of that. And we are still social creatures like we now know through research that our relationships are the strongest predictor of our overall health and wellbeing, physical and mental health and wellbeing. And so whether we're adding value, whether we're measuring up whether we're contributing these things, they matter. So it's like keeping us on our toes, right? I think it's meant to be helpful in that it's trying to keep us on our toes, but it isn't always helpful depending on how we respond to it.

Yael Schonbrun: You also make a point in your book that not everyone is at equal risk for imposter thoughts. So who is most at risk and to dive into some of the particulars, how does it affect women and men differently?

Jill Stoddard: So, I feel like I always have to answer this question first by saying like, this is really all a hypothesis because the research on this is very inadequate. You can do a Google search and get tens of millions of hits on imposter syndrome, but if you look it up in, you a scientific database like PubMed, it's hundreds, you know, it's a lot fewer, um, hits.

And a lot of those research studies are just correlational studies, like they're not rigorous, well designed studies. So I feel like that caveat needs to be out there. There are some studies that show this happens more commonly in women than men. There are other studies that fail to show that difference.

What I think, and what others have also suggested, is that where those gender differences are not being seen, it's likely a function of marginalization versus

not. I think if you compared people who have been marginalized to people who have not, or even people of any gender who have been marginalized, To people who have not that that's really where you would see the differences.

And the reason I think that is because if you think historically women, people of color, people in the LGBTQ community, immigrants, disabled people have a history of being told that they don't belong in certain spaces. Women don't belong in men's spaces. People of color don't belong in white spaces, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

And so I think both overt messages have been sent in those ways, as well as just sort of swimming in our cultural waters these messages covertly get in. I give an example in the book of like, I'm Gen X and my mom grew up where her career options were nurse, secretary mom and teacher, that was pretty much it. So I think women of her generation looking to be entrepreneurs or to get into STEM very much have been told they don't belong in those spaces. So it would stand to reason that it might be more likely they would experience the imposter phenomenon in those spaces.

So I think that that, that learning history impacts imposterism a lot, but studies show up to 70% of people will experience this. So like, really it's most of us, so kind of going back to the evolutionary hypothesis, it's why it shouldn't be called a syndrome because this really seems like it's a pretty normal part of being a human being.

Debbie Sorensen: So people who listened to the episode back in 2021 that we did on imposter syndrome, before you wrote this book, will notice maybe that we're not calling it imposter syndrome in this episode, we're calling it imposterism and the imposter phenomenon, so Jill, why is it the case that, that, There's a problem with calling it a syndrome.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, I think this is so interesting. So you know, when this phenomenon was identified back in 1978 by Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes, they called it the imposter phenomenon and they thought that it really only occurred in high achieving women. And I find it fascinating. I don't think it's a coincidence that a phenomenon found predominantly in high achieving women suddenly got rebranded in our culture as a syndrome. I just don't think that's an accident. I think that that is a cultural example of systemic sexism. But if up to 70% of us have it, it means the majority of us have it.

So how can it be a syndrome? How can it be a pathology if it's something most of us experience? And then I think if the hypothesis is accurate, that experiences

of marginalization are what tend to lead to this. Then it also shouldn't be called a syndrome because this is not about a disordered psyche.

This is about people, this is the result of organizational and systemic oppression. And so, you know, in the book I sort of call for a cultural rebranding and going back to calling it the impostor phenomenon or impostorism, impostor experience thoughts, anything other than syndrome. Because it's simply not, it's not a syndrome.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, and I think that you're getting out of blaming the victim for it, so to speak. Just because, instead of saying, Well, what's your problem? Why do you have this? It's more like, Well, given the context, of course you have this. And now let's find a way to not let that hold you back. But to be less pathologizing about it.

It's not like there's something wrong with you for feeling this way. You have some terrible syndrome. It's like, this is a human experience that many of us have. I'm actually... I'm somewhat fascinated by the small percentage of people who are completely unfamiliar with this concept, And in your book you write about this, and you write about the Dunning Kruger effect, which to me is, I love talking about the Dunning Kruger effect, I think it's such a fascinating concept from psychology.

Could you speak a little bit about that, what's going on there?

Jill Stoddard: So the Dunning Kruger effect is basically a failure in self awareness where people who have limited competence overestimate the knowledge or skills or abilities that they actually have in a given area. And then because they lack competence, they also lack the ability to recognize their deficiencies.

So they don't question whether they're legitimate or deserving of inclusion in a group.

Debbie Sorensen: It's like they don't know enough to know that they don't know anything about it. They, they kind of think that they know everything there is to know about it, when in fact, they don't know enough to know that they aren't competent. My husband works in technology and renewable energy. He's like a computer guy who does tech work, and he finds this often happens people know just enough to think, Oh, I know what you need to do, and it'll take two days or something, and it turns out It's this really complicated thing, but they don't know enough to know

Jill Stoddard: But they don't know.

Debbie Sorensen: takes so long, but they think they do.

They think they have an understanding of it. And it's that thinking they do piece of it. You know, maybe they took a computer science class back in college or something. Um, So they think they know it, how it works and how to do it. And often there's this overconfidence that people have. Is that right?

Jill Stoddard: That's exactly right. Yep. That's exactly right. They have lots of confidence, confidence, but not a lot of knowledge.

Debbie Sorensen: So in a funny way, it's almost the opposite of imposterism. It's, it's almost like, instead of thinking, Oh, who am I? I don't know anything. They're gonna find out any minute. It's like, Oh, I know all about this. And yeah, and maybe we all have

Jill Stoddard: two ends of the, the similar,

Debbie Sorensen: Right?

Jill Stoddard: we may in certain domains, and then you don't know what you don't know, so you don't necessarily know if you're guilty of the cognitive bias.

Debbie Sorensen: right.

Yael Schonbrun: And maybe it also gets to the point of that there's some utility in having imposterism thoughts, which is that it helps us to know when we lack competence and do I know what I'm talking about might help lead you to doing some research and finding out, you know, is there more that I should understand before I act as the expert.

I have this general question, and I know that there's no recipe, but do you have any advice for how do we know when to listen to thoughts of I don't know enough versus when to shift our attention away?

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, I think that's, that's a really good question, and I think it's a hard thing for us to answer for ourselves, like if you want to get a new job, and the job description lists these are all the things that they want in a candidate, and maybe you look and you don't meet every single qualification.

And, you know, from a psychological flexibility standpoint, it would be like, alright, what are my values here? Well, do I want to, like, be brave and take a risk and be vulnerable and, like, put myself out there? But also maybe I value self knowledge or humility or something that's like, I'm not going to go apply to be a computer engineer when I don't know anything about computers.

And so how do we know, this is the question you're asking, right? Like, how do we know where that line is? And I think one of the helpful ways to, to get at that is through Marsha Linehan's wise mind. So wise mind is where our rational mind, you know, the facts and the figures and the pros and cons kind of intersect with our emotion mind, the way we feel about something and that if you think of it as a Venn diagram, where those two things, overlap is this sort of, like, grounded sense of knowing or gut or intuition. So I think that's one way, and it's not always an easy place to find, but you sort of know it when you're there.

And I have some questions that I will ask myself or ask clients to sort of get there. Things like if I weren't afraid of what might happen, does this still feel like the right thing to do? You know, if I didn't feel anxious, you know, worried that I'd be outed as a fraud. Is this something that I would still consider?

If no one knew I was doing this, would it still matter to me? Meaning, am I doing it for the right reasons, not just to, like, impress others? Or what are some other ones? If someone were watching me, would I still be doing this? And that's not about impression management, but if someone I care about someone who, you know, like if my children saw me doing this, someone I want to model something to what choice would I make in this situation?

And that can kind of help get at motivations and values and that, that sort of thing. And I think the other thing is there's nothing wrong with getting more knowledge with skill building with ongoing learning for me, ongoing professional development, lifelong learning.

These are values of mine. I think where the line is, is are you doing a lot of learning and preparing, but not doing a lot of doing? And there's no mathematical formula for where that line is, but I think that's a question to ask. And maybe I can learn and do at the same time. I don't have to wait to know everything there is to know about podcasting to say yes to your invitation.

I don't have to wait till I'm an expert in writing books before I sit down and start putting words on a page. And I think that's where people often get kind of trapped and stagnant.

Debbie Sorensen: This is where I actually want to ask you to give another personal example because you outline several types of imposterism and it's really fascinating to read some examples of that and to think about, you know, I can actually see a couple different types that I might fit into, but one example is the expert imposter.

And I loved what you wrote about you being an expert imposter in the domain of writing. Um, so could you share that story? Cause I was

Yael Schonbrun: also remember just through the course of our friendship, Jill, having, like, in the process of you recognizing that you were an expert imposter, these conversations of, like, I've s I did what?

Jill Stoddard: So when I realized that I Wanted to write, wanted writing to become a bigger part of my life I felt like a total fraud, like I'm not a writer. I don't know anything about writing Who do I think I am to be a writer, etc, etc, etc um,

Debbie Sorensen: Meanwhile, you had already published a book, if I'm not mistaken, at this point, when you decided this.

Jill Stoddard: I had already published a book and it was a painful experience. And I had told my husband, if I ever tell you I'm going to write another book again, I never want to write another book again. And I think part of the reason the whole experience was painful is because I felt like such a fraud.

I just felt like such an amateur, like I didn't know anything. And that was so uncomfortable for me, but of course I didn't know anything. I had never done it before. Then I, I changed my mind and I did want to write some more. I went, I basically like started going through some hard times and found kind of essay writing and journal type writing or narrative nonfiction writing was a really helpful way to process some of those things and I wanted to do more of that, but I really didn't want to have those feelings anymore that I had when I wrote the big book of act metaphors.

And so basically over the course of about four years, I took five writing classes. Attended a writing retreat, joined an ongoing writing group, and then also started my own separate writing group, went to two writing conferences, read seven entire books about writing, listened to five writing podcasts, like not episodes, but full seasons of writing podcasts, and then, you know, followed writers and editors on social media and subscribed to newsletters and just was like reading about all the things, book launches and platforms.

I hired a marketing consultant, a branding firm, a book coach, all of which those latter things cost a lot of money and that was all about being the expert imposter. And so this is an example where like, yes, I needed to learn about the industry. Yes, I needed to learn that there are rules when you write narrative nonfiction.

There's kind of like right and wrong things to do that I needed to learn about. But while I was doing all of that learning, I wasn't really writing, you know, or I was writing, but I wasn't like, Publishing and querying and like doing the things. And in the book I call this the getting stuck in the gap trap.

That you get trapped just being stuck and stagnant because of a perceived gap in your expertise or knowledge or experience and you sort of wait until that gap is filled before you take steps to move forward with the thing that's important.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm gonna ask a follow up question about this. Actually, Tara Moore, who's been on the podcast before, she wrote *Playing Big*, she talks about a hiding strategy, where instead of doing something, you feel like you have to go back to school and read 20 books and all these things. And sometimes you do, right? I mean, if I wanted to become a surgeon, I'd have to go back to school.

I mean, that's a fact, right? Um, but sometimes it's like... Something is kind of within the realm of something I could be doing, and you might still get really stuck in, I have to learn more, I can't do it until I know everything there is to know and meanwhile you're holding yourself back.

So if you could go back in time and tell yourself at that moment, a better way forward, what would you, like, give, if you yourself could go back and give yourself some advice, what would it be?

Jill Stoddard: Ooh, I love that question. Well, I think it would be to use a both and strategy. You know, instead of Waiting until you feel like you have enough, because guess what? You're going to be waiting forever because you're never going to know everything, right? So there's always more to learn. So I think it would be, yes, learn and grow and build your skills, while also Doing the thing.

And, you know, one of the things I told myself so when I was invited to be a guest on the Art of Charm podcast to talk about imposterism this podcast was huge. And I was like, I don't know any, this was just because I had done a panel and talked for 10 minutes about imposterism. Michael Herald, who people know

from our podcast, also works on the Art of Charm, and he was at the panel and invited me on, and I thought, oh my god, I'm not an expert.

Like, I did a 10 minute presentation based on other people's work, and the way that I was able to talk to myself about getting onto that podcast is, I don't need to know everything. I just need to know enough to speak intelligently for one hour, right? So it's like trying to figure out, like, what is enough in order to move your feet in the directions that matter?

And it doesn't mean you stop learning. You can keep learning, but not waiting until you feel like you know enough before you start moving.

Yael Schonbrun: This kind of reminds me of the difference in maximizing versus satisficing, which is a decision making paradigm from Barry Schwartz, who we've had on the podcast before, but it's this idea of people often get caught up in like, what is the perfect way to show up? And those people really struggle to make decisions versus people that have like a predesignated, this should be enough for me. Like I can decide and anchor it that this this can be enough. And I think that's a bit of what you're talking about. I wanted to pull out something that you had said earlier, which is that you didn't want to have the feelings that you were sort of pursuing all this knowledge so that you wouldn't have the feelings, which is something in acceptance and commitment therapy that we call experiential avoidance, which comes up a lot in this conversation about imposterism and what happens for folks. So I wonder if you can talk a little bit about what is experiential avoidance and how it sort of fits into the problems caused by getting sucked into imposter thoughts.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, I mean, really simply put, it's anything you do or don't do to control the way you feel. And normally that means trying to reduce the feelings you don't want to have or enhance the feelings you do or trying to prevent a feared outcome could be part of it too. And so, I think this can play out in a number of different ways with imposterism.

The obvious way is you don't do things because you don't feel like you know enough or you'll be outed as a fraud and that fear, not wanting to feel the fear, makes you turn down opportunities or not pursue goals that are important to you. That's sort of the obvious way. But I think the other way that it plays out is really the opposite of that, where we pursue achievement after achievement after achievement.

Because we think, if I just get one more award, if I just make more money, if I just get this one promotion, or I write one more book, right, then, that is gonna

be when I finally feel like I've made it, and I'm legitimate, and I will no longer worry about being outed as a fraud. And I think that's just a, a little bit of a sneakier form of avoidance.

And like, guess what? It doesn't work.

Debbie Sorensen: You have a quote, actually, in your book, it works until it doesn't, which is. I love that. I'm like, ooh, that was, that was really a good way to think about

Jill Stoddard: Well, and of course, because everything works or we wouldn't do it. But then eventually it doesn't work, right? So yes, I effectively feel less like a fraud if I don't go after a promotion. But now, I'm still feeling like I'm less than, I'm not good enough.

So, you know, when we avoid, it does work to make us feel better temporarily, right? If you feel like a fraud and then you pursue an achievement, then you'll temporarily feel better.

Like, ah, you know, today I won't be outed as a fraud because I checked off this box. But then the more you do the more expert you think you're expected to be, and so then you're back to feeling like a fraud. Like, it really ends up being this kind of self-perpetuating, maintaining cycle of, of reinforcement learning is really what it is.

Yael Schonbrun: So you have some terrific exercises for figuring out how to manage or respond to this impulse to experientially avoid. And one of them has you smelling your husband's feet. So I want to know if you really did that. But I also wonder if you could just share some examples that other people might be willing to do because they can't smell your husband's feet from not your house.

Yes.

Jill Stoddard: well, I don't know if I've ever talked about this on the podcast, but I actually have, like, a fairly strong foot phobia, and I don't, I don't know if I wrote about that specifically in the book, but I have, like, a real... aversion to feet. I worked on it a little bit in grad school, did some exposures.

It's better now than it used to be. But luckily, my husband has like fairly cute, like little Fred Flintstone feet, so they don't bother me as much as other people's feet do. But I, I don't think in that example, I actively chose to smell his feet. I

think, That they just, I was in a position where I couldn't help but be able to smell his feet.

And so, you know, I do my best to practice psychological flexibility whenever I have the opportunity to do so. And if my normal reaction would be to like, you know, scrunch up my nose and go, Ew, get those things away from me! Willingness would be essentially doing the opposite. Like observing, opening up, noticing the experience really just as the...

Olfactory qualities that they are without judgment and without any kind of avoidance. So, yeah, I mean, yes, this is a way, there are many, many, many ways to practice willingness and you certainly don't have to smell feet in order to do it. But that's just one way. And my favorite way that I talk about in the book, and I've probably talked about on here and other podcasts that I use with my patients all the time, is eating BeanBoozled Jelly Beans, which are these, I have them sitting at my desk right here.

These jelly beans that might be strawberry banana smoothie or might be vomit flavored, but at the end of the day, they're all just jelly beans. And so it's a really effective way to practice having an experience that's unpleasant, but doing that in a new way, right? So you can sort of, what I like to do is first have people resist, or you know what?

We can do a really quick and easy one right now with our listeners. Let's do this. So. If anyone, as long as you're not driving and don't have to keep your hands on a steering wheel, if you just cross your hands the way that feels natural, like prayer hands I guess if people pray, um, and notice how that feels, and then just switch so that you're one finger off.

And, and yeah, I'll just made a face like immediately it doesn't feel right and you want to switch it back, right? And so it's like making space for the discomfort But also noticing the urge to change it because it's that urge that's the thing that we respond to and if we can like Use our breath and just be mindful and open and allow each of these experiences over time that starts to be It's like, oh, it's, you know, I'm essentially getting comfortable being uncomfortable, not comfortable, but willing to be uncomfortable.

People understand when you say getting comfortable being uncomfortable and that, you know, I, I gave a talk for some adolescents and they really wanted me to give them like a skill they could go out into the world with that would like change their lives, like change their mental health. But I only had 20 minutes to do it and I was like, oh my gosh, like that is a tall order.

And I really thought if I could teach people one thing that might change their life. That's it. It's teaching people to get comfortable being uncomfortable, because think about if we were willing to experience different types of discomfort, how many opportunities would open to us? It's like everything.

Debbie Sorensen: I love your exercises, the jelly beans and just all that. They're so clever, the feet, the jelly beans. So, I mean, that alone is worth its weight in gold in your book. I think they're so creative and some of them are kind of fun, but they really do practice that idea of stretching your comfort zone, sitting with discomfort.

And I think you've been alluding to this along the way. I think it's come up, but this idea that imposterism is really mostly a problem when it holds you back, right? If you're trying so hard to stay in your comfort zone that you don't do those things that are really important to you. So could you talk a little bit about the cost of that in terms of having a full life?

And then maybe just a little advice for how we imposters can use that idea to bring us a little bit closer to the life we want.

Jill Stoddard: So if we think about imposterism looking like experiential avoidance in two opposite ways, one being overachieve, overachieve, overachieve to try to outrun it. I think the cost of that is burnout. And we'll do a later episode with Debbie on how to manage burnout when her book comes out.

Debbie Sorensen: I make that same point, by the way, which is that sometimes that kind of constant doing achieving cycle gets us really stuck there.

Jill Stoddard: exactly, yeah, the more you do, the more you need to do and burnout occurs. So I think that's the cost there. And then certainly the cost of staying in your comfort zone is essentially like not having a big bold life. If that's something that you want and so, of course, like, if you're satisfied with your life the way it is, there's nothing to be done here. But what we're talking about is people who have goals and dreams and aspirations that they really want to move toward, but they're not doing that because they're afraid, they're insecure, they're feeling inadequate, they have uncertainty, and they're afraid that they have no business doing this and they'll be outed as a fraud.

And so the cost is not having the life you want, whether it's in your career or in your personal life. And so as far as like giving some advice for what to do if you're in that, you know, if you're in the former group, we've had lots of podcast episodes that are all about really identifying what's the most important to you.

You know, essentialism was one of them. Subtract was one of them. You know, take away the things that aren't serving you and only do the things that you really, really care about. And I think that's the advice for the first type of overachieving imposter. For the doing less imposter. One of the ways I think about this is, we have many present moments that in the book I call them points of possibility, and guess who gave me that idea?

Dr. Debbie Sorenson. Do you remember

Debbie Sorensen: Oh yeah, that's right.

Jill Stoddard: We were talking

Debbie Sorensen: right, for a term.

Jill Stoddard: yeah, like, what do we call this? You're like, how about points of possibility? And I was like, ooh, and then we can have an acronym that's like POP, like moments that pop, and I got all excited. So that's in the

Debbie Sorensen: I forgot that I did that. Wow,

I'm such a, such a genius.

Jill Stoddard: You totally are. You

Debbie Sorensen: kidding.

Jill Stoddard: But

Yael Schonbrun: You're an imposter. No more Debbie

Jill Stoddard: in these, these moments, these points of possibility you know, you can ask yourself a few different questions, and I call this the four P's. So the first is to pause and to pause and really notice that like, Oh, I'm in one of these pops. Like this is a point of possibility here. I have a choice to make in this moment.

And then to pick your values. Who do you want to be? What do you want to stand for? What do you want your life to look like? What really matters to you? And then the last two Ps are either persist or pivot. So based on your values in this moment, do you want to persist in the direction that you're already moving?

Or do you want to pivot to do something different that's a more workable action or in other words something that's values congruent and really getting conscious about that because so much of what we do we just do on autopilot like we feel afraid so we just dive into our comfort zone and that's that.

So really getting conscious and you know more more choosy and deliberate based on values. Um,

Yael Schonbrun: Well, Jill, this has been so fun to talk with you about your book that Debbie and I were kind of with you on the journey for, but it's now gonna be out in the hands of readers and make such a difference for people. So we wanted to end, with you sharing a little bit about a personal story. So your entire approach to navigating imposterism is really exemplified in your giving a TEDx talk. So could you walk us through that experience and how you navigated it to illustrate how people can use the concepts in your book as your subtitle says to overcome self doubt and imposterism to cultivate a successful career?

Jill Stoddard: yeah, this was a biggie for me. So I was, uh, had the opportunity to apply to do a TED Talk. And, you know, was it, was like, well, I'll apply because I won't get accepted. Everybody always gets rejected their first time around. And then I got accepted. So of course my mind said, well, she must've just accepted everybody, right?

It couldn't possibly be that you actually have a message worth sharing. So there were imposter thoughts all along the way, and then it got accepted. And I really was sort of in this position of like, I really don't know if I can do this. I was so incredibly anxious. I really did not feel confident or certain that I had a message worth sharing and on a much more personal painful level, I have a long history of having a complicated relationship with my body.

My mom used to call me tubby, a little tub head and things like this when I was growing up and I gained a lot of weight during the pandemic. And so it just felt really hard for me to memorialize myself on video forever at a time that I was feeling particularly insecure about myself, but doing a TEDx talk was like, you know, top of my professional bucket list dream come true type opportunity.

So I just was so conflicted, right? Like I really wanted to do it and it was so painful to even think about everything I would need to do, every step I would have to take to actually accomplish this. And believe it or not, I got there with like a pretty simple values identification exercise. And this was actually a, a patient of mine, I think I've told this story on the podcast where she came into

session one day, all excited that she had done a bunch of committed actions and when I asked her, How?

She said, oh, I just thought, WWJD. What would Jill do? And so this, like, I've kind of turned this into an exercise, like, who is your J? Right? Who is somebody that you admire, that you look up to? A hero that could be, like, a wise guide? When you're struggling to make a decision, a hard decision.

And so my J is Oprah. Like, everyone who knows me knows I'm a little obsessed with Oprah. And it's because she has endured, you know, sexism and poverty and racism and abuse and body shaming and all of it. And it's never stopped her. So I genuinely thought, well... If Oprah were in the exact same situation I'm in right now, what would Oprah do?

And it was instant. I didn't even have to think about it. Of course she would do the talk. And then I thought, well, what would she say to me? Like, if she knew that I was sitting here feeling all of these painful emotions, and, you know, we've all seen Oprah struggle with her weight very publicly, you know, I thought, what would she say to me?

And I thought, well, she would say, Oh, I'm gonna cry. I get like really emotional when I think about this. She would say, Jill, you are so much more than your body. And if you have a message to share that helps even one person that's in line with your professional mission to share psychological flexibility with people, then you have to do it.

And that was it. Like I did not have to struggle and hem and haw. I just thought about those two things and was like, okay, I'm doing it. I have to do, this is the right thing to do. This is what my values, I am at a point of possibility and I am going to persist with this Ted talk because this is what's values aligned for me and I did it and it is still very hard for me to watch and Not only did I do it, I wore a bright red blouse, I wore leopard print shoes, I bought a little round red rug, because this was during COVID, so it was just virtual, so it, like, so that I would feel like I was having, like, a little bit of the real Ted Stage sitting on that red, standing on that red circle.

And, you know, I was like, I'm not going to hide behind my insecurity. I'm going to not just do this, but do it as boldly as I can and it's hard for me to watch. And I am so freaking proud of myself, and I am so glad that I did it, and, you know, I think it's had about 4, 000 views, so it, like, didn't go viral, but it didn't flop, and I've had a number of people in the comments when you go to the

TEDx YouTube, someone did, like, a mic drop, and someone did a mind blown emoji, and even just those couple people, I'm like, this is worth it.

This is worth it. Like, somebody got something out of this message, and I showed myself that I can do this even when I feel really terrified and insecure and it was worth it.

Debbie Sorensen: Jill, you're an inspiration. I know you well, and I'm still finding myself feeling so inspired by that story and by so many of the other stories. Your book, it's terrific. All the imposters out there will definitely want to pick up a copy of *Imposter No More*. Go get it now. Run to your bookstore or order it online because it's so good and so fun to read.

Funny. Just personal. I really am so glad you wrote it. Jill, so besides psychologists off the clock, of course, where can people follow your work?

Jill Stoddard: They can find me on my website at jillstoddard.com and, you know, we talked today about some of these imposter subtypes like the expert. So I did want to mention there's a quiz on my website if people want to find out what their imposter subtype is. I also have one for, um, like what type of avoider you are that's also in the book.

And then all my social media and everything else is there too.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, thank you, Jill. It was so fun to have you be in the guest seat again for the first time in quite a while.

Thank you

so much.

Jill Stoddard: lady.

Yael Schonbrun: Jill.

Jill Stoddard: It was so fun and thank you for all of your help along the way. I think some listeners know we also, we don't just podcast together, but we write together and help with each other's editing and all of that. So it's been like really meaningful to have you be a part of the process right from the beginning.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, it's been really fun, and to see the final book in my hands has been so cool, just how well it turned out, and to be there along the way. Actually, I was going to have my first question be, Who is this Debbie Sorensen you mention on page b But I

Yael Schonbrun: Who are these

Debbie Sorensen: sneaking that in

Yael Schonbrun: mentioned the acknowledgments.

Debbie Sorensen: end. Right. She sounds amazing.

Yael Schonbrun: She is not an imposter.

Jill Stoddard: Agreed.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, thank you, Jill.

Jill Stoddard: Thanks guys.

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