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Love your imposter

Be your best self, flaws and all

Rita Clifton



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*Dedicated to my late mum, my daughters, and all the
women who will make the world work better.*

And my husband too.

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About the author

Rita Clifton started her career in advertising, becoming vice chairman and strategy director at Saatchi & Saatchi in its most successful period, and was London CEO and then Chairman at the global brand consultancy Interbrand over a 15-year stint. She has advised leading businesses around the world, as well as start-ups and growth-stage businesses of all shapes and sizes. In 2013, she co-founded the business and brand consultancy BrandCap, which now has offices in New York and Hong Kong as well as London.

She is a regular commentator across all media, including CNN, BBC, Sky and social channels, as well as a columnist. She was recently a mentor and judge on the CNBC award-winning series *Pop Up Start Up*.

She is a non-executive director on the board of businesses including ASOS and Nationwide Building Society, and previously Bupa and Dixons Retail plc. Her non-profit work has included being a board trustee of WWF (Worldwide Fund for Nature) and a member of the UK government's Sustainable Development Commission.

Rita received a CBE for services to the advertising industry in 2014.

She is the author of best-selling books including *The Future of Brands* and two editions of *The Economist: Brands and Branding*. This time, it's more personal, and *Love Your Imposter* is a book she has been wanting and meaning to write for some time. It builds on her experience

of leading, coaching and mentoring, and captures her own unique take and tips on how to get on and make your own difference in the world. She feels strongly that we need new kinds of (very human) leadership and many (many) more women running organizations of all kinds.

There's just a small matter of how...

Prologue

In my imposter dreams...

I've always been a bit of a dreamer. Not always in a good way.

Aside from the ballet dancer and saving-the-world stuff of daydreams, I've also managed to have the full range of anxiety dreams pretty much all my life. My own imposter has been alive and kicking both day and night.

Obviously, most of those dreams don't make sense, but I can guarantee that they will involve any or all elements of:

- being in a plane that can't take off high enough or brushes tall sliver-like buildings;
- being chased by someone/something of varying degrees of weirdness;
- having to retake exams when I haven't revised/make a presentation that I'm completely unprepared for.

And, of course, more often than not ending up stark naked. Usually in front of crowds of people. You don't need to delve into the book of Meaningful Anxiety Dreams for the symbolism.

I know I'm not alone. Apparently between 50 and 85 per cent of people claim to have (or rather, remember) these kinds of anxiety dreams and nightmares.¹ And women seem to experience these slightly more than men.

One of many theories is that they're apparently to do with something called 'threat simulation'. That people 'rehearse' frightening situations in their dreams, and this equips them

to face those situations better in real life. (Mmm... fighting your way through writhing snakes on the floor, anyone?)

The same academic study also found that the students who had the most anxiety dreams the night before an exam scored the highest marks.²

This 50–85 per cent ‘dream’ figure is also broadly similar to those claiming to have imposter syndrome at work (c65 per cent of people, and around 90 per cent in creative industries).

And recently, there has been something of a torrent of actors, celebrities and business leaders talking about their insecurities and personal imposters.

Good for their honesty. And, judging by the success of so many of these people, it can often be used in a positive way.

Whether you personally have exactly the same feelings and experiences, a few things emerged from discussing some of these issues with others:

- a That imposter syndrome is so common that it ceases to feel like a syndrome and starts to feel like a normal part of the human condition.
- b People were very keen that I should be as honest as possible about the ‘I’m a bit crap, me’ feelings that lots of us have from time to time.
- c Many of these worries and insecurities in dreams and in general are also normal...and can, in fact, be great sources of empathy with other human beings.

Which is funny, because a bit more honesty, empathy and basic humanity are just what business and the world needs at the moment. I hope that means you.

In fact, you can use some of this kind of personal stuff to help you (and, indeed, people and things around you) to shine and make it to the top. And as you, yourself. Not some corporate construct.

We're obviously all different, and this book is not intended as a self-help prescription. It's a collection of experiences, ideas and (yes, sorry...) tips that I've picked up along the way of life. I offer them as a *smorgasbord* – please feel free to do your own pick 'n' mix. They've evolved over time, and are a bit messy, in a way that life is. That felt normal too.

I have worked around the branding industry for most of my career, so have used several elements of brand thinking and building your personal brand as a way to help make things happen for you.

However, this book is not all about a highly self-conscious and laser-like focus on your personal brand throughout your career, whereby you plan your clear path up the mountain, kicking ass as you go. That's not life as we know it, and it's not particularly human.

So yes, *Love Your Imposter* is an open book, on all levels. There's a bit of theory, and a lot of practice. I've loved writing it, and I hope you find some things that might be useful.