

# Conquering Impostor Syndrome: Practical Strategies for Coaches

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# Workshop Overview



## Duration

2-hour interactive Zoom workshop with breakout sessions and collaborative activities



## Participants

Coaches at various experience levels seeking to understand impostor syndrome



## Facilitator

Tímea Piroska, PCC, expert in coaching psychology and author of resources on impostor syndrome



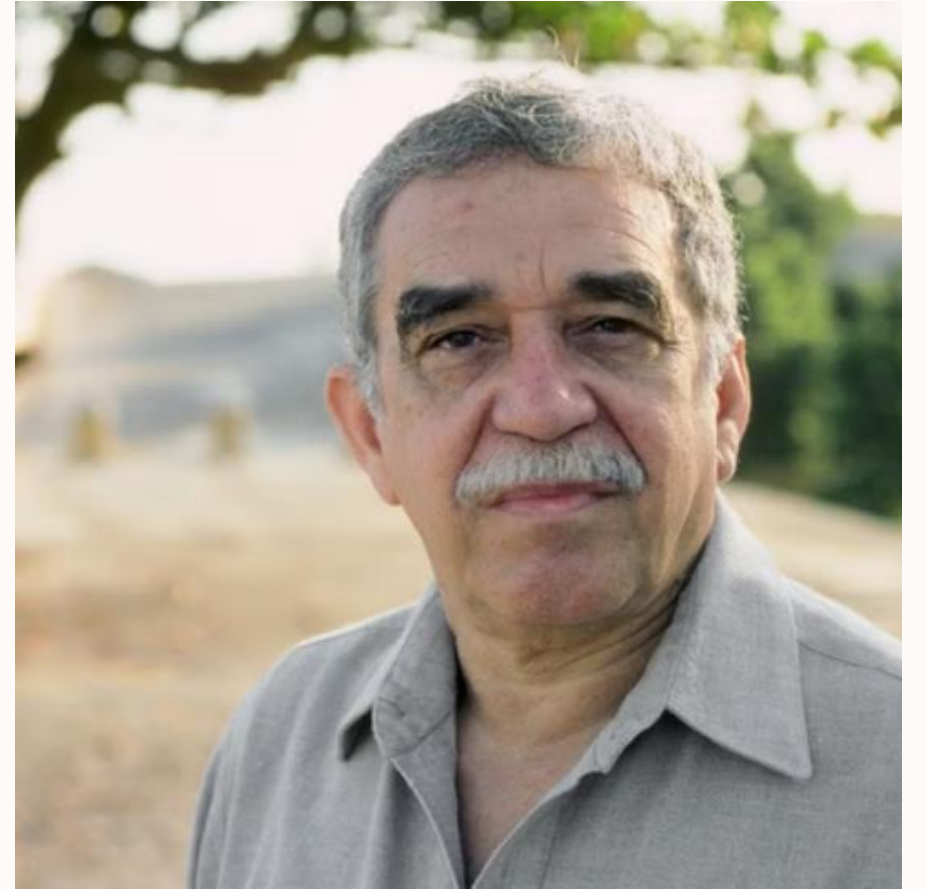
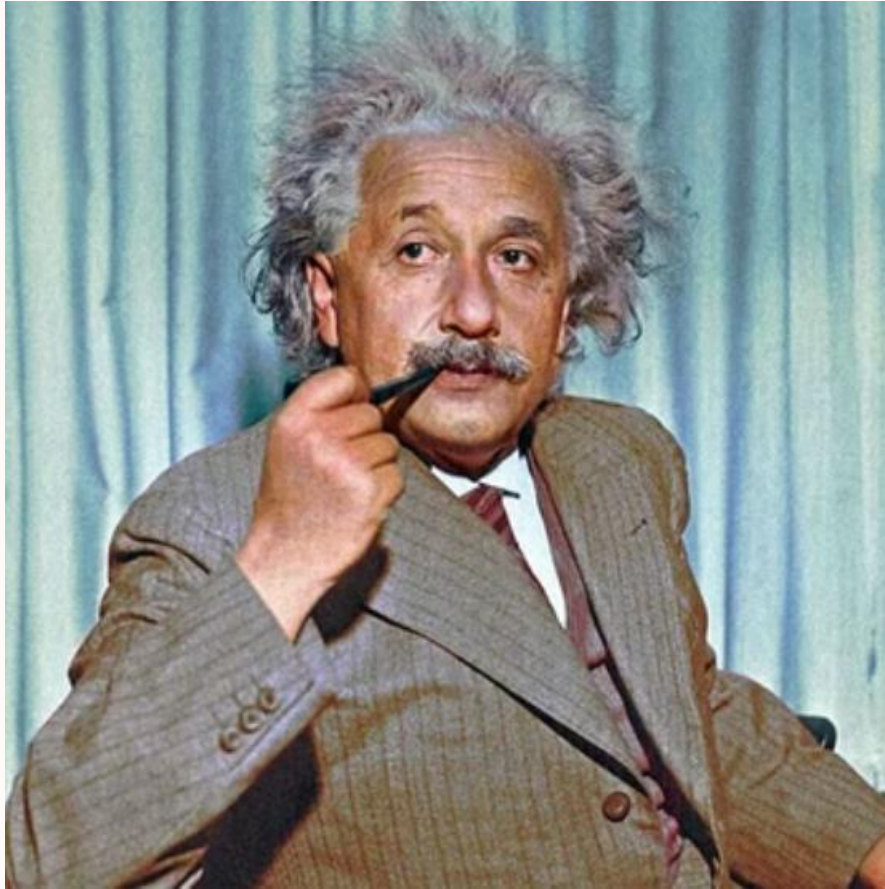
## Format

Blend of theory, breakout discussions, practical tool demonstrations, and application exercises





# Exceptional Talents





Poll #1: How familiar are you with impostor syndrome?



# What the literature says

The **imposter syndrome**, also known as **imposter phenomenon**, is a psychological experience in which an individual suffers from intellectual and/or professional fraudulence feelings. (Mak et al., 2019)

"the internal experience of intellectual phoniness" (Clance & Imes, 1978)

"the subjective experience of believing that one's achievements are unlucky flukes or attributable to a mistake, despite evidence of one's competence" (Walker & Saklofske, 2023)





# Understanding Impostor Syndrome

## Definition

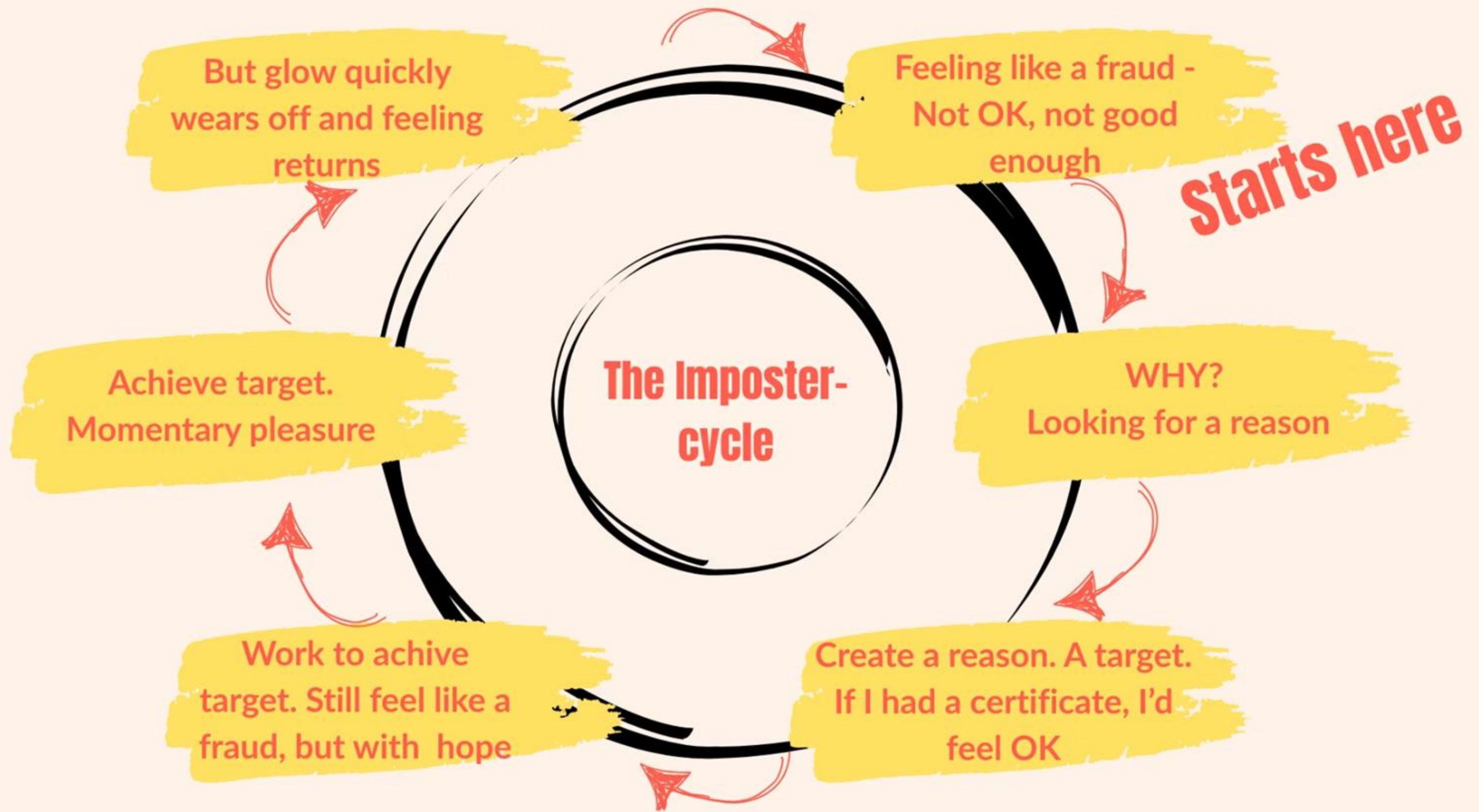
The persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a fraud—even when there's clear evidence of success and competence. First introduced by Clance and Imes in 1978.

## Prevalence

According to Bravata et al. (2020), impostor syndrome affects between 9% and 82% of people, depending on population and measurement tools—highlighting how many high-performers secretly doubt themselves.

## Associated Factors

Often linked with anxiety, burnout, perfectionism, and self-sabotage. Interestingly, it frequently appears in high-achievers rather than being a sign of incompetence.



# Why Impostor Syndrome Matters in Coaching

## Coaches Are Not Immune

Even highly experienced coaches often experience impostor feelings. These doubts can affect our presence, our ability to confidently challenge clients, and even whether we pursue further credentials or opportunities.

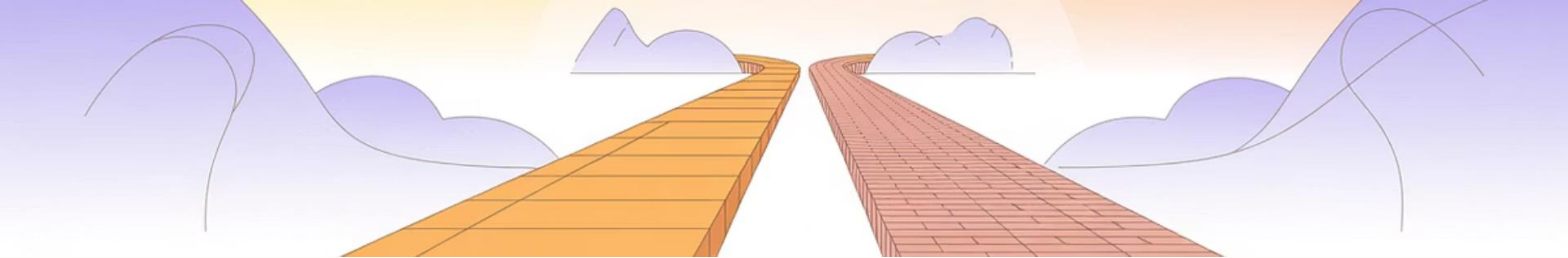
Recognizing these patterns in ourselves is the first step toward authentic coaching presence.

## Clients Bring These Feelings

Clients frequently bring impostor feelings into sessions—sometimes subtly through their language, hesitations, or goals. Being able to recognize and ethically address these patterns can transform the coaching relationship.

This awareness directly connects to several ICF Core Competencies: embodying a coaching mindset, maintaining presence, and evoking awareness.





# Two Essential Pathways



## Coach as Client

Recognizing impostor syndrome in ourselves as coaches. May appear as overpreparing for sessions, reluctance to set appropriate fees, or constant comparison to others.



## Awareness

Developing self-awareness through reflection, supervision, and creating the same psychological safety for ourselves that we offer clients.



## Client as Focus

Identifying patterns of self-doubt, achievement discounting, or luck attribution in clients without labeling or diagnosing.



## Ethical Response

Holding space, reflecting strengths, and gently challenging limiting beliefs—always within ethical boundaries of coaching.

# Breakout Room 1.

**Group size:** 5 participants per breakout room

**Duration:** 12 minutes

✓ Share one personal or coaching-related experience involving impostor thoughts

✓ Reflect on:

- What happened?
- How did it feel?
- What helped?



# Survival Strategies I.

①

## Overpreparation or Hard Work

You rely on extraordinary efforts to hide your perceived inadequacy.

②

## Holding Back

You know you could achieve more, but you don't. "If I fail, it's better they think I'm lazy, not stupid."

③

## Use of Charm or Perceptiveness to Win Approval

We use social skills and humour to mask our uncertainty. We later reject praise.

④

## Maintaining a Low or Ever-Changing Profile

We choose a path where there is little external evaluation. We often change positions to avoid "exposure".





## Survival Strategies II.

⑤

### **Procrastination**

You leave tasks to the last minute, using the rush as a safety net.

⑥

### **Never Finishing**

You start projects but intentionally do not finish them, avoiding the final evaluation.

⑦

### **Self-sabotage**

You unconsciously make decisions that undermine your success.



# The Invisible Cost of Defensive Behaviour

## Daily Losses

- Constant anxiety and suppressed feelings of success accompany you.
- Your health deteriorates due to continuous stress.
- You get stuck in safe, dead-end positions, and your talents do not unfold.

## Missed Opportunities

- You never experience the pride of taking risks.
- You deprive yourself of valuable feedback and connections.
- The true potential of your venture remains hidden.

## Long-Term Consequences

- The feeling of "what if" will remain forever.
- You can never truly enjoy the joy of your successes.
- Your positive impact on the world is lost.

# Silencing the Inner Critic

## The Distancing Technique

Imagine that the critical inner voice is not your own. Name it and respond to it as an external voice.

## Naming the Imposter Moment

Simply say: "This is an imposter moment." The awareness itself reduces the power of the feeling.

## Objectifying Your Successes

Collect the evidence of your successes in one place. Review them when you have doubts.

## The "What's the Worst That Could Happen?" Analysis

Play out the worst-case scenario. Would it really be that terrible? How would you handle it?

## The Power of Reframing

Transform negative thoughts into opportunities for growth:

"I'm not good enough" to "I'm still learning and improving".

"I don't understand this at all" to "This is a chance to acquire new skills."



# Strategy 1: Belief Excavation



## Uncover limiting beliefs

Help clients identify self-critical thoughts

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## Explore origins

Use Socratic questioning to trace belief sources

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## Reframe with growth mindset

Co-create empowering alternatives

Rooted in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy principles (Beck, 2011), this process helps clients disrupt self-sabotaging cycles by addressing beliefs directly. The key is maintaining a curious, non-judgmental tone while guiding clients to reflect and discover their own insights rather than imposing solutions.

# Strategy 2: Strength-Spotting Partners



Based on positive psychology research by Seligman & Peterson (2004), this exercise increases self-awareness and confidence through strengths-based feedback. Often, we underestimate our unique abilities until someone else mirrors them back, helping recalibrate our self-image toward evidence-based self-worth.



# Strategy 3: Implementation Intention Planning

If (Trigger Situation)	Then (Planned Response)
Before giving a presentation	I will review my preparation notes and take 3 deep breaths
When receiving praise	I will say "thank you" without diminishing my contribution
If I compare myself to others	I will recall three unique strengths I bring to my work
When feeling overwhelmed	I will pause and remember past challenges I've overcome

Peter Gollwitzer's research shows that "If-Then" planning significantly increases goal achievement by creating automatic behavioral scripts. This technique turns insight into habit, strengthening goal-consistent action under pressure. It works especially well for clients with performance anxiety when they mentally and physically rehearse their planned responses.



# Strategy 4: Reframing Exercises

## Negative Thought

"I was just lucky to get that job."

"They'll realize I don't know what I'm doing."

"Anyone could have done what I did."

"I need to work twice as hard to be good enough."

## Reframed Perspective

"My preparation and skills earned me that opportunity."

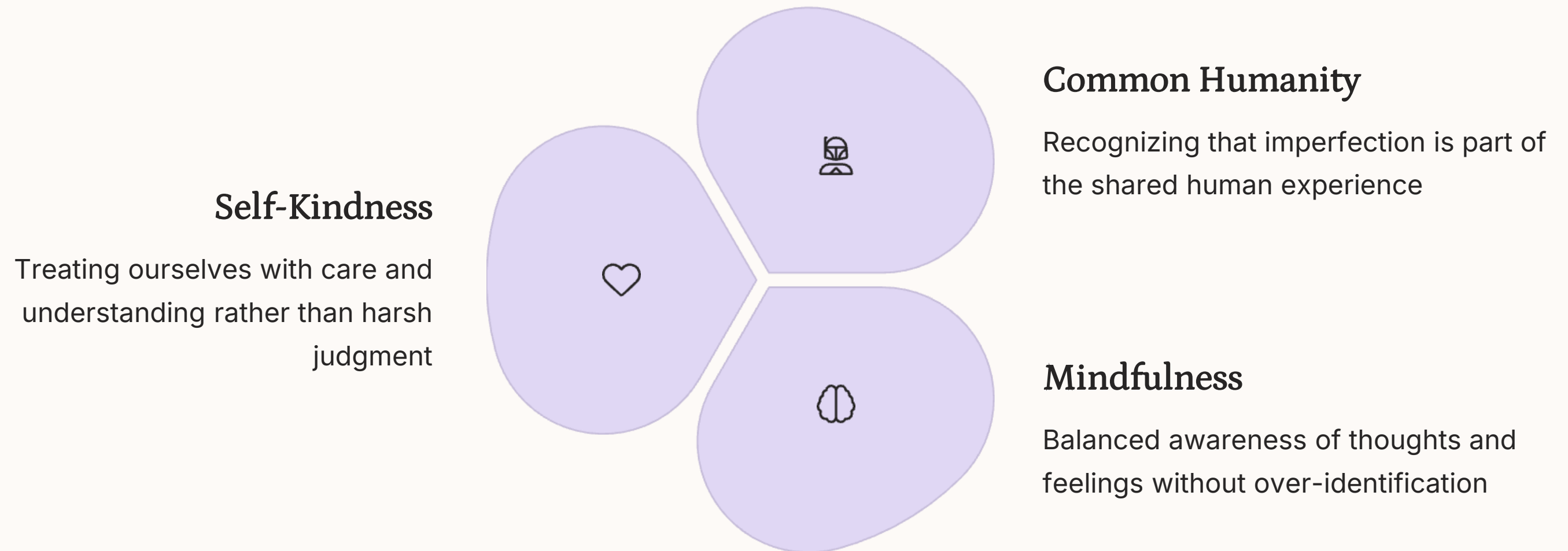
"I'm learning and growing into this role every day."

"My unique approach added specific value to this project."

"Working efficiently and maintaining balance makes me more effective."

Rooted in cognitive reframing techniques (Burns, 1989), this strategy helps clients challenge and shift negative self-talk patterns. By examining evidence and creating more balanced interpretations, clients develop the habit of questioning automatic negative thoughts rather than accepting them as truth.

# Strategy 5: Self-Compassion Practices



Dr. Kristin Neff's research shows that self-compassion correlates with lower anxiety and higher emotional resilience. Many clients initially confuse compassion with weakness—clarify that it actually strengthens motivation by creating psychological safety for growth and learning from mistakes.

# Strategy 6: Evidence Log



## Document Achievements

After every success, kind feedback, or achievement, clients write a short note capturing what happened and how they contributed to the outcome.



## Regular Review

Encourage clients to review their evidence log before high-stakes events or when impostor feelings arise, providing a concrete reminder that feelings don't always reflect facts.



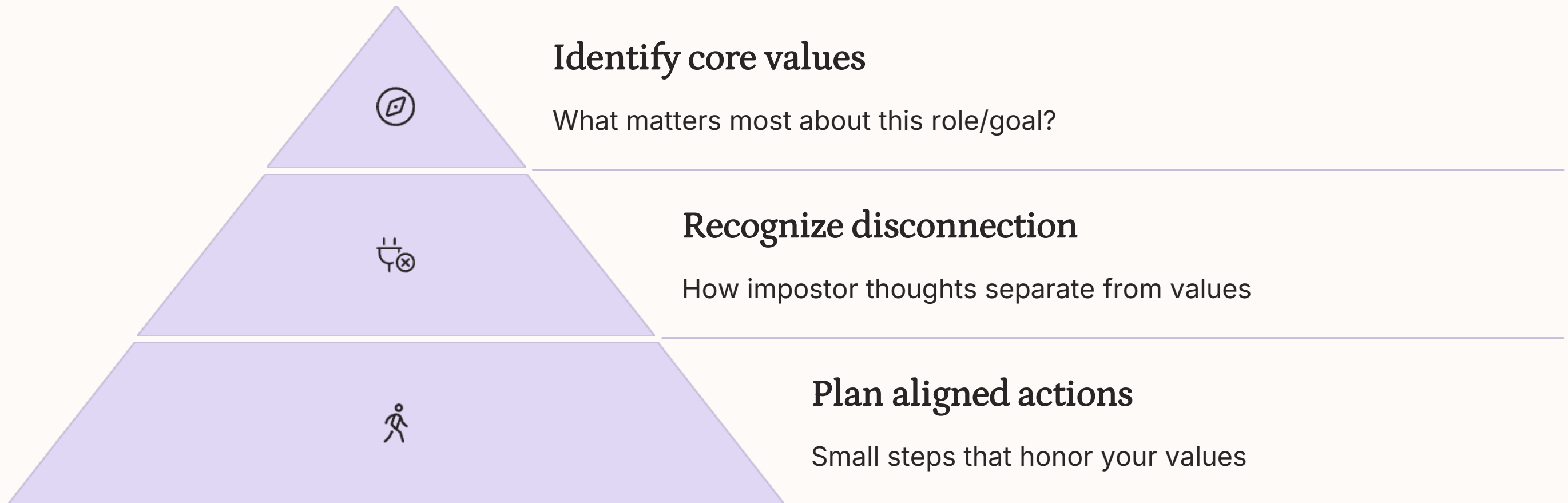
## Accessible Format

Keep the log in an easily accessible format (digital document, phone notes, dedicated journal) to ensure consistent use and maximum benefit as a confidence anchor.

*Research shows journaling supports emotional clarity and cognitive restructuring (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016). This tool helps clients anchor their confidence in reality rather than feelings.*



# Strategy 7: Values Reflection



Values-based coaching increases motivation and self-regulation (Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck, 2014). When impostor feelings surface, reconnecting with values can realign identity and action. This approach shifts focus from performance anxiety to meaning and purpose, tapping into intrinsic motivation rather than external validation.

# Coaching Application Activity

## **Breakout Room Activity #2**

**Duration:** 12 minutes

**Group size:** Pairs (2 people per room)

### **Task:**

- ✓ Choose one strategy from the 7 tools
- ✓ Imagine how you would use it with a client facing impostor feelings
- ✓ Explore both perspectives

*One tool – one client – two perspectives*



# Reconnecting with Ourselves

## Not Innate

Imposter syndrome is not innate. We have learned it. And what we have learned, we can also forget.

## Reconnecting

Look in the mirror. Not to criticise yourselves, but to see the little person you once were.

## The True Goal

It's not about never feeling uncertain again. It's about learning that these feelings do not define us.



Poll #2: What is one insight or intention you're taking with you from today's workshop?

Use one or two words — maybe a feeling, a key concept, or a practice you want to apply



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