

WLIT 2021 Q1: February 16, 2021

Q&A WITH TERESA SANDE



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WLIT 2021 Q1: Find Your Fierce & AIM for Success

At our 2021 WLIT (Women Leading in Technology) kickoff event on February 16, we were honored to be joined by Teresa Sande, Founder & CEO of Mirror Mirror Strategies and author of *Find Your Fierce*, for an insightful discussion about imposter syndrome and its effects on the careers of women and people of color. You can find the event recap and full webinar recording [here](#).

The event video replay includes crowd-sourced questions to Teresa Sande from the audience using Pigeonhole Live. Since there were many more crowd-sourced questions for Teresa than the event duration allowed, she graciously took the time to answer a number of those questions in this post-event supplement.



How do I better advocate for myself when negotiating pay while battling imposter syndrome?

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The way to best advocate for yourself is to follow the frAIMwork to truly understand imposter syndrome, where it comes from and why you're experiencing it. Then, prepare yourself to interrupt it and do some of the deeper work to build momentum. For example, there are exercises in the momentum section of my book, *Find Your Fierce*, that has you work through understanding your value in the marketplace. This will be key to know what you can command from a market perspective and ultimately negotiate the pay you deserve. In addition, the more in tune you are with your unique strengths and skills, the more confident you will feel advocating for yourself and setting boundaries to ensure you are fairly compensated. Lastly, one fantastic resource you need in your life is Kim Tran. She does some great workshops on pay negotiations, especially for women. Follow her on Instagram @YourWorkInspires.

How do you transition your mindset from individual contributor to a higher-level management/strategy perspective?



TS

As an individual contributor, it's about getting results through your work. As a manager/leader, it's about getting results through others. To do that, you need to engage, motivate, and value others so they deliver their very best work. One of the most important roles of a manager/leader is to create a healthy culture that creates psychological safety for those on your team. When you have a good culture, you will have good work teams, and good work teams create amazing results. The key mindset shift here is that you are no longer the person doing it all. Therefore, you need to make sure that those on your team can perform and to do that you must create a healthy environment. "What got you here, won't get you there" is key when transitioning from IC to manager to leader.



I feel like my imposter syndrome appears when I am interviewing for roles, which hinders my ability to sound confident and promote myself. Any tips?

TS

I can relate. I was once interrupted in an interview because I kept saying things like “my team did X” and “we were able to get these results”. The person interviewing me finally stopped me and said he didn’t know what I did and was capable of because I was being so team oriented and not able to articulate my contributions. It was eye-opening. Because I was feeling like an imposter and like I wasn’t the only person who was talented, I almost gave away the job! I was grateful to this person for pointing it out to me. In my book, *Find Your Fierce*, I walk you through exercises to help you articulate your skills and talents and own them. If you’re feeling uncomfortable owning your successes (say, in a job interview), I challenge you to reflect and think about awards you have won, assessments you have taken that articulate your strengths, or words other people use to describe you. Practice phrasing those successes into something that could serve you during an interview. For example: “My team recently awarded me the Golden Trumpet award for innovation, which meant a lot to me. The Golden Trumpet is for anyone who comes up with an idea that serves the entire team and helps amplify them to a success. What I did was...”. With this example, you are leveraging data points to validate your success, while allowing others to toot your horn for you. This can be a way to still get your strengths and successes across in a way that may feel more comfortable to you.

How do you tease out where you do need more development vs where it's “just imposter syndrome?”



Combatting Imposter Syndrome IS a form of development. If you’re feeling like you don’t belong or it’s a matter of time before you’re found out, there is work to be done, both in the way you are thinking about yourself and in terms of the environment you’re in.

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TS .One exercise that can be really helpful is deciphering between facts and judgments. You're in a meeting and you get a lot of questions that you don't know the answers to. It's making you feel like you don't deserve the job you're in. Reflect on that meeting and determine what is fact and what is judgment. Is it your role to know those things? If yes, you may have a development area to prepare for meetings better. However, if you reflect and realize they were tough questions that will require work to get to the bottom of and actually no one else knew the answers either, perhaps you are applying a judgment to the situation that you 'should' have known all the answers. Getting feedback from others, especially those you trust and admire, can help you tease out your actual flat spots vs. those areas you are struggling with that may be more related to Imposter Syndrome.

What can we do as organizational leaders and people managers to create a culture that disrupts imposter syndrome?



The best thing you can do is create inclusive, trusting environments where people have psychological safety to bring their full selves to work. This doesn't mean forcing people to share more than they want to or labeling someone, but if you can create the container for people to feel safe and encourage open dialogue, it will create the container for people to be fully engaged and feel like they belong. Encourage candor, call out inequities, check your own bias and preferences to make sure you aren't making decisions based on it, and role model the behaviors you want to see emulated in the cultures you are creating. Doing this will benefit you well beyond the Imposter Syndrome challenge, but it will certainly ensure the environment isn't feeding any of the Imposter Syndrome symptoms that pop up.

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What do you say to someone (a male superior) who says they don't believe imposter syndrome is a "real" thing?

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By the very nature of this question, that tells me that the person has the luxury of feeling safe and feeling they belong. That is a privilege many simply don't have. That being said, I don't believe you can force someone to experience something if it's not been their reality. The best thing you can do (if you feel comfortable) is share your experiences and why you believe you might be feeling that way. It invites a conversation if the person is at all open to having it. If they aren't, I would question why you want them to believe it's a real thing. You know that it is, so convincing someone else who doesn't believe it is may not be time well spent. You can raise awareness, share facts and data, and invite a conversation. If you let the person know that something they are doing is contributing to you or someone on your team feeling a certain way, hopefully they will be open to that discussion. If not, you may want to move on and find a team that wants to support you fully and not create environments that contribute to Imposter Syndrome in the first place.

How do we engage leadership with their role in impostor syndrome? Every session I attend focuses on the person feeling it - where can we move this conversation forward?



This is why in my sessions I unpack the environments that are most likely to feed imposter syndrome. As managers and leaders, you can evaluate your behaviors and the cultures you are creating to make sure there are not blind spots or certain behaviors that are inadvertently feeding imposter syndrome for people on the team. Individuals benefit from knowing what they can do to manage situations and environments **until** those environments change. Manager and leaders have quite a bit of power to change those environments that perpetuate imposter feelings, particularly for those not in the majority.

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TS One way to engage managers and leaders in the conversation to invite them to understand how cultures can be deliberately created to fight imposter syndrome. Most of my leadership coaching and consulting work is with leaders and leadership teams to explore this!

How can allies and supporters ask questions that help surface feelings of imposter syndrome - so the responsibility doesn't only sit with the person experiencing imposter syndrome?



Asking questions, being supportive, and curious are great ways to avoid labeling someone as an imposter or having imposter feelings. Asking what people need to feel most supported is a great way to understand what the person needs. Playing back what you are seeing in someone is another way. For example, “Sarah, I noticed in that meeting you were chalking a lot of the results you’ve achieved to ‘luck’. I see you doing X, Y, and Z and that hard work is what got us here. How can I most support you to really own that success that you’ve driven?” Another suggestion is to be curious about how the person is feeling overall. “Mark, I’ve noticed that you have been giving a lot of ownership away. I’m curious if you notice yourself doing that? I ask because I want X for you and I care about how you’re positioning yourself.”

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Can imposter syndrome be confused with being promoted out of your depth?

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I believe there are times that you can be promoted before you are ready, and you feel you need to ‘fake it til you make it’. Talk to most leaders and they will say that someone, somewhere along the way took a risk on them and they were promoted before they felt truly ready. It’s normal to feel that way when you’re taking on new challenges. And, maybe you aren’t 100% ready for it, but if you can draw from your past experiences, leverage your transferable skills, and learn from what you’ve done up to this point, that feeling will be fleeting.

TS It won't linger. It's natural to feel a bit out of your depth at first. If you find yourself in a role where you factually, and objectively, don't know how to do it and don't have a way to learn what you need to be successful, you may be out of your depth and will need to focus on your development to close gaps quickly. The key word here is 'objectively'. When you're experiencing Imposter Syndrome you are likely not being objective about what is fact vs. what you are judging to be true.

Do you feel that imposter syndrome has attributed to over 12 million women leaving the workforce during COVID?



That is a hard correlation to say with confidence without valid data. I do believe women have been asked to be a lot of things to a lot of people – caregivers, teachers, parents, partners, successful at work, heads of households, etc. Many were thrown into situations where they have doubted their abilities and haven't been able to see how talented they are. I see Imposter Syndrome show up as part of the symptoms that led to their departure from the workplace. That said, COVID has been a tremendous burden on women who are playing many, many roles for their families and communities and the burn out is real. If an environment isn't one that supports, encourages, and helps women to be successful, many have opted out. So, many of the things that will help to combat imposter syndrome in your organizations and work cultures, will also support women who are opting out. A whole other side to this coin is the number of women who have been impacted by downsizing due to COVID. Research is showing that women have been negatively impacted at a much higher rate than men in terms of role eliminations and layoffs. There could be some correlation with imposter syndrome (i.e. if you don't believe you are as good as the organization thought you were, then maybe they missed something and you should be the one to go) but that would require evaluation to determine if there is a factual connection there.

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How important do you think life coach/ business coaches are? Would you recommend becoming a coach?

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I believe the best leaders have coaches and coaching is a critical part of their success formula. I've had the benefit of having a coach throughout my career and being a coach to others has added value to their careers. Being a coach is a calling and something that should speak to your desire to want to serve others to becoming the best they can be. If you want to have that impact for others, I recommend coach training and exploring coaching as a career path.

What is the best way to approach a potential mentor or someone you want on your "board"?



Instead of teeing it up as something you are lacking, tee it up as something that the person does that adds value to you. So instead of saying "I'm not good at having difficult conversations. I'm afraid of the impact and I'm not sure I'd be good at it.", you'd say "I value how you are able to lean in and have difficult conversations. I've seen you do this and would love to learn more from you. Having people like you in my corner make me a better leader and I'd be honored to be able to call on you in times when I need that most." People like to help others in their network. Name the thing the person does well and the value you receive from them - 99% of the time, the person will be happy to be on your 'board' to see you succeed.

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How do you get a mentor and/or sponsor? What would make someone want to do this for another person who doesn't look like them/remind them of themselves or doesn't have anything to offer the person?

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While both mentorship and sponsorship benefit from having a solid and strong relationship first, mentorship is more based on skills or wisdom shared between two people.

TS Therefore, you can do that with minimal relationship to start off. Sponsorship is all about the relationship! For someone to advocate for you, stick their neck out for you, and speak on your behalf when you are not in the room requires a trusting relationship. Focus on those relationships you can cultivate first. Then, make sure you ask for the mentorship and/or sponsorship if you want it to happen. Relationship first; mentorship and sponsorship second.

I find that I need to admit a failure among peers/my boss or feel stuck with it (and continue to beat myself up) but it seems so risky and not a typical practice. How do we change this?



Work with your boss to 'normalize' failures. I think of the famous interview with Sara Blakely, Founder of Spanx, who says at the dinner table her father wouldn't ask her and her family what successes they had that day, instead he would ask what did you fail at today? He felt that if you weren't having some failures, you weren't pushing yourself far enough. As a manager, I used to have a standing agenda item on my staff meetings to ask people what they did that week that didn't go well. We would chuckle and giggle about it whenever possible, support each other through finding solutions that would work better next time, and it normalized the process along the way.

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TO LEARN MORE ABOUT TERESA SANDE AND HER BOOK ON IMPOSTER SYNDROME, GO TO WWW.TERESASANDE.COM/FIND-YOUR-FIERCE.