

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 133: Behaviour Change Scientist Reveals A Simple Solution To Imposter Syndrome: Shahroo Izadi

Impostor syndrome. How does one move past it?

Oh, sit back.

There's this word we use a lot in society at the moment, which is imposter syndrome.

It's a really interesting concept.

I mean, the word itself, the phrase itself, is kind of loaded with a series of assumptions that I don't think are necessarily helpful, but you must, in your practice, deal with a lot of people that are showing signs of what we know as imposter syndrome.

What's your take on it and really, like, how does one move past it?

Well, this is a very new, this is a hot take because it's through an observation.

The way that I come up with things is I spend as many hours as I can speaking to people, human beings,

one after the other, as many human beings as I can in different contexts,

and seeing how they are using these tools and what's working for them and what isn't.

And for imposter syndrome, essentially not being able to internalize your accomplishments, feeling like a fraud, which I've had.

Managing my binge eating and my anxiety differently helped me change my imposter syndrome for the better.

And I'm seeing why that is now.

I've just started, well, now that I'm so passionate about binge eating as a result of weight loss diets being a thing that goes with my generation, what I've noticed is that when people give themselves permission to find whatever they find difficult, difficult, whatever it is, even if it's subjectively far more simple than all the things they're managing to do every day, something extraordinary happens.

And that tends to have a really extraordinary impact because usually with the people I work with, because I'm talking about like booze and other drugs and food and stuff, there's a lot of shame and guilt associated with it.

So that extra bit, we all find it difficult to acknowledge, a lot of us find it difficult to say,

I was great at this, and that's the end of the sentence, without any caveats,

When it comes to acknowledging our, say, our professional accomplishments or academic accomplishments,

the people I work with a lot of the time feel so ashamed and guilty about this thing that still eludes them.

That's the bit.

They'll be like, yeah, I got a pay rise, but I still haven't thought of this.

People don't know how I behave when no one's watching.

I'm like, that bit, that's what drags people down.

It doesn't let them really, really internalize and process their capacity because, well, for example, I've written two books.

That's cool.

They've done well.

Writing books was not hard for me.

Doing this, this is way, this is, you know, being able to not stammer while I speak to you

because I had the confidence to sit and breathe before I came in here, rather than look at notes,

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 133: Behaviour Change Scientist Reveals A Simple Solution To Imposter Syndrome: Shahroo Izadi

or only binge eaters will understand this, but being able to start a binge and then bring it back, as opposed to just starve myself for weeks or whatever I was doing before, is a power and a trust in myself and an ability to close the gap between what I would tell other people to do and what I do.

And a sense of integrity when no one's watching, that seeps into every area of my life.

But the trick was to allow myself to find something incredibly difficult that other people thought was a no-brainer

and not think that that meant I was stupid or weak, but just that's the way things have gone for me.

I remember sitting with Marissa Peer and she said that she's never had a patient, whether they were a sports star or a, you know, successful millionaire or whatever, that believed they were enough in terms of her patience.

So the people that had come to her struggling with something at the root of it is that they didn't believe they were enough in some capacity.

Do you agree with that?

I think, yeah, I think self-worth.

Self-worth is something that comes up a lot.

And if I come to you and it's clear that I have my self-worth is in the proverbial bin, I just think, come on, fucking, you know, useless, worthless, don't deserve anything.

What's the start of that process to get me to a better place?

Like, what do you do with me?

So if you came to me, it wouldn't be just the problem wouldn't be, I have low self-worth.

It would be, I want to change this behavior.

Yeah, and I want to change it.

I've been, you know, drinking too much alcohol, smoking too much of that, sniffing too much of this.

Where would you start with me?

Well, we would get an honest baseline of where you're at now.

So that's why in the book we do like a snapshot letter without judgment, totally private.

To just say, like, I think a lot of the time we create plans for who we want to be as opposed to who we are.

And we use this stuff to find ourselves.

And I think, first of all, you meet yourself and you get on board with who you meet.

And then I would help you to understand why you've come to be this way.

So in that first step, you know, getting to understand who I am and getting on board with who I meet,

that's through a snapshot letter.

Yeah, so it's essentially saying, here we are today, this is where I'm at.

This is where I've got to. This is where I'm starting.

Usually it's quite a fed up letter, like something's got to change. Here we go.

But what it does is it sort of anchors the process and says, right, this is where we begin.

And then what we start moving on to is the fact that you already know what to do.

I believe that the people who buy my books already know what to do.

And I believe that a lot of people feel really patronized when they're told what to do.

They know what to do.

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 133: Behaviour Change Scientist Reveals A Simple Solution To Imposter Syndrome: Shahroo Izadi

And if they don't, they can Google it.

They don't know why they're not doing it, despite wanting to do it.

So then we start thinking about closing the gap between the advice you'd give another person.

So I just say to people, what would you like to be doing?

I don't give them an A or a B.

I would like to be running a marathon every, you know, every couple of months.

I'd like to be fit. I'd like to be skinny.

I'd like to be a good partner. I want to be perfect.

Okay. Why are you here? Why are we having this conversation?

Because I'm not. I'm drinking so much alcohol, sniffing so many things and doing all the naughty things I shouldn't be doing.

And I can't stop myself.

But I know you're right. I do know what I should be doing.

I just can't do it.

Okay. Yeah.

And in the past, when you've created plans to change.

Yeah.

What have they looked like?

I've basically thrown all of the alcohol out my house and everything that I could possibly sniff.

And I have emptied the fridge and put only vegetables in.

And I have written it down on a piece of paper and then a week later,

I'm back to all of the naughty habits.

So what you've done is you've punished yourself.

You've put things in place to say, this has got bad.

I need to create this environment and control and isolate so that I don't do the bad thing.

Did you establish what you're afraid you might have to experience if you change?

Did you identify if you get there?

What if it's not as good as you think?

If you get there, will you have to do all the things that you've told people you're going to do when you get there?

Is the process of getting there one that you're familiar with?

No.

All of that. What do you think you're going to have to get through?

What are you going to have to prove?

What triggers you're going to have to respond to differently?

These are the things people don't talk about.

What self-doubt are you going to have to push against and disprove and update along the way?

It's not about thinking you're going to be able to focus on what's bad.

And also you should anticipate that in a week's time you're going to want to use.

You should put things in place.

What can I put in place to...

I found this really compelling in your book because it's something I think about a lot.

We think of motivation as being this constant.

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 133: Behaviour Change Scientist Reveals A Simple Solution To Imposter Syndrome: Shahroo Izadi

We ask stupid questions like, how do you stay motivated all the time?

Which is, again, an assumption that people that are successful in whatever facet of their life are able to always feel a sense of motivation.

But how does one prepare for that dip, that speed bump, the regression, the relapse?

I think the best bet you have is the conversation you have with yourself when your plans don't go to plan.

And I think, first of all, you prepare by, yeah, you can have the best plans in the world, but you should assume that your plans will not go to plan.

And even with the best tools in the world, you should assume that you're not able to pre-empt every single trigger, every single challenge.

The way that you do it is you start to reframe challenge as an opportunity to voluntarily demonstrate your capacity.

You're like, here we go.

I'm off grid right now.

And all I've got is the advice I'd give another person and the conversation I have with myself that's going to turn into what I do with my hands.

Well, don't do.

And I think that if you really focus on making that conversation one that holds firmness and compassion together, then that's the best thing you've got.

Because what you're chasing there is to feel smart and calm and proud of yourself.

And you already know what you tell someone else.

So the more you do that and when you take that advice and you see the results, obviously, and it actually works, the more you start doing it in other areas of your life.

And my job is to make myself redundant to people as quickly as possible.

I think we should have been taught this at school.

We have to change habits our whole lives.

Why is life dragging us along and making us change them when we're all depleted and desperate?

So yeah, I would say it's the conversation you have with yourself.

Very often people say to me like, how can I hold kindness and firmness at the same time, right?

So how can I change habits which involve sitting in discomfort and craving and urges and still be kind to myself?

Because being kind to myself means doing whatever I want whenever I want to do it.

And what I always tell them is it's kind of like if you, let's say you have a kid and you read an article somewhere and realize that this treat you've been giving your kid at 11 a.m. every day for the last year

is actually not very, it's really unhealthy.

So as of tomorrow, you're not going to give the kid the treat.

You know you're not going to give the kid the treat, the kid doesn't know yet.

Kid wakes up tomorrow, it's 11 o'clock, you're not going to give them the treat.

What's the kid going to do?

Want the treat.

And what else?

Cry.

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 133: Behaviour Change Scientist Reveals A Simple Solution To Imposter Syndrome: Shahroo Izadi

Kick off, yeah?

Yeah.

Would you blame the kid for crying?

No.

You'd expect the kid to cry?

Yeah.

It's used to something.

You wouldn't make its life miserable.

You'd make it as comfortable as possible and you just repeat that in a row until it realizes that it's come out unscathed.

Compassion.

I know why you feel this way.

Of course you feel this way.

You deserve to feel this way.

You scream all you want, babe.

That doesn't mean I'm going to do what you want.

That's the conversation you have with your body over and over again where you hold compassion and firmness together until you've done it in a row until it's easy.

That's my angle.

And does it help to remove the kid wants the candy or whatever the thing the kid was expecting in the morning?

Does it help to remove it from the environment?

I've struggled sometimes with like, I had this like, sweetie drawer in my house at one point and I knew I didn't want to eat the sweets.

But when something would happen, maybe it'd be late at night.

I feel a bit hungry, maybe a bit stressed.

I'd end up in a drawer.

And so I always, always wondered to myself, would it just help to just remove the drawer, just like pour it in the bin?

I ultimately did.

But I'm just wondering if those cues, those triggers, removing them completely is the answer.

I have this question all the time about abstinence and sobriety and whether, you know, again, there are some people for whom it's easier.

My approach is very much more for the general population.

And so a lot of the time it's more, you know, we all sit in the middle and I want you to feel like you can have chocolate in your house and consume it and enjoy it and not feel powerless over it.

So at the core of my message is you decide what you do with your hands and any negotiation you have internally about it is a jumping off point and doesn't actually make you do anything.

And is an insight into how what you're telling yourself about the sugar and what it means and how you'll feel if you don't have it.

If you were trying to build up a streak and get some time under your belt, yeah, maybe.

But ultimately what I would recommend under those circumstances, impose some friction.

Give yourself some speed bumps to start thinking about whether you actually want to do it.

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 133: Behaviour Change Scientist Reveals A Simple Solution To Imposter Syndrome: Shahroo Izadi

So for example, if I want to, if I'm working into the night writing, which I love doing, invariably at like 1 a.m. I start thinking about delivery.

And about 3 a.m. I regret it strongly.

Same.

So with that in mind, I don't just delete delivery.

Card details are out, addresses out.

It's not because I don't trust myself.

It's because I want to put in moments where I think, ah, remember you didn't want to do this?

Do you remember why you didn't want to do this?

Make it harder for myself to do the thing that I don't want to be doing and easier for myself to do the thing that I do.

Like back in the day when I used to hate exercise, I used to go to sleep in my gym kit.

So it was just one less thing to do.

So that's like removing friction versus adding it.

Exactly.

So I would, if I were you, I'd impose friction first, like put that drawer somewhere else.

And then when you go looking in another place, start thinking to yourself, God, why is that drawer?

It disrupts the autopilot.

That's what's something I've struggled with.

I do a lot of like late night eating and then I always regret it in the morning because you wake up feeling bad.

And especially if you've eaten just before you fall asleep, the body hasn't really had a chance to digest it.

Sometimes you get like some, I don't know, reflux, whatever they call it.

And I've always wondered how to stop myself doing that when I have the urge.

How do I break that habit?

I guess what's the friction that I can add?

Don't be hungry at that time.

True.

That's, you know what, sometimes I get really deep in the weeds about binge eating and policy around it and obesity and how we've got to take down all the diets and everything.

And sometimes I forget to say stuff like, don't be hungry.

That helps, you know, like there's so many like deep psychological stuff and we all have our own complex relationship with food and stuff.

And that's what's really difficult about talking about food is because it is all the good things too.

It really is.

And much like with alcohol and other drugs, when people struggle and feel powerless around it, feel really misunderstood because they hate it by that point.

It's the bane of their life.

It's all they think about all day.

Have I been good?

Have I been bad?

What am I going to have?

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 133: Behaviour Change Scientist Reveals A Simple Solution To Imposter Syndrome: Shahroo Izadi

Was that okay, conflicting nutritional advice?
Like, let's go out of hand.