

We engage in coping behaviours to protect ourselves

We are incredibly resourceful beings and find ways to work within the limitations we place on ourselves - such as the distorted self-image that the Imposter Syndrome represents.

When the circumstances around us are volatile and we are experiencing the Imposter Syndrome, we feel the fear and we want it to go away. We want to reduce the discomfort and vulnerability. We want to impose some control over a situation where we may feel out of control. We don't want to feel those intense feelings of inadequacy. So we develop coping behaviours.

In the past 10 years, working with more than 1000 people, I have identified 7 of the most common coping behaviours that people use to reduce their vulnerability.

Withholder behaviour is all about protecting ourselves by withholding who we really are, what we really think and what we really believe in, in the belief that if we reveal ourselves, we may be rejected at our core.

Defender behaviour arises when we take feedback personally; when we see it as a personal attack and then we are moved to defend ourselves. We may verbally attack back. We may deflect with humour or diversion.

We may engage in **Workaholic behaviour** when we hold the belief that we are not as smart as other people think we are. We may feel we have to work harder than others to achieve the same result. We certainly don't want to get caught out without enough information or, heaven forbid, the wrong information.

If we have felt and continue from time to time to feel that we don't quite fit in, then we may be motivated to engage in **Chameleon behaviour** which is all about changing who we are in order to be part of the group and to be accepted. The double bind is that when we engage in this behaviour, we are accepted for our mask, not who we are.

The main objective of **Shrinking Violet behaviour** is to be invisible. When we can't be seen, we can't be judged and found wanting. People engaged in Shrinking Violet behaviour live under the radar so they avoid notice.

Judging behaviour is all about having standards that simply aren't being met. It can be very righteous, perfectionistic and critical of others. Yet the person they are most critical of is themselves.

Dare Devil behaviour is the final common behaviour. This behaviour type is about feeling the challenge and the fear and going for it anyway. It may sound romantic to behave like a Dare Devil. However, the downside is that this behaviour type is not good at risk assessment and may expose him-/herself or their employer to unnecessary risk.

Principles for Coping behaviour

- Different situations will trigger different coping behaviours
- We may engage in more than one coping behaviour in any situation
- Most of us have engaged in all 7 coping behaviours at some stage
- There is nothing wrong with these coping behaviours! There are times when it is appropriate - even smart - to engage in these behaviours. Whether they are appropriate or not depends on the intention behind engaging in them. If the intention is to wisely protect ourselves, or to create rapport, for example, the behaviour may be entirely appropriate. If, however, the intention is to protect ourselves from discovery as fakes and frauds, the behaviour arises out of limiting self-belief and is commonly not in our best interests.
- Having said that, there is always a positive intention for our behaviour - also called "secondary gain".