

MAY 18, 2022



# The Insightful Leader

by *Kellogg Insight*

*Leadership advice from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University*

When you're thrown into a new, challenging situation at work, how confident do you feel in your ability to navigate it? Do you march in, head held high, thinking, "I got this!"? Or do you worry that you're out of your depth? If you're consistently in this second camp, despite positive feedback from your colleagues, perhaps you experience imposter syndrome.

I checked in with Brooke Vuckovic, a clinical professor of management and organizations, about how to combat imposter syndrome. First, she says, stop feeling bad about feeling unsure.

## **How to Maintain a Strong Presence When You're Feeling Unsure of Yourself**

I reached out to Vuckovic on this topic because in addition to teaching at Kellogg, she is an executive coach and an expert on executive presence. How, I wondered, can we maintain a strong presence that demonstrates confidence and calm when we're feeling anything but? Here's what she had to say:

**Vuckovic:** First of all, if you're growing in your career, it's completely normal to feel unsure. That's a sign of growth. So let's normalize that lack of certainty.

Second, in thinking about how to cultivate a strong presence when you're feeling unsure, prepare with what IS certain. For example, if you're presenting to a new level of higher ups in a meeting, get really familiar with the setting: Who will you be dealing with? (Do your research.) What does the room set up look like? (Show up early.) What is the group hoping for from you? (Ask, if it's not clear!)

Then prepare internally to show up in a way that supports the leadership requirement of that moment. For example, you may feel scared as hell and what your group needs from you is a sense of stability, a sense of optimism, and a sense of hope. And you have to find a way to get there. Authenticity is important, but so too is adaptability to the wide demands of leadership.

How might you be more adaptive and yet remain authentic? Create a "grounding statement" that keeps you focused. Here's how to do that in three steps:

First, clarify the context and what the team needs from you in that moment.

Second, ask yourself: given that aim, what most supports that happening? Do you need to be firm but kind? Flexible and empowering? Clear and decisive?

Finally, to give yourself the firmest of footings, find your why for that moment: why is it important that I show up that way?

Then you put those three elements together. For example, “I am open and empowering so my team can determine their own next steps on this client issue.” Or, “I am clear and decisive so my team understands their roles and responsibilities here.”

Usually once you determine what, specifically, is required in a given leadership moment, you’re able to get there.