

A portrait of Leon McKenzie, a bald man with a beard, wearing a dark blue turtleneck and a blue blazer. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a plain, light grey color.

EXPERT **PROFILE**

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LEON MCKENZIE
ON BEING HUMAN

FAKE IT UNTIL YOU MAKE IT

Facing Fears as a Founder or Entrepreneur

I remember the day, about ten years ago, when I decided to start my own entrepreneurial journey. Having spent the previous two decades as a human resources executive inside both traditional corporate settings and start-ups, I wasn't sure what that looked like, but I was open to taking risks along the way. My first attempt to grow something was with a trusted colleague recently retiring from her successful corporate career.

She had a secret family recipe for delicious baked chocolate bread shaped like teddy bears and wanted to build something around that item. Over the course of a year, we expanded offerings, secured distribution in approximately 15 local markets, built a corporate gift program with a handful of clients, brought on three employees, and secured a lease on a storefront. Unfortunately, less than 18 months into our venture, we had to shutter our business due to cash flow.



I was proud of myself for going out on a limb and testing my abilities. I was also embarrassed by the failure that left me unsure of my ability to be an entrepreneur and founder. I returned to a more traditional opportunity for a short time before I was itching to give starting up a business another try.

This time, I encountered a challenge I hadn't experienced before. I found myself paralyzed by a fear that I wasn't "enough" for the client I spoke with. I didn't have the right skills, the right experience, and enough success to ask for their business or trust. This nagging feeling followed me for several years, through another start-up and into my work as an advisor and later as a COO.

One day, it finally struck me: I was the only one who didn't see my value for what it was. I was consumed

by Imposter Syndrome, afraid I'd be called out for pretending to be something I was not. The truth is - no one expects perfection or having all the answers when I'm brought into a project. They expect my ability to apply past experiences to new strategies that will aid in the success of that business.

Since then, I've leaned into a few tactics that keep me moving forward with confidence:



1) Acknowledge that I don't know all that I don't know, and it is okay to say I'll need to think more about that before providing guidance. Allowing for a bit of grace for myself creates clarity of mind to find the best solutions.

2) Build a network of trusted advisors in different areas of expertise to bounce ideas off of, ask for help, and get affirmation that I can deliver. Their trust in me is invaluable.

3) Make personal development and learning a monthly event on my calendar. Knowledge is power and can help to eliminate self-doubt.

4) Be fair to myself on my expectations. Almost everyone who has jumped into the hot seat of founder, entrepreneur, or CEO has uncertainty. It is how we grow from it that makes all the difference.

At the end of the day, no one will ever be as hard on you as you are. The journey along the way is to be enjoyed. The battles you face as you proceed, like imposter syndrome, make the wins even more exciting.

***Breathe deep, and forge forward.
You'll be glad that you did.***

