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The Urge to Self-Destruct Puts You in Lofty Company

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By James Warren, Chicago Tribune

If you secretly fret that others will discover you're not as brilliant as they assume, you may suffer from a purported malady whose name suggests the analytical flexibility of the psychology profession. Yes, you could be a victim of the dreaded Impostor Syndrome.

According to the May-June issue of *Best Life* (a magazine about "what matters to men"), this syndrome may well explain former Tyco boss Dennis Kozlowski's disputed financial dealings, *West Wing* producer Aaron Sorkin's drug bust, short-time University of Alabama football coach Mike Price's topless-bar escapade and *New York Times* scam artist Jayson Blair's phony reporting. They all goofed big time as they reached certain lofty heights of their chosen fields.

One social psychologist, who is identified here as "an expert on the subject," informs us that the syndrome stems from low self-esteem and the fact that success can bring gloom and pressure because since "with every gain, there is also a loss."

So, if you're planning to run a Fortune 500 company, or coach a famous sports team, "Get a good psychological screening for depression, manic-depressive disorders, or substance abuse if you suspect there's a problem," counsels Daniel Yohanna, director of psychiatry at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

Of course, how many folks who ascend the top of any institutional mountain will concede failings of any consequence? But you can take a brief quiz on the topic, with questions passed along by Valerie Young, "a well-known authority on impostor syndrome." By the time you're done, maybe you'll be a well-known authority, too, if not necessarily willing to admit fatal imperfections.

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