



## **How Eve Chaurand of Change.org Beat Imposter Syndrome**

**Skills and Professional Development**



Eve Chaurand, former general counsel and head of business development of Ask.com, is currently general counsel of Change.org. Despite her high-powered global career, Chaurand isn't intimidating or unapproachable. Chaurand is an understated woman, but with bright red hair, French flair, and a lot of determination. Her piercing eyes, kind smile, and unwavering attention will make you feel comfortable and important at "hello." And her on-point responses will make you feel heard and understood on a deep, fundamentally human level. Even if you have just met, she makes you feel as if you have been friends forever.

The air of confidence about her is so deeply alluring and satisfying that one would never guess that for years she has struggled with imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is the phenomenon of high-achieving individuals finding themselves unable to internalize their accomplishments. Because they do not feel they deserve their success or believe in their own competence (despite external evidence), these individuals are convinced that they are "imposters," constantly at risk of being exposed as a fraud. Chaurand has recently discovered her calling in helping others battle their own imposter syndrome. After she learned to understand the symptoms and developed strategies that work for her, she realized that she could use her struggles to inspire and guide others. Below are a few suggestions that she shared in our conversation.

### **Recognize when you are vulnerable and identify the imposter syndrome when it shows up**

According to Chaurand, "It's very easy to lose confidence when you perceive a loss of influence and fall out of favor, whether it is real or imaginary." Chaurand explained that we derive a lot of our identity from our professional lives and it is easy to become insecure when life does not go as we

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plan. She explained that she recently left Ask.com after nine years of serving in various legal and business development roles there. Her first year after switching to business development was exciting. "We closed fantastic deals and we were delivering on our goals. That helped my confidence and I loved every moment of it."

Then there was a shift in strategy, and content partnership deals were rolled back. "We became a purposeless business development team, managing existing partners whose deals were being scaled back on our site. And I took this personally, as if it were a reflection of my ability and worth." This made Chaurand's last year at Ask.com one of the most difficult years of her career. "I did not feel like I was in sync with the company, its goals, or its management. I wanted to improve the user experience, and the company had other priorities. And mostly, I did not feel useful anymore." Chaurand spent her time trying to evangelize her point of view and convince people to help her in projects that were no longer considered a priority.

Of course, imposter syndrome creeps in when we are vulnerable. Chaurand observed, "As a lawyer, I was never second guessed or criticized. Yet, as head of business development, I had totally lost any influence in the company and had a hard time coping with the new reality." Numerous questions perpetually ran through Chaurand's head as she was spinning down a cycle of self-doubt: Why is the CEO listening to others and not me? Why does my opinion no longer matter? Why are my comments dismissed immediately? Why am I no longer invited to participate in strategic discussions? Why am I afraid to speak in meetings all of a sudden? Why am I completely shutting down?

According to Chaurand, these sabotaging thoughts are a part of vicious cycle that make an otherwise unfortunate circumstance unbearable and absolutely hopeless. "Your bad thoughts lead to you questioning yourself and your worth. And then this leads to even worse thoughts and even more rigorous questioning. And the cycle continues as you at some point wonder if you were a one trick pony, a fluke, and start contemplating lower level jobs. These thoughts may seem normal for you, as they are normal for many professionals. Yet it is important to recognize them for what they are — symptoms the imposter syndrome. If these symptoms are not addressed in a timely manner, they can lead to countless hours of unproductive spinning and self-disparagement."

## **If the imposter syndrome has taken you over, get help and find a support group! Needless suffering does not make you stronger and will not magically lead to a solution**

During her six months of soul-searching after Ask.com, Chaurand relied on the support of the French American Chamber of Commerce's Women Executive Club. She explained, "I always identified as a 'female executive role model,' and this identity was taken away when I left Ask.com. This group of supportive and inspiring women continued seeing me as a high powered female leader even if I did not. And this helped to eventually recognize and address my imposter syndrome symptoms."

Interviewing and networking is downright impossible when your self-confidence is challenged. In order to put on a good face and tell a good story about why you left your company, you need to find a way to battle imposter syndrome. You need to convince yourself that your prior success was well-earned and deserved, not just a fluke. "So, these women helped me with that. They made sure I was not considering offers that were below my abilities, and that I kept aiming high with my career goals," Chaurand shared. Chaurand warns that aiming too low, settling, and not recognizing your worth — essentially seeing yourself as a victim — is a very high cost of living and coping with imposter

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syndrome.

## **Step outside of your comfort zone. Asking for help is not a weakness**

Chaurand strongly believes, "This fake it till you make it thing works!" She entered Ask.com as a contract attorney and was naturally promoted almost every year until she became general counsel and a member of the executive team. This legal career progression at Ask.com was easy for Chaurand.

Then Chaurand stepped in as an interim head of human resources after the head of human resources left. "After seeing that I could step outside of my comfort zone and lead the human resources function, the CEO took a chance and offered me the role of SVP of business development," she explained. "It was super scary and exciting all at the same time. The deal negotiation and relationship piece was easy. The excel spreadsheet and financial modeling was more intimidating and I learned from the rest of the business development team." Chaurand learned that she was not alone, that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, and that others are often eager to help.

## **Overcome the "you can't do it" attitude and teach others, even if you're not an expert**

Chaurand was the youngest of three children. "When I wanted to do the same as my siblings, I always heard, "tu es trop petite" [you are too little]. It made me feel like I was inadequate and I had to somehow overcome that inadequacy. That creeps in in difficult moments." Chaurand remembered that in high school, she was a totally inadequate gymnast, nowhere near competitive level. To overcome the inadequacy she became a gymnastics coach and loved every minute of it. "I was hopeless, but when I saw the girls progressing, it gave me confidence and so much satisfaction."

Similarly, when she was a young lawyer seconded to Estonia, even though she had less than three years of experience, a lot of her Estonian colleagues were even younger than her and looked up to her due to her western training. "I realized being a teacher makes you a de facto leader," she explained. "So, I overcame the "tu es trop petite" voice by showing my colleagues how to run due diligence and deals, manage clients, conduct productive meetings, and speak 'globe-ish' in cross-border transactions."

Chaurand found the experience of transferring knowledge to others particularly transformative. "Through teaching, I earned the respect of my colleagues, on which I built my own self-confidence" she shared.

## **Empower yourself by helping and empowering others**

For Chaurand, empowering others is the best antidote to imposter syndrome! Just as teaching forces you to grow, be a better version of yourself, and discover your potential, empowering others amplifies your potential as much as it amplifies the potential of others. As Chaurand says, "You lift yourself as you lift others." This is why she never misses an opportunity to help other attorneys to understand the symptoms of imposter syndrome and strategies for addressing it.

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Ultimately, that is why Chaurand joined Change.org. "At Change.org I get to support projects, initiatives and people that bring about positive change in entire communities, sometimes at global scale," she shared. "Most petition starters have no network, no access to media or power, and yet they find the resource to go out of their comfort zone to create change. I have the privilege of supporting and enabling these incredibly impactful people. That makes me feel empowered. At the end, all of the career path, recognition by peers or trying to shine brighter than the executive sitting next to you, none of it matters. I find much more validation in supporting others in their mission to create positive change. There can't be any imposter syndrome in that!"

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Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

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She has authored numerous books, including *Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat*, *Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security* and *Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities*. She is working on her next books: *Visual IQ for Lawyers* (ABA 2024), *The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle* (Globe Law and Business 2024), and *Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data* (Globe Law and Business 2024).