



Feeling like a Fraud: Everything I Know Seems Wrong! **Bruce E. Roselle, PhD**

In this third of a six-part Leadersynth series, we focus on how dramatic changes can make you believe that everything you know seems wrong. These installments come directly from my new book, **The Fraud Factor**, to be published by Leader Press in April, 2016. This is only two months away! Following this current article, the four remaining installments in this series include these topics:

- Feeling like a fraud: the big fat lie
- Feeling like a fraud: who am I at the core?
- Feeling like a fraud: getting real again!

You may have had experiences in your life and work where everything you knew seemed wrong. As we discussed in the last Leadersynth article, being confronted by new information, situations, and perspectives that radically differ from your prior understanding of how things work can make it seem that everything you know is suddenly insufficient to the problems at hand. This type of situation nearly always generates some dissonance, but when you actually develop a deep belief that everything you know IS wrong, it can destabilize you and stir up fraud feelings.

Such was the case with Burt, a 50-something clinical researcher who had been enjoying his role as the team lead, until, suddenly, a new boss stepped onto the scene. It felt abrupt because Burt thought that he would continue to lead the clinical trials team. However, senior management decided to create a new level of leadership to which Burt and the rest of the clinical team would report. Burt was not considered as a candidate for this new role. In a sense, Burt had received his first demotion in nearly 10 years of work at this company, and in almost 30 years in the industry. His reaction to the new circumstances was to feel destabilized and overwhelmed, and to employ a hide and avoid strategy.

His new boss, Yolanda, was at least 10 years younger than Burt, and had moved quickly up the ranks in her previous company. She was smart, well educated, and personable, but she and Burt got off to a poor start when, in her mind, the dynamics between them seemed more competitive than collaborative. Based on the information she had been given by Burt's previous boss, as well as her early observations of him, she did not see any evidence of him functioning like a leader in this organization. He seemed to be in denial and unable to step in to lead his smaller functional role. Burt, for his part, felt like a fraud in his new role, and he thought that Yolanda wanted him to be someone very different from who he was.

The problem. Since Burt had been in the lead role before Yolanda arrived, he continued to receive emails and voicemails from the team asking for his expert perspective weeks after his boss had started. Unfortunately, he simply answered many of their questions and weighed in on problems without thinking that he was overstepping the boundaries of his boss's new role. He explained that, "Others don't know her well enough to have confidence in her, so they come to me as they have in the past. I'm trying to not overwhelm her with decisions, but she thinks I'm being secretive."

Part of the problem was that, in fact, he was not certain what responsibilities his new role and the boss's role now included. In the absence of specifics about his new job description, he interpreted his role as simply filling in the blanks and protecting Yolanda's backside from potential problems. However, whenever he stepped in and deflected the impact of some of the early decisions she made, she interpreted this as resistance, not protection.

Because Burt had always been certain of the scope and expectations of his jobs in the past, not knowing these things created in him a destabilizing tailspin. The harder he tried to figure out who Yolanda wanted him to be, the closer he came to crashing. Consequently, he began to stay in his office and dig into details that, unfortunately, were not priorities to his boss.

Sensing that I did not have much time to turn this around as his coach, I began to work with Burt immediately. He was a deer in the headlights when we first talked, still trying to understand how he ended up in this smaller role, and highly suspect of what my coaching function was. The more he revealed to me in our first meeting, the clearer it became that, while Burt was understandably resistant about this new situation into which he had been thrust, he was also approaching the new circumstances with the same ineffective tools and perspective that he had used in the old role. In fact, he was using the same tools and perspective that he had used for most of the last 20 years of his career.

The assessment. I decided that it was time to help him see that, in some ways, everything he knew WAS wrong. We started with 360-degree feedback and personality tests, and the picture from these data was quite clear. I summarized the results by saying, "Burt, the good news is that you are viewed as a technologically savvy scientist who is steady and predictable emotionally, assertive in your communication, and empathetic in your relationships. The bad news is that you are not viewed as a strong team player, nor someone who can inspire others or generate enthusiasm, and you tend to be a bottleneck for work the team is trying to complete on time."

My blunt assessment of these 360-degree data surprised Burt, and he became red-faced and defensive about the comments and ratings. He was having a hard time assimilating them into his view of himself as a leader; consequently, he could only dismiss or debate them. He was obviously flummoxed about others' perspective on him, and this seemed to stir up even more fear about being a fraud. Over the course of our in-person meetings, as well as phone calls or emails between sessions, I deliberately supported the validity of the 360 degree data and, at the same time, affirmed the value of who he was at the core as a person and a leader. We worked together to make this a growth experience for him.

The solution. Burt's story illustrates clearly the phases we each must pass through in order to grow from feeling like a fraud--because everything we know seems wrong:

1. Gather accurate information from several sources to gain a true perspective on the situation
2. Compare those data with your own perspective, feelings, interpretations to find disconnects
3. Provide as much clarification as needed, so that all involved agree on expectations, roles, etc.
4. Facilitate the growth process through coaching/mentoring /teaching toward a better approach
5. Huddle periodically to make sure progress is being made, expectations are clear, etc.

Please weigh in on our blog with your own experiences with this phenomenon of feeling like a fraud:

<http://roselleadership.com/stay-informed/leadersynth-articles>