



Feeling like a fraud: the Big Fat Lie Bruce E. Roselle, PhD

In this fourth of a six-part Leadersynth series, we focus on how dramatic changes can make you believe that you are not adequate to the situation you are facing. This is the Big, Fat Lie. These installments come directly from my new book, **The Fraud Factor**, to be published by Leader Press in late April, 2016. This is only one month away, and pre-sales of the book are available on amazon.com right now! Following this current article, the two remaining installments in this series include these topics:

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

In general, what is the **Big Fat Lie**? It is simply *the belief that you are not adequate in the situation or circumstances you face*. This false belief often occurs when you face new, unfamiliar challenges that make you begin to doubt your ability to handle them. When the changed circumstances seem extremely challenging to you, and you feel overwhelmed and paralyzed, you might begin to think that everything you know is wrong and you are totally inadequate to the task (see our last post on this topic). You might start to doubt yourself and your abilities. You might even experience a level of destabilization at the core of your being.

In David's case, for example, he experienced dissonance in his new role. When David and his manager first met with me to talk about starting a coaching relationship, several factors were clear immediately. David was an extremely bright VP who had grown up in the finance part of the high-tech manufacturing company in which he was employed. He was personable in an introverted sort of way, displaying an easy smile and a wry, somewhat random, sense of humor.

In the first meeting with David and his manager, she described him as, "someone who struggles a bit taking a strong, definitive stand in the midst of uncertainty. That is, he often seems uncomfortable going with a hunch when he doesn't have what he feels is a sufficient amount of data to support his conclusions." His manager indicated that the most important challenge in David's new role was for him to influence leaders more broadly within the organization, to create the right vision and plan so that others would follow, and to empower his team to make decisions and take action. From her perspective, he needed to move more quickly to explain the core of the issues and help frame the discussion so that others could get up to speed and on board with his thinking.

For his part, David admitted that he tended to not ask for help until he was in deep water, believing that he could "just work my way out of it." He described himself as, "the kind of person who stubbornly refuses to admit defeat," and who, instead, would "crank up my hard work ethic and put in more hours until I get the job done." This behavior tended to push his team away when they could have been of the

most help, and it took time away from his more important role of influencing the thinking of internal and external customers.

It also contributed to his feelings of being a fraud, because he thought that, “If I’m smart enough to be in this role, I should be able to figure out the answers without needing someone to step in and save me.” Because he could not always figure out a way to work through the problems he faced, he began to feel inadequate as a leader.

Senior management in the organization was keen to support David in his new role. They viewed him as having all the right stuff to be promoted even further, yet needing to change some fundamental ways in which he operated, as reflected in the feedback he received from his manager and his 360-degree results. After reading his feedback from others, and recognizing that he was not as successful with internal and external customers as he expected himself to be, David wondered whether, in fact, he was the right fit for his new role and responsibilities.

Identifying the lie. David and I had met a couple of times in our coaching engagement before he was comfortable enough to confide in me that he felt like a fraud in his role. He did so by sharing his version of The Big Fat Lie, “I need to be someone totally different to really be successful in this role.” His peer, Faye, was in a similar product management role, and David began to believe that he needed to fashion his approach to match Faye’s personality and style.

As David described it, “Faye comes from a marketing and sales background, so her personality is naturally much more outgoing and verbal, and way more engaging with customers than mine. She’s also extremely confident interacting with internal and external customers, with much greater finesse at casting a vision and enrolling them through her charisma.” David had tried to emulate Faye, but felt like he had failed miserably. This just underscored in his mind that he was a fraud in the role.

Despite the fact that he was chosen for the role and had been fulfilling it with relative success for nearly two years, David had somehow still harbored the lie that he was not fit to be in the role. Consequently, everything he saw about himself in the role was filtered through this Big Fat Lie, and he continually felt like a fraud, particularly when he was with clients and potential clients.

This initial conversation led to many others as David and I fleshed out what his core personality characteristics, abilities, motivations, and beliefs were, and strategized how to leverage these fundamental characteristics to maximize his effectiveness. We discovered together that he tends to be most comfortable in a role when he can act as a ‘guide’ or ‘helper’ to the people around him. I challenged him to think of ways he could shift his approach in his current role so that he could function primarily as a guide or helper with his team and his customers. He began to shift his approach to fit his core style, and began to experience success with his team and clients.

The problem for David--and for you--is that the Big Fat Lie, while it seems to explain things on some level, also acts in a self-fulfilling way to inhibit your effectiveness. The misperception that you must act differently than whom you are at the core undermines your ability to be successful. To what extent has a Big, Fat Lie limited your success in your career? What lie do you believe right now about yourself that makes it difficult for you to be completely effective in your work? Please weigh in on our blog with your own experiences with this phenomenon of feeling like a fraud:

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