

EPISODE 95: HOW TO DEFEAT IMPOSTER SYNDROME – WITH KATIE CROSS

Speaker 1: Two writers. One just starting out, the other a best seller. Join James Blatch and Mark Dawson and their amazing guests, as they discuss how you can make a living telling stories. There's never been a better time to be a writer.

James Blatch: Hello and welcome to the self publishing formula podcast with James and Mark for another week's chat about what's happening, what's hot and what's not, as they used to say in the 1970s in the world of self publishing. Well, they didn't say that bit in the 1970s. Hey, and we're recording this ... Sorry, what were you going to say?

Mark Dawson: Welcome to Tiswell's.

James Blatch: No one knows that.

Mark Dawson: They don't all know that.

James Blatch: No, no. Sally James and her almost legendary rock star interviews, I remember those. I remember Sally James a lot actually, but let's not go there now.

Tiswell's was a Saturday morning children's program on ITV. We were a BBC house of course, but occasionally watched it. I don't know what the equivalent was. It was completely anarchic, wasn't it?

Mark Dawson: It was, yes.

James Blatch: I don't think there was an equivalent anywhere else in the world, of Tiswell's. It was a great thing.

It's a late night for us. We normally record these during the day, but it's been a busy time recently and we've just got a slot. It's beer o'clock in the Blatch household.

In honor of it being Thanksgiving, I also have large quantities of chocolate, which I'm consuming. It's Thanksgiving around now. We're recording this, obviously it will be a week later when this gets transmitted, so Happy Thanksgiving to everyone in America.

It's a huge thing, isn't it? I mean we start getting emails about three days out, people saying, "Oh by the way, do you know it's Thanksgiving on Thursday?" On Thursday, nothing from anybody in America, and then on Friday, a couple of people surface, but they still say, "It's still Thanksgiving." I mean Thanksgiving, it takes a long time to say thank you this week in America.

Mark Dawson: Isn't Thanksgiving giving thanks for kicking our asses? It's probably no surprise that we don't celebrate it. We lost our empire.

James Blatch: I think it's quite rude. It's not thanks.

Mark Dawson: It's gloating, that's what it is.

James Blatch: I don't know. I've got a couple of American friends and neither of them can agree on what Thanksgiving actually is. A lot of people say it's giving thanks to the Native Americans, but it isn't that I don't think.

I think it's giving thanks for this land that we European settlers have found, "Thank you for this land." It's a mighty controversy, I guess if you want to dig into it. I'll tell you what, let's not bother doing that. Let's eat our M&M's and eat some turkey and have a happy Thanksgiving.

We got waylaid, but what have we been doing this week? We've had a busy time, as I say recently. We've got two, a course launch, and then something we've never done before.

So many people doing the ads launch said that they were really looking forward to 101, but it's a drag having to wait until sort of February, March.

I was resisting using the words Black Friday, but they did slip in there at some point, a mini release of 101. That was an unexpected time for all of us. It's all done and dusted now.

Mark Dawson: Yes, as we're recording it, we're in the middle of it. When this goes out on Friday, it will have been long since consigned to history. It's been a nice little thing.

We just stuck out, sent an email, a few Facebook posts, and we must have had a good 15 or 20 new students, as we record this now, something along those lines. It's great.

There's some lovely comments, people really were keen not to wait, who were already diving into the content. We'll get all the new stuff when we update it, when we put it out again next year. It's been good.

James Blatch: It has been good. I'll tell you what else has been good, is lots of positive comments on the last two or three weeks of podcasts. We had two good author interviews in a row. We had Cecilia Mecca and we had ...

Mark Dawson: Michelle Maddow.

James Blatch: Michelle Maddow. I told you it's been busy recently, and Cecilia.

First of all, just really lots of love in the room for those two inspiring stories, both of them, in different ways. I think the different approaches from the two authors.

For those of us getting our careers going, fantastic to hear how they approached it, what's happened, the results they've got, full of admiration. A lot of those comments on YouTube and on Facebook, and in emails to us as well. That's great.

Then last week, Mrs. D made her appearance. She's picked up some compliments as well and quite rightly too. She was a natural. In fact, we may open the polls later to see who you'd like to see regularly opposite the main presenter of the podcast.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, not me.

James Blatch: How do you think you'd fare in that popularity poll?

Mark Dawson: Oh, I think I'd lose every week. I think I'd have to rig it so that I lost every week.

James Blatch: Yeah, you'd have to rig it. You'd have to use some male cheating, which is traditionally what men do.

I think there's space for both of you in the long run, so have no fear. We've had a good response also to the SPF Foundation, and just a reminder that if you're interested in applying for that, it's effectively a grant to get your author career going.

It's our courses, but it's a few thousand dollars as well, to invest in things like editing and covers, supported by Reedsy. You can go to our website selfpublishingformula.com, to pick up more, it's one of the top tabs, SPF Foundation, you can read the terms and conditions and see if it's

something that you can apply for. We are getting applications in, which is always good to see.

We'll also mention Patreon, which is an opportunity to be a closer part of the podcast and support us every week. You can go to patrian.com/SPFpodcast, and I'm going to mention this because if you're a gold level patrian subscriber, we are just about to pick our first experimentee, should we say, who's going to have their author career, all their assets to do the marketing setup dissected by experts. We're going to do that in a very public ...

Mark Dawson: And me.

James Blatch: And you, I'll count you as an expert. We're going to do that in the public forum of this podcast, so we all get to learn from it, what a fantastic and valuable opportunity for that person.

If you're a gold level subscriber to patrian, there's your opportunity for that. There'll be another one in a little while as well. We're going to line a couple up. We're getting going with that soon. This is probably the last week I can say that, and we're going to choose someone soon.

What we're going to talk about today, well it's an interesting one actually, and I'll be very interested in your take on this, which I think we'll talk to you afterwards about Mark, but this is that vague nagging feeling that you're not really up to the job.

At any moment now someone's going to put their hand on your shoulder and say, "You've been rumbled mate." In the modern sense it's called Impostor Syndrome. It's remarkably common.

Lots and lots of people say they have it to one degree or another in various walks of life, even people who appear to be super confident. It's becoming a growing thing. It's been keenly identified. We've raised it from time to

time on the podcast actually, but we've never actually had an episode dedicated to it.

This week's interviewee is called Katie Cross, she's an author herself. She lives in Colorado. She has a military husband, so they do quite a lot of moving around.

She suffered quite badly from it and needed a bit of help. She's now doing what she can to help others. We talked to Katie about her career, her writing, her setup, but also about this whole area of Impostor Syndrome, something that she's doing a lot of thinking about. Let's hear from Katie and then we'll have a chat off the back.

Katie Cross: I am a self-publisher. I've been self-published for five years. I am a mom. I live in the mountains and I love to write fantasy stories.

James Blatch: When you say you live in the mountains, whereabouts are you?

Katie Cross: I'm in the state of Colorado in the United States.

James Blatch: Okay, lovely. I have been there, beautiful mountains. The Continental Divide.

Katie Cross: Yes.

James Blatch: Your background a bit Katie, I know you've had a busy time recently. Not least because you're married to the military, should we say, so you've been moved around the world a little bit I guess, or certainly around the country.

On top of that you've got children and books and a self-publishing career. I guess it feels fairly relentless for you.

Katie Cross: Yeah, it can. It gets really busy. I have that kind of personality that I enjoy being under pressure, which is good for how much I have going on in my life. I'm able to get a lot of stuff done.

James Blatch: Tell us about your writing starting, you're into double figures now of books.

Katie Cross: I started writing young adult fantasy. It was a four or five book series. That was a really good place for me to start because I loved young adult fantasy.

My first book is Miss Mabel's School for Girls. As I was doing that, I started writing on Wattpad. I was just doing a fun book, a chick lit book, just for fun on Wattpad, to try it out.

It ended up really taking off, so I started a genre of chick lit. Since I've done that, I actually teamed up with a food blogger and we made a cookbook together, that goes with my chick lit genre.

Now I'm currently working on a series that will be more epic fantasy geared, but still within the world of my young adult fantasy. I'm still not quite sure if it will be totally epic, it still might be kind of young adult. I'm still in the beginning stages of it, but it's been really fun to kind of bounce around.

James Blatch: In terms of commercial success, this has been successful for you financially?

Katie Cross: Yeah, yeah. I worked as a nurse before I wrote, and before I had my son I was able to quit nursing and start writing full-time.

Part of it was because my husband was able to support us, but I was still able to contribute through my writing, and then run my business as well. It's

been really great. Now my husband is kind of in an in between phase with his military career, so I'm able to work full-time to support the family.

James Blatch: You're now supporting the family through your writing?

Katie Cross: Yeah.

James Blatch: At the moment anyway.

Katie Cross: Not completely. I mean we have other things in place and he works for the National Guard and stuff too. Luckily the whole weight of it isn't on me right now, but I am able to use my money to support my family.

James Blatch: Well that's great, isn't it? It's fantastic. I mean this does happen to families and couples over time. You're in a position where you can give your husband a bit of freedom to make longer term decisions, thanks to the fact that the self-publishing market is working for you.

Katie Cross: Yes. It's been a huge blessing. It's so flexible because I can work from home and still take care of my son. I call myself a nap time entrepreneur, because I often have to work during nap time and then bed time.

When my husband's home, he takes over the care of my son, so that I can work. Then when he needs to go, because he's also a firefighter right now, when he needs to go on a fire call, then I can take my son because I have that flexibility, which is such a blessing.

James Blatch: I like the idea of being a nap time entrepreneur. It has a slightly different meaning for me. I might have a nap this afternoon, we'll see.

One of the things that we talked about in setting up this interview is a little bit about your marketing, what's working for you. I know you've got some quite interesting ideas.

I talked to you about the friendly nature, the inviting nature little tricks you've put on your website, the welcome mat type thing.

We also want to talk about an area, which I think you've become very interested in, which we refer to several times on the podcast as being Impostor Syndrome, this feeling. I, not least of anyone, I suffer from it, this feeling that you're not good enough to do stuff.

Let's park that for the moment and talk a little bit about how you got to the commercial success that you're enjoying now.

What's working for you? What has worked for you in the past? What's working for you now?

Katie Cross: It's funny, because I stumbled onto what's now conventional wisdom. I do a lot of study of the market, in terms of what's out there, who's doing what, and what works for them.

With Mark and his Facebook ads and advertising, he has a fantastic email list that I love being a part of, but also Nick Stevenson and all of those people, I stumbled onto some of that just trying stuff on my own a couple years ago. It actually really worked for me.

I had a BookBub, it was like three years ago, my first BookBub, with my first book Miss Mabel's. I had it as I was releasing my second book.

What I did was I offered the second book for free to people who subscribed to my list. I understood pretty clearly at the very beginning of my career how critical the email list was. That did really well for me. I got, I

think in the matter of a couple weeks, like 800 subscribers to my list at the beginning, which was fantastic.

I decided to take that down for some reason and just try something else. What I did was I left that up for a long time, but I just decided to try something else.

I created a book of short stories that revolves around the first book. It's short stories from Miss Mabel's. I put that up as a lead magnet, just to try it and see what it did. I just had another BookBub last month, where I put that up and tried it. It was not really that impressive, not impressive enough to induce me to keep that as a lead magnet, a sole lead magnet for subscribers from the ebook.

I've just taken that down a couple weeks ago and put the second book back up for a lead magnet. I offered the first book for free. I have five books in that series, so I'm basically giving the first two away, but the response has been phenomenal. I'm back up to averaging, I think, 20 subscribers a day.

I'm pulling in hundreds of subscribers at the beginning, when I first released that, because I was still on the BookBub high and then I turned the book free. I got a ton of exposure that way.

I'm just marketing through other ways. That's again, just enriching my email list over time. I think what I've learned from that is in my email list, to ensure that my lead magnet is an offer they can't refuse. I think the short stories was interesting for some people, but it clearly wasn't interesting enough. I just didn't get the response I was hoping.

Offering the second book, especially in a five book series, is worth to me the risk, because you're giving two books away for free, but what I'm actually seeing is that for every 200 books I give away ... I give on average 200 to 400 books away a day, just through Amazon.

For every one of those, still like 40 people or so are buying the second book. About as many are subscribing and getting that.

Then the buy through numbers for the third and fourth book, and the fifth book, and the other short stories I have available, are totally even. It seems like if they're buying the third book, they're definitely going to buy the fourth book.

The other thing that's worked with that is I have Network short stories, or I have the collection, so the whole series in one ebook, and that is actually keeping pace with all the other books. It's selling a lot too. That's been really helpful for me.

Another thing that you mentioned was the welcome mat. I was watching a webinar by Sumo, they're a website company, it was just a free webinar they did. I'm always watching free webinars to see what's out there.

They called something the welcome mat. Basically, it's just part of the landing page on your website. They describe the first thing you want visitors to see on your website is just this really big picture of your lead magnet, your free offer. I was like, I didn't really think of it that way.

At that time, I had a picture of me and my son. I was like, "I'm going to try it." I just got on Canva, made a really big picture, and it just says, "Do you want a free book?" Then the book is right next to it and the picture, and I have a link for them to subscribe right below, to my email list and get it for free.

I set up a different email list on MailChimp, so I could track them separately, so I know who's coming in from the website and who's coming in from Amazon or all the other ebooks.

What I'm seeing is several subscribers a day are just hitting that welcome mat and getting the free book. That's really cool because even if it's just like

two or three subscribers that day, over time that's just one more funnel that's adding a lot of email list to my subscribers. If anybody wants to see that welcome mat, you can just go to my website. It's Kcrosswriting.com.

James Blatch: Kcrosswriting.com?

Katie Cross: Yeah. I just made sure it was just a pretty picture, it was really big, and the subscription was right below it. There's not a lot of text. It just has the book, and my book won an award, so I kind of made sure they could see the award, and then the text right next to it and the subscription option right below it. That has been just another good funnel that took me like 20 minutes to set up.

James Blatch: That's great Katie. I love the fact that you listen to everything, you absorb everything, and you start to implement that and see what works for you and what doesn't. It's obviously paying dividends.

Do you know the split between the people who buy your second book, i.e., they've got the first one free maybe and they've bought the second one off Amazon, who then go on to buy three and four, and those who were given the second book free, who go on to buy three and four?

Is there a difference of people, if they've paid for the second book are more likely to pay for the next ones?

Katie Cross: I don't know. I'm not sure how to track that. I'm also wide, so I offer outside of Amazon. I still have sales going on there. The most I can track that really well, fairly well, is just website traffic.

I always look at what people are looking at and then what they click out. Ever since I had the BookBub, but especially since I set the first book free and offered the second as a lead magnet again, I just have tons of website traffic now. They're all coming into either the second book or the third book, and just recently the fourth book has really been picking up too.

Then when I check the outbound links, like what people click out, it's always, the number one links now are always my books.

As many people are coming into the webpage, as many people are clicking out. I know that's a success of my landing pages, because I had just revamped all of my website to have really good landing pages. Also I know that if people are researching into it through my website, then they're also clicking out as much as they're coming in.

James Blatch: What's your relationship with your readers? You must have a pretty active list now.

Katie Cross: I actually just recently started grouping and segmenting through MailChimp, just to try it out.

What I was finding, my list actually wasn't as healthy as I wanted it to be, because my response was ... I can't even remember my open rate, but it wasn't fantastic. I think on some emails, depending on the email, it was less than 15% sometimes. The click rate was like 3%.

That wasn't ideal for me. I wanted to do better. I actually decided to start giving people options for what they wanted for my email list. I just started creating groups, so I have three groups.

I have a group for sales and free book notifications. I have my monthly newsletter that I send out on the 15th, and then I have new releases. When they subscribe on MailChimp, they go to my page and they can pick, "I want to be part of all three groups," or, "I want just these two groups," or sometimes I won't put any, which means they'll get all of them. I just have a thing that says, "Thanks so much for subscribing. I want to make sure you get the content that you want, so here are your options. You can click as many as you want. If you don't click any, you'll just be sent all of the emails."

That's actually helped, because then I can just say, "Hey, this book is only \$0.99," to the sales category, and then they're not getting the monthly newsletter that they don't want to hear.

I know they still want to keep in touch, but maybe they don't want my monthly updates, which is fine, I understand that. I'm trying to just make it easy for them.

What I'm actually finding that surprised me is the majority of people want my monthly newsletter. Like I said, I subscribe to everyone and everything. I've been watching what people do in their monthly newsletters that I enjoy.

There's a businesswoman named Melanie Duncan that I follow, and she does this newsletter called The List. It's like, "What I'm eating, what I'm reading, what I'm enjoying," something like that. She'll just put pictures and she'll have content that's really applicable to her audience. Like, "I tried out this app and I loved it because of this," or, "I tried out this app and it didn't work," or, "I went on vacation here, here's some pictures."

I kind of liked that I got insights into her life, but she was also very helpful to me. Then there are other writers that I follow just to kind of see what's engaging about their newsletter and what's not. I try and put that in my own.

Then what I actually did, is I just sent an email out to my list and I said, "I'm trying to revamp a little bit. I just want to know what content you want. Here is a list of things that I would be happy to send you every month. What one of them are you most interested in?"

A lot of people actually responded. I didn't even know if they would open it, but they responded and just said, most of them wanted book reviews. They wanted to know other fantasy books like mine to read. I was like, "That's easy. I can do that."

One lady was like, "I would wear the heck out of a Miss Mabel's School for Girls t-shirt." She really wanted a t-shirt.

A lot of them actually wanted glimpses into the life of an author. They just wanted to know what was going on in my life, which was the last thing I expected.

My life is not that exciting. I have a toddler and I live in the mountains. It doesn't, to me, seem that exciting, but I realized to them, that I am more than just me to them. I'm this author.

They have this romanticized version of my life in their head, and that's actually where I kind of started learning more about Impostor Syndrome in my life and in other author's lives. We'll get to that in a minute.

I thought that was just fascinating, what they wanted. I also let them know in the email, "Hey, I'm revamping this. If you want less emails or you only want certain ones, here are the groups. Let me know and I'll just put you in them." A lot of people, again, responded. It was like, "It'd be awesome if you just put me in the sales and new releases." It's like, "Perfect, I'll put you in those two groups."

I group them out and then I know exactly what people want, where they want it, and the health of my list has improved a lot. I'm getting more 40% open rates with I think 10% to 15% clicks.

I haven't released a book since I started grouping and segmenting out, so I don't really know that as well. That has really helped just narrow down my list a little better. Then the other thing that I've been doing lately has been to ... I've revamped my monthly newsletters kind of like I talked about.

James Blatch: I love your attitude. I love the fact that you're looking at other people's lists and thinking, "That works, let's try that," and keeping an ear on it. It's an effort to do that because it's very easy not to do that, to not join

other people's lists, and certainly not have a critical view on what's working, what's not. A great thing that's paying dividends I think. You seem to have a really great setup Katie, and congratulations on the work you do and the success.

Let's come on to, because you touched on it there, the surprise that people are interested in you, and that they like you, and that they admire you, and that they think you're great.

They're difficult things sometimes to take on board, aren't they, and believe?

Katie Cross: Oh yeah, yeah. I hear from fans often. It's rare that a day goes by that I don't have contact somehow with a fan or new fan or something. It's always fun to hear that they love my stories and that they've enjoyed it. That's always fun. Them having an interest in my stories made sense, that was like, "Yeah, you love to read," that made more sense to me.

Them having an interest in my life was like, "What? I'm not anybody. I'm this self-published author that's just trying to make a living." I love writing. I love connecting with people. It's kind of what I love to do.

It was difficult for me not only to internalize, but to put into action, to then act on. It's like, "Okay, they want this, but then how do I act on this?" A lot of it just comes through Instagram actually.

I just realized Instagram, and somewhat on Facebook and Twitter too, but Instagram seemed like the best platform to me, to really push out more of my life for people to hear about, but do so with an element of respect for my family.

The way I put that knowledge into action was just trying to be better about posting certain things on Instagram, that not only had to do with fantasy and my writing my books, but actually just my life.

We go on hikes every day, and yesterday I posted a picture of these gorgeous Columbine flowers that I found, or like my son got some cowboy boots, I'll just post pictures of that. That's actually been what people have seemed to like the most, whether they comment on my Instagram or not, I hear as an aside from people, "I love following you here. I love seeing about your life. I love hearing all this." I've had to just kind of accept that, that's reality, when that doesn't make sense to me. I've just kind of had to say, "Okay, that's just what they want, and this is what they believe."

One other thing that helped me though is to look at it from a different perspective. These readers have an idea basically of what my life is like in their head, and it's probably not true.

They're not here, they don't know me, they can't live my life. I do that with writers that I love. I'm a huge Brandon Sanderson fan, and Lou Labray is one of my favorite authors. I have this idea in my head of what their life is like and I love to follow them and I love to see glimpses of their life.

Once I shifted my mindset to say, "Okay, these guys just don't understand that I'm basically just scrubbing toilets and chasing dogs and cleaning up after my toddler. My life isn't that glamorous."

They just want to know more about me, like the way that I want to know more about Lou Labray and Brandon Sanderson. I just started looking at it more that way and it was kind of easier to understand.

James Blatch: I wonder how much of that is completely normal in most people, in the surprise that people actually value you and want to know more about you. There's stuff on Instagram about your hikes and so on.

There's no direct link to young adult fantasy or epic there, is there? I mean that is genuinely about you as a person because they're now interested in

that. In the same way that I'm interested in the authors and I can pick out names as well who I'd like to know a bit more about.

Usually if I find a new author and I'm really enjoying the book, I will go onto Wikipedia and the internet, and read more about if they're married, where do they live, what do they do.

That, I think is something, is probably again, underestimated, particularly in the self-publishing market, where we don't regularly work with publicists and people who think about this all the time. It's happening organically to you.

Katie Cross: Yeah. I think it is very normal. I think it's just a part of the process when you're in the public eye in whatever form, people are curious and just want more information.

James Blatch: Why don't we come back to Impostor Syndrome, this idea, this sort of nagging doubt, which plagues people.

You're 11 or 12 books in now, so I'm hoping that you've got to the point where you've worked out that you can write books and people like them.

For those of us who are at an early stage in our career, and are generally frightened that what we're writing is rubbish and no one's going to read it, maybe it's right, maybe it's true by the way. The other thing is maybe it's not true and it's just a difficult thing to get over.

Katie Cross: Impostor Syndrome came about biggest for me when I started publishing. Especially after my first book, I didn't recognize it then, it's just been this last year that I've really seen it, not only in myself but in other creatives.

When I published my first book and it did really well, like the first day I think I sold 300 copies, which was years and years ago. It was way beyond my

expectations because I'd heard the horror stories of self-publishing. I just remember thinking, "When are people going to figure out that I'm just a nurse that thinks she can write?"

I was a pediatric nurse before I became an author. Being in the military, we were moving like every six months and I couldn't work as a nurse because my license didn't always transfer, and it just got kind of hairy.

I just decided to try writing because it seemed like fun. I was really nervous that people were going to say, "She's just a nurse that wrote this book. She's not a writer," but no one ever said that. I was like, "Well, I'll just keep going."

With every book I published, I just got more and more nervous. It's that feeling of like, "Someone's going to draw back the curtains and just see that I'm just like a normal person living my life and writing these books. I'm not John Grisham. I'm not these authors that live in New York and write at a coffee shop."

I write in like 10 minute increments sometimes because I'm at nap time trying to write while my son is either sick or my husband's deployed or whatever.

That was the first experience I had with Impostor Syndrome, is this idea that someone's going to draw back the curtain and call you out. There's like this fear that someone is going to say, "You're not really this. You don't deserve this success. This was a lucky break. You're not going to have it again." That's kind of the elements of Impostor Syndrome that I first noticed.

I want to say it goes away, I really want to say that, and maybe it does for some people. I still experience feelings of fear and doubt every time I publish a book or do anything like that.

I don't think they've gotten as bad as it was in the beginning, but then I start something new and it gets even worse.

I've always helped other self-publishers. I'm a connector by nature, that's just my personality type. I'm an extrovert. I'm a connector, I'm connection driven. I always love helping people find what they need, and I just love helping people. It got to the point where I just didn't ... I was spending hours emailing people to help them and I just couldn't do it anymore.

My husband's job shifted and so I just started doing strategy sessions with self-publishers, but I started charging people for it. I was sick to my stomach the entire time.

I remember thinking, "They're going to know that I'm just another self-publisher." I know how to strategize. I know the market. I know what I'm doing. I've published 11 books, but I'm no Mark Dawson, I'm no Nick Stevenson. I haven't met XYZ idea in my head, that I have to have achieved this much success to be either successful or useful.

It reared its ugly head again when I started something new. Then what I started noticing was I saw Impostor Syndrome in the way people emailed me. I was so attuned to it in myself that I was just paying attention to the way I said things, the way I did things, and I started seeing those things in other people.

I got an email from this mom blogger that I follow. Since I'm a mom and I blog about how it is to write and parent at the same time, I follow some mom blogs, just to kind of see what content they put out. I didn't want to be a full on mom blog, but I just wanted to see how other people approached it.

She wrote this email the other day and she said in the email, she accidentally forgot a link in her first email, so she sent a followup email and said, "Oh my gosh, I am so sorry I forgot to send this link. It was just a

mistake and it's not like I'm trying to get money from you guys. I'm only doing this because I love it and I would never charge you unless I absolutely had to."

She was so apologetic that I was like, "I don't even want to buy whatever you're giving me, because you don't seem to have any confidence in this product that you've released." She was like apologizing, basically for having released this product. I was like, "This girl doesn't know her own value and she's definitely struggling with Impostor Syndrome."

I have a client that I work with, this really respected, well known author. He teaches at Comic Cons, he teaches in libraries. He's called to conferences, he's an author, he's done video games. He's literally done everything and can do everything.

I took a look at his website because he's paying me to revamp his marketing and that kind of stuff. I said to him in our Skype call, I said, "You struggle from Impostor Syndrome, don't you?" He's like, "Oh yeah. I don't have a degree in writing, so I don't feel like I deserve to be here as a teacher," even though he's been teaching for 10 years and is invited everywhere.

It's like, "Wow, that's amazing to me, that you are building this career around this idea that you don't deserve it." That was so sad to me. The truth is he has stunning content. He's a great teacher. There's this idea in his head that he hasn't reached, so in his mind he's an impostor in this business where, by all means, he thinks he shouldn't belong.

I could see that in his website, just by the way he laid it out. He was just giving tons of content away for free. Whatever he did charge for these classes were like \$10 for an hour, and it was really thick, awesome content. This was just great stuff.

The man is invited to teach at all these big Comic Cons and conferences. I was like, "You should be charging way more than this." He's like, "No, I can't charge more than that. I don't deserve any success." It was interesting to me that in the design of his website I could see that he struggled with Impostor Syndrome.

James Blatch: I'm just going to pick up on that, because I think there's something worth pointing out here, is that particularly in you saying you didn't want to buy from this woman because she was so under confident about herself.

There's a serious element to this. This is not just, from a business point of view, this is not just a feeling that you have that you kind of have to live with or fight. It can damage your career. It can prevent people buying your products.

I quoted Mike Massimino before, I was just trying to look up the name of his book, I'll remember in a minute. It's his only book I think, it's an autobiography. Mike Massimino is a NASA astronaut who did two very big, important missions on the old space shuttle, repairing the Hubble space telescope.

He fought his whole life to get to become an astronaut, which is top of the tree. You're right up there. On planet Earth, there's a few people that rise to the top, and he is there.

He realized after his first mission, he'd been to space, done a fantastic job, that he was not making progress in his career because of Impostor Syndrome.

Even with everything he'd achieved, he felt there's going to be a tap on the shoulder at any moment and someone's going to say, "Buddy, we made an error. There was a clerical error. We've gone back over your results and you're out."

It was stopping him being a leader. It was stopping him taking the next step in his career. He had to psychologically get over that, boost his own ego, and work, and start believing in himself, so that he could then lead the next mission. It affected his career and he writes about it very frankly. I think it's worth a look if people do suffer from this, it's quite inspirational.

Very interesting to hear you say the negativity that came across from somebody who probably is very valuable, probably does have something to offer you, but is allowing this Impostor Syndrome to block that sale.

Katie Cross: I'm glad you highlighted that. That's why I wanted to talk about Impostor Syndrome, is because it is so damaging. I don't think most people even know they're fighting it.

What Impostor Syndrome does is it creates self-limiting beliefs. Those self-limiting belief patterns hold us back, which is exactly what I found out too.

When I started pushing boundaries in my career, like, "I'm going to try these other things," and I'm really uncomfortable trying them because I don't think anyone's going to respond, or I don't think I have the value needed for this.

Even though I had talked to like dozens of other people who are like, "Yes, you do. You need to try this." I still had this self-limiting belief in my head that no one wants to hear from me, which is so typical of Impostor Syndrome. That's just what it is, that's what you hear.

I started looking at the way I blog, at the way I talked to my email newsletter, and I realized that I was holding back. In me believing no one wanted to hear from me, I was acting like no one wanted to hear from me, and wasn't reaching out the way I could.

I think, whether we realize it or not, people pick up on that. When I work with other indie publishers, I always ask them, "How do you talk to your email list?" Most of them, I would say 90% of them say, "I don't really want to bug them too much, so I just email them when there's a release."

That's where I'm like, "Okay, so you struggle from Impostor Syndrome." There's a belief that, "I don't want to bug my email list. They don't want to hear from me."

It's like, "Why would they have subscribed if they didn't want to hear from you? If they don't want to hear from you, then they'll unsubscribe. That's fine. Let them unsubscribe because then they're not your audience anyway."

That's a really hard thing to say to yourself. Even something as simple as an unsubscribe feels like a rejection, like, "Oh, you don't want to hear from me. All these people probably don't want to hear from me." That's where those self-limiting beliefs start looping through our head and affecting our decisions.

What I see most in self-publishing is this Impostor Syndrome comes out, creates all these self-limiting beliefs, and the people stop publishing, because they're like, "I didn't sell that many copies of my book, so I just gave up," or, "Nah, no one wants to hear from me. Who am I to write this book?" Or any such thing. When it's just a matter of finding your audience too.

Self-publishing is a long-term game. I've been doing this for five years and I'm still not fully able to support my family and my business. I mean my income's going two ways. That's okay because that's a fairly normal trajectory.

You get stories like T.S. Paul and Michael Andalay and Chloe Esposito, that you've had on your show, that can. They're making ridiculous amounts of

money, but again, that's another place where for me, Impostor Syndrome comes into play. Like, "Who am I to say all these things when I'm not pulling in mid six figures every year from my writing." That's just another way it comes.

James Blatch: We talk a lot about the advantage of self-publishing. Obviously we're big advocates of it and the freedom, particularly financially. There's one area here where self-publishing misses out from the traditional publishing setup, which is having that advocate, that person in the traditional published house at Harper Collins or wherever, Penguin, who's seen authors over the years and will say to you, "You're good, keep going," and keep them going at those dark moments that all authors have.

With self-publishing, it can be solitary and you don't have that professional person who said, "I've seen it before. Believe me, believe in yourself."

Katie Cross: Yeah, that's a good aspect. There's a sense of validation that comes with being chosen for traditional publishing because you made it through the gatekeepers.

In self-publishing, where do you find that validation? Where do you find that person to say, "Okay, you're it. You're a writer now."

Why can't we just be writers because we're writers? That's a really good point you made.

James Blatch: Let me ask you what you've got in terms of helpful advice. You've thought a lot about this. You're very intelligent thoughts process on this, I think Katie.

What would you say to people then, including me, who do suffer from this?

Katie Cross: The first thing that I say to people is literally every single person at some point has or does suffer from Impostor Syndrome. I haven't met an author yet that hasn't on some form suffered with it. It appears in various ways.

There's a really good friend of mine, he just finished his first book and he is sending it out to agents. He sent it to 15 beta readers before he finalized. He said, "My biggest fear is that no one is going to think this is a book. That they're just going to think this is something I did and it has no legitimacy."

I was like, "Okay, well that's Impostor Syndrome." That's the self-limiting belief that, "I can't create this book," even though it was a wonderful book.

I would say recognizing that everyone suffers from it is the first step. You're normal. This is normal. This happens. It's okay.

There came a point where I realized how much Impostor Syndrome was holding me back and I had some big decisions to make in my business, and I couldn't make them. I didn't think I was worthy of them.

I have a business coach and she has a Facebook group that she runs. I went to that Facebook group and it's just a bunch of female entrepreneurs that are in various stages. I just said, "Look, I'm really struggling with Impostor Syndrome. Can you guys help me? What have you used in the past to help you struggle through this, because I know you've struggled through this?" All of them were like, "Yes."

Everyone had all these various things, but this one woman suggested a book called *Playing Big* by Tara Mohr. It's M-O-H-R. It's geared specifically to women struggling with Impostor Syndrome or playing small, as she puts it.

The way she used to combat Impostor Syndrome is good for men too. If you're a man wanting to look into it, I would suggest that book, but just know that it's written mostly for women that are playing small.

She suggests, and this might sound funny, basically to recognize and hear the voice of your inner critic. When you're all of a sudden hearing those thoughts of, "I'm not good enough to publish this book," or, "No one wants to hear from me," or whatever it is that your inner critic says, kind of make a cartoon out of that inner critic.

Picture some frumpy, dumpy old woman that is just this crotchety old woman, cat lady, that says, "You're not good enough for this." In creating a cartoon caricature out of them, you're helping yourself recognize when you're hearing the voice.

The problem is most of us don't actually recognize Impostor Syndrome when we hear it in our own heads. Learning to hear that inner voice, just identifying that, kind of puts you in a space where you can say, "Okay, this is Impostor Syndrome coming out or this is my inner critic."

Then the important part here is to recognize that Impostor Syndrome is actually a defensive mechanism. There's some part of you that is trying to protect you from perceived harm, which basically is rejection or emotional disturbance or whatever, like sadness or pain.

When you're about to push boundaries and you feel this panic, this, "I can't do this. I'm not good enough in this. Other people are better than me," that's when you need to step back and recognize, "I'm hearing my inner critic that's saying I'm not good enough for this," and then you just need to say to yourself or your inner critic, if you cartoonize him, just say, "I hear you. I understand that you're concerned that in taking this risk I'm going to fail, or I'm going to fall short, or I'm going to experience pain, but I got this. I can handle this. I'm going to do it anyway."

You're like talking to yourself, and I think anyone who's never been through therapy might think this is totally crazy. You're talking to yourself, but you're just acknowledging that there's a part of you that's scared and that's good.

That warning system is really good for us. It's an evolutionary thing, because then we know when we're taking risks. Also not fighting with yourself, just saying, "I understand. I appreciate your concern, but I got this. I'm confident that I can handle this. I've done my research. I'm going to move forward anyway."

Even if you're not confident, just say, "I hear you, but I'm moving forward," and then go take that risk.

The other thing is, when you're feeling Impostor Syndrome or you're feeling uncomfortable, like, "I don't know if I can do this. This is really scary." That is a really good feeling. I mean it doesn't feel good, but it's a good feeling to have, because that means you're pushing boundaries.

You can't grow if you're not pushing boundaries. Obviously there are times where you're not feeling good about something and it's like a really not good feeling, you shouldn't do it. If you're uncomfortable because you're doing something new, that means that you're putting yourself into an avenue of new growth.

That can be a really exciting place, just as much as it can be a scary place. Once someone had pointed that out to me, "I know you're uncomfortable about all this, but that's a really good thing. Look at the ways you could grow from this. If you don't do it, what's going to happen?"

Once I recognized this discomfort is actually meaning something that could be good, that helped me embrace it a little bit more. To be able to step back and say, "Okay, this can actually be a good thing."

The final thing that I would say is when you're experiencing this, reach out to someone that you trust. When I was having this big crisis with Impostor Syndrome that was holding me back, I reached out to someone who I thought would understand.

She had gone through something similar in her career and I just said, "Hey, I'm really struggling with Impostor Syndrome right now. I just need someone to talk to about it, that's possibly been through this and has taken these risks before. Can you and I have a chat about this?"

She wrote back and she was just like, "Oh that's totally normal. You'll be fine." I was like, "I kind of need some help." I was kind of devastated because she basically just brushed me off. I don't know what was going on in her life. Maybe she was busy. That was even harder then for me to approach someone else. I was like, "She totally just brushed me off. Maybe this isn't legitimate, I'm feeling this way."

Then I reached out to people that I really trusted and I just said to my best friend Tara, and I said, "Tara, I am having a really hard time with this. Can we talk about it? Can you tell me your view of this or your view of my career? Help me piece this out so I know I'm not just making a bad decision and that I have the ability to do this." That made a big difference.

Like you said, we don't have an agent, we don't have an editor in New York, as self-publishers, that can say, "I've seen all this. You're it. We're getting you into this. It's going to be fine." We don't have that person.

Finding that person is really key because you just need someone in your court. If you absolutely don't have anyone, just come to my website and find me. I do free 20 minute strategy sessions, and for 20 minutes we'll talk about your Impostor Syndrome for free, and I'll be in your court. That was a really scary time and I can understand that.

James Blatch: We've been talking for 50 minutes and I've really benefited from it. That's great Katie. I think at the bottom of this is the tragedy of people who give up and don't write it and don't push stuff out, because this gets the better of them. That really would be very sad whenever it happens, and it has happened.

Katie Cross: A lot, yeah.

James Blatch: **You have very kindly have offered to put together something, just maybe a one pager that people can use as a reference at those moments, to give them a little bit of focus, as a PDF handout.**

Katie Cross: Yes, yes.

James Blatch: You're going to do that for us.

Katie Cross: Yes. I'll create a PDF handout with the steps of recognizing and dealing with Impostor Syndrome, so you're not holding yourself back.

James Blatch: Okay, that's great. We'll give the URL out for that immediately after this interview and probably just before it as well, where people can get that.

Katie, this has been fabulous. I guarantee this is an interview that we're going to get really good feedback on, because I know it touches a lot of people's lives. It certainly has touched mine.

I think it speaks to where authors are, and you're one of the few people who can do that because you're one of us. You're that author. We can only talk to each other about this stuff really. You had your friend and that's great for that sort of best friend stuff and thank goodness for best friends that we can get that feedback, but there's some areas that only authors know and really understand about.

Katie Cross: Yes, yes. Yes, I agree.

James Blatch: Thank you for joining us from the mountains.

Katie Cross: Yes, thank you. This has been so fun. I'm really excited.

James Blatch: Where's your toddler? Is it literally entrepreneurial nap time now?

Katie Cross: No, it's 7:00 in the morning. My husband's home right now, so he's watching him.

James Blatch: He's doing a good job keeping him nice and quiet.

Katie Cross: Yeah, I told him to stay downstairs and I'm up in our spare bedroom.

James Blatch: It would have been okay as well, if we'd heard a little bit of him, but that's fine. Katie, thank you so much indeed for joining us. We'll give out the URL for the handout. It's been fabulous having you on. Thank you.

Katie Cross: Sounds great. Thanks James.

James Blatch: Mark, the big question is has Mr. Dawson ever thought, "I'm not really up to this."

Mark Dawson: I was thinking about it when I went for a walk today, knowing that we were going to have this chat.

I suppose I probably have done at times. First when I started out and certainly when I had my original two books published and nothing really happened.

I don't know whether I could have blamed myself a bit or blamed the publisher or was it a combination of things, but that certainly didn't help my confidence.

Then I was asked to leave my job for reasons that we'll get into another time. I was a lawyer at the time. I then spent six months writing a new book that I thought was going to be fantastic and the start of a glorious new career. It was terrible.

I think the fact that it was so bad and I knew it was so bad was one of the reasons I stopped writing for such a long time. Then it was only when the Kindle came around six or seven years ago, for me anyway, that I got back to it again.

Subsequent to that, I think I've always known I'm a good writer. I've always done it, ever since I was much, much younger. In my early teens I was writing.

The thing with me now is I'm fortunate enough to have sold a few copies and to get regular emails and messages from readers who tell me how much they like my stuff.

It's quite difficult to feel that you're an impostor when you're surrounded by, without being too cheesy, so much love. I can remember what it was like. In fact, you're probably in a better place to talk about this than I am, because you're closer to the start of your career rather than being established.

James Blatch: I think it's a really interesting area to think about. I think people should think about it. We should just say by the way, I should have mentioned this earlier, that Katie, as I mentioned towards the end of the interview, has prepared that PDF, sort of handy hints to help you deal with the basis of the psychological approach to dealing with Impostor Syndrome. Just some good mental exercise tips. If you want to get that

PDF, just pop along to selfpublishingformula.com/impostor. It's a rather sinister URL, but the only one I could think of off the top of my head. It's selfpublishingformula.com/impostor, you'll get that PDF.

My pet theory on this is that if you have a career / job / hobby that doesn't really involve any moment of you being vulnerable, i.e., putting yourself forward to do anything, being on a stage, delivering something, put a bit of creative work out, I think you never suffer from Impostor Syndrome. I think you probably think you're quite good at stuff, but secretly kind of know that's not tested.

Then the more likely, the more you are in a career where you're out there, so you might read the news, as I've done in the past on TV, you might be an author, like you are Mark, you might be an artist, you might be a stand up comedian, you might be a politician, I think they are the people most likely to suffer from Impostor Syndrome.

You cannot help that when you're out there, have that sense of vulnerability. It suddenly brings that focus onto your own mind, and you quite rightly ask that question, "Am I good enough? Am I actually good enough?" All these people are staring at you, stand up comedians probably most of all. When you talk to those people, and I know a lot of people in TV who all suffer from this. They all look confident on TV and it speaks to them, and they're very vulnerable actually about it.

Mark Dawson: Actually, now I think about it, I do remember I have felt this quite strongly in the past. That was when I was a lawyer. For people who don't know, coming out of university, went to law school, and then was a lawyer in the City of London for about four years. Then in Soho, doing celebrity law for a couple of years after that.

I felt terrible Impostor Syndrome then, because I knew that I wasn't a very good lawyer. It was a combination of ... I suppose I wasn't a terrible lawyer, but I had no interest in being a lawyer. I wasn't prepared to do what was

necessary. I wasn't ambitious enough to put the hours in. I didn't really fit into that world either. That did make me feel like I didn't belong there.

I felt that way because it was true. I didn't really belong there. I had no interest in belonging there or being there for any longer than I had to. It was only when I moved to the job where we all met that I didn't feel that way anymore, because I felt I was with people who were similar to me. I certainly don't feel that now with other authors. I feel quite the opposite now.

I know what it feels like. It's a confidence thing, isn't it? It's just one of those things, it's normal and you have to get used to it. It goes with the territory really, with what we do.

James Blatch: I think the word normal is a really important one to use there. I think it is normal and I'd be worried if ... I think it's not a great personality trait for the people who never doubt themselves at all. It's probably part of being a good person generally.

We did have a moment together actually, at the BBFC, or the group of us there, where I'd never really been in a redundancy environment before. The whole time I was at the BBC, they made thousands of people redundant every year, but I never met anyone who was made redundant. It's such a huge organization. They normally didn't end up being compulsory made redundant.

At the BBFC one year, they suddenly did and they did this horrific thing where they just drew, I can't remember how now, 11 of your most recent film reports, marked them like a teacher, and sacked the bottom three.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, it was horrible.

James Blatch: It was brutal. There was nobody in the building there who was swaggering around saying, "I'm going to be safe." I think it was in fact a

very, very good examiner did end up at the bottom of that. There was a complete random element to it. It just happened to be, we did so many reports, just to pull 11 out.

In any situation, you are going to find yourself suddenly confronted with this inner voice and this weakness, which can either be positively overcome or could start to grind you down.

The other thing that Katie offered in her interview is a 20 minute free consultation with her, if you just want to have a natter and get something off your chest with her, that maybe you can work with her in the future. Kcrosswriting.com is Katie's website, so you can get in contact with her there.

An interesting one. After a few author interviews and quite writing focused, and obviously we did talk about Katie's writing. I thought that was a very interesting little breather for us in our busy worlds, to have a think about.

Well Mr. Dawson, can't see each other at the moment. I've got Peroni. I always expect you to have the gentleman's drink, the G&T going.

Mark Dawson: No, I'm very tired. I was in, I didn't mention, I went to speak at an event, the Association of something to do with copyright. I can't remember what it was. The ACLS? In Manchester on Thursday.

The night before that I was in London at a concert. I stayed in a hotel in London Wednesday night, went straight to Manchester, then came back.

For those who don't know, Salisbury to Manchester is a reasonably long way. I was probably traveling for about seven hours on Thursday. I'm pretty tired.

I couldn't sleep last night either, which is a bit odd for me. No, I'm not drinking. I'm going to turn in, in a minute. I've got to drive to my family tomorrow, so I need a good night's sleep really.

James Blatch: Driving to the far East, where your family live.

Mark Dawson: Yes, not exactly the far East, it's about a five hour drive. I know our American friends will be going, "This is like going to the shops."

James Blatch: Yes, I know. Manchester to London, that's going from one side of Houston to another.

Mark Dawson: Yeah, exactly.

James Blatch: Yes, the far East, it is the most easterly point, isn't it, of the United Kingdom. Surely that's the only claim to fame Lowestoft has, that I can think of anyway.

Mark Dawson: Well, that and I'm from there and The Darkness are from there.

James Blatch: The Darkness.

Mark Dawson: That's pretty much it really, and Terry Butcher.

James Blatch: Oh, is he? Terry Butcher, he's a good bloke.

Mark Dawson: And Benjamin Britton.

James Blatch: Oh.

Mark Dawson: In your face Blatch.

James Blatch: I've completely underestimated Lowestoft. There you go. Lowestoft was suffering from Impostor Syndrome and it's been raised.

Mark Dawson: Yes.

James Blatch: Good, thank you very much indeed Mark. Thank you very much indeed for this week. It's been a little bit rambly, but we're so tired.

We come off the end of this work period and it's getting towards the kind of rundown towards the holidays. I guess it's going to be slightly more lighthearted hopefully, the next few weeks.

Thank you for all the love for the recent podcast episodes. They've been passed on to our contributors, and I completely agree with you by the way. I thought both those author interviews and Lucy were outstanding recently.

Let's keep this run going if we can. Thank you for listening. Have a great week writing and a great week marketing. We'll see you next week.

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