How to Overcome Imposter Syndrome

November 24, 2020 7 min read

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At six years old, Michael Judson Berry began his acting career by playing a prince in a local production of *The King and I*. He went on to receive a BFA in Theatre Arts from Boston University and an MA in Classical Acting from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. He toured the country in the national tour of Monty Python's *Spamalot*, worked in casting agencies in Los Angeles and New York and completed a feature film. No matter the task, Berry is not afraid to take risks — even when it's uncomfortable.

During Covid quarantine, Berry stepped out of his comfort zone once again and brought his comedic acting skills to TikTok to bring joy to people all around the world. His impressions of Catherine O'Hara's *Schitt's Creek* character have gone viral, amassed millions of views on social media and drawn praise from O'Hara herself.

Berry spoke with Jessica Abo to reflect on the past year and shared his five tips for anyone who might be doubting their skills or talent.

Jessica Abo: Michael, tell us a little bit about your career.

Michael Judson Berry: I'm an actor. I first started acting when I was six. I had one little moment that got a big laugh and ever since then I was hooked. So, I started acting regionally when I was a kid and then went to Boston University for theater. After that, I got into casting and TV and film as

well.

Tell us how COVID made you shift gears.

Berry: When we went into shutdown, I was looking for creative outlets and a lot of my friends are comedians and writers and improvisers, and they all started making web series and doing videos on TikTok. I thought, well, let me give it a try. My roommate and I did this little Instagram impersonation challenge where we did Moira and David and people thought it was really funny. So, I just had this idea of, what if every few days or so Moira Rose from *Schitt's Creek* had a cup of tea and just kind of checked in and gave you her perspective on the pandemic.

I have now done almost 100 episodes of 'QuaranTeaTime with Moira Rose' and I've learned how TikTok works. I've learned how IGTV works. I've learned how to write, direct, edit and shoot my own videos. It's been a huge, amazing learning experience that never would have happened otherwise.

When did you realize that you could do this amazing impersonation of Moira?

Berry: I don't remember a set time that I was like, *Ooh, I can do this*. I've just always had an ear for voices. Growing up, I loved Robin Williams and Monty Python and *The Carol Burnett Show* and Mel Brooks. I always grew up imitating great comedians like that. It probably made my family insane at the dinner table. But it's come in handy now.

It's always been just sort of the parody that exists in my brain that seems to kind of, sort of be in line with what Catherine O'Hara did. I remember my mom texting me and she said, "Michael, if you're going to do this, and people are going to watch you, make sure you keep every video very positive because that's what we need right now – an uplifting voice."

And then another friend who does drag reached out and said, “If you’re going to do this, brush your wig.” Now I have up to 25 wigs that I do brush. Every episode is addressing something that I think we’re all feeling and trying to have an uplifting, positive spin on it.

Michael, so many people are trying to adapt in our ever-changing world. What advice do you have for the people out there who are suffering from imposter syndrome?

Berry: I definitely know that feeling very well, as someone who is now using social media a lot and was very nervous to do it and was very hesitant to do it because I thought, *Who’s going to want to watch me*? But I finally got up the courage to just say, *Well, I’m just going to try it. We’re in a pandemic, what have I got to lose?* So, I think that’s the first thing, is just get over that fear of failure and just try it, trusting yourself and saying, *I can do this and I am worthwhile, so I’m going to put this out there.*

Finding your own voice, your true voice is essential. I know with me, there are loads of trends and things that a lot of people are doing that just don’t really fall in line with who I am or what I do. Part of the reason I’ve had some success is because I did find a tone and a voice that suits me, that’s very honest to how I feel. And I’ve stuck with it.

Set achievable goals for yourself, know your limitations and respect them, and be kind to yourself. I know that if I don’t have the right mind space to do a video that day, I’m not going to, because it’s not going to be the best quality. And you just have to be kind and respect yourself when you are setting those goals.

Challenge yourself. Every episode that I do, I’m trying something different. I’m singing a song. I’m doing an impression of a celebrity I’ve never done before. And there’s something very exciting about it. Each time I do that, I learn

and I grow more and more confident. So, while it always is just a little bit nerve wracking, it is fun and exciting to really push those boundaries.

Doing something like improv actually allows you to stretch a lot of those other four things. You push yourself, you try scary things, but in those moments when the scene is going faster than your brain can even think, you do find your voice and you find your humor. And I think I personally have, and I know a lot of people who have gained so much confidence by doing things like improv, because it forces you to really trust your gut and to trust your voice, which I think is very, very valuable for anybody no matter what profession you're in.

That's great advice. What's next for you?

Berry: I primarily did theater before shutdown and theater is definitely not happening right now. So, the challenge I have right now, which I'm very bad at, which I'm learning to be good at, is to just live in the moment, honestly, and to enjoy this moment while I'm having it and to make the best of this moment while I have it, and to just be excited about what might potentially be coming next.

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