

## R-E-S-P-E-C-T

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

**"**Do you know what the first question anyone gets asked at these things is nowadays?" asked a member at a recent industry event.

I didn't know the answer, and when I heard it, I was speechless.

He said, "They ask you how many urgent cares you have."

Who are we becoming when this is our measurement of worthiness? When did size become the first thing that matters in our getting to know one another?

There is a condition called Imposter Syndrome and we all have it. It tells us that we are not actually very good compared with others, and that we are going to be found out by those others as an imposter. If we used to be good, we aren't good enough anymore. It's that voice that tells us that we don't belong, and that we'll never belong.

Attempting to quantify our worth to one another by the number of centers we represent is driven by and reinforces imposter syndrome in the worst kind of way. For example:

Person One has a great background in scaling businesses and tons of funding—but doesn't have a deep knowledge of urgent care operations. They suffer from imposter syndrome because they are working in an industry they don't actually know much about because they are new to it, and they are embarrassed by their ignorance. No matter how successful they have been before, they are afraid someone/anyone/everyone is going to find out that they are winging it when they talk about the details of doing or delivering urgent care.

Person Two knows everything there is to know about urgent care. They have built a very successful small urgent care company serving an important role in their community. But all of the recent action is in mergers and acquisitions and multiples and scale, and Person Two hasn't done any of that. They don't want to do any of that, but it's now the currency of the realm, so they feel they no longer belong in the industry that they

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themselves built. They are embarrassed by their answer to this question we now ask each other.

Person Three leaves a huge organization with lots of centers to join a startup to build from the ground up. They are worried that everyone else thinks they did something wrong and *had* to leave the huge organization. It's much harder for them to talk about what they are doing now, even with tremendous success behind them.

Here's the truth: Persons One and Two and Three are just versions of every one of us. What they are feeling...we are all feeling in our own way. That insidious voice talks to us all. It tells us that in the areas that matter to us most, we do not *really* belong and never will.

What struck me about the "how many urgent cares do you have" question is that it suggests that X many urgent cares is required for you to matter. Do five urgent cares make you count? Do 10? Over 100? Where is the line that lets us be tall enough to ride the ride? What is the number that indicates we might learn something from talking to a person?

I am not saying that the number of urgent cares someone is involved with isn't interesting. It is. But so are all of the other facets of doing well in our very challenging field. Defaulting to this one metric as a conversation starter is beneath us. It belittles the importance of all of those other facets, stifles our ability to learn from each other, and diminishes the quality of our conversations.

Whether you have been in urgent care for 5 minutes or 2 decades, whether you have one center or 101, you belong here because you are doing the hard work it takes to stay here. Running one center without outside funding is difficult every day. Running a multistate, private equity-backed organization is difficult every day. Let's show our respect for the amazing variety of backgrounds, attitudes, ideas, perspectives, failures, and successes that make urgent care a great world to be part of. See you in Vegas. ■



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