

Ep #183: Embracing a Beginner's Mindset



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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This is Episode 183, and today I have some thoughts for you, some coaching to offer you, on the topic of being a beginner because this has been coming up in all sorts of areas of my life. I just thought, “You know what? Let's have this conversation.” So, let's do it.

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Alright, folks, there is a topic that's been bubbling up in various conversations over the last couple of months. Sometimes it's been with my friends, or my one-on-one clients, or in my membership; especially since we have been collectively doing our 30-day Get It Done Challenge, which we have just wrapped up. I'm probably going to speak more about that at a future time.

But there's been this thread throughout these conversations about being a beginner, what it's like to be a beginner, and the value of new endeavours of some kind, whether that's hobbies, or doing something within your professional life. And I've got some thoughts on that to share with you, as well as an example of how this has appeared in my own life recently.

So, in this challenge that we've been doing, the members have picked a goal to work on for 30 days. I did too. And some of that involved diving into projects or pastimes that they've never tried before. Or maybe they just haven't done in some time, because some of them have kind of returned to things that they used to do, perhaps as a child or as a young adult, but then haven't done in quite a chunk of time. So, they haven't touched it in years.

Obviously, this brings up a bunch of thoughts and feelings about being a beginner. And that happens in all kinds of ways, some more useful than others. And the less useful ones, again, it's not a problem that they show up, it's just how you are able to interact with the presence of these emotions.

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So, often, we have things like doubt coming up, insecurities, fears, all bubbling up to the surface. And questions might come in your mind like, “Well, am I going to be any good at this? What if I embarrass myself? What if I fail? Have I made a mistake in saying yes to this? Was it the wrong decision?” There are all sorts of flavors along those lines.

I'm 43, and I think it's really common that by the time we're in our 30s and 40s, we're just used to doing most of the things that we do. Okay, we've got experience of them. They're quite habitual, we don't have to think much about doing them. They don't require much cognitive effort, because we're just repeating things that we have done numerous times before.

And so, we have confidence in doing those things. There might be times where you up the stakes and do things that you haven't done before, but they're often still in the same arena as what you have done before. So, when we make changes and we do something that's different, it's understandably going to bring things up.

I think that's fantastic, right? Because that stuff, those beliefs, those assumptions, those limiting thoughts that you have, they're all there anyway. Okay? So, whatever happens, we may as well just bring them up to the surface, coach on it, and unwind them, okay?

And this has also been coming up in my personal life, especially with my partner, Paul, because he has changed the direction of his career this year. So, he certified as a life coach; we are a life coaching household now. And that's after 30 years of working in graphic design. But of course, in his design work, and also through setting up and running our local community radio station, he has actually been coaching people for a long time without knowing that's what he was doing.

But still, when you train as a coach and you learn specific things and you're held to a certain standard within that training, then that is different. It's totally different. So, we've had lots of interesting discussions about changing lanes at this stage of life. And all the conversations with my clients, and also with a friend of mine, about the insecurities that come from

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starting over again, starting from scratch, or picking something up that you've never done before.

What if you're not good at it immediately? What if after all the effort and risk involved you are just average? Dun-dun-duun! Such a juicy area to coach people on. But why is an activity only worth it if we are good at it? What is this deep-seated fear about being good at something?

I mean, some of you listening might be thinking that being good sounds great. But some of you might be thinking, "Oh, that sounds awful, being average at something." If it does, then please ask yourself why? And really answer that question. If you're in the membership, then definitely get coached on what comes up.

And just to be clear, when we're talking about "not being good", what we really mean is not being the best, not being exceptional in your field or your role, or doing a particular task. It might feel intolerable to you, the idea of that. But when you're in environments, or you've been raised in environments where being the best, or at least striving for it, is what's glorified and rewarded, then settling for what's good or being good could have you feeling like that's a complete failure. And it might feel really scary.

I've seen this fear in many of the clients that I've coached, this almost ingrained belief that anything less than an A might as well be an F. And if they get a B, then somehow, they're going to end up homeless. As if a B, whether it's literal, like in an actual test, or it's metaphorical and something in their lives, is somehow going to lead to their downfall.

But often, this is really fun to do this work with them. Often a B, or even a C, turns out to be just fine. And I know that if you're listening to this, and this applies to you, then this may be very hard for you to consider, let alone believe, okay? I get it. So, all I'm asking is that you entertain the idea that it *could be*. That it could be okay. So, can you entertain the idea that it might be alright to get a B once in a while? What comes up for you when you consider that.?

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Actually, when I was 16, I got a C in Home Economics on my GCSEs, and I remember being so disappointed by that grade. Because first of all, I think Home Economics was kind of looked down on, generally speaking, as a subject. It's not very serious because it's "women's work", right? I had internalized that. Therefore, it should be easy to get an A in Home Economics. I got a C, and I remember being so disappointed by that grade.

A large portion of that course was about childcare, and I went on to become one of the most sought-after birth and postnatal doulas in London. Although, to be fair, being a doula is largely about mothering the mother and the parents, but caring for a baby does come into it. And I do think I'm amazing with babies.

But this isn't just about the idea of an activity being worth it if we're good enough at it. There's also some unspoken nonsense rule that something is only worth doing if it's valuable, as in it produces a financial return somehow. And personally speaking, I think of value in a much broader and deeper sense. But these conversations are about an activity, creating money in some form, whether that's money for yourself, and/or the money that a business generates in revenue and profits.

That's what the undercurrent of the conversations is like. "Well, is it worth doing?" i.e., are you going to get a financial return out of this? And this can be in a very straight-up manner, right? Just like that.

But it can also come in like sneaky ways, as well. We can tell ourselves, "Oh, doing this thing is really good for me because it reduces my stress levels and it's fun. And that means I'm more productive when I am at work, and I'm better able to do my job." It comes in this sneaky way. And yes, that can be 100% true, and I absolutely love that for you.

Why does it have to be justified in relation to your productivity and ability to work and create money? It's great if a hobby reduces your stress or helps you with productivity at work, because those benefits are real. They are valuable, but why do we feel the need to justify everything we do through

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its potential to generate income? Or perhaps, prevent us from generating income?

That can result in this underlying pressure to always be monetising our passions and skills. Like, your passion, the thing that you enjoy doing, has to then become a side hustle. Which you may want it to. And if you do and you love your reasons, I am all for it. But it can also just be something that you enjoy doing and that you get to do for that reason. You can do things because you enjoy them and that'd be that. Even, and perhaps especially, if you're not very good at them. Okay?

Of course, that is a thought that's not factually true. I'm going to tell you about how this happened to me recently. "Oh, I'm not very good at doing that." That's a thought that's debatable, and there are going to be varying opinions on that. So, stick a pin in that for a moment.

I've got some reflective questions to help you with this. Think about what is your beginner thing? I want you to think about something new that you've been wanting to give a go. Or an old passion of yours that you've considered revisiting.

What have you been holding back from trying? And what's holding you back? Is it the fear of not excelling at it immediately? And if it is, what are you worried will happen if you don't excel? How can you detach from the idea that every endeavor has to be about peak performance, or meeting some form of external validation?

And how can you create some space and some lightness around doing something new, whatever it is? Just so that there's enough freedom and enough space for you to explore it, to learn. Because when things are stressful, it's a lot harder to learn. Our brains don't work so good when that's going on. And some space to make some mistakes without this heavy burden of pressure to perform and the expectation that you should be excellent at it from the get-go.

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How can you bring some space and lightness to it? Can you just let your success, if you're going to quantify it, how can you just let your success be about connection and fun and doing it for the hell of it?

Okay, I promised I would share how this has shown up in my life recently. Consider this your periodic reminder from me that being a Master Certified Life Coach, and having a very high level of self-awareness, and ability to coach myself and feel my feelings, etc., none of that means I don't have brain drama. Okay?

I don't think I have a lot of brain drama, but once in a while, I'm like, "Ooh, I really went into something there." So, I think I have less than the average person, but I still do have it, okay? Because the goal of having and using all the skills that I'm always talking about and always teaching in the membership, it's not to completely obliterate limiting negative thoughts about yourself.

Because, first of all, I think that would actually be quite weird. And I think we could stray into potentially dangerous territory, in terms of ego, etc. And there's also a lack of emotional resilience with that.

Basically, what happened is, a couple of weeks ago, I went out on a hack to the beach on my horse. We were with Sophie and her horse, Sticky, because they very kindly invited us along. Sophie's husband was on his bike, cycling in front of us. It was such a great ride. Shout out to Sophie, if she's listening; I know she listens sometimes.

After the ride, Sophie sent me a few photos that they'd taken of me riding. It was fascinating to observe my response to them, because I immediately focused on my perceived shortcomings. "I'm crooked. I'm leaning forward too much. The position of my feet isn't as good as it should be. My contact through the reins isn't right. My legs are moving around too much. I'm never going to be a good rider. My horse is wasted on me." Blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.

In a very level headed way, I'd say most of those things are actually all true, with the exception of 'him being wasted on me.' Because even very

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experienced riders might have the same assessment of their riding, right? I mean, horse riding, let me tell you. If you've never ridden a horse or had horse riding lessons, there is so much to learn and continuously work on.

So, I could make that same assessment of myself, and it actually be far more neutral and very helpful. Okay? But on this occasion, I was viewing things through an unkind critical lens, rather than a helpful critical lens. Which is how I'm often able to reflect on lessons and think about improvements that could be made for the next time around.

We all do this, right? We all have these sneaky, inaccurate, negative thoughts that just alter our perceptions of ourselves and how we experience the world around us.

So, these types of thoughts, where we are overgeneralizing and catastrophizing, and just focusing on the negative, are called “cognitive distortions”. And they suck. They feel awful. They're very common. I spot them in my clients all the time when I'm coaching. They're just always around.

And cognitive distortions also really get in the way of enjoying new experiences. It's a clear sign, when they show up, that you are being hard on yourself when you don't need to be. Because they're inaccurate. And clearly, I was definitely focusing on the negative and just forgetting about any positives, just dwelling on the negative details of what I was seeing in photos, which are just a snapshot, a moment in time. Not even reflective of the whole time I was riding. They were just all I had.

If you're learning a new skill, or starting a new hobby or a job, this line of thinking is going to make it seem like you're failing, even when you aren't. It's going to make it seem like you're not making any progress, even when it's the opposite that's actually true.

So, you have to balance that out with other thoughts. You have to catch these distortions and balance them out. And that means, rather than letting your mind just go off the rails, you've got to rein it in.

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That doesn't mean ignoring the things that would actually benefit from some attention or some effort or improvement. Okay? We're not going off into la-la land where it's like, "Oh, I'm amazing. I've got nothing to work on," blah, blah, blah. It just means that you give equal weight to what's going well, as well as what could do with some improvement. Equal airtime.

Whenever I leave the yard, the stables where I keep him, I assess what went well. That's always my starting point. And I use the High-Low-High Technique; I've spoken about it on the podcast before. But just as a reminder, this is something that Nelson and I have been doing for years. Where, at the end of our day, we come up with a high from the day, a low and another high.

It's just like a lovely moment of connection for us together. But also, it invites some reflection. And to think, even when it might have been a really challenging day, there are still things to celebrate and to be grateful for. So, feel free to steal that and come up with your high, a low, and then another high.

Prior to this bundle of crappy thoughts that I had, I was feeling so proud of myself and of Buttons, my horse; that's his name. It was an 11-mile ride. I'm not sure he's ever done that. We did a 10-mile ride a week or two before that, but I'm pretty sure he's never been ridden that much, in terms of that distance. So, that is a success just on its own.

We left the yard 6:30 in the morning; there were lots of tractors on the roads at that time. I was a bit surprised. Plus, all the cars. This is a big deal for a horse to deal with that. We also crossed a bridge; we went on a road across a bridge that had cars passing underneath, and we did that twice.

We went over railway tracks, that are used, twice. And at one of the crossings, there's a phone next to the crossing, and you have to call the railway line and let them know that you're going to cross, and they tell you if a train is coming along. They ask you how long it's going to take you to cross. So, we have to wait for the train.

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So, the train whizzed by, and we were right next to the tracks, on the other side of the gate. Buttons did spook, he did jump, but he didn't take off. That's *huge* for a horse. So, then you cross the train track, close the gate, and you make the phone call again to you let them know that you're safely across. I didn't even know that doing that was a thing.

All of these things on their own, but especially together... this is just on one ride... these are big things for horses, and for me. I am a novice rider, and we dealt with everything so well. Plus, I only bloody started having horse riding lessons in April of last year. So, I've been riding for all of, what, 14-15 months? I've built some muscle memory, in terms of riding, but it's not like I have three decades of being on horses under my belt.

But when this was going on, I had a level of expectation of myself that was just so unrealistic and so unkind, because I was literally comparing my riding to the TikToks that I see of professional equestrians who spend hours on horses every single day. And they have done that for decades. And it's not just me learning to ride, I'm teaching him how to do things too.

He turned five a month ago, so he's a young horse. He was backed at the start of the autumn last year, so he's only been ridden for the last nine months. He's not fully mature yet, by any means. And I only got him in February; we've been in a partnership for four or so months. That is nothing compared to all the time that I hope we have together. So, we've achieved a lot in those four months.

When I got him, he had two types of worms; we got rid of them. He also had feather mites in his feathers. So “feathers” are the long bits of hair on the lower leg of some breeds, some types of horses; fingers crossed, they stay away. So, his health is improved. His coat is shinier now, which means his digestion has also improved, and he's recovering from having the worms. His body shape has changed.

We've worked through him going to nip and bite me, and through him not being able to lift his feet up for me to pick and clean his hooves out. I've introduced groundwork exercises to him. He knows the cue for taking a

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step back or taking one forward. We've practiced trailer loading. We've gone in the trailer to an organized fun ride. We've gone out riding around other horses and riders, and that has a very different energy to it from just doing things around our yard and local area.

We can ride in a straight line. That was so challenging to learn how to do. And I have a completely different understanding of the riding aids now, as in how you use your seat, or your bum and your pelvis, and your legs to ask for and control certain things when you're riding. I might struggle to do them, because my body's still figuring it out, but I understand what it is that I'm aiming for and why. And most importantly, I have a sense of Buttons and what's going on for him, and I'm getting better at listening to him.

So, having a horse is so much more than riding a horse, right? There are all of these other elements as well. In those 10 minutes where I was criticising myself, I lost sight of why I have a horse in the first place. And as you might have guessed, the reason I have a horse isn't to ride him perfectly. Of course, I want to ride him well. Because that's a kindness to him, and it's enjoyable for me to learn and to improve.

But I have a horse because I want to build a bond with him, to connect with myself, to be outside, and to learn and challenge myself in new ways. But when I was busy criticizing myself for those 10 minutes, I just skipped past all of those fantastic things that have happened in the last four months or so.

This is what brains do. We just fail to see all the amazing things. This is why intentionally celebrating is so important. And also, if I arrive at some mystical endpoint, some make-believe destination where my riding is perfection, I'd be so bored. I really am all about the adventure of the journey. I don't want it handed to me on a plate.

Don't get me wrong, my horse is great. He is a quick learner, so in some ways, I do have it easy, especially because of his temperament; there are definitely more challenging horses out there. But there's still plenty for me to wrap my head and my body around, literally wrap my body around, and

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that's so much fun. So, we are actually heading off to horse camp this weekend. And this experience has really helped me to get clear on what I want from this weekend.

My aim isn't actually, in terms of achieving anything riding wise, I just want us to have fun experiencing some new things together. That's it. And this is what I mean by adopting a beginner's mindset. Seeing an opportunity with fresh eyes, from a beginner's perspective, and just experiencing the sense of possibility that comes with that.

That means not confining yourself to any self-judgment or harsh expectations. And that means, instead, you get to be curious and open and keen to explore. Because you're not supposed to know everything. And that's not just okay, it's actually exciting. You can just have some fun. All right folks, have a fantastic week and I will catch you next time.

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