

Ep #193: Breaking Free from the Burden of 'Shoulds'



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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This is episode 193. I've got some personal updates to share with you because in doing so I want to show you how I handle a specific unhelpful thought pattern, and that's the trap of should. This is something I teach in the membership. I know it's going to be really useful and practical for you to use in your life. So let's get into it.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Hello friends, what is going on with you? How are you today? Today we're going to be exploring the burden of shoulds. And I'm going to share two situations from my own life, my personal life, where shoulds have been popping up. I don't know how the weather is where you are, but autumn has descended on the UK. Oh, my gosh, it's shocking how quickly we have landed in autumn. And there's been a lot of seasonal change going on recently. So I've been reflecting on that and everything that's been happening and what that represents within us.

At the start of this month, September, I did a call in the membership that was called Clearing the Way, and it was such a good call. I taught for 45 minutes. Then I coached the members for 45 minutes. It was great. And in the teaching part, I was sharing insights from Chinese medicine, those of you who don't know, I was formally an acupuncturist. That's what my degree is in. And I was sharing insights on the qualities of late summer, which is the fifth season in Chinese medicine, and it occurs around harvest time.

So roughly speaking mid-August to the time of the autumn equinox, which is on September 22nd this year. And although it's a short season, a lot happens in that time. And that rapid transformation is something that we experience within ourselves too. And now that I have my own horse, Mr Buttons, I spend a fair bit of time in the countryside and that's really deepened my connection to the seasons. Even just driving to the stables, just seeing the difference in the landscape as I get there.

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And my son Nelson and I love to pick blackberries. It's something we love doing as a family, with Paul as well. So every summer we go to our favourite spots. We've got our places that we like to hit up. And so we know which ones are going to be ripe first and then which ones will follow. So we just drive around in the car to all the places. But now that I'm out horse riding in the countryside, I'm seeing all these other spots with blackberries and there's so many of them. And the great thing about being on horseback is that you can reach the ones that nobody else can get to when they're on foot.

And I've taught my horse, Buttons, to take one step at a time, that cue of one step, which means I can now perfectly position him where I want to pick the blackberries from. And then when I'm done picking them, get him to take one more step and then pick the other ones. So it's a great bonus from teaching him that specific skill set. So all these blackberries were beginning to ripen and then they were perfectly juicy. They were just suddenly, you could see they were perfectly juicy. And then a week later they were just done.

And I could literally see when the plant started to pull its energy inward again, when it stopped putting it outwards into the fruit, and drew it in and the berries just lost their juiciness literally overnight. And nature's cycles of growing and flourishing and then drawing inward exist in us because we are also nature. So I've been noticing this in myself, that awareness of autumn coming and being wise about discerning where and how I'm using my energies and to just begin drawing inwards and focus on what really matters.

And I recently shared about my health and how I've been feeling this year. To be frank, I don't feel like I had my season of flourishing this year. I didn't feel juicy or ripe and I didn't feel full of energy. And the iron transfusion I had a month ago has certainly helped and the menstrual cycle that I'm in right now has been the first one in a really long time where I've felt some enthusiasm and motivation in my summer. So the summer season of the cycle is the run up to ovulation, the time around ovulation.

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But even though my summers have been lacking, and I mean that in terms of the summer season of my cycle and the summer season of the year and what that has been like for me. I still notice that shift into autumn. And it's what I described on the recent call as the urge to clear the way, to prepare for the colder months. This is about getting organised, making decisions, tending to what needs to be tended to. This is about focusing on what matters so that you have a strong foundation and so that you're creating space for your next chapter.

So that's just a kind of extra information for what's going on right now and hopefully that's useful to understand how you might be feeling at this time of year, but let's talk about how this is showing up in my life. So we are finally renovating our house. Note the finally in that sentence. Any time my clients, when I'm coaching them, say, finally, when they're describing something, that's a signal to me to get curious and ask them what's going on. Because often it's an indicator that there's some judgement about how long something has taken and that it should have been done sooner.

So we moved into our house seven years ago, something like that. It looks like we moved in a few months ago. So very limited storage, piles and boxes of stuff, not one room that's done and sorted. There are paint samples on the wall that I painted on six years ago. There's wallpaper that still needs to be stripped. It kind of got mostly done, but because it's in an awkward patch on the stairs we just left it. You get the idea.

So earlier on this year, we got new windows installed. So this was the first summer where we could open all the windows because a good portion of them were painted shut. So this is going to be our first winter in the house where our windows also don't have holes in them because there are a few that had cracks and holes. We've had most of the electrical work done. Right now we're in the midst of plastering. We've picked our painkiller painkillers, we've picked our paint colours and we'll be painting soon.

There's some what I would describe as light building work that needs to be done. Other people have different ideas about how much building work there is. So my dad is a carpenter. My brother used to work on the tools,

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doing window and conservatory installations and stuff like that. So to me, I'm like, "What's knocking some walls down and moving this," kind of thing. So we'll see how that goes. And we're going to get a new bathroom. We're saving the kitchen for next year.

So things are happening and I'm very literally clearing the way and preparing for colder months. We're making decisions about all the stuff that's accumulated. We are curating our belongings, getting rid of the stuff that no longer has a place in our home and the stuff that I own that just doesn't have a place in my life anymore. It's time for it to find a new home. So all of that is great. It's great progress. But even as I share this with you, there is a voice inside of me that's whispering, "Well, you should have been able to do this sooner. You should have done this years ago."

And there it is, that should sentence that is loaded with criticism and will often create shame. And that actually ignores the intentional decisions that we've made based on our circumstances and our capacity at the time when we made those decisions. So, it was a very intentional choice to wait. I decided years ago that I didn't want to be going through a house renovation of any kind whilst writing or promoting a book or when there was a launch or something happening within my business.

So three books in however many years, what, four/five years or something? There haven't really been any chunks of time where something book related hasn't been going on or when something in the business hasn't been going on. And there was also a time when we just couldn't do it financially. And then we could have, but I decided to invest money back into the business. And that's a decision that I would 100% do again, one that I'm really proud of.

I also wanted to do it when I had the capacity for making all the decisions, the capacity for the upheaval, the capacity for complications and extended timelines, which often happens with building work and renovations. And the capacity for all the communication involved between Paul and myself and everyone else doing the work, etc. So lots of solid reasons that I still stand by, that was an intentional decision. But when I get caught up in the belief

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that I should have been able to do that sooner, I’m moving the goalposts and forgetting that this was intentional, and we do this all the time.

There was a reason that we made a particular decision but then when we get caught up in this blaming and shaming cycle, when the should shows up, we’re switching things up on ourselves. It’s very unforgiving. And of course, there have been consequences, waiting till now. We’ve had no heating in our kitchen. There was a hole in the window in our bedroom, one in a kitchen window. The no storage situation has been challenging. It hasn’t been awful to live there, but it also hasn’t been great. It has been challenging to heat, expensive to heat.

The horrible bathroom that no matter how much you clean, remains awful. Not to mention all the sensory issues that I have because, well, I may as well tell you everything now. So for the first two years that we lived there, we didn’t have any cupboards in the kitchen. We had two carcasses, but they had no doors on and no shelves inside.

And then someone noticed that we had no kitchen, they took pity and very generously gave us cupboards from this school science department or university science department and they’re very cool. And they’re definitely better than nothing. But the noise that they make, triggers my startle reflex all the time. And the same goes for Nelson walking and running around, the noise of his feet on the floorboards, multiple sensory issues. It’s not a sensory friendly environment for me at least. So in many ways, living this way has actually reduced my capacity and caused issues.

I have had to manage my mind and what’s going on in my body, really working with my body to just such an exceptional degree. So then that voice inside me whispers, “Yeah, but you could have used that mental bandwidth to take action and do things around the house so that you weren’t in that situation in the first place.” And that’s true. That’s a reasonable point to make. I could have, but I didn’t for all sorts of reasons. Some are the ones I’ve mentioned, there’s other ones. Some of them I stand by and some of them were thought errors that I had.

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And when I say thought errors, I just mean thoughts that I believed to be true and that seemed factual and they're actually not true. That's just my brain coming up with things. So we can only reflect on and learn from these things after the fact. That kind of knowledge or experience isn't available to us when we're on that side of things, it's the benefit of hindsight. But there's a way to reflect and learn on these things in a way that's useful. And then there's a way to do it that's critical and shaming and not useful. And there's just no point arguing with reality.

And that's what I would be doing if I got invested in the belief that I should have been able to do this sooner. What's the point in doing that? It's not going to change anything, and it's only going to feel like crap. So let's break down what happens when we should ourselves. It comes from a place of comparison or unrealistic expectations, both of which are incredibly unhelpful. And shoulding yourself just narrows your view of what's acceptable, it demotivates you, and it does so by creating those feelings of inadequacy and regret.

So instead of succumbing to the weight of those shoulds, I want to give you some simple ways to interrupt that pattern of thinking. So you're going to interrupt the thought pattern and interrogate it and then if at that point you need to replace it with something else that's more useful, you can. But I often find that just by interrupting things, that is enough. So that's where we're going to head.

So first of all, and most importantly, you're going to notice when you are shoulding yourself. So pay attention to your inner voice, notice your thoughts. Also notice the things that you say out loud to other people and the texts that you send. You could actually search should on your messages and your emails and see what pops up. Find all the ways that you have been saying should. And then when you spot one of these should sentences, you're going to ask yourself some important questions, starting with why.

Why should you? Or if it's a shouldn't sentence because it can also show up that way, why shouldn't you? And whatever your brain has to offer here

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is really good information to have. It will reveal a lot. And you can just keep asking yourself why, because you get one answer and then ask why again, you get that answer, you ask why again. The answers are fascinating. So you're going to do that, and then you're going to ask if the belief that's behind the should is genuinely yours.

Is it a belief that you actually believe in, one that you want to keep, or is it one that you've absorbed from other people? That might be people that you know, it might be strangers on the internet. It might be through societal expectations and pressure. I've addressed shoulding myself in lots of areas of my life. But as well as coming up with the home renovation, another place where should has been showing up for me is in having a horse. Because should often shows up in new situations, new environments, like when you have a new job or a new hobby, which for me is having a horse, riding him.

But it also shows up when you have a lot of experience. It can also show up in the form of you should know better by now. You shouldn't be having this problem at this stage of your career. You should have gotten over that by now, that was years ago. So interesting to spot all these areas. And the shoulding for me with having Buttons has really shown up with the arrival of autumn, because we've had lots of rain in the last week, the temperature's really dropped. It's been so windy, and I can handle the cold. I'm not too fussed by the rain, but the wind is often really challenging for me.

I've shared about this before. Being autistic, one way that impacts me is that the wind really dysregulates me. And I've actually done a lot of work to be able to be in the wind in a compassionate way. And I've worked on changing my relationship with the wind. And that has really helped me to be able to be in the wind more, but it doesn't mean it's smooth sailing. And over the last week I've caught myself thinking, I should be able to ride my horse in all weather conditions. So I asked myself, why?

And the answer is. well, because if I do that, then it means these things about me. It means that I'm resilient and brave and a good horsewoman. And I don't even really know, but I know that it's nonsense. I don't actually

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believe these things. This isn't my view of what resilience and bravery actually is. And I don't need to ride in torrential rain and howling wind to think that way about myself. I can just think those thoughts without putting myself through that. And who flipping cares? Literally, so what if people think I'm a fair weather rider. What is wrong with that?

And besides, which, it's not even my business what they think of me and who are these people anyway? Even whoever these people might be, and literally they don't even exist, I don't think, this is just literally my imagination. These people wouldn't even be thinking about me anyway. They're busy with their own life. So this is just literally my imagination and my fear speaking up. What if I just decided to really embrace being a fair weather rider?

And all that means is that I can take exquisite care of myself and my horse. I get to decide what that means. I've done a lot of work to increase my capacity in the wind, that doesn't mean that it's easy or that I can be in the wind all the time. And so it really does mean that I'm taking exquisite care of myself. It also means I'm taking care of Buttons. I mean, he lives out 24/7, he's out in the wind all the time. But taking him out on a hack into the countryside on our own without another horse for company is a big deal for a young horse. He can do it, but he's tentative.

And I am protective of his confidence, I want it to keep growing. So going out on our own is challenging enough. It can be challenging even with another horse and rider, without adding in additional layers of complexity like crappy weather. And as I said, these aren't my beliefs. And this is why interrupting these thought patterns is so important, because you can really then see them for what they are and question them and be like, "Do I actually believe this? Do I want to keep thinking this way or is it time to drop this so-called belief of mine?"

So these aren't my beliefs, they're just they're sometimes explicit, often implicit attitudes of people that I don't even know, that I don't actually care about, but they just exist on social media in kind of equestrian groups and pages. People whom I'm sure I would never ask for or trust their opinion on

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anything else in my life. So why would I so readily take them on board with horse riding? So I’m not going to do that. Instead, I’m just intentionally rejecting the idea that I should be able to ride in all weathers. It doesn’t work for me so I’m not going to take it on board.

And when I teach my clients this, I often encourage them when they notice it’s not their thought, it’s come from somewhere else, to just flick it away like it’s a fly in front of you. “Oh no, get it away. Don’t take it on, reject it.”

Another should that I spotted when I was riding is that I shouldn’t need to do the aids in halt. So the aids are just the cues that you give your horse with your body to do a certain movement or a transition. So going from walk to trot for example. And there are a lot of things that I’m learning. My horse is young, I’m a novice rider. And it just really helps me to practise what I’m doing with my body when we are stationary and then we do it and then we change the rein.

So if we’re riding in a clockwise direction, then we switch to going anticlockwise, which means then you have to do everything the opposite way around with the other side of the body. So there’s just so much complexity to doing this. And I’m learning it. It’s not something I’ve done before because when you ride more experienced horses in a riding school, they know what they’re doing. You just give them a cue and they do it. I’m teaching my horse what these cues are and it’s a lot. It’s a lot.

And then figuring it all out on one side of the body and then having to flip it round and doing it the opposite way around, that can get confusing for me. So what works best for me is to just stop, to be stationary in halt and go through the aids and then I do it and walk and then in trot and then we progress to canter. And I caught myself internally saying to myself that I shouldn’t need to do that, which quite frankly, is ludicrous. This is just me beating myself up on that occasion.

Doing these things, I just don’t have the muscle memory of doing it yet. I’m working on it. And when I say that I shouldn’t need to do it this way, I’m not honouring what works for me and I’m not honouring my needs. I’m just

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beating myself up and in doing so, in trying to skip doing that because I think I shouldn't need to, I'm not setting myself up for success and I'm not setting Buttons up for success. Which means that there's objectively going to be more areas where I could end up criticising myself. See how this cycle works?

Should statements are demotivating because they create shame and these critical thoughts, they just don't help you to do the thing you're telling yourself that you ought to be able to do. They just keep you in this narrow confine of what's acceptable. So my recommendation is that you just blow that wide open. And what's really interesting is sometimes when you remove the should from your sentence, you might realise that you actually do want to do that thing, but that desire is only revealed when the should is out of the picture. That's why it's so important to get rid of it.

But the point actually isn't to remove all of your should sentences from your brain. Please don't think that's what I'm saying here. You can certainly lessen their frequency through the practice of interrupting and interrogating them, but it's more about how you respond to them. Because I don't should myself a lot, but it would be weird to think that I'm never going to think that way, that I will never have those thoughts. So we just want to be mindful with the thought work that we're doing, that we're not using it against ourselves in some way.

Alright, lovelies, spot those should sentences, interrupt them, interrogate them and let me know how you get on. I'll be back next week, I'll catch you then.

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