

**Ep #126: The Power of Unlearning
with Flow Collective Member Elana**



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Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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You're listening to episode 126 of *The Maisie Hill Experience*. The power of unlearning with flow collective member Elana.

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*.

Hi, everyone, welcome to this week's podcast episode. I have got one of my wonderful clients here to have a conversation about who knows what. And I really say I know who knows what because I was just explaining to Elana that my period has just started in the last half hour. And so, I've got some paper in front of me and a pen so I can try and keep track of where my brain is going. When we first scheduled this I was really thinking because my cycle tends to be a bit shorter these days.

That's going to work out really well because I'll either have finished my period or I'll be a few days into it and kind of I'll have some oestrogen. And then don't get too comfortable with your body, Maisie, because we're going to be like, no, we're going to throw you a long cycle this time. So, when I'm in this part of my cycle my brain can be quite expansive. There might be some very circular conversations going on between you and I today, Elana.

Elana: It's absolutely fine.

Maisie: So, Elana, why don't you introduce yourself in whatever way you want to. Let us know your pronouns, where in the world you are, wherever you want to take things.

Elana: Okay. Well, I'm Elana, and thanks for having me, nice to be here. I live up in Scotland but I'm originally from Switzerland. My pronouns are she, her. At the moment I work for the Scottish Government's Nature Agency. I also run a social enterprise which is a tree nursery, growing trees. And I'm also a member of Scottish Mountain Rescue where I train two trainee search dogs.

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Maisie: Are you?

Elana: Yeah, that's probably the key things that I do, yeah.

Maisie: They are fabulous key things. Oh my gosh, I have so many questions now that are not relevant to this. I'll save them for another time. When did you first join the membership? Feels like you've been there for quite a while.

Elana: I had to look it up actually and I knew it was early last year. So, it was March actually that I joined last year, so a year and a bit.

Maisie: So just over a year, yeah.

Elana: Yeah. It was actually, I was recommended *Period Power*, I think it was my best friend, Rhianne who recommended it. And I devoured that. It was one of the first books I'd read in a really long time. And I'm normally a voracious reader and I hadn't read for years. And I absolutely devoured this book over the New Year I remember. And it was from that, where you mentioned *The Flow Collective* that I looked into it. And then by March took the bold decision or it felt like a bold decision at the time to join.

Maisie: Why do you think it felt like a bold decision? Because this is something that I hear a lot from members who join, it's quite significant for a lot of people to sign up. So why was it bold for you?

Elana: One element was the cost, I felt it was really high. And I thought it was, yeah, quite an expensive thing for me to spend money on, on a monthly basis. But to be honest, it's the best decision I ever made in that regard because of what I've got out of it is absolutely invaluable. And it's actually turned into a total non-negotiable. This is something I spend money on.

And it's turned from something that feels, or it felt originally like a bit of a luxury almost or something I don't deserve, it's not really for me into

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something that takes priority, which has been a really pleasant kind of experience actually, that whole transformation of looking at it in that way.

Maisie: We get a lot of that feedback from people, it starts off as this is a lot, can I do this for myself? Is it okay? And for some people it's what are people going to think of it. And they might kind of get negative feedback from other people about their decision to do it. And then as you said, it just becomes this thing of no, this is just what I do now. And it's interesting you bring this up because I've actually got a podcast episode, I don't know if it's going to come out before or after this one but it's all about personal standards and how that can change.

Elana: Yeah, that's really interesting actually because that's been such a key theme in this whole process of going through being part of *The Flow Collective*. And I think the key thing for me was that it was a departure from things that, you know, I've had counsellors and been to therapy in the past. To start with I think I didn't know how many tools would come as part of being a member of *The Flow Collective* and how many tools there would be that I would be able to learn and apply directly.

So, it's a massive contrast to going to see a counsellor where you need to go to somebody else to get some help or for them to help you. But this was very much about, here are all these resources that you can learn to help yourself and to give yourself agency. And I think that was the real key for me and recognising that shit, this is really good for me. And I can create the changes that I really want to have and understand myself better and all the things that we learn and that's been kind of the key for me really, that sense of agency that I've learned things that I can use to help myself.

Maisie: How was that for you going from that position of receiving support, having appointments which are wonderful to do but to then kind of switch into something that is, yeah, something where you're learning tools that you yourself can use? And, of course, there's guidance and ways to get feedback and to take it all deeper. But my intention is that I don't want you

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to need us, but I want this to be something that you can do by yourself. And then we're there and we love to jump in and help and do all of those things.

But I really want the tools to be things that we can just hand over and then you just use them. So, what was that like for you?

Elana: Yeah. I really like how you summarised that because that has been my experience and that's been so valuable because I could use what I needed when I needed them I suppose. And really tune into where I was at myself if that makes sense.

Maisie: Where were you, kind of back then?

Elana: I was really disconnected, really disconnected from myself. And I was going through a really difficult time, the start of what became what someone called a humdinger of a year. And it was actually Robin that said it in that way, when I had my reading with her. As I said, I'd been to see counsellors and therapists over the years. And they all helped in a particular way, but I still felt a dependency almost on an external source for help. And I think that was rather, at the time I just felt like I didn't have, I don't want to say a sense of control, but everything felt really out of control.

And I couldn't put my finger on why, but it felt awful, and I wasn't enjoying how I felt a lot of the time. And I was in a really tricky part in my relationship at the time which just kind of added, it was one of the reasons why I felt I really want to do better because this isn't working for me or for us. It's quite nice kind of looking back where I am now compared to where I was then and everything that I've learned and what I didn't know at the time. Being able to reflect and say, "Well, no wonder you felt disconnected and all these difficult things."

And I think this is kind of probably, it was a kind of culmination of a lifetime of that, of being disconnected from my emotions and my body and being very much in the thinking part of my brain for such a long part, most of my life really. And understanding that there is a different way of doing it, that

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there's nothing wrong with me in that sense, I'm not crazy. I have learned a certain way of doing things and actually there's a whole other, a really wide range of other ways of doing things that actually feel a load better.

Maisie: So how was it for you then to join and start to watch the materials and come to the calls and things and have these other options presented to you?

Elana: It was all incredibly new. I think the thing that was most difficult for me but also most valuable for me was understanding the nervous system because that was something I couldn't get my head around. I couldn't understand that. And now I know I've not been particularly regulated in my nervous system for the majority of my life. And I didn't understand that being in that constant fluctuation up or down was stressful and there can be a different way of feeling in your body.

And I think because it was such a new concept that took a really long time for me to understand to really get what that meant on a day-to-day basis but also from a tuning into what my body's doing and how it's feeling basis, kind of both at macro and at micro level. That was the hardest thing, that was the biggest nut to crack for me.

Maisie: Yeah, because I think that's the thing, you can have information presented to you but then when you're able to actually understand that information from a feeling perspective and from an awareness perspective. So, when you're saying this, that's what that feels like to me because of course we all have our unique experiences of stress responses and different types of awareness of our bodies and ourselves. So, there's a multitude of ways of approaching this and things that can come up for people.

But I think that is, when you can really have that awareness and understanding where you can feel it and see it happening in yourself, it's completely different. And there's all sorts of things you can do on top of that in terms of techniques and things. But I think it's just so powerful to be able

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to notice and name what's happening with your nervous system even if you do nothing else after that, just to know, I'm reacting this way. That's because this is what's happening.

Elana: Yeah. And part and parcel of that whole process was also being able to name what I was feeling. So first of all, coming out of my head enough to feel what I was feeling and then being able to put a name to it. I think that was something that I've never learned really is what is it that I'm feeling, give it a name. My predominant kind of emotions for a lot of my life have been anger and sadness. They've kind of been really strong themes and particularly the anger side of things. That has carried an enormous burden of shame for a really long time.

And being able to unpick that and being able to look at it differently not as it's a bad thing, you're just an angry person, this is bad, you're shit. Stepping away from that and saying, "Right, okay, this is trying to tell me something. This is in response to something, what is it in response to?" And then starting to unravel and untie all the little knots. It's like a piece of string full of knots, trying to untie each knot one at a time and figure out what they are and why they're there. And for me a lot of these things have been really old things that have been there for quite some time.

I suppose I never had a light shone on them in the way that I needed to understand why they were there. And kind of learning to put names to what I was feeling was huge. It felt like such a basic thing that I should know what emotions I'm feeling. I felt like a child again learning what my emotions are.

Maisie: Yeah, but you're right, it is that thing, it's like why aren't we taught this? And I think it is beginning to be, that emotional awareness is beginning to be taught. But it was the same for me. I remember working with a psychotherapist for several years and then I stopped. And then I had, I think just after my miscarriage, I wanted to go back and do, I did a double appointment just to talk about the things that had come up as a

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result of that. And I was just saying all my feelings. And he's like, "I'm just so impressed with how you're able to talk about your feelings now."

And it was that, yeah, I wasn't able to identify that I was angry or disappointed. It felt dangerous to be angry. It felt dangerous to be disappointed in someone. I wasn't able to find my way into it even though I was really kind of feeling it. But it was, yeah, it's so weird now to look back and think, wow. And sometimes I remind myself, wow, you've come a long way, Maisie, nicely done because we hear it all the time from people. This is new for me and I'm not quite sure what I'm doing but I'm willing to give it a go, which just sounds like what you did.

Elana: Yeah. And I think I was at that point where I felt I really needed something different now, something massive needs to change for me. I just felt that kind of, well, everything had kind of culminated at this point that I was at when I first joined of something really has to change. And I felt at the time that that job laid with me because I wasn't finding it anywhere, I wasn't finding that solution anywhere else. And yeah, the timing was just really perfect.

And what's been really interesting as well, I'm not going to say that I'm an expert in naming every single one of my emotions that I'm dealing with perfectly, that's absolutely not the case. I spent most of yesterday in a really, really shit mood and I'm not quite sure why. And the difference now is that whilst in the past that meant something about who I was as a person. Now I can say, "Right, okay, there's a reason why I feel like this. I'll feel differently tomorrow. What can I do to help myself right now? What do I need? What do I need to not do that's just going to make it worse?"

That's the difference now, which kind of helps break that cycle of reinforcing my anger, my feelings of shit-ness and that spiral into thinking worse and worse about myself and beating myself up that I feel worse now. And that I'm angry that I'm beating myself up by being angry. And all the bullshit that happens with that. It's still hard to feel anger because that is still a kind of a touchy emotion for me, but it's certainly shifted things massively in terms of

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how I can respond to it now. And also, in how I respond to other people's emotions and so called bad or difficult emotions.

It's a bit easier for me now to separate myself from them and understand that this is their stuff, it's not mine.

Maisie: And people listening are going to want to know how. Because whenever we do these episodes when I'm talking to someone I always get messages from people afterwards, "That was so useful, I'd love to know how that they've managed to do that." So, I'm going to ask it now because I know that that is a very common thing for a lot of people. So as best as you can, how have you been able to create that separation, I suppose?

Elana: That's a really good question and for me specifically a lot of this had to do with finding out that I'm neurodiverse. So last year I found out I have ADHD and in the last few months, ASD has been added to that. And it's kind of felt like all the lights have gone on finally. I'm not tapping in the dark, all the lights have gone on and I can see and go, "Okay, now this all makes sense. I make sense to myself." And I think just for me simply having that information alongside the work that I was doing in *The Flow Collective* kind of both helped me to understand that there's nothing wrong with me.

I'm not broken. I'm not crazy. I'm not bad. These are things that I genuinely believed about myself for a really long time to the point where even before I was 10 I was like, "I am never going to have kids because whatever is in me I don't want to pass on." It's that kind of deeply ingrained belief and thinking. And so, finding out about all of this stuff really helped release so much of that and for the first time as well, helped me to be able to be compassionate with myself. Because I have not been able to do that. I have an excellent highly trained inner critic.

We talk about self-care quite a lot in The Flow community, what that means and that was something that I didn't really know how to do. I didn't care for myself, in fact if anything, I would punish myself for doing things wrong or just being who I was in all these subtle and not so subtle ways. This sort of

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information, just it was a total game changer, the lights came on. I was like, “Okay, I can be nice to myself now because there’s nothing wrong with me. This is just how I am and that’s entirely okay.”

And now I know more about myself and why I am the way I am, why I respond, why I’m highly sensitive, why I get overwhelmed by all these things. Now that I have this information, I can take the steps and it comes right back to having agency, to change what’s around me to suit me rather than trying to change me to suit everything around me, which has been big.

And I think being able to cultivate that sort of compassion in myself and understanding and just being nice to myself has given me a little bit of a boost in terms of being able to deal with other people going through challenging emotions or challenging situations.

Maisie: Yeah, I think definitely that ability to have compassion for yourself and to practise self-care by which we don’t mean body brushing and bubble baths or whatever, which are all well and good and yes, I’ll say, I’ll take all of them please. But when we’re talking about self-care we’re really talking about the relationship that we have with ourselves, the degree at which we’re able to care for ourselves and not beat ourselves up by thinking really critical judgemental things about ourselves, which as you said, the brain is prone to doing for most of us.

So, the ability to notice that that’s what we’re doing and then circumvent it or just get in there as soon as you can and go, “Whoa, what are you doing?” Because if you saw someone on the street being spoken to like that, we wouldn’t accept that, whether or not you would intervene or not, but you wouldn’t accept it. You’d know, that’s wrong, I don’t want that person to be spoken to like that. But often that’s what’s going on inside our own mind. So being able to know that, see it, stop it, change it. All of those things are just so huge.

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And when you can do that, when you can work with your own nervous system it does mean we're less ruffled or affected by what's going on for other people.

Elana: No. And that, what you're saying about what self-care actually is, was a big learning curve for me too because I did think originally it was bubble baths and massage and a cup of tea and yeah, to a degree, yeah. But what you're saying about what it actually is, that was a big learning curve and that went against kind of the way I lived in terms of kind of having tendencies to punish myself when I didn't do things well or when I fucked up or when I thought I fucked up.

Then I would go into these kind of destruct modes and hurt myself, not in overt ways but in patterns of behaviour and reactions, which weren't good for me. And that has taken a fair bit of working, really concerted daily work. And I started out small.

Maisie: Perfect.

Elana: Which, well, it felt big but small in terms of really super basic things that for me was sleep, having a sleep routine and a sleep pattern. I'm really good at staying up late for no reason. Hydration, I don't drink enough water and food, kind of the really basic things. Eating well, sleeping well, being hydrated. And I started focusing on that months ago and that's still kind of at the core of my focus because as I start to become better at observing myself and how I respond to what I do have or don't have.

I see the relationship more clearly between how I feel the impacts of my emotions and my psychological state if I haven't had enough sleep or enough to eat, all of these sorts of things. Whereas in the past, wouldn't really pay much attention, you'd just power through and be expected to do everything the same way and that just doesn't work.

Maisie: Yeah. And I think without being willing to actually look at what's going on and start to decipher things. It's just one big bundle. And in some

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ways it depends on who I'm coaching and what's coming up. But sometimes we'll be like, "Well, who cares? You don't need to decipher it. We just know this is what's going on." And then we can roll with that. And other times I might lean into coaching that's more like, "Well, let's try and discern where that exactly is coming from and work with it that way.

So, I'm curious about how that's been for you when you come to the group calls or when you're getting coached yourself, seeing the different coaching that people get and knowing what to take as coaching that's relevant to you versus coaching that's maybe not for you?

Elana: That's quite interesting because it's I think more often than not there's always been something relevant and usually more than one thing. I've actually come to love the group coaching sessions. I thought I would really struggle with them because in my head, yeah, they were impersonal, wasn't one-to-one. It felt almost like a bit of a copout, and I hate saying that, but that was the kind of the initial response I had. But in reality it's completely different, yeah, it's the opposite of that.

There's a real power in that sort of vulnerability as a group and sharing with a wider group. Because I think it's safe to say for me at least in every single one of the coaching calls that I've been on with everybody who's been coached I have got something from each and every one of them. And most of the time they were things I didn't actually know I needed to hear at the time. Or yeah, that's been the really pleasantly surprising thing and I think the part for me that has almost, I don't want to say it's become addictive, but I love being there. It's been really powerful.

Maisie: I know what you mean because I had the same experiences as well and like you, had a lot of those thoughts about group coaching calls earlier on in my experience of doing them. But so much comes up from them where you're like, I totally have that going on in my life too and I didn't clock it until this person brought it up. But now they're saying it, yeah, you can do that. Or I think I shared recently, I was reviewing a coaching call for a colleague, and it was a weight loss coaching call.

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I've got no interest in losing weight, it's not on my radar at all but I could still apply the coaching to another area of my life. And that's a skill to be able to do that and I think that comes with repetition and kind of the more you come, the more you're training your brain to use all of these tools and to be able to apply them in a way that's relevant to your life even if it's not obvious in the first instance.

Elana: Yes, that's spot on and more often than not it's the ones where I start to think this isn't going to be relevant to me. There's something in there that's like, okay, that's super relevant actually, I can really use that. And I write it down and I go, "God, that's good." And I think the other thing that's been really nice about this is, when you ask for kind of thoughts and feedback after the group coaching and the group and then it's just so wonderful to see, to be part of, it is that part, being part of a community that is also so useful and safe.

It is a safe space. You can talk about anything. There's no judgement, you can bring your wackiest issue or whatever and it's not a problem. We don't focus on that. You focus on the actual coaching parts and the resonance that this has with other people as well. And for them to be able to post that afterwards in the follow-up, it's really nice to see that and to see the kind of the group impact that it has. That's quite powerful as well, you're not alone as it were.

Maisie: Yeah, the community's just been so important to me for all of those reasons and more. But I think so much of the topics that we end up coaching on are often things that people do feel shame around or judgement and maybe they've been judged by people in their lives for a certain behaviour or a thing that they've done or not done. But making that mean all sorts of things about them which then we're just in the shame spiral. So having a space where it's more of an attitude of is that it, and I don't mean to minimise anyone's experiences.

But it really is like this just isn't, of course we can talk about this. We coach on so many topics, some of them which I think could be described as heavy

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topics, things that are quite intense, they've had big impacts on people's lives. But it's that ability to hold the space for it and to hold it lightly and with tenderness. And I think that for me is what the energy on those group calls and in the community is. And to come together like that and to see that because yes, I'm coaching or someone else is doing the coaching but it's also the way that as a community we all hold space for each other.

Elana: Yeah, and it is really palpable. And that I think, it was definitely one of the reasons that it feels so important, it's such an important part of the tools that I have in my life that I choose to use, it's definitely there because of that. Because it is so easy to be around in situations or in contexts that are really judgemental. There's a lot of judgement out in the world and it's not helpful, it's not useful. It's shit. We don't need that.

And if we're dealing with things that are on our minds, the last thing we need is for our shame to be magnified or anything like that and really just to say, "Look, this is okay." And to bring humour into it as well which there's always a laugh.

Maisie: Yeah, we do like to have fun.

Elana: Even in the darkest topics there's always a way to make people smile which is beautiful.

Maisie: So, we've spoken about kind of where you were when you joined. Do you want to share some of your journey or how you would describe where you are now in comparison?

Elana: That's another good question. Between when I joined last March and where I am now, I had a complete kind of collapse in my mental health and I'm kind of halfway in between. I think the first time you coached me was when I was in the middle of that. And then I think instead of coaching me on what I brought, that was a really good lesson, or introduction, kind of real life introduction to what my nervous system was doing because I was really, yeah, I was in a really difficult place.

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I think the most helpful thing that I remember you telling me at the time was that when you're in that state you can't do a thought model, that's not the time and space to do it. You need to just deal with this first and we'll do a thought model later kind of thing.

Maisie: It's the whole idea of regulate before reason.

Elana: Yeah. I couldn't reason my way out of this complete dysregulation that I was in. And that was probably the hardest thing, was to be in that dysregulation as deeply as I was and feel all the feels and the emotions that came with it. That was excruciating. I really needed help and I started medication, antidepressants and was off work for quite some time. And it was just after I was already off work for long COVID, so it was one blow after another sort of year. And in a way, at the time I think it was like, how the hell do I navigate this?

But really I think the things that really helped was just the kind of concurrent learning that I was going through about what my nervous system was doing and how to support myself, starting small with the basic things. And not letting myself be defined by what I was feeling or thinking. That whole idea that I am not my thoughts was massive because up until that point, my thoughts were who I was and they weren't nice, or the emotions I was feeling defined who I was. So, I see it as a kind of really necessary process to have gone through.

I wouldn't want to ever do it again. I wouldn't wish it on anybody else, however, it did provide the opportunity to really almost have a blank slate and address all the things that I had been carrying with me, all the things that I was responding to, the whys of why I was responding the way I did. And getting to know myself. So, it was all these things happened at the same time, with my mental health, with finding out about the neurodiversity, with learning what I was doing here in *The Flow Collective*. All of that was happening at the same time.

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So now we're in the beginning of May and I have just last week finished, came off my antidepressants fully actually which is a bold thing. It feels good but it also feels bold. And I'm conscious of the thoughts I'm having about that, that things are going to go tits up now and maybe that's why I was angry yesterday and all these sorts of things. But now I've got this hyper awareness, not hyper awareness, but this awareness of my needs. I've learned how to identify what my boundaries are and to set them, whether it is with myself, so kind of things like not staying up late and buffering and scrolling mindlessly.

And making sure that I do have a breakfast and all these sorts of other things that are useful, but also my boundaries at work and what I will and won't accept and what does and doesn't work for me. And boundaries with my family, that has been a massive one for me as well. Knowing that I actually have agency to set boundaries with my family, to protect myself, to serve me.

Maisie: What's helped you be able to do that? Because again, that's a topic that comes up for so many people is they might know that they want to be more boundaried with family members but struggle to actually do it. So, it's one thing to know and then another to be able to do it.

Elana: It's scary. It's scary, setting boundaries. It definitely felt scary doing it the first time, but it's definitely been a process. It's kind of crept up on me in a way. And I'm not sure, that's not very helpful for someone else trying to understand it.

Maisie: But also, it's about it being helpful for you as well because often I do like to encourage everyone including myself to really, to figure out how we have created any result, whether it's a win or a loss because then we can adapt things to do them differently, to create a different result. Or you can replicate it. And sometimes what I've noticed about myself and many of my clients is we often have a process that just makes sense for us of well, this is how I often approach things. And then when you can figure out what

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that process is you can just hit the ground running. You can just apply it to so many things.

But often that's how a lot of the things that I create in the membership is based on a process that I've come up with and I think, well because I'm thinking, how can I create a process or a framework that you can all use and adapt as much as you want to in order for it to make sense to you.

Elana: You've actually just reminded me of one of the things that has been helpful in determining what my boundaries are, that I have boundaries and what they are and then enforcing them. And that has actually been the kind of seasonal workshops. And I guess what has now evolved into the value and activate sessions. And in that, certainly in the last seasonal ones late last year and early this year it was writing down what your one year, three year and 10-year visions are and what you need in order to start getting to your one-year plan.

And kind of looking at the year in review to look at what the dominant kind of emotions were and what you felt, what didn't work, what you need. I think it was through that process, actually sitting down and asking myself these questions and really answering them honestly without thinking about them and without becoming intellectual about them, that has helped. And I find it really useful to look back on them periodically and just to read what I wrote. And I was surprised with what I wrote at the time.

And I think through that, that has really helped me articulate what I really want and need, which makes me feel good and what doesn't. And I suppose with that, that has definitely been a support in identifying, okay, this isn't working, and I would like to change this. And I have again that agency to change that. I can set a boundary not in a mean-spirited sort of way but in a healthy sort of way that is going to help keep me safe I guess and keep my energy where I want it to be, if that makes any sense.

That concept of where your energy goes or where my energy goes has been a big one. And a lot of my energy has gone outward external towards

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other people, whether that's to keep other people happy or to keep the peace or because that's what I thought what was supposed to happen. And that's really changed where last year kind of the word that I chose was 'selfish'. Not in a self-absorbed narcissistic sort of way but in the sense that I am going to keep my energy for myself as much as I possibly can because I really need it.

Maisie: And so, did you decide that at the start of the year?

Elana: No, this came about halfway through I think. It was later on in the year after I'd become a bit more involved. I have to admit, it did take me a while to get going with being actively involved. I think just trying to find my feet. And I think also maybe putting it off, putting off allowing myself to, I suppose, open myself up to what I would need to look at in myself as part of the process. And that vulnerability, that fear of being that vulnerable, looking at the shadow sides of me. I did put it off for the first few months but then I got stuck in and then I got really involved.

And so, it was later on in the year, I think it was probably the end of summer review where that first came up that word for me.

Maisie: I was just curious because I was just thinking about the year that you had with having COVID and all the other kind of nuances, let's say to that year. If that word came up in response to those experiences or did it come before those experiences?

Elana: No, it very much came after that because it had all, every month had a massive, massive event from my dad having a heart attack to my partner moving out to us breaking up to COVID and long COVID to a bunch of other really massive things. And it really just broke me down and so that word very much came afterwards because it was very much that mode of self-preservation that I am the most important thing right now. I can't afford to give my energy out to anybody or anything else quite literally because I need it to get through this.

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So that's what I tried my best to do and there hasn't been too much pushback actually I think because I was very clear into what I needed and why I wasn't available all the time, for example. I think that has been met with an understanding, okay, I understand why you need that and that you are where you are, and this is what you need. So that's been good. It's particularly the family I think, it's been scary setting boundaries.

Maisie: I was absolutely shitting it when I did it for the first time with my mum. I just remember doing it and again it was to do with self-preservation and just that, we can all reach a tipping point, and the idea of boundaries is that they're just existing anyway, and you don't need to get to a tipping point. But if you're anything like me and perhaps like you, it's not something that you've been doing on the regular throughout your life. So, then I think often it is something, there's a push or a pull that just pushes you beyond that tipping point into I'm going to flex this muscle for the first time.

And it really is like walking into a gym having never been in one before and walking up to the most intimidating piece of machinery and lifting the biggest weight. Well, not even the biggest weight but just using your body in a way that's completely unfamiliar and you're like, "I'm not quite sure what I'm doing here but I'm going to do it." And then it's just all weird, I'm going to say.

Elana: Yeah, it's unfamiliar.

Maisie: Yeah, very unfamiliar and I remember doing it and it was back when I was a birth doula and I'd been up at birth for a couple of days, or I definitely missed out on at least one night of sleep. And my mum was visiting, and I'd said that I'd give her a treatment because she had some conditions that were giving her a lot of grief, but I'd just got back from the birth. I think I'd had about four hours sleep or something like that. And she was asking me, and I was just like, "No, mom, I've been at this birth." It was such an obvious response.

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Actually, although I think there definitely would have been a time where I would have just summoned it from somewhere and been like, “No, she’s asking. You can help her. Really, what cost is it going to be to you?” And I just would have been harmful to myself in order to do it. I would have been pushing myself. And there would have been a consequence to it, so I said no. And I can tell she was a bit upset or having her own response to it. And I remember just kind of calmly leaving the room whilst internally going, “Fucking hell, what’s going on? Oh my God, what’s going to happen now?”

And just leaving the room and shutting the door. And then she probably must have heard me leaping around on the other side of the door and just punching the air and I was just like, “I did it.”

Elana: It’s amazing, isn’t it?

Maisie: It is amazing, and I think that’s the thing, if you can, for anyone listening who hasn’t taken that step yet, what’s on the other side of it is amazing, even if people don’t respond in the way that you might like them to or would be the dream scenario because what did it give you doing that?

Elana: It’s just given me so much freedom. I’m so glad that I finally learned how to set a boundary or even know what a boundary is because we had no boundaries when I was growing up. That wasn’t something I ever grew up with or had in my relationships. And then I learned how to do this and now I’m boundary at everything, I love it, I can say no to this. And again, not because just for the sake of it but because it actually helps me. And it just removes so much, that whole process of thinking, I should do this for the other person even though I’m tired, I’ll push through, and I’ll do them.

Maybe they’ll be happy then and then having the consequences of the whole thing. That’s just not there anymore and I can say, “No, this isn’t right for me. I can like my reasons for saying no.” And I think that’s been a big shift whereas no in the past meant I fail, I’m failing or I’m not meeting an expectation or I’m being too selfish or all these sorts of things that we can

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quite often think. And it's such a nice feeling. I love sharing this with the people that are close to me who also kind of struggle to say no.

And I love it when they'll send me a message that I said no to something. What? And it's such a big deal and I'm just so happy for them. It's definitely become a fun thing and a really positive useful thing. I still struggle with some of the kind of the old thought patterns, I think particularly with my work and that's been a tough one, probably tougher than the family thing funnily enough.

Maisie: In what way?

Elana: In the sense that I've always been a really high achiever and that's become, it's almost like a definition, that's what I do. And actually, I don't have to go above and beyond. I can just do some really good work and leave it at that and not feel guilty that I'm not doing more.

Maisie: I think that's the thing. When it's tied up to identity in some way, for some people it might be the opposite way around, they can be very boundaried at work and not make it mean anything about them. But if it involves their parents or their children and they are strongly attached to their identity as the child of the parents or the parents of their own kids, bringing in a boundary and it mean, well, I'm not a good daughter if I do this or it means this about me as a parent if I do this.

So, it can be the other way around as well, but yeah, for sure, when it comes to work, it's that whole good girl thing I think of just say yes, be the A student, the one who's in line to be a prefect or a [inaudible] or whatever.

Elana: It's a really interesting one and it surprised me that I find it actually harder, more challenging from a work context. And I am still getting used to the fact that I can have boundaries and still get loads of work done. And still feel those thoughts that I'm going to get found out or I'm going to get in trouble because I'm doing less than I was doing previously. But one of the interesting things that I realised when I was off last year was how much

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energy I put into my work and that I'm not left with anything for myself. I don't want that anymore.

I want to put a reasonable and necessary amount into my work but actually I want my energy for me to live, to live my life, to have fun and to be able to come back from work and still have something left rather than everything going to my work. So that's been a big shift and not feeling guilty about that as well. That's probably one thing that I'm still grappling with a little bit, that sense of guilt, even though I am still doing my work and I'm doing it well. It's so ingrained in me that I need to achieve and perform somehow.

Maisie: Yeah. It's a great one to unwind because like you said, it's incredibly freeing to do that. So, you've already shared some of the amazing results that you've created and had. So, are there any other wins that you would like to celebrate here with us?

Elana: That's a good question. I think one of the things that was quite challenging at first was celebrating myself. We have Fridays, we celebrate things that have happened in the week. And this is kind of probably related to that high achieving big thing sort of way of thinking that actually celebrations can be teeny tiny and still be equally valid. That took me a while to get in the swing of that sort of thinking, but I love celebrating stuff now, it's really important. And I notice when I don't do it, I notice the difference.

Maisie: What do you notice?

Elana: I guess in my way of thinking it becomes more negative, more you haven't done this, or this isn't good, or you still have to do that. And yeah, just kind of it helps you, it helps me, rather, pull my head out, admire and just go, "Look at the pretty flowers."

Maisie: Yes. I celebrate things all the time. I do it with Mars a lot. We have our daily brag to each other about things. And sometimes I reply to that email, or it could be literally anything rather than I've still got all those

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emails I need to reply, or I need to do this because there's always a to-do list that we can choose to beat ourselves up with, but we don't have to, that's optional.

Elana: Yeah. I love how you've just put that, you choose to beat yourself up with it. And I think, I had quite perfectionistic tendencies I think, that was a sense of I see it and I know that it's a kind of really ordered way of doing things, kind of not controlling but everything, well, I was probably fairly rigid actually. They were my ways of coping with the challenges that I was feeling internally. And a lot of that with the ADHD and the ASD I think as well, which a lot of that, I've been able to release that and actually be imperfect.

And that whole concept that you've brought about messy imperfection, I love that. That's just really worked for me where I can relax, that things aren't done in their kind of regimented or kind of rigid systems that I had to do them in the past in order to feel like I was coping.

Maisie: Well, they possibly helped you to cope as well because sometimes that's just, I definitely know there's a massive difference in things like that for me when I'm regulated and have the capacity for things versus when I'm in a stress response and feeling overwhelmed and things like that. That's when I'm like, "No, I have to be the one to do this because then it's done this way and it's not going to add to the situation." Is a lot about being able to collaborate with your own nervous system on things like that.

And for me, I'm like, "You know what, this is a time when I need things to go exactly like this and I'm okay with that." To be okay in all of those places which I think is so much of what you've spoken about today.

Elana: Yeah, that is about just being okay in those spaces and allowing in flexibility and spontaneity. And the past was quite scary because I would want to know what to expect and how to prepare for it and if it was something spontaneous I struggled with that because I couldn't think it through or try and anticipate how it might feel or be. And now I understand

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why I have those needs, but it's also I can play with that a little bit and let go of that kind of sense or need to be able to control that process. And just tiny little things.

So, if I go drop something off at a friend's place and they say, "Do you want to have a cup of tea?" I can say yes. Even though I wasn't anticipating doing that and it might change my schedule for the day, now I'm playing with that sort of expanding my capacity to do spontaneous things by saying, "Okay." And just seeing where it takes me. And that's a small example. Well, actually it's quite a big example for me.

Those are fairly big things but there's been other examples that are more significant where the outcome of doing that has been amazing, so much better than saying, "But I can't because I don't know what's going to happen and I've got to go do this now. And I need to stay on my schedule." And kind of just, yeah, letting go into that flexibility and flow has been quite fun, challenging and unfamiliar but fun and ultimately always for the better and I've really enjoyed that.

Maisie: I love it. What's your word for this year?

Elana: Unshield. Yeah, it's very much about kind of letting go of all these old ways of thinking about who I was and how I am or operate and letting go of all these ways that actually aren't who I really am. They're just thoughts.

Maisie: And how is it going then?

Elana: It's great I think, on the whole. On the whole, no, on the whole it is definitely the appropriate word. I still, as with everything, it's not linear. I have ebbs and flows. Sometimes it's easier than other times.

Maisie: But even that, it's like unshackling yourself from the expectation that it's going to be always an upwards trajectory and a nice clean line and all of that.

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Elana: Yeah. And it's been really interesting when there have been those so-called setbacks, when I feel like I've regressed. I don't need to beat myself up about that.

Maisie: Yeah. I've actually got an episode planned about things like that and it includes, I've regressed, I've gone backwards, all of those things.

Elana: Yeah. And that kind of was a bit of not a problem but something that worried me because I felt, well, I was doing so well and now I'm back to where I was, and my old thought patterns are screaming in my ear again. Shit, it hasn't worked. But then breaking it down a little bit and realising, okay, I've had two nights of really shit sleep, I didn't eat very well, I'm tired, wherever I am in my cycle. All these other sorts of things, I can look at that now and go, "Okay, no wonder I feel this way." That has been such a powerful phrase. No wonder I feel like this.

That has been really, yeah, a proper game changer, being able to look at things leading up to where I am whatever I'm feeling. Whether it's negative or positive and be like, "Okay, no wonder I feel this way." And that level of understanding and compassion just such a game changer.

Maisie: It really is. And just think about the number of people who don't know that their cycle, for instance, is one of the things that can impact that. And how if you're tracking your cycle, and as I said, even if you don't do anything about it, but at least you know that's what's going on and that's what's influencing. I call it the doom, my premenstrual, the doom where it's like I'm suddenly like, "It's all going to fall apart. This just isn't going to work out. What were you thinking?" And I just get the doom about all of it.

Elana: That was me yesterday, I was like, "Fuck this, fuck everything."

Maisie: And sometimes I like to, well, usually I do a mixture of both of these things actually. Sometimes I'm just clocking the places where the doom shows up because it's like it's just revealing things to me. When my hormones are doing something else I'm not necessarily seeing what's

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going on. But at the same time not putting so much weight onto those things. And so, I'll just say, "It's just the doom. You'll be grand tomorrow." And I'll just lie there trying to fall asleep with my bit of premenstrual insomnia. And I'll just hug myself and just stroke my arm.

And just, "Maisie, it's alright. You can have these thoughts that come up, it doesn't mean they're true. And actually, when we look at things, there isn't actually any evidence of these thoughts being true. So, it's just your brain doing its thing just before you start to bleed.

Elana: That's amazing, isn't it, just that whole realisation, it's just a thought, not a fact. That's been massive. For someone who's just been thought based for so long and believed them to be facts, that's such a change.

Maisie: I know, and I love it because once you deprogram and reprogram yourself, you're always going to look at things that way. There's no going back.

Elana: You remind me just there of something that I picked up from one of the coaching sessions and that was that there's plenty of things that you've learned but if you've learned them you can unlearn them. And that, I was like, "God, yeah, I can unlearn these things that I thought I had to deal with or were just the way they were."

Whether that could be something like, coming back to that idea of boundaries, I learned that boundaries didn't exist and now I can learn actually boundaries do exist and they're amazing. It's such a powerful concept and that ability that you can change. You can change your mind about how you want things.

Maisie: In all the ways.

Elana: Yeah. And whatever micro or macro scale you want that to be on. It's really powerful, it really is.

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Maisie: It is. Is there anything else that you want to add before we finish up?

Elana: It's been such a great process that's brought me to this point where kind of I'm now in a position where I'm able to start looking at my behaviours and responses and kind of be completely accountable for them. And no longer look at other people's behaviours or impacts, but actually just look at mine and say, "Right, okay, well, I'm fully responsible for this." I don't think I could have imagined myself doing that when I first joined last year. But through this whole process I've kind of ended up in that place. And it is a really new thing to do.

And it's a sort of almost, I almost get quite a lot of pleasure out of kind of looking at the really dark stuff now in a really perverse sort of way. Yeah, that kind of accompanying enjoyment of being really vulnerable, of being vulnerable and open. So, this is kind of the current, where I'm at currently, just playing with that I think.

Maisie: I know that resonates for me as well. What do you think it is, how are you able to do that?

Elana: I am looking at what happened in the breakdown of my relationship last year and my role in that. And that's hard at first but the more I do it the more I'm like, "Yeah, that's me. I own that." And really letting go of the shame that accompanies it.

Maisie: Yeah, because often, when we think about the breakdown of relationships that we see in the mass media, TV series, soaps, films, all of that, we're either blaming the other person, they're at fault, they did this, who you know.

Elana: They hurt me.

Maisie: Yeah, or it's blaming ourselves and I'm just such a shit person. And if I was able to do this it would have all been alright. And so, it's just very blamey.

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Elana: Yeah, and I fell into that, I went through that myself and I come from quite a blamey family. So, it was kind of a natural tendency of mine, but I noticed that then. I went, "Okay, this isn't going to work and it's not right, it doesn't feel good either." And then that kind of evolved into, right, okay, well, what was my role in this? Without the kind of starting to blame myself, although I did have a tendency towards wanting to do that, I'm shit. I was angry. I was too angry, I was this, I was that. And now I can be at the point where I'm like, "No wonder I felt this way at the time."

With the skills I had, or I didn't have, no wonder I responded that way. It was the only way I knew how. And I know better now and that means I don't have to do that again. I won't have to go through that again. And that's been really powerful because there's still an enormous amount of pain associated with the loss of this person. It's not all plain sailing, far from that but there are things that I can do kind of like you said, stay in your lane, just stay in my lane and focus on my crop and my rule. And unpicking or unpacking why I behaved or responded in the way that I did and understanding why principally.

It's more the why rather than I am a shit person because I did that. It's, I responded because I was feeling x, y, z or felt x, y, z or didn't know x, y, z, whatever. And it's not a copout, it's not an excuse, it's just, yeah, no wonder sort of thing.

Maisie: Yeah, I think it just, it becomes more factual. Sometimes when I'm evaluating things I'm like, yeah, it's just this just didn't happen, or it was because this was needed. And I wasn't able to do that at that time and it just becomes, there's more clarity and less judgement.

Elana: Yeah. And in fact, what really drives this is that, just that need to repair, largely with myself and not go ahead in life thinking there's something wrong with me, which there isn't, but understanding, just having that compassion with myself for where I was at the time and yeah, trying to replicate that slightly with some old family issues but we won't get into that now [crosstalk]. I think that's going to be, yeah, that's definitely a key

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process for me this year is that taking full responsibility and yeah, owning what I do.

Maisie: Yeah, it's a game changer.

Elana: It's really interesting, yeah, scarily fun and addictive.

Maisie: I know exactly what you mean. I know exactly what you mean.

Elana: Yeah. It's bizarre.

Maisie: Yeah. Well, Elana, thank you so much for coming on today. It has been so much fun to get to know you more and hear more about your journey and get a sense of what's on the cards for what's coming up as well. I've been making notes, where we're going to take things next. Yeah, it's been wonderful, thank you so much for coming on.

Elana: Thanks so much for having me, I really appreciate it.

Maisie: Yeah, alright everyone, we'll be back next week with another episode. Have a good one.

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