

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

You're listening to episode 135 and this one is a journey into authenticity, self-expression and how we understand and engage with our evolving identities.

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*.

Okay, folks, whether you're new here or you've been around for a while, maybe from the very beginning, it is great to have you. I really appreciate you listening and sharing the podcast. Thank you for all your reviews and also your updates about how the podcast has impacted you. It's always wonderful to read those. Now, today's conversation is about transformation and growth. There's a lot that we can learn about these topics from nature.

And as you probably know, I love to work with the seasons and use what's going on around me in nature as inspiration for me in my life and also to share with you here on the podcast and to teach inside *The Flow Collective*. So today we are drawing lessons from the humble caterpillar or not so humble, really, because their life cycle really serves as a metaphor for growth and evolution. And I get a fair number of comments and questions about identity and being authentic. I get them on a very regular basis and I'm excited to dive into this.

If you do want more on this topic, then definitely go to episodes 99 and 100, which are about supporting yourself through change and going through identity shifts. I recorded those after going through quite a strong one myself last year and those episodes will be really helpful additions to this one.

There's also a fillable worksheet that accompanies this episode. If you're already on my email list, you'll receive it automatically, if you're not, then just head to the show notes, follow the link to the page on my website for today's episode and just fill in the form and we'll email it to you.

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

I recently did a free webinar called your iconic era, which was just so fantastic to do and someone who attended, I can't remember their name, but they mentioned how helpful they find the worksheets that I create for some of the podcast episodes. So, shout out to whoever it was for inspiring me to create one for this episode.

Okay, earlier on this year, I was having a conversation with a friend about identity, and they mentioned using another word and I wish I could remember what it was, but I can't because for them, identity is something that's fixed. So, they preferred this other word that for them was more changeable, but to me identity is not fixed. So, I was kind of quite intrigued by their comment about it because for me identity is something that evolves, it deepens, broadens and shifts. Or perhaps we have a core identity, but there are these other layers that evolve.

And we can look at the caterpillar in the same way. The caterpillar becomes a butterfly, and it looks completely different. And each form of its life cycle has a very different purpose, but throughout the life cycle it's still the same species. So, the caterpillar is a great example of how you can remain true to your core, your authenticity, whilst still evolving and looking completely different and having shifts in purpose throughout the life cycle. So, I love to look at the caterpillar, the butterfly and whatever the whole life cycle is called because there's continuation and evolution.

So, when a caterpillar first hatches, it is 100% caterpillar. As far as I know, the caterpillar isn't dreaming of being anything else. From what I've researched, it is solely concerned with eating, eating and pooping and avoiding being eaten by predators. It just gets on with it. It doesn't pretend to be a butterfly, but it also doesn't hold itself back from becoming one either.

And in the same way, authenticity is about being honest with who you are in the present. Not yearning for who you might be in the future or confined by who you were in the past. It is expressing yourself in your current form, in your current understanding of the world. So, are you thinking that your current form is ugly, and your future form will be attractive and perfect and

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

superior in some way or all the ways, and I mean that both literally and figuratively?

So, are you putting your current or your past self down and viewing some perfectionist future version of yourself as superior and preferable? So, can you love and accept yourself as you are, or do you need majestic, colourful wings in order to do that? And even if you got them, would you be looking at them and saying, “Well, they're not pink and they're not this shape and they're not like so and so's over there, they've got bigger and prettier”, and blah blah blah. Rather than, holy shit, you guys, I used to be a caterpillar, which was pretty cool, by the way, but then I made this cool home called a chrysalis.

Seriously, how far out is that? But wait till you hear what happened next. I became goo and then I reconfigured myself as a butterfly and look, now I can fly and pollinate. That's the vibe I want you to have about your own evolution. You're not shitting on yourself the whole way through. You're loving on yourself the whole way through. But before the caterpillar goes through any of that, it goes through five moult cycles before it becomes a chrysalis. And yes, we're going to look at what happens because it's fascinating and totally relates to how we evolve too.

I don't mean in terms of human evolution, by the way. I just mean in terms of how your identity evolves. So, in the moulting cycle, the caterpillar sheds its old exoskeleton, and it grows a new one so that it can accommodate its increasing size. And during the early stages of its life, as I mentioned, the caterpillar just eats voraciously, consuming many times its body weight in food. It eats so much that a newer, bigger version of itself pops out. So, this is similar to how we grow from what we consume. And I want you to think about that in terms of experience.

All the experiences you go through are causing you to grow, even the ones that suck, especially the experiences that suck. A good example of this, last night my son and I had a horse-riding lesson together and he is learning to canter, which is one of the gaits that the horse does, walks, trots, canters, gallops. So, he's been trotting for a few months initially with someone

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

alongside him and then a month ago he started just riding on his own and now he's learning to canter.

And last week he did a couple of strides and quite rightly, he was very proud of himself. And then last night he got the pony to canter, but his heels kind of, they just weren't down in the best position and that combined with the surprise of how it feels to canter, because does feel very different to trotting. And so that meant that his weight wasn't balanced and he basically just kind of popped forwards on the horse so that he was sat in front of the saddle.

So, he came up out of the saddle and in front of it onto the pony's neck, and the pony at this point is still cantering. And so, he's trying to get it to halt whilst also trying not to fall off and he didn't fall off. He did so well to stay on. I for sure would have come off. So, he carried on with the lesson and we chatted about it all afterwards because it was a shock. Now, I didn't lead with what I'm about to say. I started off acknowledging what happened, reassuring him, telling him he never has to canter ever again if that's what he decides.

But later on that day after the initial comfort and reassurance and processing, he asked me about when I fell off, which has happened twice now, by the way, in the three months that I've been riding. And I explained to him that even though I didn't want it to happen, and it sucked, and it was a shock, and I was sore afterwards, I learnt so much from falling off. They were big lessons for my body, for my mind. And those experiences have vastly improved my riding and resulted in me not making the same mistakes again.

The second time I came off, the horse actually just chucked me off because they didn't like how I was riding them, which was really fair enough. And that happened because I didn't trust myself in the moment, my sense was that that horse was not ready to canter or together we weren't ready to canter, but my instructor told us, "Canter." And probably on the next corner we would have been ready to, but I overrode myself in my brain, that

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

instinct that we weren't ready because I thought, well, I just need to do what I'm being told.

And I overcompensated it with how I was riding, and the horse just was not having it. And he just literally flipped me over his head. I did this apparently really interesting slow-motion somersault over the top of his head, landed on the ground. I didn't get hurt. I actually wasn't sore, and I wasn't shaken up because this was the second time that I'd kind of come off a horse. And I was just like, "You know what, mate, fair play. I actually love that you were like, "Fuck you, Maisie, you're not riding me like that.""

So, I got back on, we had a lovely lesson, but I learnt massive lessons from that experience, especially with trusting my instinct rather than following instruction. I mean talk about how we're socialised being in yourselves, that you just respond to that instead of your own instinct. And there were other lessons involved as well. And I've really enjoyed riding that horse since then.

So, I was explaining to Nelson, my son, that these experiences can be awful, scary and painful, physically, but there are things going on as a result of them that are beneficial, that are available to us. So, these experiences grow us and just like the caterpillar sometimes as we're accumulating experiences throughout our life, we can outgrow our old selves, our identities, and we need to shed them. And we often make that mean a lot, just it can also mean outgrowing people, situations, places, environments.

And I get a lot of questions about outgrowing friendships and from coaching so many people on it. I know that there are themes around worrying about what someone will think or how they'll feel and being overly responsible for that. So not just being kind and considerate, which is different to being nice, but trying to manage someone else's feelings and responses. So, that's one of the themes. And then there's also what you make it mean, i.e., that you're disloyal or a bad person, for example, or anything in that vein.

And if that resonates with you, then I encourage you to take a leaf out of the caterpillar's book, because to them, it's just inevitable and completely

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

neutral. It doesn't mean anything that they outgrow their form, their life and kind of pop into a new version. I realise that caterpillars don't have human brains and therefore don't need to be concerned with many of the things that you probably are. But can you borrow a bit of caterpillar vibe? So, there's the intensive feeding that they do that leads to rapid growth, causing that exoskeleton to stretch, but caterpillars, it's amazing.

They have nerve cells that detect stretching in their segments, and these nerve cells then release a hormone that initiates the moulting process. So, it is very literally their growth triggers their transformation and this happens to us too. So, we outgrow situations, environments, roles, relationships, interests and your identity. And when you feel that pressure of outgrowing your current circumstances or identity, you are triggered to change and to evolve.

And then this next phase fascinates me, if you couldn't tell all of this really fascinates me. So, while it's still inside its old skin, the caterpillar begins to grow the new exoskeleton underneath, very cool. And then once the new exoskeleton is fully formed, the caterpillar sheds or moults its old tight skin. And this is often a challenging process. It requires the caterpillar to wriggle and contort its body in order to free itself from its old exoskeleton. It's challenging. It isn't a smooth process, and it probably won't be for you.

In fact, shedding an identity will be uncomfortable, it's meant to be. But not only that, after moulting, the caterpillar's new skin is soft and flexible, which allows for further growth because it just starts eating again. And it further expands its body by inhaling air, but until the new exoskeleton hardens, its new skin is soft and vulnerable, and this is part of why it's uncomfortable for us. When we step into the next version of ourselves and when we express our new selves we can feel vulnerable and exposed and tender, that's just part of it.

It's a necessary part of the process because it's how you end up with a sturdy outer layer. You might even feel the need to inflate yourself to take up space in your new form but over time there's a hardening that happens,

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

not too much, not rigid, but we grow into our new identities. We become comfortable with our own transformations.

It's also interesting that before moulting, the caterpillar anchors itself using the silks that it produces. So, it attaches to a leaf or a twig, something in its environment, and there's this moment of grounding, of rooting. And that serves as a really great reminder for us that during periods of growth and transformation, we could do with finding our anchors, our sources of stability and those can be within us, inner resources that we have and also around us.

This is why I love to teach the tools inside *The Flow Collective*, because there's the tools there but there's also our amazing community, because that also facilitates transformation as well as all the coaching and webinars, of course. But it's not a single overnight transformation, the caterpillar doesn't go from tiny larva to a dazzling butterfly in one leap, it goes through five moulting cycles before it gets to that point. And each moult is a rebirth, an evolution, a new version of the caterpillar emerges, one gets left behind. There's this sequence of many deaths along the way.

And I have to emphasise this repetition to you because we can be quick to dismiss it and just want to hurry up and get to the butterfly phase. So, after the caterpillar has grown to its maximum size and gone through its final moulting stage, it forms a chrysalis, I'm sure you've seen them, in its safe spot. It's anchored to a twig or something like that and it sheds its final caterpillar skin, revealing the chrysalis underneath.

Now, growing up, I had this idea that a caterpillar somehow just grows wings. So, when my coach, Robin, told me about what actually happens, it blew my mind, because the transformation that occurs inside the chrysalis is really nothing short of miraculous. So, once it's safe inside the chrysalis, the caterpillar releases enzymes that break down its tissues into a kind of organic soup or goo.

Essentially, most of the caterpillar's body is digested and turned into raw materials. But some clusters of cells that the caterpillar had before it even

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

hatched, remain intact. And each of these discs is destined to become a different part of the adult butterfly or moth. So, it could be wings, legs, eyes, etc. And once the caterpillar's body has been broken down, these discs use the soup of nutrients to fuel rapid cell division, eventually forming the organs and body parts of the butterfly.

In other words, when you are going through this process, you might feel like you're being dismantled, and like every part of you is being broken down but within that goo, that soup is everything that will be used in your next form. And I've gone through this process myself. It doesn't feel great, but it also feels necessary. So, the new butterfly or the moth continues to form and mature within that protective chrysalis, its wings expand and harden, the body continues to transform.

And this is a metaphor for periods in our lives where we need to retreat, to be introspective and to do the inner work. I think it's a beautiful reminder that evolution often requires stillness. And of course, on the surface it seems still, maybe even stagnant or dead. When you look at how a chrysalis just blends in, just like whatever, you could just ignore it, it goes undetected, but inside there's this profound transformation happening. It really is ridiculous what happens, but the cocoon is also a place of uncertainty.

The caterpillar is just surrendering to the process without knowing the outcome, and that's a lot like our own journey of growth, embracing uncertainty, trusting the process. That's crucial, as you shed your old selves and begin to express your new identity.

So, here's what I think about the difference between the evolution in the caterpillar's moulting phase and then the evolution that it goes through in the chrysalis. You can have transformation within a situation. Often I'm coaching my clients on remaining in a job, remaining in a place that they live or a relationship that they're in, but kind of evolving themselves without changing the setup. And having transformation without changing your external circumstances but they do change as a result of the inner work that you do.

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

So that for me is like the moulting stage of the caterpillar's life cycle. But then it gets to the point where maybe some of those things do need to change or you want them to change in order to reflect the level of growth that you've experienced. So maybe you're like, "You know what, I'm going to go for a promotion or get a new job or change the place that I live, either in terms of actually moving or just upgrading and redecorating or something like that."

And then when the metamorphosis within that chrysalis is complete the adult butterfly, of course, begins to move, and it softens the chrysalis. It releases these enzymes that soften it, and then it kind of struggles its way out. This is also really important, it softens. How can you soften in order to evolve? Where would softening help you in this process? That's one of the questions that's going to be on the worksheet, you can get the rest. So, at first its wings are damp, and all crumpled up, but it pumps these fluids into them or through them in order to expand them and then lets them dry and harden before it can fly.

And the number of things that are fascinating about this, but I think this might be my final one, despite the drastic transformation that has occurred, studies have shown that butterflies and moths can retain memories from their caterpillar stage. So those neural connections are preserved through the metamorphosis. I told you what happens, it's ridiculous. So, it's a caterpillar, it's got all its cells. It goes into the chrysalis, it turns into goo, but there's memories retained within the cells. And then it reconfigures itself as a butterfly, and its experiences are within its cells, same for us.

We take those experiences from our previous incarnations and use them in our current form. Even as we change and evolve, we carry our histories, our past selves within us. I don't mean past selves by the way, in terms of past lives, I mean past versions of you in this lifetime. But if you want to look into past life stuff too, feel free to add that in. They form part of our identities as we are embracing new versions of yourself. I don't think caterpillars are capable of thinking this way, but I'm going to pretend that the butterfly is grateful to its previous form.

Ep #135: Transformation and Growth

It's not hating on it and belittling or judging everything that went on in its life as a caterpillar. The other thing that I think is really important here. When we think about support during transformation, because we aren't caterpillars. So as humans, maybe we could do with some guidance, whether that's supportive friends and family, mentors, coaches, teachers, therapists or a supportive community to navigate our own periods of transformation.

And speaking of community, final fact for you, the caterpillar's transformation is not a solitary event. It's connected to this wider ecosystem and similarly, our own transformations are often connected to the world around us as well as the world within us. So, remember, just like the caterpillar, it is okay to outgrow old versions of yourself. It's okay to evolve, to express your new self and to continue becoming. In the end, no matter how much you transform you are always you. Alright, my lovelies, that's it for this week, I'll catch you next time.

Hey, if you love listening to this podcast then come and check out my membership, *The Flow Collective*, where you get my best resources and all the coaching you need to transform your inner and outer life. Sign up to the waitlist at theflowcollective.co/join, and I'll see you in the community.