

Ep #163: Examining The Thoughts You Have About Yourself



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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This is episode 163 and we are returning to a hugely important topic and that is the conversations that you have with yourself, specifically the thoughts that you have about yourself.

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, folks, I have a treat for you today because this episode is about a topic that we all need to return to again and again and again, including myself. Because our human brains have a huge tendency to focus on the negative, which means that we tend to be very critical of ourselves. We focus on our deficiencies, our limitations, our failures and our mistakes rather than focusing on our strengths, our heroic attempts and our achievements.

So we're very prone to criticising ourselves and the inner critic usually has a lot to say and it's also very loud. It likes to dominate the internal landscape of your mind. And of course this has a huge impact on what's going on in your internal world as well as how you show up in the world around you. So we all have our go to put downs, I'm an idiot, I'm so stupid, I'm so disorganised, I'm such a mess, I'll never be successful, nobody likes me, I'm not lovable, I'm too this, I'm not enough of that.

And we are so used to saying these things in our heads and perhaps even exclaiming them out loud at times too, that we end up saying them as if they are 100% true and we just believe them. We say these things as if they are factual and they really aren't. But what happens is we say them as if they're facts and then find all the evidence, what's going on currently in the situation, what's happened in the past, even decades ago, we just accumulate all the evidence that proves that fact to be true.

And when you repeat these statements to yourself you just hear them over and over again and that has an impact. It's incredibly harmful. Imagine criticising someone else out loud as frequently as you criticise yourself in

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your head. What would that relationship be like? It would suck. It wouldn't be respectful. It wouldn't be compassionate.

So today's episode is all about examining the thoughts that you have about yourself and how to go about changing them so that you can turn down the volume on your inner critic and turn up the volume on your inner cheerleader. Because inside you there is an inner cheerleader who has pompoms, and they are ready to unleash themselves and celebrate how awesome you are. And they don't care how uncomfortable you are with that. They're there with their pompoms ready to get going.

Alright folks, enjoy this episode, let me know how it lands and I'll catch you next week.

I'm recording this on day 23 of my cycle which for me means I'm in the autumn season of my cycle, the premenstrual phase. And my autumn has been so good these last few cycles. There was definitely a while where my autumn was challenging in terms of mood. And then I worked on some stuff and it did improve. But then Covid happened and the lockdown started and my sensory issues really took off, they became really pronounced during the lockdowns.

And as you'll have heard on previous episodes this past year has been a time when I have discovered that I'm autistic. And because of that experience and processing that diagnosis, and the unmasking process that often follows a neurodiverse diagnosis of some kind I would really notice my autistic traits most in my autumn which is when I'm most prone to dysregulation. And I've spoken about this on previous episodes.

And there was definitely several months in a row where I was losing the ability to speak because I was so dysregulated. But since then I've been working for the last six months or so in a really focused way on improving my autumn and improving my ability to regulate myself. So I've been making some adjustments and it's so much better now. A few cycles back, that's when I first really noticed a difference.

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And we were talking about this in The Flow Collective this week about how when we do get an improvement of some kind it can come as a bit of a shock. Because I think deep down inside we're not really believing things are ever going to get better. And then when it does and our efforts are paying off the response is often to doubt it and just think what the fuck's going on? Why am I feeling so good, is this really happening?

Even when you know you've been working at improving something and taking steps, taking that massive action that I've spoken about before. When it actually happens it's just like what's going on? But then you have another cycle where it's also okay or even better. And you start to think well maybe this isn't a fluke after all. And then on the third cycle you really start to trust the results. And I've given a timeline of three cycles because that's what I tend to see happening. But of course it can be more or it can be less.

So that's where I'm at right now. That's what's going on for me. I'm on day 23 and I'm kind of checking out what's going on because I'm able to have conversations. I do have some sensory stuff going on but I'm really able to care for myself and regulate myself. So it's not the big deal that it has been historically.

And I'm also not dependent on the being alone because for a long time that was my go to and it was needed, and it was important for me to be able to name that need and ask for that, and make requests of others in order to enable myself to do that. But now I don't have to rely on that. So I might choose time alone, it's not an emergency strategy like it has been in the past. So I just wanted to share that with you because I know lots of you struggle with this as well whether you're autistic or not. Autumn can be challenging and I just want you to know that things can get better.

Now, last week's episode was all about other people's thoughts about you and today we're sticking with that theme. But I'm turning it inward and focusing on your thoughts about you because no matter what anyone else says or thinks about you, you think about you the most. Truth be told, other

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people rarely think about you. They're far more concerned with themselves than anything to do with you. And it's very easy to forget that.

And you always hear the thoughts that you have about yourself. There's no getting away from them so it's worth paying attention to the thoughts that you have about yourself. And it's estimated that your brain has 6,200 thoughts a day. So it's not humanly possible to control all of them, that's never the aim. But we can bring awareness to the loudest ones, the ones that are there on repeat and probably have been for years and the most negative ones. And that starts with noticing the way that you talk about yourself.

And a great way to do this, so this is tip number one is to pay attention to the sentences in your head that begin with I'm so, something or other, or I always do something. I never do something else. They're usually very dramatic statements. And another way to bring awareness is to just be aware of when you are feeling down, or sad, or depressed, or you're feeling shame, embarrassment, anything like that, and pay attention to the thoughts you're having about yourself.

So you might be telling yourself things along the line of, I'm useless, I'm stupid, I'm pathetic, I'm lovable, in capable. All these sentences can actually appear as you're so useless, you're so stupid. So there might be an I, or there might be a you're in front of it. But that's the gist of the kind of sentences that we're on the lookout for. See how general they are. And these thoughts might be more common at certain times in your cycle. So do see if there are any patterns on that front.

But you want to be on the lookout for these thoughts because they are the reason you're feeling like crap. Because if you were thinking positively about yourself or even just more neutral thoughts about yourself, we don't have to go everything being amazing. But just some more neutral thoughts about yourself then you wouldn't be feeling incapable would you? No. You'd be feeling the opposite perhaps, capable, or resourceful, or something along those lines.

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And as you're finding these thoughts I really recommend writing them down somewhere because it's going to be so helpful just to get them out of your brain and onto paper. That way you can start to separate yourself from your thoughts and see them for what they are. Because when they're just rattling around your brain they're believable and they seem very factual as well. But when you see it on paper you can get some distance.

In fact if you're not driving, or exercising, or wrangling kids as you listen to this and as long as it's safe for you to do so, why don't you go ahead and grab a pen and some paper or open up the notes function on your phone. Hit pause if you need to, to do that, because you're going to get so much value out of listening to this episode but you'll get 10 times the impact of listening if you actually go through this exercise as you listen. So hit pause and get something to write with.

Okay, welcome back. Write down one of the thoughts you often have about yourself. And I don't want you to worry about picking the right one, it doesn't matter which one you pick. I know there are some perfectionists listening. It doesn't matter. I get it, but just pick one thought. So now you've got a thought to use. I want you to get to work on proving that thought wrong because what usually happens when we think a crappy thought is that our brains find evidence to prove that thought true.

For example, if you're thinking I'm a failure, that's just a thought. It's a sentence in your head. But if you don't see it as that you'll just go ahead and believe it to be true. Most of the time you'll just accept it as a fact and your brain will come up with a long list of all the times you have failed. And by the way, failing at something isn't a problem. I did a whole episode about failure, and while failing is good, but failing at something doesn't mean that you are a failure. There's a difference.

When your brain looks at evidence like this it likes to go way, way back into the depths of your past, all the way back to your childhood, for me getting something wrong or thinking I'm a failure takes me back to a time when I made one mistake on a reading test in infant school, that I would have got a perfect score had I not made this one mistake. And it just felt so

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unbearable. By the way the word was 'tongue'. I think I said tong you. I was kicking myself. I still kick myself over it but I also get to laugh about it now.

So any time I fail at something that's where my brain likes to go. And I just have fun with that now. Here we are, back in 1986 or whenever it was. It's just not a problem for me anymore. This is just standard for my brain, that's where it likes to go. I don't get invested in it. I just watch where it goes. It's a bit like watching a kid go for a biscuit jar when they think no one is watching them. And then they turn around and realise they have been caught. That's the kind of energy I'm talking about here. That's what I like to do with my brain, I see what you're up to and we're not going there.

So thinking I'm a failure and finding all the evidence for that is going to make you feel pretty crappy about yourself. You might feel dejected, or incompetent, maybe even doomed. And because of how you're thinking and feeling, you'll then act like a failure, that's how you will show up. You probably won't even show up. You probably just don't even bother doing certain things because what's the point if you're doomed to fail.

So you don't go on that date, you don't go for that job or promotion. And then that just proves that you are a failure. You just create more evidence of how you're a failure because if you weren't a failure you would do those things. So can you see how this plays out? But I want you to do the opposite. So you're going to write down all the proof you can find of how that thought isn't true. And your brain's going to resist doing this. That's okay. It's just your brain being a human brain. I'll explain why it does this in a moment.

So let's use the example we just went through of I'm a failure. What you're going to do is mine your brain for all the examples you can find of you not being a failure. And when you do this, it's important that you don't discriminate against the examples you come up with. They all count. They can be simple, basic, straightforward. We just want to come up with a body of evidence for how you're not a failure. You just want to get your brain out of that pattern. And I did this earlier for myself so that I could share some examples with you.

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So here's what I came up with and you're going to see how straightforward these ones are, wouldn't be winning awards for these things. I got up out of bed. Do you see what I mean about not discriminating or worrying about what counts, just use everything. You just want to get your brain on a roll because the more it gets used to this the more it will find more substantial things. But you don't even need them. Okay, so I got up out of bed, I made breakfast for everyone. I replied to Beck, my assistant about something. I left the house on time. I came up with the idea for this episode.

I wrote the notes for the episode in the time I had allotted. And I found a hotel to stay in and booked it because I'm speaking at Bath Festival on the 21st of this month. So I booked somewhere to stay. So that's seven things so far. And really take note how there's nothing particularly special on that list. But I have to say just from reading it out and coming up with those things, I feel like a bit of a boss. Just as I'm reading them to you and boss isn't an emotion.

But as I read that list I can feel my body becoming more upright. My chest feels expansive. I feel centred in myself. I feel capable. And because I feel centred and capable that will carry through into how I show up for the rest of the day. And I will just go on to create evidence of how I get things done which is very different to if I was feeling like a failure. And that's only looking at today.

If I wanted to I'm sure I could find more examples from today and of course I can go into my past too. I can look at yesterday. I can look at 10 years ago and find lots of examples of how I haven't failed. Even my previous marriages which you could say were failures. I could think about how I didn't fail even though the marriage failed, 100% I could do that. But as I said, your brain is going to want to resist doing this because it's more familiar with the crappy thoughts you've been thinking about yourself for decades, they're its go to place.

Even those thoughts suck and feel like shit, and they are not serving you at all, they're what's familiar to you and comfortable. I have this tendency when I lie down that I put my left ankle over my right ankle, I just kind of

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cross my legs. It's very familiar to me. I've been doing it for years. And it's comfortable but it causes me problems, it makes my pelvis go skew-whiff, that's the official technical terminology. And it gives me sciatica. So although it's my go to position and it's familiar it's not good for me, the same with your thoughts.

Another visual which might help you here is to think about walking through some woods. Most woods have footpaths that have been worn away over the years. And even when you go off the beaten track there are usually ones that are subtle but very much there. And what most folks do is automatically follow that path. It's subconscious and it's just the brain's way of preserving energy because it takes less energy to walk somewhere where others have walked. You don't have to make any decisions, you just follow the path.

And you conserve energy in other ways because it takes less effort when other people have trampled down the undergrowth. If you were to pause for a moment and go, "Is this the path we want to go down or do we want to walk that way instead?" That would take some effort and require energy, the same with your thoughts. Your brain will go down the well trodden route because it's easier and familiar, even if it feels like crap. So we have to put in some conscious effort to change things and the way to do this is by proving your thoughts wrong and thinking more useful ones.

To recap, here's what you want to do. Find a crappy thought you have about yourself. Then find all the evidence you can of how that thought is not true. Literally as many examples as you can find from your day or in the past. Some of them are going to sound a bit ridiculous and maybe a bit simple but it doesn't matter, don't judge them, just use them. And what you're going to do in that process is show your brain that you are capable, that you are resourceful, that you are lovable and that you are fantastic.

And then you're going to take that energy into your day and see the difference in how you show up because it's going to be pronounced.

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