

Ep #171: Jumping to Conclusions



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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This is episode 171, Jumping to Conclusions. And I'm coming to you straight from my car.

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*.

Alright folks, usually I record the podcast in my studio where I work, but today I'm joining you from my car. We are in Scotland visiting some friends and family. Right now we are in a town called Girvan. It's a seaside town on the west coast of Scotland and it is where my dad's from. So he's up here at the same time because he doesn't live here. We've seen my Auntie Ena and a couple of my cousins. It's been really great. And before this, we were in the south of Scotland visiting some friends of ours near Biggar.

And today we are going to be driving another four and a half hours up north. So we're going to end up east of Inverness, visiting some other friends and apparently it is snowing up there today. Anyway, I had planned on recording this before we left Margate, but that didn't happen, life happened instead.

So now I'm recording in the car away from my family because this is where it's quiet. And I did actually bring my podcast mic with me so that I could record in the usual way that I do, but I managed to leave the wire behind. So I'm using the headphones from my phone. So just so that you know, if you want to record a podcast, you can literally record an amazing podcast in a car on your phone with bog standard headphones.

Okay, let's get into it. So recently I have been thinking a lot about jumping to conclusions. It's something that we all do in some form or another. We all do it pretty much every day. So just I want to underscore it's a common habit and a very normal human thing to do. We're constantly making mini decisions and all these little judgements. Think about the number of times in a day when you need to assess something and make a judgement or a decision.

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And this habit of jumping to conclusions isn't just about big life altering decisions that you face. It's about all the tiny, seemingly inconsequential choices that we all make every day. And that can be from interpreting a glance from a colleague or deciding why a friend hasn't texted back yet. Our brains are on autopilot, filling in the blanks with our own narratives. That's what it's all about. Your brain is just filling in the blanks with its own storyline, often quite dramatic. And these narratives aren't always the most accurate or helpful.

The thing is our brains are wired for efficiency over accuracy. They love a good shortcut. It's just like, why take the scenic route when you can use the motorway. But here's the catch. Sometimes that motorway is actually a bridge to fantasyland. And we just find ourselves reacting to stories we've concocted based on a patchwork of assumptions and half-truths. And it's not just about the minor understandings or the oops moments.

This tendency of jumping to conclusions can lead to real stress, it can strain your relationships, cause anxiety, close us off to new perspectives and opportunities as well. So it's just like walking around the world with blinders on, convinced you're seeing the whole picture when you're only catching a glimpse of it.

So think about how many times you have spun a whole narrative in your mind based on a text message that was shorter than usual or shorter than you wanted it to be. Or a look that someone gave you across a room. Or the tone that you put into someone's email, that maybe wasn't even there. What if you just read it in a completely neutral way without any tone added to it? Or it could be that someone's been really transparent with you about something in their life. So they've given you a lot of information to go on, but you've added your own dramatic storyline going on in the background.

Because our minds are incredible storytellers, but sometimes they're a little too good at their job and that can lead us down paths of worry, resentment or defensiveness. That's a big one, too. And none of these things were necessary in the first place. And of course, this is just what we do to try and keep ourselves safe. And I do, like others, jump to some conclusions.

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There are occasions where I make assumptions, but for the most part, my assessment of myself is, I'm pretty good at not getting carried away.

So I'm going to share the process I use so that you can use it too, because I want you to be able to catch yourself in the act of jumping to conclusions and understand why you do it. And most importantly, learn a strategy to slow down your thought processes and your reactions so that you can respond with clarity and less drama. Because life is complicated enough without adding extra layers of misunderstanding and misinterpretation to the mix.

This is all you need to do. Ask yourself, am I in assumption ville or am I in facts ville? Assumption ville is a place we've all visited. It's that mental space where we're filling in the blanks without all the facts, usually defaulting to our biases and our fears. It's where those dramatic stories are built on a shaky foundation of maybes and what ifs.

And just leads you down a rabbit hole of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. They said they're going to do A and B, so that must mean they're going to do C and D as well and especially if you're concerned about C and D happening, whatever those things are. Well, they said this. They asked that question, which must mean, insert whatever storyline your brain happens to come up with.

And that journey to assumption ville usually starts with a situation, a trigger of some kind, something as simple as an unread message or an offhand comment or a look or one word in an email. From there, your beautiful brain, in all its wisdom and its quest for efficiency, leaps to conclusions. Well, they're ignoring me because they're upset with me, or they think I'm not capable. Those are the kind of classic assumption ville narratives that we come up with.

And these assumptions are often rooted in your insecurities and past experiences. And they just colour your perception of the present and they might be relevant. I'm not saying that they're not. Your concerns might be relevant and useful to you. But there's a way to interact with those concerns

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in a way that serves you. And there's a way to do it where it just fuels your fears and becomes un-useful.

So living in assumption ville will feel like an endless loop of stress and anxiety. Not because you're reacting to what's happening in your life, but because of the stories you've created about what's happening or what isn't happening. So this is where a significant amount of stress and anxiety comes from. And it's a vicious cycle because fear and worries can cause you to jump to more conclusions. The fear of something happening, worry about what someone will think or do. And then the fear and anxiety that come from those thoughts will fuel jumping to conclusions even more because you're on threat mode.

Whereas if we take a journey over into facts ville, that's where things are grounded in reality. It's where things are taken at face value, judgements are reserved until all the facts are in. And in facts ville, we acknowledge the gaps in our knowledge and might seek to fill them with information instead of speculation. So we just notice that there is a gap and rather than trying to fill it with our stories, actually seek out some facts instead. And of course, this isn't black and white. Our lives are constant navigation between assumption ville and facts ville.

The key is recognising when you've crossed over into the realm of assumption and gently guiding yourself back to what you know to be true. And by the way, this isn't about always being perfectly objective about everything and never having opinions or concerns. It's just about reducing the mental drama you are creating as a result of jumping to conclusions. Because whilst it's a common habit, it's also one that can cause a lot of unnecessary stress, a lot of misunderstandings, embarrassment, anger and conflict.

Your brain fills in the gaps, often with the worst possible scenarios, by the way. Adding that dramatic storyline to the facts that you do have, causing internal anxieties and impacting your personal and professional relationships. So if you've ever found yourself halfway through a heated

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argument, only to realise that you started it in your head because you leapt to a conclusion, then you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Or maybe you've convinced yourself of someone's opinion without a shred of evidence. And then years down the line, had a conversation with the other person or someone who knows them, and they've pointed out to you that you were incorrect in your assumptions. Or maybe they just shared something with you, and you realised, I leapt to the wrong conclusion there. So this process starts with awareness.

By becoming aware of our tendency to jump to conclusions, we can start to catch ourselves in the act, or perhaps later on, further down the line, realise, that's what I did there. Because the road to facts ville requires mindfulness and a willingness to question your initial reactions. Now, I am going to warn you, your brain will really want to convince you that you are, in facts ville. It will tell you that it's a fact that the other person is being rude, but that's a thought. It will come up with all sorts of evidence to support your conclusion, but I want you to be as objective as you can. And I've got five questions you can ask yourself to help you do that.

The first is, what do I actually know to be true? The second question, what facts do I have? And really think about facts. And I like to think about, if another person is involved in this dramatic storyline you're coming up with and they're on the receiving end of your internal assumptions about them. The facts are things that they would agree with. That is the telltale way to know if you have come up with a fact or it's a thought. So, so far we've got, what do I actually know to be true? What facts do I have?

Number three, what assumptions have I made? Four, what could I be wrong about? Just imagine, I'm not saying that you are wrong, but what could you be wrong about? Let your brain go there. Just get curious. And five, how can I find out more? Because when we're in facts ville we communicate. Instead of assuming someone's feelings or intentions or opinions, we ask questions. "Hey, if you've done that, does that mean you're going to be doing this thing as well?" Or "You asked me that question and I was curious about why."

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We're just getting information. There's no judgement there. Just like, I'd like to know a bit more about this instead of just going straight to the worst-case scenario, I'll actually find out some more information. But if you do this enough, you won't need to ask these clarifying questions as much. You are just going to be able to let people be themselves because the things that they say and do will end up being far less loaded to you simply because you are doing this exercise. Do you see how powerful this is?

Because when you're consciously choosing to visit facts ville more often than you currently are, you will reduce a lot of unnecessary stress and drama in your life, I guarantee it. And if you wonder how I have hardly any drama in my life. This is how, this is it, is by limiting assumptions and misconceptions that create the drama in the first place. And by the way, this habit of making snap judgements isn't limited to our perceptions of external events and other people because it also deeply affects how we view ourselves.

So just as we jump to conclusions about the world around us, we often leap to judgements about our own character, our capabilities and our worth, all based on seriously questionable, fragmented pieces of evidence. The way you jump to conclusions about yourself, shapes your self-image, it influences your decisions and impacts your emotional wellbeing.

So how you frame and piece together bits of feedback, experiences you've had, your interpretation of those experiences, your failures, your successes. They can all result in you making sweeping conclusions about who you are and what's possible for you, what you're capable of. Recently I've heard a lot of people make statements about themselves where they are, in my opinion, leaping to conclusions about themselves based on really flimsy evidence. And there's danger in the rigidity of these self-conclusions.

I can see how these statements that people have made about themselves are really limiting them and holding them back. Oh, no, I couldn't do that. Oh, no, I'm not someone who can do. That's the actual words they're using. So when you label yourself as inherently flawed or limited in some way, you

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really do close off avenues for yourself, opportunities, growth, exploration. And you become trapped in a self-fulfilling prophecy where your beliefs about yourself limit your potential to change and evolve and enjoy life.

So question your conclusions. Just as you can challenge your assumptions about others, you can also question the narratives that you've constructed about yourself. Is there any evidence that contradicts your self-judgement? I bet there is. So this is all about slowing down your thought processes and seeking clarity instead of reacting because that space between observation and conclusion is where your power lies.

So start with awareness. Recognise when you're somehow on the motorway to assumption ville and just take a breath, just step back, question things. That's all you need to do. This is really about awareness, asking some questions and coming at things from a different perspective. And remember, this includes all the ways that you jump to conclusions about yourself too.

Okay folks, talking of motorways, it's time for me to hit the road and head up north. Nelson is very excited about the possibility of seeing snow. And I'm looking forward to hanging out with my friends. So I will be back next week, probably with another car episode. I hope you've enjoyed it. It's actually been really fun for me to do it like this. Alright, I will catch you next time.

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