

Ep #232: When Self-Improvement Becomes Self-Rejection



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Maisie Hill

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What if your quest for self-improvement is actually a form of self-rejection? In today's episode, I'm pulling back the curtain on how perfectionism, shame, and hustle culture sneak into your personal growth and what to do instead. This is episode 232. Let's do this.

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. Today, I want to talk to you about the trap that so many smart, thoughtful, self-aware, growth-oriented people fall into, especially those of us who've been socialised as female. It's the moment when self-improvement stops being helpful and starts becoming a sneaky form of self-attack and self-rejection. I'm going to cover how it happens, why it's so seductive, what it costs you, and what to do instead. This one's going to be confronting in parts, but if you've ever judged yourself for not doing enough or caught yourself chasing some better version of you that never, ever arrives, then you need to hear this.

And if you're listening as this episode drops, the doors to my membership, Powerful, are open right now. This episode is the perfect lead into our summer workshop that's happening this Saturday, June 21st. It's called Rewire Your Inner Voice, and it's the first in our summer series. It's going to be a good one.

And if you join today, you'll be able to attend the workshop live or catch the replay, and you'll start implementing what I teach straight away. And you'll also be able to get coached on anything that comes up for you. We'll help you to explore it, unpack it, go deeper, and make changes. So if you want to rewire your inner voice and radically change your relationship with yourself so that you can change everything else in your life, then this is your moment. The doors close at midnight this Saturday, 21st, and this is your last chance to join this round.

[The Maisie Hill Experience](#) with Maisie Hill

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You'll also get access to my experiment with green bottle pricing, which is where you get to choose the amount that you pay based on what your financial situation is. And if you go for the annual option, you can get two months free and save up to £300. So head to maisiehill.com/powerful to sign up.

Now, in preparation for the workshop on Saturday, I wanted to use this episode to introduce one part of the inner critic conversation, enough to give you all a strong foundation to work from, whether you're a member or not. So I want to talk about the subtle ways that growth and self-improvement can become a weapon, how you can tell the difference between true self-leadership and shame that's in disguise, and what to do when your goals are quietly but certainly built on self-rejection. Because inside the membership, we're about to set our goals for the summer or winter for those of you who are in the southern hemisphere. And I don't want any of you making this mistake.

Because this is one of those subtle things that I pick up on a fair amount of the time. So I thought it was high time that I spoke about it on the podcast. Especially because most of you listening are into growth. You've read the books, you've listened to the podcast, including this one. Maybe you've even coached yourself, or you've been coached. And that's a beautiful thing until it's not.

Self-improvement can easily become a socially acceptable form of self-flagellation, and it becomes self-attack when you do things like mistake productivity for self-worth, or you chase routines or results that are rooted in not being you, right? Because you're chasing a version of yourself that exists in your imagination, because you don't love who you are now. And then in that process, you can confuse discipline with self-abandonment.

So it's what I call weaponised self-awareness, where you start using every bit of knowledge you've collected over the years about mindset, your habits, your attachment style, your menstrual cycle, your nervous system,

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your love language, all of those things, but you somehow use those bits of knowledge as evidence that you're still not doing enough.

And again, none of the things I've mentioned are inherently bad or useless, but it's how you use that information that matters, because when your inner critic gets hold of that information, you can end up using it all against yourself. It's like handing your inner critic a megaphone and just being like, have at it. And even if the words sound smart and helpful, the energy that's behind them isn't. So that isn't growth. It's perfectionism and self-criticism dressed up as some kind of personal development.

And we're used to thinking about the inner critic showing up with very obvious insults like you're lazy, or you're too much, or you're not cut out for this, you're not smart enough. But other times, it can borrow the voice of your favourite wellness person or life coach, and it will tell you that if you just meditated more, if you journaled more, if you walked more, or ate less sugar, or remembered to take your supplements and stop doomscrolling, then you'd finally feel okay. And it does a very good job of pretending to be the part of you that wants the best for you. But really, it's terrified and it's trying to outrun shame.

And please listen to me when I say there's nothing wrong with improving your life. I'm all for conscious change and improving your health and your life. I literally teach this stuff. But when your efforts to grow or to make these changes are fueled by fear, shame, or a belief that you're not okay as you are, then that's like a subtle form of self-attack. And it's the kind of thing that's often rewarded and praised, but it completely disconnects you from yourself.

So let's talk about the psychology that's behind this. Many of us were raised to be responsible, to be nice, and be emotionally low-maintenance. We were praised for achieving and for being good girls. I cannot stand that phrase, but that's exactly what was expected of us.

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So it makes perfect sense that your body now scans for signs of failure and treats them like emergencies, like there's something wrong that needs to be fixed. And then self-improvement becomes the coping mechanism because it feels better than spiralling. Right? Doing something feels proactive, especially when it's under the guise of being something that's like healthy or self-aware. But it still keeps you in the same loop. You're not good enough yet, so let's try harder.

This is how you end up with a self-help shelf that's absolutely massive, but you still talk to yourself like crap. And it's how you can end up cycling through endless forms of routines like bullet journals and new planners, sugar-free diets, morning cold plunges, but never feel closer to liking and loving who you are. Because underneath all of it is a belief that you're the problem to be solved, and if you do enough self-improvement, that will make you acceptable, and maybe then you'll be lovable.

So let's talk about what you can do instead, because you can learn to recognise the tone behind your desire to do those things. That's what matters. So it's things like, are you doing this to add structure that supports you, or is it to try and control your life or control yourself? Are you making changes because you are being caring about yourself? Or because you're judging yourself and trying to correct yourself? Are you working on making intentional choices and strategic decisions? Or are you trying to escape the part of yourself that you don't like?

We live in a culture that rewards urgency and pressure and hustle, where there's this weird binary in which the grind is glorified, and then slowness is framed as laziness or just not as good as. And then your productivity becomes your value, and your worth is measured in output or thinness and various forms of visible achievement. That's just the air that we are all breathing. It's internalised capitalism, mixed with white supremacy and ableism and patriarchal conditioning. So, of course, you end up thinking that constant self-improvement is a way for you to stay safe. That's how you earn belonging.

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And there's also plenty of folks living in a low-grade state of fight or flight mode, where you're not running for your life, but your body is stuck in do something, fix it, go faster mode. And in that place, shame-fueled action can feel really productive and even energising. It can feel like you're addressing the issue. That's why so many of your perfectionistic habits feel like they're helping when they're actually just revving your nervous system up even further. They're making the issue even deeper.

It reminds me of when I used to work as a practitioner. I used to have these kinds of conversations with clients all the time. And a lot of my clients were very aware, very educated about health-related matters, very willing to take responsibility for their health, really dedicated in addressing the issues that they had come to me with. And so as we were discussing things that could help them, we'd inevitably get onto the topic of nutrition. And sometimes they'd come in wanting to overhaul everything all at once, which is not really my style. I don't find that works in the long run. I could teach a whole course on how to do this. Anyway, stay focused, Maisie.

So people would come in wanting to just overhaul everything all at once. They'd have ideas about cutting out sugar, cutting out dairy, gluten, joy, you know the drill. And there are times when doing those things is appropriate and useful, but most of my clients were actually not eating enough. And part of my job was to help them to get adequate nutrition and have a good relationship with food and have a compassionate relationship with themselves, especially because in Chinese medicine, it's not just what you eat that matters. Your approach to food and how you eat also comes into it. And when there are things like rigidity and tightness and worry involved, they will negatively impact the issues that someone has actually come to me to treat. So it's a really important conversation.

And as they were telling me about their diet and what they were wanting to achieve with it and how they thought they would be able to do that, I would be listening. And they'd usually be expecting me to give them a long list of foods to avoid. And I'd then just suggest that they eat some cake.

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And this wasn't what they were expecting, so they'd be surprised, but they'd often also be resistant, especially if there was a hope that being good enough with food in a restrictive way would fix their health and their sense of self, because typically, they would also be experiencing significant stress and trying to get things right all day long at work because they feared making mistakes and what would happen if they did make a mistake.

And then so the strictness around food was often an attempt to feel in control. And asking them to eat the cake was my way of interrupting that pattern. And I wanted to see how they'd respond to something that challenged the idea that rigidity and less food was improvement.

And occasionally, someone would really panic a bit just at the idea of not following a long list of things that they should exclude, and instead eating cake, because cake represented everything that they were trying to control. But of course, it was never about the cake. It was about asking. Often, they'd panic a bit at the idea of not following a long list of things that they should exclude. I was far more likely to give them a long list of things that I recommend that they would eat, including eating cake.

And the issue is that the cake represented everything they were trying to control in their lives. So it was really me inviting them into a place where they can consider, can you make choices from self-respect rather than self-rejection?

This is why, in coaching, no matter what someone tells me they're going to do, and it literally doesn't matter what they tell me they're going to do, it could be anything, I always like to ask why. And it's never a judgment on the thing that they're suggesting that they could do. It's just so that I can get a sense of where this plan is coming from. What is the thought behind the plan? Because even if it sounds great on paper, I want to know, is the goal or the plan helping to support a compassionate relationship with themselves, or is it just feeding their inner critic?

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Because I want to help you question the story that you need to be better by doing more or cutting things out. It's totally different when you make strategic choices when you already love who you are now and you feel sufficient inside yourself, when you're not chasing a perfectionist ideal. If the goals you set come from shame, they will always ask you to abandon yourself because that not-good-enoughness is driving the bus. And then your brain works to prove what you believe about yourself. So if you believe that you're behind or you're not smart enough or you're lazy, then you'll create action plans to fix the version of you that you think is the problem.

And that's why nothing inside changes. Because even if something works in some form, like let's say a particular type of diet improves your blood sugar, if the intention behind it is some form of self-rejection, then even though you've improved your blood sugar, you've at the same time strengthened your inner critic. And it got fed, and it's going to come back even hungrier. And it's not that it has to be one or the other.

There's a way to, for example, follow a diet that improves your blood sugar whilst loving who you are. So it's not about eating loads of foods that are going to worsen your blood sugar for the sake of being able to have a loving relationship with yourself. There's a whole area in between those two extremes, and that's the area that I like to play in.

And inside Powerful, we coach you on all of these things. Like how to talk to yourself with compassion and with self-respect. Not just when life is good and it's easy to think those thoughts. I'm talking about when you're in the messy middle and life is hard. How do you talk to yourself on those days? We coach you on how to make strategic choices in your personal and professional life, choices that are rooted in appreciating and respecting who you are instead of making you the problem and trying to escape yourself. And how to make decisions that you trust instead of obsessing over getting it right and avoiding failure.

But most importantly, we help you to reconnect with yourself, not like you're some project that needs improving. You're not like a doer-upper project.

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You're a person. So we do all of this inside a space that's intelligent, it's warm, and it's very real. There's no like sticker charts or surface-level affirmations or acting as if your life should be perfect by now. It is far from that. It's real coaching, a thoughtful, inspiring, supportive community, and tools that actually help you to think clearly, speak powerfully, and live more like you.

So if what I've said today resonated with you, and you're realising that your version of self-improvement might be running on some fear or shame or self-rejection, I want you to know there's another way because there is. And I would love to help you. Powerful is open now for the first time in 18 months. Been a whole year and a half. And you can take advantage of my price experiment. So for this cohort, I've introduced a pricing model that means you can pick the amount that matches your financial reality.

I really, really want this to work, but there's no guarantee that it will be this way next time in terms of the pricing. And I say this because anytime I make a change, it takes some people by surprise. So I just want to be transparent with you that it won't necessarily always be this way. I hope it is, but it has to make sense for the business. So I'm going to be evaluating that in the coming months.

You can join us for six months, or you can go all in for a year and save up to £300. You can get started with my course, The Inner Odyssey, and you'll also join in time for our summer workshop, Rewire Your Inner Voice, where you'll transform your inner critic into something that's far wiser, kinder, and more effective. Because wanting more for yourself shouldn't come from punishment. It should come from knowing you're already worthy just as you are and choosing to live from that place.

So head to maisiehill.com/powerful or click the link in the show notes to join us. We're closing the doors on Saturday, 21st of June at midnight. And a big PS, eat the cake. Send me a picture of the one that you had. I had some delicious coffee and walnut cake recently. That's my current favourite. All right, folks, I'll be back next week. Catch you then.

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Hey, if you love listening to this podcast then come and check out my membership, Powerful, 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 maisiehill.com/powerful, and I'll see you in the community.