

Ep #246: Discernment and Trusting Your Inner Knowing



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With Your Host

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This is episode 246, and today I'm talking about discernment, about trusting what you know, and honouring the sense that you already have in your body, even when you can't explain it or quantify it or get someone else to validate it. Let's get into it.

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've just got back from eight days of training in Arizona, where I've been doing some additional training in Equine Facilitated training. This is a bit of a journey I've been on over the last couple of years, and it was an amazing trip.

But the journey home was slightly tricky. There was lots of lightning in Arizona, in Tucson, and then also in Phoenix, which meant I missed my flight from Phoenix, my second flight. And so I ended up travelling overnight to Philadelphia. I had a 12-hour layover in Philadelphia and got back to London, I don't even know how many hours after I originally left.

So I am, I'm a bit out of sorts, but I have prepped this episode, and I really want to record it so that you have it, because this is just a topic that felt really alive in me whilst I was away. Because this idea of discernment really matters. So many of my clients that I speak to or I'm coaching them, where the topic of self-trust comes up, being able to trust yourself. And discernment is a part of the conversation that I haven't covered yet on the podcast.

So I want to start off by saying that most of us who've been socialised as female, we haven't been encouraged to trust the things that we sense. In actual fact, we've been trained out of it. So think about being a girl in school, and a boy pulls your hair or says something that's quite mean. And instead of backing you up, the adults around you say things like, "Oh, he just likes you."

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So your instincts and your internal response is telling you one thing that this doesn't feel good, it doesn't feel safe, you don't like it. But then you're told to override that and to, in fact, reinterpret that as attention, even affection. Or when we think about how often we sense something and there's a variety of ways that information becomes available to us, but we just we pick up on something. But then we're told, well, you're imagining it, don't make a fuss, don't be dramatic. So we learn that what we sense isn't reliable or trustworthy.

So gradually, we just learn to stay quiet and let it go, except we really don't let it go because inside we know that this matters. And if you've ever been blamed for someone else's behaviour, told that it was because of what you're wearing, how you looked, how you responded or behaved in a situation, which I imagine is all of you by the way, then this isn't news to you. You know how deep this conditioning goes. And that's how this gets embedded within us.

So your body says no to something, and then your peers, your caregivers, and authority figures tell you that you're wrong. And over time, you learn to doubt yourself and to just second-guess or defer to others' opinions of things. And the very skills that should keep you safe, they're there to keep you safe, that discernment, that intuition, sensing things, those great skills and abilities get labelled as paranoia, hysteria, and overreaction.

Now, when was the last time you heard a boy or a man being told that? I don't think I've ever heard someone say that to a man. And what happens when you grow up being told that you can't trust your sense of things, you then start outsourcing it. You start deferring to men and those authority figures and learn to abandon your own knowing in order to fit in or be liked and to stay safe.

And this isn't a personal failing, please understand that. This is systemic. It's how patriarchy maintains control, one of the ways. So, no wonder so many women grow up doubting themselves. No wonder there is so much second-guessing going on. And we can end up hesitating when the truth is

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already right there in our bodies. We already know, but then we argue against that because of this conditioning. Because we've been taught that our sense is inaccurate, untrustworthy, even dangerous, rather than that thing that we're sensing being an actual threat to us in some way. And you know, that threat can show up in all sorts of ways.

But discernment can also get muddled when we use the wrong kind of knowing for the job that is at hand. So when it comes to doing things like balancing your budget, booking things like journeys, logistics, all that kind of stuff, that typically calls for intellectual knowing and reasoning. But when it comes to relationships, boundaries, your creative timing, those aren't problems you solve like they're maths equations. That's when you need intuition, a felt sense inside of you, and this knowing that comes from your body. And when you try to logic your way through those, they either don't work out because you didn't listen to yourself, or you end up stuck because you're using the wrong tool, the wrong way of knowing and figuring things out.

So this ability to discern came up on a call with one of my clients recently, and we were talking about how, as your business grows and evolves, the work that you do and who you do it with also shifts. And you really need the skill of discernment as you go through those changes. And I won't get into the ins and outs of the conversation, but we had this really cool conversation about how you can make an assessment of someone without judging them. Because the piece here that's uncomfortable is that when you're discerning things, you're judging someone and then rejecting them.

So this conversation was about whether she was going to do a project with someone or not. And whether that made sense for her with where her business is at right now. And if that's how you're labelling what you're doing as judgment, then of course that won't feel good. And listen, if you're judging someone in a mean way, it should feel awful to you, so that you stop doing that. But that's not what my client was doing.

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So anyway, after the call, I looked up the definition of discernment and check this out. The first definition is “the ability to judge well,” but there's a follow-up that I prefer, and it comes from Christian texts, and it's “perception in the absence of judgment,” which is exactly what I was saying to her. And another version of that is the quality of “being able to comprehend what is obscure.”

So that last one just stopped me in my tracks. Comprehending what is obscure. That's exactly what it is. It's how do you know something without necessarily having evidence to back it up? And perception in the absence of judgment is exactly what clean discernment feels like to me. It's sensing the fit, the coherence, without making someone else wrong. It's not about evidence or proof or that judgment piece. It's just about registering what your body already knows on some level, even when you can't exactly figure out the reasons why and name those.

So I want to tell you about how this showed up for me recently because it's it happened to me in my business. So a few weeks ago, I wrapped up the applications for The Herd Within, my new small group coaching program. And every single application we received was great. I could have said yes to every single one of them. They were all great candidates, really reflective, growth-oriented people who I know would have benefited from what we're going to be doing. And I would have enjoyed coaching and the group just would have been amazing, but I would have need to have done multiple groups in order to say yes to everyone, which was never my plan. But there were just way more applications and places.

And yet, as I was reading through them, I knew who was a yes for this particular round or this version of this offer. And I couldn't quantify it, right? Because if I'd asked my assistant to filter them out, which is what I was thinking about doing, like in terms of, okay, next time I offer this program in some way, if my assistant was going to read through the applications, what guidance would I give her for who was a yes or a no?

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And so I was thinking about this, and I thought, well, I might be able to give some vague criteria to justify my decisions that would then serve as guidance for Robyn to do it in the future. But I actually found it really hard to describe things and to be able to pass that on to her because this is just something that I just knew. Something in me said, yes, this person. And equally, something in me said for other applications, like not this time.

And that's the thing about discernment. It's not judgment. It's not about labelling someone as wrong or not good enough, or even unworthy, which sometimes, when we're on the receiving end of these things, that's where our brains can go with it. But this was just about coherence and timing and readiness, just like puzzle pieces coming together.

And I'll be honest with you, I was thinking about how this has shown up in other parts of my life. And I wish I'd had this same level of clarity in my 20s in my romantic relationships, because I didn't have that then. Or rather, I had that discernment, but I didn't trust it. So instead, I overrode what I knew, and I stayed longer than I ought to have done, and I argued with myself about whether I was being too sensitive, too picky, asking too much. I thought I should be more compassionate towards someone else's traumas and vulnerabilities. And at that time, I didn't know that I could be compassionate and have standards and have boundaries that would mean leaving those relationships.

And here's the kicker. Even when I did know it was time to leave, I didn't trust myself to act on it. I waited for external confirmation from someone, where, like, a new friend gently but pointedly asked me about my marriage over wine. And that was actually the first time that Mars Lord and I hung out. We've remained firm friends ever since.

Or, you know, the other person behaving badly enough that it finally became undeniable to me, and like I was justified in leaving. So I needed proof because I didn't trust that my sense was enough. And listen, it's not that we shouldn't have those people to help us sense things, like in the way that Mars did. That was very useful. And that's literally what coaching is. It's

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asking non-judgmental questions from a place of curiosity to help you access your own wisdom.

But it wasn't until my 30s and now my 40s that I've been able to really trust that felt sense inside me, the knowing when something is done, and knowing when I need to walk away. But it's only because of all those times that I didn't trust myself that I built the muscle to trust myself now. So discernment is something that grows and strengthens through use.

This is also something that comes up in my creative work. So with the idea for The Herd Within, when that arrived, it felt alive in me, and I knew it needed to come out and play fairly soon. That was kind of like a deal that I made with myself because I knew that this work wanted to be expressed in a fairly short timeline compared to other schemes that I've got on the back burner.

So the ones on a back burner, I literally think of them like they are ideas that are being softened with a gentle heat, like onion, before you're bringing the rest of the recipe and all the simmering happens and all of that stuff. Those ideas are just on the back burner, they're softening on a low heat. And at the same time, I've got some ideas that will literally never see the light of day. I don't imagine that they will, and that's okay. I always have more ideas than I can follow through on. That's just how my creativity works. It is abundant and overflowing, and that means some ideas will happen pretty quickly, some will take a while to come to fruition, and some never will.

So ideas are like follicles in the ovary. You have way more than the one or two that actually get released to ovulation. But they all serve a purpose. They all contribute to the creative cycle. But only a select few get to grow into eggs, and even fewer will result in something that is born and put out into the world. And discernment is knowing which ones to nurture, which to let pass, and trusting that you don't have to act on them all. And that doesn't mean that the ones that aren't selected are bad ideas.

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I have so many great ideas, but some of them are for other people, either because I literally say to them, "Hey, I've had this idea, why don't you do this thing? I think it could be great for you." Or because that person who I probably don't even know, just comes up with it as their own idea. And some of these ideas are just stepping stones to the ones that do make it through. And some ideas are just for the joy of generating ideas.

So discernment comes up in lots of areas of life. And being in Arizona with the horses this past week has really reminded me of that because I've been in the round pen working with them, and what's so striking is that when I'm in the round pen with them, the level of presence that I bring to that experience is like nothing else. Right? I'm not in my head. I'm in my body, trusting what I sense 100% of the time.

And the horses are doing the same. They are trusting their senses. They're not standing around second-guessing themselves or making a pros and cons list. They just respond. If something doesn't feel safe to them or they don't like it, they move. If something feels inviting, they step closer. And yes, there are times where they will leap up on a verge to get away from a discarded plastic shopping bag. Ask me how I know. But they don't then shame themselves afterwards. They don't argue with themselves about whether the shopping bag really was dangerous and how silly they were to think that it was.

They just respond, and then they recalibrate. And their survival depends on that trust in what they sense. And ours does too. Not always in that life-or-death sense, but in the way that our lives can really expand, our relationships can deepen, our work can move forward in some way when you trust yourself to sense things, to respond to them, and then recalibrate afterwards. That is discernment in motion.

So this is what I mean about working with that difference between intellect and intuition, because intellect wants things like reasons and explanations and spreadsheets. Whereas intuition is something that's alive in you and is giving you very clear answers. And both of these ways are knowing are

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useful, but not in the same situations. And part of discernment is knowing which voice to listen to and when. But I want to be really clear when I say that discernment has to be clean. What I mean by that is if you find yourself being defensive, argumentative, proving your case, that may not be discernment. And I say maybe because it could be discernment, but we're just used to having to justify ourselves. But it could also be that where that is coming from is fear and ego.

So clean discernment actually doesn't need to defend itself. It's just something that you know. It's really grounded, it's really straightforward. It just feels like a very settled no, or a yes. And this is where coaching comes in, because sometimes what you think is discernment is actually a protective strategy that's a way to keep yourself safe from potential rejection or risk. So part of the work is untangling things and learning to identify what's your true knowing and what's your fear that you're telling yourself is knowing. And so you just have to be onto yourself with this.

So I want to leave you with some reflection questions. You can take these into your journaling, your walks, your conversations with yourself, and those of you who are in the membership, make sure you bring them to coaching. You can share your answers in the community or just bring them to our calls.

Okay, here are your questions: Where have you overridden your sense of knowing in the past, and what did it cost you? Where in your life are you waiting for more evidence or permission when you actually already know? How does discernment feel in your body when it's clean and it's steady? And how does it feel when it's clouded by judgment or fear? And when you are sensing things, try to identify how you know. What is it that you sense? How do you know that? What is it that you're sensing? Why does it matter? And when you are sensing something, when you are getting that inner knowing, really get to know that feeling and understand it, come into a relationship with it, because that way when it shows up, you're going to be

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able to feel it and get in touch with it sooner, and that's going to really serve you.

And finally, just remember that discernment isn't about being right 100% of the time. This is a practice of developing the muscle to know which tool to use, intellect or intuition, and trusting yourself enough to act on it, letting your body and your sense of things guide you even when you can't explain it to anybody else. And that doesn't mean that you're closed off to the possibility of being wrong. It's a certainty mixed with openness. This is where things like protecting your capacity, setting boundaries, choosing your projects, ending relationships, all of these things come down to discernment.

And this is the kind of work that we practice inside Powerful, my membership. We build your ability to trust yourself, to know what's yours and what's not, to feel into what's alive for you and to act on it without apology. And we coach you on all of the sticky bits in between. So if you want to deepen that practice and get coached along the way, then come and join us.

All right, folks, that is it for this week. I'm hopefully going to get a nap today, but I will be back next week. Have a cracking week, and I'll catch you then.

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