

Ep #248: Setting Personal Standards That Serve You



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With Your Host

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The Maisie Hill Experience with Maisie Hill

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You're listening to episode 248 of *The Maisie Hill Experience*. And today I'm talking all about personal standards. Are you ready? Let's go.

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, hello, alright, today I'm talking about the importance of standards. And what I mean specifically when I'm talking about personal standards, because it's definitely one of those terms that can be used in a variety of ways.

Alright, let's get into it. Your personal standards are a list of thoughts, activities, behaviours that are helpful to you. They're the standards that you set for yourself and others. They provide a framework for your life. They determine what's acceptable to you, and they prevent you from compromising on what's important. Sometimes standards are explicit. We're very aware of them. And sometimes they're just more subconscious. And today's episode is just about drawing attention to them so that you can see whether your standards are useful and serving you at the moment.

I'm going to give you some examples to start off with. One of my standards is that I will only wear clothes that fit well, suit me and feel good. The last one being the most important. They have to feel good. I'll talk more about where the standard came from and why it's so essential to me later on. If you've been around here for a while, you can probably guess.

Another standard that I have is that I don't spend time with people who complain a lot. That's just a standard that I have in my personal life and my professional life. That doesn't mean that people can't share that they're struggling or have a moan with me from time to time because we all have a need for that. But I have a very low tolerance for people complaining on an ongoing basis, particularly about the same issue without doing anything to change it.

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You know when someone just always has something, or maybe it's the same thing, and there's just zero attempt to do anything about it? That's what I'm talking about. I have one friend who we send cookies back and forth to each other. It's actually my coach, Robyn, she said I could name-check her here. We're also friends outside of being coaches, and so when we're annoyed about something, we send each other gifts of cookies. When I complain about something, she sends me a cookie by text and vice versa.

And sometimes we just say to each other, "I need a cookie." And we send one. But for me, that level of expression feels that acceptable and reasonable when it's compared to all the other things that we talk about and how we talk about them. So, there's this kind of unspecified ratio of some kind where it feels okay to me because neither of us are prone to whining. In fact, we just don't whine ever. We do express frustration or annoyance. And I think it's probably an area of growth for me.

I'm not sure about her, but I think it's an area of growth for me to just have a bit of a moan and express that annoyance. But we have this lovely system of sending each other cookies that really works.

Another standard that I have is I have a money date every Friday. This one is newer for me, and it's taken a while to get to this place. I've coached myself. I've experimented with what works for my brain. And the regularity of every Friday is what's best for me at the moment. So, I use something called the Profit First system to take the revenue in the business and move percentages of money into various pots for all the different types of taxes and expenses, etc.

I also make credit card payments twice a month. As someone who has some executive functioning issues around things like this and demands avoidance, I have needed to experiment and coach, and get support as I've figured this out. And now I've got to a place where there's a rhythm and a routine that suits me. Doing it monthly just does not work for my brain; it's not frequent enough. It has to be more often than that, or it just doesn't

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happen. And think about it like trying to go to the gym once a month instead of once a week.

So, in the beginning, I needed to manage my mind, my thoughts in order to do that. And one thing that really helped me is that I would put on a short playlist with songs about money, just to kind of get me in the mood. Like I said, it was a money date, so I wanted to get in the mood for it. And in actual fact, after the money mindset training that I did in the membership last summer, we created a collective Spotify playlist where myself and the members all added songs about money. Because lots of the members started doing money dates, too.

And it's been just so cool to see the impact of that. So I would stick on a playlist. I would also put on lipstick for it. Listen, I don't put on lipstick for anyone, including myself, but for my money dates, I did. And just to be very clear, for my money dates, I'm literally just sitting in my studio or at home entering amounts into spreadsheets, looking at invoices, bank balances, upcoming payments and transferring money. But I decided to treat it differently. And a lot of that, 90% of that was about thinking about it differently.

And then the rest was supported by putting on a Wu-Tang Clan track called *CREAM* which stands for *Cash Rules Everything Around Me*. And another great track called *Dirty Cash, Money Talks*. So now that I've been doing this for a while, I don't need to manage my mind or stick on a song that's about money because it has become my standard way of doing things. So standard both means what you expect and accept, and the norm. With my money dates example, it's just what I expect of myself. And it's the standard because it's now the norm.

So, standards can also relate to your identity and your self-concept, your values, goals, needs, desires and preferences. If you have a goal of any kind in mind then I strongly suggest that you take some time to examine your standards and evaluate if they need to be revised. Keep in mind that revising your standards is something that can go in either direction. There

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are times when you'll decide it's useful to raise your standards. And there are times when lowering them is actually most appropriate.

Now, when you have low standards, you're more likely to have low self-esteem and just accept things for what they are. There's kind of a strong relationship between those two things. Low standards can lead to substandard results, being treated insufficiently, and having people walk all over you. So, 20 years ago, I had much lower standards than I do now and it didn't feel great. I was really desperate to be loved and accepted.

And because of that, I kept my standards low in a misguided attempt to receive love and acceptance from others, which didn't work because it actually just invited people to treat me poorly. And I tolerated behaviour from others that I would never tolerate now. And there's all sorts of reasons for why I did and why I don't anymore. And there are probably situations that you can look back on and think, yeah, I had totally different standards back then, and that could be a couple of weeks ago, couple of months, years or a couple of decades.

But when my standards were low, I also had low self-esteem. So, if you want to increase your self-esteem, one way to do that is by raising your personal standards. Now, be mindful when you're doing this of where it's coming from and how it feels. There isn't a right way or a wrong way of doing this, but as I say to my clients, know what model you are in. And for those of you who have no clue what I'm talking about here, the simple way of describing what I mean is know the thought and the feeling that's leading you to take the action of revising your standards, whether you're raising them or lowering them.

Because that tells us why you're doing it, and knowing why is particularly important here. I mean, it always is, but you definitely want to do it here. When you have higher standards, you will treat yourself differently, and because of that, other people will also treat you differently. They will respond to you in a different way, and that can be in a way that you want them to or not. Because sometimes we raise the bar. We raise the standard

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of what's acceptable. We stop people pleasing. We bring in some much-needed boundaries.

And some of the people in your life may not like this. This is why we do so much work on loving and accepting yourself first, so that if and when this happens, it doesn't rock you to your core. Likewise, there will also be people who respond favourably to you having different standards. And then of course, there's everyone who falls somewhere in the middle of those two, but like I said, how you treat yourself is paramount. Don't expect anyone else to treat you differently without you being willing to treat yourself differently first.

That doesn't mean that people won't, but I think it's an unhelpful expectation to go through life with. I do think we can be treated differently by others, and that causes us to evaluate and raise our standards. I've certainly had that happen, and that's a very good, helpful thing. I coach a lot of clients on this in all sorts of areas of life. It comes up a lot with friendships, dating, romantic relationships, domestic chores. There can be standards there, too, or a lack of them often.

But also, other environments that you're in, your home, your shared living spaces, your car, your workplace, your finances, professional relationships, family dynamics, sleep. I mean, the list just goes on, it's why it's such a great topic to spend some time looking at. And often my clients are subtly raising their standards across all areas of their life because what's great is that when you focus on raising your standards in one area, it mushrooms out into other areas. So, if you're listening to this and thinking oh, my goodness there's so many areas that I want to raise my standards, but I don't know where to start.

And you start getting confused and overwhelmed, then stop, take a breath. I want you to listen to this. Please hear me when I say it doesn't matter where you start, just start. If you're telling yourself that it does matter, then that's probably just your brain trying to get out of doing anything. Because as long as you remain in confusion or feeling unsure about where to start then you don't have to do anything. It's just an avoidance strategy in order

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to try and prevent experiencing some kind of discomfort, most likely to do with fear or worry about what will happen when you change things.

Because remember, your brain just wants to keep you safe. So, when you dare to consider raising the bar and expecting more, what comes up for you? Do you worry that you'll be rejected? Are you fearful about what will happen? Are you concerned about what people will think about you, what they'll say about you? Or does it feel exciting or just grounded and very straightforward, or something else? See what I mean? We just want to evaluate why they're there, what the purpose of them is, how it feels.

To just really look at it because there's a sweet spot with standards. I think we can all think of a time when raising standards can actually create a disconnect. And I mean disconnect, I mean that's pretty neutral. That can be good or bad, I would say. But maybe think about how, of a time when raising standards actually ended up being unhelpful in some way. I will talk more about that in a moment, but generally speaking, I would say when you raise your standards, you're setting the tone for the results you want to create in your life and the opportunities and action that will lead you to them.

So, revising your standards helps to create change, and it informs the decisions you make as well as how you make them and how you go about taking action as a result of them. But always check in on how they feel. When you think about this standard or when you talk about it, how does it feel in your body? There are times when it will be in your interest to lower your standards; setting the bar too high can mean you're setting yourself up to fail and just giving yourself a way to beat yourself up.

Or if perfectionism is what's determining your standards, then that's also going to suck. If your standard is that you always get up at this time. And you only eat this, and you definitely don't eat that. And then you journal this many pages when it has to be that. And then you do this many of whatever exercise. And then reply to every text message and achieve inbox zero. And then do this and get to bed at this time. For some people, that will work

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really well for them, and there's no issue. If that's you, feel free to ignore what I'm about to say.

But I'm going to suggest that for a lot of you, that's coming from perfectionism, and it's not particularly useful to you. This is why we always want to understand where behaviours like this are coming from and assess if they're helpful or harmful. For one person, it will feel great, be very useful, and it's just what they do. For someone else, it will feel tight and rigid and can be coming from low self-esteem, low self-worth and perfectionism. So, can you see how raising your standards doesn't necessarily equate to increasing your self-esteem?

And of course, for an individual, what starts off as feeling helpful and supportive can become unhelpful or limiting in some way. It just all depends where it's coming from, and that is subject to change. We can also stray into the dark side of standards where there's elitism and that rigidity that I mentioned.

I was recently talking with my coach, Bev, about a project that I'm working on. And we were just talking about how I'm going to get it done, when I'm going to do it, all of those things. And I told her that it's important to me that I don't work on it in the evenings. That's my standard, because I don't want it to be ever present. I want to be able to switch off, be with my family or be doing some non-work activities without it kind of hovering around and interfering, but I'm not going to be rigid about it.

I told her that if I'm in the part of my menstrual cycle or the astrological cycle where it's my go time, then I'm going to work in whatever way feels good, which could well involve me working some evenings. And I'm not going to make myself wrong for doing that because that's just, it's just not how I like to do things as you may well be aware. And I want to be intuitive with it as I always am. So, the standard that comes in there is that I trust myself and that I make sure I take breaks, spend time outside and eat sufficiently and sleep sufficiently to support that level of focus.

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I mentioned at the start of this episode that a few years ago I decided to have a personal standard of only wearing clothes that fit me, suit me and that feel great. I think this is my favourite example that I can give you. So, I'm going to give you some details about it. If you've been around here for a while you'll know that I'm autistic and very sensitive to sensory input, and this includes clothes. If something doesn't fit me, if the sleeves come up a bit short or it doesn't fit right on my shoulder or even if the band of my socks is too tight that can really throw me off.

Even as I'm recording this, I'm very aware that I have worn the wrong socks today. They're too thick. I saw a video recently where someone said that autism assessments should be: Do you care about socks at all? Do you need to wear socks all the time, or do you struggle to wear socks in any way? Because it's very relatable. If my socks are too tight around the top, I literally feel nauseous. And if I'm wearing the wrong socks, as I am today, it will really distract me. It's a bit warmer than I expected it to be and my feet feel just a little bit too hot.

So, this is why I end up changing several times a day. And I do my best, especially in transitional weather like this, where it might be cool, it might be quite warm. I try to remember to carry backup socks just so that I've got an option. And I also can't handle things around my neck, whether that's scarves, roll neck jumpers, anything like that, same for my head, wearing headbands, sunglasses, hats of any kind, it's just all a no for me. And because I'm particular about how things fit, Paul would, well, he used to joke about how I needed a tailor to adjust everything.

And this was before we knew I was autistic. I mean, that would just be the ultimate self-care for me. If that was something I could gift all people who are autistic or who have sensory challenges, to have clothes that fit you and feel good, would just be the best. But as I said, it's not just the fit, the fabric has to feel good too. I spend a lot of time in tracksuit bottoms, sweatpants and pyjama bottoms because they feel great. So, as I said, on average, I reckon I change my clothes about three times a day because what I'm wearing has to work with what I'm feeling and doing.

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And if I'm starting to feel dysregulated in any way, then one of the best things I can do to support myself is put comfortable, sensory-friendly clothing on. But I used to own a lot of clothes that didn't feel great. I might have liked how they looked, but the material or the cut bothered me. And at the time, I just had no idea why. So, most of the time I would just stick to the same pair of old, worn-in Levi's and t-shirts that I've had for 20 years, that I still have, and now they're so thin that they've had to be relegated to pyjamas. They were a wardrobe staple for a long time.

And I would try new clothes on from time to time, but it was rare for me to buy something that was a yes on all counts in terms of looking good, fitting well and feeling good. But many years ago, before I had Nelson, I walked into a shop in the UK called Toast. And I tried on their stuff, and I was like, yes, this works for me, this feels good. But the price wasn't right for me at that point. So, I went in, tried it on, was like, "There's stuff that does feel good." And knowing kind of that's what I would like to work towards. When I was able to, that's what I wanted to be able to wear.

And at some point after having Nelson, I'm not sure when exactly, he must have been quite young, because I was still carrying him around in a sling a lot. So, he must have been one or two. And I just decided that I was only willing to wear clothes that felt good. So, looking back now, this was just such an amazing accommodation to make because at the time, I was getting irritable a lot. I was getting overwhelmed, very stressed. It was all to do with being autistic and being sensitive to sensory input.

And then the interplay of that with the menstrual cycle and stress responses. So, when I wear clothes that feel good, it's very soothing, and it means that there's one less source of sensory distress as well. So, it's a really great accommodation for me. But I raised my standards by making the decision to only buy and wear clothes that are a hell yes, to stop compromising and making myself wear things that weren't good for me. Now, at the time, I didn't have an income that meant I could go out and create an entire wardrobe based around this decision.

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I couldn't fill it with new clothes, but I could get rid of all the clothes that didn't fit my new standard. So, I went through everything and separated out all the stuff that bothered me in some way and just gave it away. And at some point, I bought a few items from Toast, some from their sales, some from eBay. I wasn't able to buy a lot, but it didn't matter. I just needed a couple of outfits because I don't care about wearing the same stuff all the time. Because my personal standard isn't to wear different outfits every day, yours might be, and it's fine if it is, that just wasn't my standard and isn't my standard.

My standard is to feel good in my clothes. So, I bought some green trousers, a t-shirt. I think there might have been one other thing, but I can't remember what it was, maybe a dress, a summer dress, but I was basically wearing the same clothes all the time. So, for some people, that could feel like a lowering of standards, but for me, it was the opposite. It was a huge increase in my standards. My thought was that I'd achieved the ultimate capsule wardrobe, which I had; everything went together. It was very small. It was the same two or three outfits all the time.

And I didn't care about what others thought for all sorts of reasons, one of which was that I didn't care because I felt great. Another was because I had raised my internal benchmark of what I was going to accept for myself and for how I was willing to treat myself. And because of that, this one standard, this one decision changed so much for me because it was all about how I was willing to treat myself. And every time I raise my standards, it has a ripple effect, and it will for you, too.

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