

Ep #275: Self-Leadership and the Shift from Knowing to Doing



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This is episode 275, and today, I'm talking about the difference between knowing what you're doing and changing what you're doing. 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. Welcome back to the podcast. I'm a little tired today. I'm a little bit croaky. I've had interrupted sleep for the past few nights because it's the Easter holidays here in the UK, so my son's been off school, and he went off to camp last week for the day and came back really not looking like himself and started vomiting pretty soon after. And I think he actually had heatstroke because it was the first day that we've really had sunshine, and even though it wasn't that hot, I think it was just such a shock to his system.

Anyway, I was determined to get into my studio and record this episode for you, so I'm just going to jump right in and ask you, how many times have you caught yourself saying or thinking some version of, "I know what I'm doing. I understand why I do it. I've known this for years, but I still do that thing."

So, despite knowing what the behaviour is, like people-pleasing or sabotaging your own success or silencing yourself in conversations, and despite having a decent sense of where it's coming from, you still do it. And maybe it's a pattern that you've been able to name, thanks to a book that you've read, like one of mine, or your therapist or a friend has helped you to identify a type of behaviour.

But it's happened somehow, so you're able to see what's going on, and you probably have a name for it as well. And then beyond that, you might also have awareness of where that behaviour has originated. So your socialisation, childhood experiences, family or relationship dynamics, what has been modelled to you, your formative romantic relationships, all of

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these things, right? You can probably trace it back to particular experiences.

And this is something that I hear a lot from my clients, but before they've really started doing this work in the way that I do it. And often they've been doing self-development in some form for years but have just hit a ceiling with it. So they know all the terms. They can recognise the behaviour, understand where it's coming from, but still find themselves doing it. And then, where I think this is particularly sad to see, is that they then use that knowledge as a way to criticise themselves because they can identify a tendency that they have, they should magically stop doing it. And because they are still doing it, despite them, quote-unquote, "knowing better," then their inner critic uses that as ammunition.

And this is one of the most consistent things I see across years of coaching people, and the most common version of it that I hear is, "I know exactly why I do this. I just don't know how to stop." Or, "I know exactly why I do this, but I'm still doing it." And I want to be really clear that knowing your pattern and changing that pattern is two completely different skills. Self-awareness is valuable. I am not dismissing it in any way. The ability to notice what's happening, to name it, and to trace it back to something, those things are really important, and they are the prerequisite for change. But insight isn't enough on its own, and it's not the same as change.

Somewhere along the way, a lot of us have picked up the idea that it is the same, that if you just understand yourself well enough, then behavioural change will follow. And that all those valuable insights that you've picked up will automatically translate into action, and that you'd stop repeating those patterns.

But as you've probably recognised, it doesn't work like that. But if you're operating on that assumption that working harder and harder to understand yourself and collecting more insight, listening to more podcasts, doing more reflection, adding more books to your pile, but you're still wondering why nothing is actually changing, then that's probably why, because you've

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somehow picked up the idea—I would call it a thought error—that if you understand things enough, if you pick up enough insights, then somehow how you behave will shift.

So it's really not that you've been failing at self-development. You've probably been doing one half of it incredibly well, but just not doing the other half at all or from the right place. So let's talk about that other half, the bit that actually requires you to do something.

So I spoke about this on the Yin and Yang episode recently, and it's the idea that we want to be in cycles of reflecting and taking action. We all have our favourite place to be, but I know that for many of my clients, they enjoy and feel most comfortable in reflecting and collecting insight. So that's the yin aspect. So a lot of my work is about helping you to take action and step into that yang aspect.

But please hear me on this: you cannot get to the part where you actually take action by doing more and more reflection. That reflection that you do is useful. It can create a swell, like if you're out in the ocean surfing. There's a bit of a swell that comes up from that insight, but then you have to go with it. You have to catch that wave. And some of you are just out at sea, ignoring all those swells, telling yourself that you just need more understanding. So I encourage you to notice that in yourself and then do something about it. Don't then use that, "Oh yeah, Maisie, that is exactly what I do," and then think, "Now I should go and reflect more on that." No.

Self-awareness does happen in reflection. You can look at what happened, you can notice the pattern, you can understand it. All of that is important. But I want to talk to you about self-leadership, because self-leadership includes self-awareness, but it also extends beyond that because it's the skill of actually directing yourself in the moment, the ability to lead yourself through an awkward conversation, for example, instead of letting things slide again, or to make a decision that is potentially going to disappoint someone without immediately trying to manage their reaction in order to

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make everything okay for you. So it's what takes you from knowing what you do to actually doing something different.

Same goes for when your premenstrual week arrives and your inner critic decides this is a fantastic opportunity to tell you a load of crappy things about yourself. And if you don't know how to interrupt it, then you're going to just let it go off on one. And then you're going to be, quote-unquote, "losing" that time in every cycle. But alongside that, it also has a longer-term effect, which is that it deepens that neurological wiring where you're talking really poorly to yourself, and it strengthens that very critical internal voice.

So what you need in moments like these is a practised skill, the ability to notice what's happening, to interrupt the automatic response, to direct your thinking deliberately, and choose a different action before the old way of doing things has already played out.

So it really is about directing yourself in the moment. And yes, we use coaching to set you up for success with that. It's also why I teach my clients how to coach themselves as well. But the skill is built in the doing, not in the knowing about the doing or the imagining about the doing or anything like that.

So think about learning to drive. You can read the highway code, you can pass your theory test, but actually driving is completely different. So the knowing and the doing are two very different things. For sure, one supports the other. They have that relationship. But nobody is going to hand you a driving license because you passed your theory test. It's the same with this. The insights and understanding are useful, they are important, but they must then result in you taking action.

So let's say that your parents come to visit. This is a situation that comes up quite a lot in coaching, in the membership, and with my one-on-one clients. It's pretty much a universal challenge with parental relationships. So your parents come to visit. You already know that you have a tendency to

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silence yourself around them. So when they say or do things that aren't okay for you, you just don't say anything. You might even have awareness of what's happening in your nervous system, maybe that you go into a please-and-appease response around them, something like that.

But they're visiting, and then your mum starts gossiping about other family members. And maybe your mum doesn't do this, but insert a colleague at work or whoever in your life does something like this. So your mum starts gossiping about other family members, and you don't want to go along with it. So you don't actively engage in the conversation. Maybe you go quiet, you're not adding to it, and but inside you're just hoping that she picks up on that and then changes her behaviour. But of course, she doesn't because this is probably normal and acceptable to her. So you go quiet instead of saying what you actually want to say, which could be something like, "Mum, I wouldn't want someone talking about me like this, so I'm not willing to talk about others this way either."

That is the difference between just awareness and self-leadership. When you don't go along with things, you know what's happening, you have that understanding, and there's some level of response because you're not engaging in the gossiping. But self-leadership is what takes you the rest of the way. It's being able to feel the discomfort of saying something and knowing it might land awkwardly, knowing that your mum might not like it, and you still say it anyway because it's coherent with who you are and what you value. That is the skill, and it's built through doing it, not through just understanding why you haven't been doing it.

But of course, being in the knowing is the safe option, or at least we think that it's the safe option. I would argue that it's not. Because when we're staying in the knowing, we don't have to do anything. It doesn't require anything. There's no emotional risk involved. So you can keep learning, you can keep exploring, you can keep adding frameworks and perspectives and just collecting them and collecting them and collecting them because there's always another layer to uncover. Notice if you're telling yourself that

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there's, "You just need to figure out what the other layer is, and then change will happen." I want you to question that.

Because while you're doing that, you can also tell yourself that you're doing something. You're still moving because you're trying to understand stuff, and you get to be fascinated with yourself. And listen, I am all for that, but you have to know when you're using it as a hiding place. The doing is very different. It requires you to actually try to change the behaviour in real life with real people and with real consequences, which means that you will get it wrong sometimes. You'll catch what you're doing, your pattern on some days and not on others.

You will try something new and it will feel clunky and awkward and very much nothing like the sorted version of yourself that you had in mind when you imagined yourself doing this. You will have experiences where you feel like you're going backwards and that you're failing. And staying in the knowing phase protects you from all of that. But I want to encourage you to run towards it.

I'm not saying that any of that knowing has been wasted. I'm saying it is the prerequisite. And if you've done that part well, then you've got that prerequisite in place. Amazing. Which means you are ready for what comes next. Because what you don't want to do is keep hanging out in the knowing phase. It's like, I don't do well with heights.

So for me, it's like going up a cliff and there being a pool of water, a lake, or something down below that you are meant to jump down into. If you go up there and you just look down for ages, the longer you stare down, noticing all the stuff that's going on and how high it really is, and just becoming more and more aware of everything that's involved, then the less likely you are to jump.

But of course, you do need to look down and see where to jump, and you should have knowledge of the pool you're jumping into. That awareness is essential. But then once you have that information, you have that

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awareness, you need to just jump in and get it done. And then go back up and jump again. Go back up and jump again and do it over and over until it's exhilarating. You definitely feel it, but it's not terrifying you. It's become more normal because you build self-leadership by getting your reps in, by making repeated efforts at interrupting the pattern and choosing a different course of action, a different behaviour in a variety of situations so much so that it becomes normal to you.

So each time that you notice that the people-pleasing response in you has been activated and you pause before automatically accommodating someone, that counts as a repetition, a rep. And each time your brain tells you that your goal can wait until the circumstances of your life are better, but you just ignore that voice, and you do it anyway, that's a rep.

Every time your inner critic shows up right as you're about to do something that really matters to you, and instead of just listening to it and getting caught up in that storyline, you direct your thinking deliberately instead of following it down the rabbit hole, you're just like putting a stop to it, you're having a useful conversation with your inner critic and changing your mindset in that moment. That is a repetition.

And as I said, you're not going to catch things all the time. Sometimes you will, sometimes you won't. And whilst I do recommend using coaching to understand those times where you didn't catch it or you weren't able to take action in the way that you wanted to, you don't want to get stuck in reflecting. The biggest reason that you would get stuck in reflecting is if you're judging yourself for doing that thing that you always do. So by all means, reflect and learn from it, but then use what you learn to do something.

What matters is the accumulation of doing things differently because in doing so, you will rewire yourself, and you'll increase your capacity to handle things in the moment, which is a tremendous skill to have.

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So I want to leave you with one question. Where in your life are you in the knowing phase when you actually know, when you're honest with yourself, that it's time to move on and do something? Because if there's a pattern that you've been working to understand for two months, two years, five years, and the understanding has deepened, but the behaviour hasn't shifted, then I encourage you to shift your focus onto practising and actually getting your reps in.

And that is exactly what we help you to do inside my membership, Powerful. It's where you'll get coached through the situations in your life repeatedly until that gap between what you know and what you do starts to close. And this is what I love this work for.

Okay, folks, I hope that has been a fun bit of a wake-up call for you and prompting some juicy reflection. Those of you who are in the membership, I really encourage you to bring your answers to that question that I left you with. Where in your life are you still in the knowing phase when you know that it's time to move on and do something? Bring that to the community, bring that to ask a coach, our written coaching service, bring it to the calls, and get coached up on it. I can't wait to have these conversations. All right, folks, that's it for this week. I'll see you next time.

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