

## Ep #287: Rethinking the Traits You Criticise in Yourself



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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## Ep #287: Rethinking the Traits You Criticise in Yourself

This is episode 287, and today we're talking about how to stop making yourself the problem. 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 have had today's topic on my list of episodes that I want to do for quite a while now. But it really came up during a coaching call recently, so I thought, why not take advantage of it being fresh in my mind and bump it up the list so you can thank my client who got coached on this.

So here's the deal. When I'm coaching someone on one of our calls in the membership, sometimes we're coaching on challenging situations in someone's life. Sometimes my clients will share a personal or professional goal of theirs, and then we'll coach them on that. So my clients, you share your goals and part of that is you share what you believe needs to happen in order to create that goal. But in doing so, you often, perhaps unwittingly and subconsciously, express that you need to change an aspect of your personality.

So, in other words, you're making who you are a problem. And in your mind, there's this thought error, a thought that isn't true that you have to change that in order to create a result, meet a goal in your life. So there's this underlying vibe of making yourself the problem. And a big part of my coaching ethos is that you don't make yourself the problem. Because when you make yourself the problem, you're viewing yourself in this negative way. It's very self-critical and it's like you're trying to escape who you are.

That's very different to loving who you are and then making supportive changes that help you to be who you are and create the specific result that you want to meet that goal. So what catches my attention when I'm coaching someone is this underlying tone of self-criticism or self-shaming. And on this recent call, my client talked about themselves in a way that I

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know was self-deprecating, because that was the vibe that was coming through. That was there in the language that they were using.

But the actual traits that they were describing sounded amazing to me. And I was thinking, well, these things must make them really good at doing their job and using these traits in certain situations. So I asked her to spell out what the problem was, because to me there wasn't one other than how she was viewing herself. And I wanted to get a clear idea of her perspective, as well as showing her my perspective, because it was the complete opposite.

So, many of my clients will describe themselves using terms that society generally speaking uses in a negative way, especially towards women. So terms like controlling, bossy, sensitive, exact. And it's fascinating because from my perspective, these traits are not inherently negative. But I understand why my clients see them as negative, because that's just the soup that we've all been swimming in as we've been raised.

And there might be certain expressions of these traits could be a problem, but they're often attributes that I really admire in others. And being controlling usually means you're excellent at managing details and keeping projects on track. That, to me, is a highly valuable skill set in many situations.

Another example of this that I can give you is, I've got a friend who describes herself as anxious. And whilst it's true that she does experience anxiety, she also uses that to talk about herself in a derogatory way, as a way of putting herself down. And whilst I have no doubt that she does experience anxiety and that that is challenging for her and probably something she would love to be able to change. I also have different thoughts about her to the ones that she has about herself.

So I describe her as someone who's punctual and respectful of her time as well as my time and the time of others. She's reliable. She's attentive. She's incredibly good at organising. These are all traits that I deeply admire about her. But notice how I'm not doing that weird thing that people do, of denying her experience of how she feels. Because this isn't about

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plastering over someone's reality and being weird and trying to slap a positivity sticker on how they're feeling. We're not doing that.

This is about just softening the edges so that they aren't as blunt and well, edgy. So this is all about the narrative you have about how you feel and how you behave. I love that she shows up at the time she says she's going to show up. I wouldn't love her any less if she was late, though. Whilst she, like many of my clients, might want to shift the experience of feeling anxious about time and being late, it's far more useful to do that when you're not heavily criticising yourself for being someone who's mindful of time.

So notice the difference in how that way of describing things feels. Are you someone who's mindful of time, who's attentive, who's punctual? Do you kind of put yourself down for it and be like, "I get so anxious about time?" And kind of just frame things in this negative way, which has usually come from, we've heard that from other people around us, who frame things in a negative way. So what narratives do you have about yourself? Are you lazy? A lot of my clients have that thought about themselves. And none of them in all the experience I have in all the years and sessions, all the people I've coached, no one has ever been someone that I consider as lazy.

Often they have chronic health issues, are recovering from burnout. And they're actually highly productive, but they just have this entrenched negativity about deserving rest and having fun and pleasure in their lives. And that's often coupled with a fear of being told off or the wheels are going to come off if they don't maintain this high, high, high level of productivity, whilst telling themselves that they're not being productive.

So if you're someone who perhaps labels yourself as anxious or bossy, what if we saw these as your excellent attention to detail and your leadership skills? And again, just to remind you, this isn't about sugar coating or denying your feelings, your experience of day-to-day life. It's about recognising the strengths in these behaviours. So how you narrate your story to yourself, in your own head and as well as in the words that

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you speak to others, that plays a crucial role in then how you interact with the world, as well as how you perceive your capabilities.

So what if you viewed yourself as being detail-oriented or exceptionally aware of your surroundings? This isn't semantics. It's about recognising the strengths and behaviours that others or even you might have viewed negatively. And these negative labels are ones that you've probably been carrying for a really long time. These ways of describing yourself are descriptions that your family might have said to you, your teachers, someone might have said it explicitly to your face, said it behind your back, but you got wind of it, or you heard the whispers.

It might be something that your peers, your old boss said. And they might have just said it once and it just pierced you to your core. Or it might have been said repeatedly over the years, perhaps in a light-hearted manner and maybe even well-intentioned, but actually it had an effect on you, and it still does.

So I was trying to think of examples of this from my life, and the one that came to mind is my mum called me a Dizzy Dora for years. And if I'm honest, I don't really understand that term. I think I have a sense of it. I'm guessing it's a way of saying that I'm forgetful and in my own world. And whilst it's true that I do forget things, maybe I forget things that it's easier for other people to remember. The scope of what I'm remembering in my brain is massive. There's a lot of things that I do remember, but I just kind of filter out the stuff that just isn't so important to me.

And I do also love being in myself, being in my own world. So that is true. It is true that I am in my own world, but it's also true that I hyperfocus and that I have slow audio processing. So it takes me longer than some people to come out of where I am inside myself and to be present to others. So when someone calls my name, when I'm working or reading or just thinking inside my own head, it can take me a while to realise that someone is saying something to me, and I might not hear them. And then it takes me a while to come into connection with them and be able to hear what they're saying.

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And of course, this is all through the lens of belief. And to some people, the difference in language that I'm talking about here might not matter that much, but it does to me. And I suspect that if you're here in this community, listening to my podcast, then it probably does to you, too. Words matter, especially when you're in the habit of being mean to yourself. We really want to pay attention to the words that you are using to describe yourself, the words that you are accepting when other people describe you. Because that's how we're going to stop this habit of being mean to yourself.

So, as you reflect on the labels that you use for yourself, start considering how you could reframe them to acknowledge your capabilities and strengths instead of perceiving them as flaws. And shifting your narrative isn't about denying your experience of these things, because sometimes the experience of these things is going to be shitty. It's also not about denying your limitations. We all have limitations. This is just about balancing out your view of yourself.

For instance, if you consider yourself bossy, you're actually a strong leader, and you know what needs to be done. So it's this kind of positive reframing, it changes your self-esteem and your interactions with other people. It makes a huge difference to how you feel inside yourself and how you carry yourself throughout your life. Now, that doesn't take away from the times and places where it might be useful to you to make some adjustments, but the starting point needs to be acceptance. Actually, it's not even acceptance, a celebration of who you are.

Maybe acceptance is a good starting point, but ultimately, I'd love you to just be celebrating who you are and all the facets of yourself, all of your traits. So instead of shaming yourself and belittling who you are and trying to hide these parts of yourself, you lead with them. And once you're in that place with it, then you can assess if you actually want to change anything. Because you've changed the lens that you're viewing things through and it's no longer a skewed lens of negativity and criticism.

Instead, it's a lens of deep appreciation for who you are. And when you do that, you won't be at odds with yourself and fighting who you are. This is a

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very different way of existing, and it creates an internal liberation and a flow that has profound effects on your experience of being you, as well as how you move through the world.

But let's say that after doing all that, getting to that place of self-acceptance and celebrating who you are, delighting in who you are. Let's say there are places that remain where you would like to make some adjustments, and you like your reasons for wanting to do that. You're going to have far greater success because you're doing so, you're making those changes from a place of sufficient self-belief. It's like the jar is already full and you're just adjusting the contents, rather than the jar is somewhat or severely empty, and you're just trying to fill it up by changing who you are. That's never going to feel good.

And what's interesting is that because you can unashamedly be yourself in other areas, those parts of yourself, they've now got the freedom to fully express themselves. And then that means that they won't be so vocal in the places where they're not so needed. And I spoke more about this in last week's episode about the inner boardroom, and when the voices of your inner boardroom are heard, they don't have to keep shouting and arguing.

So think about this whole negativity around being bossy. Well, if you're really leaning into your self-leadership and your leadership of others and you're going with that, then that part of yourself is fully expressed. And it's not seen as something that's negative. And then that means it's not kind of fighting to show up in other areas, that maybe that part of yourself isn't as needed. But because it's being kind of suppressed in one area, it's starting to show up in other areas a bit like whack-a-mole.

Now, one criticism I've received of this approach is that in reframing things, we're excusing ourselves from personal responsibility, and that is not true at all. That comes from a gross misconception about what self-responsibility is. So true self-responsibility means owning your actions and your decisions without falling into a cycle of blaming and shaming yourself. Blame and shame are often mistaken for self-accountability, but they're actually counterproductive.

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They just lock us into a cycle where we bully ourselves and we feel worse, which then immobilises us from making any helpful changes. But when you do this, when you actually look at who you are, love who you are, this helps you to be 100% self-responsible. Because it removes that blame and shame cycle, which isn't about responsibility; that is about bullying yourself and feeling like crap. And if that's what you're used to doing, if you're used to bullying yourself, feeling awful, shaming yourself, then how is that cycle going to help you to be responsible? Because you're actually going to try and avoid it because it feels so bad.

But if we remove that unhelpful shaming and the habit of punishing ourselves, it's so much easier to be self-responsible. It becomes much less loaded and more neutral. And sometimes wanting to adjust how you do things does come from this clean place. And when I say clean, I mean that you're wanting to make that change from a place of already feeling good about who you are. You've already addressed and cleaned up any unhelpful critical thoughts about yourself that's rooted in shame and not feeling good enough.

Once you've done that and you still want to make a change in yourself and how you do things, and you like your reasons for that, that's doing things in this cleaned-up way. And then once you view these traits through a lens of appreciation rather than one of judgment, you're better positioned to decide if and how you want to change them. So rather than fixing something that's broken, you're refining something that is already powerful, already wonderful and that's going to feel very, very different.

Alright, my friends, that's it for today. I will catch you next time.

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