

Ep #24: A New Way to Engage with Your Inner Critic



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 24. This is Kristi, and today you're going to learn a new way to engage with a part of you that's really critical.

Welcome to *Habits On Purpose*, a podcast for high-achieving women who want to create lifelong habits and feel as good on the inside as they look on paper. You'll get practical strategies for mindset shifts that will help you finally understand the root causes of why you think, feel, and act as you do so you can learn to create habits that give more than they take. And now, here's your host physician and Master Certified Life Coach Kristi Angevine.

Hello, hello, everyone. So, a mentor of mine once said, "When there's a fight, someone always loses. And when you're fighting with yourself, nobody ever wins." I want you to think about the part of you that's really critical of yourself. And bring that to mind while we talk today. I'm going to talk about what we usually do in response to feeling criticized by ourselves, and what might change if we made space and time to engage with this part of ourselves in a very different way.

So, if you haven't already listened to Episode 8... Episode 8 goes into a lot of the details about our inner critic, and why we have it, how we normally respond to it, and how it may make sense, but may actually sabotage our habit change efforts.

What do we usually do? Well, usually, when we have a critical part of ourselves, we're usually beat up by it. And we usually feel either discouraged, or defeated, or deflated, or just some version of really down. The other thing that we oftentimes do in response to that really critical part of ourselves, is we try to ignore it, or resist it, or put up a fight to this critical part.

What I'm going to talk about today is a radical departure from the ignoring, the resisting, the fighting, and the feeling really beat up by that part of us that's really critical of ourselves. So, let's talk about this new way. This new way, that I'm going to float to you, is the idea of deeply listening to the part of you that's really critical. Deeply listening to your inner critic.

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Now, to explain what I mean by this, I'm going to share a really concrete technique. And as you learn about this technique, you will understand how it works, as well as the rationale for deeply listening. And this technique actually calls on you to personify the critical part of you, or to see it as a distinct entity.

Let me talk about the concrete technique; there are actually four steps and I'm going to tell you what the four steps are, then I'm going to go and explain all of them.

Number one, you want to start with a really sturdy, inquisitive state of mind. Number two, you imagine your inner critic is a person, or a distinct part of you. Number three, you want to be very curious, warm, and really listen to what you notice. And number four, you want to acknowledge and express gratitude to your critic. So, let's talk about what these steps mean, and why they're important, and how they can really help you change your relationship to this part of you, that's really critical.

So, number one, to start this process, being in a sturdy, inquisitive state of mind first, is essential. If you are starting this technique, and you are feeling quite fragile, or sensitive, or defeated or discouraged, it's probably not the time to sit down and have a cup of coffee with the critical part of you.

What you're setting out to do, is to create an internal dialogue or a conversation. And like any conversation, where you're deeply listening to the other person, you want to get yourself ready to hear a whole range of responses from questions that you might ask. And keep in mind that this is an exploration, this is not a fixing, and this is not a fight. So, once you find yourself there, your baseline is to feel calm and inquisitive.

The second step is to imagine that this critical part of you, that your inner critic, is either a person or a part of you with whom you can have a dialogue. So, let me explain this a little bit better, if it sounds like I'm speaking a different language.

You know that animated cartoon feature, it's called *Inside Out*? If you haven't seen it before with your kids, just google it. You will see this

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animated feature follows a young girl, who's going through a particularly stressful experience in her life. In it, they go inside of her mind, and they show characters that are personifications of her emotions. So, there's a character that represents sadness, one that's happy one, that's anger.

What I'm talking about here is, instead of your emotions being personified as characters, you're thinking about your inner critic kind of like a distinct part or person, or a sub-personality. An entity that's like one facet of your personality.

It might help you to think about it from the perspective of you might also have an anxious, people pleasing part, an analytical thinking part. You might have a part of you that's a consummate student. You might have a part of you that's really fearful of rejection. You might have a caretaking part. You might have a part that really loves figuring things out, and fixing things, and coming up with solutions.

And if you're familiar with internal family systems, this is the idea that we are made up of a variety of parts and multiplicity, if you will. So, step two, is to imagine that your inner critic is a person, a being, a distinct personality, a distinct entity, or a distinct part of you.

Now, once you've done that, step three, is to get really warm, really curious, and really listen. So, the first part of this is warmth. To feel warm towards someone means that we are receptive, we are open, and we are not defensive.

To start this type of dialogue, and to deeply listen to whatever this critical part of you has to say and has to offer, calls on you to approach this part like you might approach a startled, scared creature that you come upon when you're hiking, or when you're in the woods.

A description that really resonated with me, is the description of a friendly attending, as described by David Rome in his book, *Your Body Knows the Answer*. I'm going to paraphrase the way he describes the stance of a friendly attending. He describes, "Imagine that you're walking through some

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outdoor area, whether it's a forest or near a stream, and as you're walking along, you come up upon a small, maybe, baby animal.”

For the sake of this description, let's just assume that you're not instantly worried about where that baby animal's mom or dad are. “But you come across this little baby animal that turns and recognizes that you're there and is startled. You, in response, you soften. And you, with your body language, try to convey to this little creature, that it's safe. You're not going to do anything that's going to cause it harm, and that you are friendly, and that you are open, and that you are present, and that if it needs anything, it can totally trust you and turn towards you.”

Like you might do with a baby kitten that looks a little scared, but you just want to, without words, convey a sense of warmth, and safety, and presence. This is the type of thing I'm talking about when I say bring warmth, and bring curiosity, and a desire to really listen. Because when you bring this level of attentiveness, and warmth, towards the part of you that's really critical, it will change the usual dynamic in a really interesting way.

When you do this, instead of feeling attacked by your critic, or feeling annoyed, or feeling like it's time to harshly interrogate your critic in response, because you feel defensive. When you are deliberately calm, curious, compassionate, warm, and you have this friendly attending presence, you lay the foundation for a much more fruitful exploration.

So, step one is to start with an inquisitive sturdy state of mind. And step two, is to imagine that your critic is a person or a part of you. And step three is to bring warmth, curiosity, and to really listen.

Let's talk about the curiosity piece here. When you are curious, and you are going to have a conversation with somebody; you're going to go have coffee, and you're so curious to know about all the things. When you are genuinely curious, you ask questions.

And you ask questions that you really care about the answers to: What are you worried about? What's your biggest fear? When did you first come on the scene? And why? What are you afraid might happen if you didn't give

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me this criticism? If you didn't do the job of always being so critical? What do you want me to know so that you feel more understood?

These questions are not a script. There's actually, no right way to have an internal dialogue with a part of you or a critical part of you. The goal here, is simply to ask anything that you might want to know, so that you can better understand this part of you that's critical.

And then, the next part of this is to really listen to the answers. Meaning, don't just listen and feel in anticipation of saying your next thing. This kind of a turn off... In conversations with external people, it conveys that you don't really care what they're saying. You don't really want to know; you're just waiting to say your piece. So, when you listen, you want to listen like you actually give a shit. Listen like you care.

How do you actually listen to yourself when you're having this internal conversation? Listening means you ask a question, and then you listen in for images, memories, impulses, sensations, thoughts, beliefs, recollections of what people said, recollections of situations you've experienced, you feel in, notice things that come up.

You basically, just observe what comes in response. Knowing that when you're having an internal discussion with yourself, the responses can come in a variety of forms, depending on how your particular mind works. Some people are more visual. Some people have more auditory answers. Some people have answers that come in thought. Some people have answers that come in memories. Some people have very strong physical sensations.

It kind of doesn't matter *how* it shows up for you, just that you're open to whatever comes to the surface. So, when you ask a question, and you listen for an answer, whatever the form is, just be patient and channel the stance and the idea of; what's this all about?

And then when it feels complete to you. The fourth step is to thank this critical part for the conversation. And what I mean by thanking it; you don't have to write a letter, you don't have to stand up and announce to the world

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that you've just had a conversation with a critical part of yourself, and you're going to thank it. You just, inside, in your mind, you just express gratitude. You express some acknowledgement. Say basically; thanks for sharing, thanks for being willing to share.

And let that part know that you heard it. You might just sort of mentally express, to that part, that you know it's trying to do a good job. Maybe you understand it's trying to protect your health in some way, and you totally appreciate it. Maybe you can tell this part that you're going to keep this dialogue going, in the future. Maybe you just say, "I heard you." And, that's it. That is the technique that you can use to have a totally different interaction with a critical part of you.

You may be wondering; why do this type of interaction? Why not just try to get rid of the inner critic? Aren't we just supposed to eradicate the mean voices and make them go away? Isn't it a little bit, maybe, coddling to do this type of thing with a part of us that is usually really harsh, and really mean, and really judgmental, and really rigid?

Or, you might just be thinking; isn't this just kind of a really weird exercise, to talk to yourself like you're talking to somebody else? Don't people who hear voices and have internal conversations, don't they actually have some pathology that can interfere with daily life? So, let me address these one by one.

Number one, trying to eradicate or force a pattern of thoughts into hiding, it just doesn't work. It's just not practical. If it was practical, then most of us wouldn't have an inner critic, because most of us have tried really hard to get rid of it.

Number two, inquiry and having a conversation like this, is not coddling. Inquiry is not the same thing as walking on eggshells. And number three, yes, this can be a weird exercise, if it is new to you. But let's take a minute to think about this. At any moment in time, most of us can actually identify multiple parts of us. Like, if somebody asks you to go out to dinner, you might have a part of you that wants to go and another part of you that doesn't want to go.

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Or, you might have a part that gets really mad and yells at somebody at work. And then later on, you have another part of you that feels kind of worried that you might lose your job, or that you might have a stressful interaction with your boss because you yelled.

And there might be another part of you, that actually understands that everybody gets stressed sometimes. At baseline, we all have a variety of parts or facets that we're made up of. And explicitly labeling these parts, as parts, doesn't mean you have dissociative identity disorder.

Or, that you're flirting with being like the character in that film *Sybil* with multiple personalities, that are really pathologic. Labeling these different parts is just a strategy to actually flesh out or formally categorize the multiplicity of parts that we actually all have.

So, let's get back to 'why.' Why take this different approach? Well, there are three reasons. Number one, having an internal dialogue like this permits you to learn the purpose or role that your critical part is playing for you.

Number two, this type of internal conversation helps you better understand your relationship with the critical part of you; is it adversarial? Are you constantly defensive against it? Are you curious about it? Are you constantly listening to it, believing it, and feeling defeated and discouraged? What is your relationship to that critical part?

And, the third reason why to do this, is to lay the groundwork for transforming this relationship. And to consider what type of other job, our inner critical part might want to do more.

These three things, they increase your awareness, and they increase your understanding, in a way that can have profound ramifications not only for your self-concept, but for how you approach your habits.

Think about your habits this way. If you have habits that you're trying to change, one of the things that gets in the way of habits is listening to the critical voices in our mind that tell us; we are not far enough along, we should be doing better, change should be happening faster, there must be

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something wrong with this, you're broken, you're not worthy. And, only once you change your habits, will you be able to feel at peace, and calm, and content, and worthy.

The usual way that we approach these critical voices and critical thoughts is trying to fix them, trying to change them. Now, trying to fix and change something, I don't know about you, but if you've ever been on the receiving end of somebody who's trying to fix you and change you, from a place where you are not actually heard or understood first, it doesn't feel very good.

What I'm offering, with having an internal dialogue, is a different approach, so that you can actually better understand the purpose that, that critical part is playing for you, your relationship with that critical part. And then, from that place, consider how you want this relationship to actually evolve going forward.

So, when it comes down to the logistics of doing this exercise, let me just go over the steps again, and then give you some very specific points. Number one, you want to start off feeling very inquisitive and very sturdy. Number two, you want to imagine that your inner critic is a person, or a part, or an entity within you, with whom you can converse. And then you want to get very warm, very curious, and really listen to the answers you get from your inquiries. And ultimately, at the end, you want to offer acknowledgement, and thanks to this critical part of you.

If you're going to do these four steps, what's it actually look like? You can either do this, just quietly, mentally, in your mind. You can do this by asking questions and recording things, just on your recording device on your phone, or you can write it down.

I will say, there's a significant ease that happens when you do this with somebody else, who can ask you these questions and facilitate this type of inquiry. But you can do this same inquiry all on your own.

I'll just give you an example of what it might sound like when I do this. So, I start out making sure that I'm in a calm, centered, grounded state. And I

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already feel kind of inquisitive and interested in what I'm going to find. I do not start out this type of exercise if I'm feeling highly anxious, pressured for time, worried about things, or discouraged.

Then, I will just bring to mind something that feels very critical. I will either think of something that I tell myself that sounds kind of mean, or I will bring to mind the bodily sensations of feeling criticized, just for a moment, to bring that part to the surface.

And then, I will just kind of imagine that this is a person. Sometimes I will flesh out an image of an actual person, like particular characteristics. It might be somebody who has really thick glasses and their arms are crossed, and they've got a bunch of pens in their pocket, and they're holding a clipboard, and they've kind of got a scowl on their face.

The personified version that I bring to mind, isn't the same every time, and you can do whatever feels good to you. But you can bring to mind either a figure, or an energy, or a visual that helps you, as you are going into this internal conversation.

And once I have that in mind, either this figure, or this person, or this feeling, I will do what I mentioned, that David Rome describes as tapping into that friendly attending really warm place, and then I will just start asking questions.

Basically, I'm asking questions of myself, right? I will say something like: Hey, what are you worried about? And then, I will listen for whatever comes. And the answer might be, "I'm worried if I stopped talking to you, and telling you that you need to work harder, that you're going to fail." And then, I'll say, "Oh, okay, so what happens if we fail? What's the problem?" And then I will listen to the answer.

The answer might be a memory of another time that I failed, or a memory of fearing failure or fearing rejection. Or, it might be a sensation of a constriction that reminds me of the emotion of shame. And then what I'll do is I'll just ask whatever comes next.

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So, if maybe, it was a memory, I'll say, "Okay, I totally get where you're coming from. And I understand that if you were to change what you're doing, you're afraid of these things. Is there anything else that you might want you to know?" And I'll just listen to whatever comes up. I'll just keep going back and forth with this type of conversation, for as long as it feels right.

And then, just like I would with a friend that I'm having coffee with, I will basically say, "Hey, thanks so much for sharing. That was really helpful. I totally get where you're coming from. I want to keep this conversation going."

When I do that, I kind of just notice, how does this part respond? Does it roll its eyes and say, "Well, sure, maybe. We'll see if we keep talking it out or no." Is it skeptical? Is a little bit defensive? What's it like? I'll take note of that. And, that's it.

As you notice, when I'm describing this example, I'm not approaching this from the point of view of; I need to fix and get rid of this critical part. I'm approaching this from the point of view of; what's here, and why? What's here for me to learn? What messages, what ideas, what beliefs, what experiences are housed in this part of me, in this facet of me, that is quite critical of me, that might really help me to learn about?

If you've listened this far, I cannot wait to hear how this exercise goes for you. And if you do this, and you notice that you actually just want to sort of rush through it, because you just want to get rid of this critical part, that's totally normal.

If, when you do this exercise, you think, "Gosh, this feels kind of strange to be talking to myself in this way." That means you're doing it in the right way. You're stretching yourself to try something a little bit new. That the more you do it, the more familiar it actually gets. But in the beginning, it is supposed to feel a little bit unfamiliar, and that's totally fine.

So, let's summarize what you've learned. The usual way we respond to our inner critic, is to believe the thoughts, believe the ideas and sentiments,

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and to feel discouraged and deflated. And/or to ignore it, resist it, and fight it off. But when we do both of these, we don't actually transform the critical part of us. And, we don't actually make any progress.

Instead of these usual ways, my invitation to you is to have a conversation, where you deeply listen to the part of you that is critical. When you deeply listen to a part that you normally fight off, or try to get away from, you're going to discover things that are subconscious. That are not usually present for you in your awareness. That are going to be really fruitful, as you start looking at the habits that you usually notice yourself, criticize yourself for.

I hope that you like this different approach, and that you have so much fun trying this. If you'd liked what you listened to here, I would love it if you would let me know, by leaving a review on iTunes™ of the podcast. If you loved what you heard here, and you feel drawn to share it with someone else, that you think would benefit from these topics, from this type of discussion, that would mean the world to me. The more people who can better understand themselves, better understand their habits, the better the world we live in can be.

So, I will talk to you next time.

If you want to learn more about how to better understand your patterns, stop feeling reactionary, and get back into the proverbial driver's seat with your habits, you'll want to join my email list which you can find linked in the show notes. Or, if you go to www.HabitsOnPurpose.com you'll find it right there.

If you're serious about taking this work deeper and going from an intellectual understanding to off the page implementation, I offer coaching in two flavors: individual deep-dive coaching with the somatic and cognitive approach, and a small group coaching program. The small group is currently for women physicians only, and comes with CME credits. You can be the first to learn more about the individual or group coaching options by getting on the email list.

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Thanks for listening to *Habits On Purpose*. If you want more information on Kristi Angevine or the resources from the podcast, visit www.HabitsOnPurpose.com. Tune in next week for another episode.