

Episode 006



Soothing Your Inner Critic *(Inner Critic #1 of 4)*

February 7, 2021

Well, hello friends.

I am AMAZING.

I'm also loving life because this weekend is the Super Bowl, and my Kansas City Chiefs are trying for back-to-back Championships.

What?

Oh My Goodness! You guys!

Anyone who knows me or has taken a spin by my Facebook page KNOWS I am a HUGE Chiefs fan.

Have been since my early 20's.

So, I'm not a band wagoner. I didn't jump on this train last year.

I've been loyal through all the dark, lonely years when we couldn't scare up more than a few wins a season to save our soul.

So, the prospect of winning a second championship in as many years is beyond anything, I ever dreamed possible.

That said, we're playing the Buc's and Tom Brady is no joke.

So, it will be interesting.

Two great quarterbacks – one at the beginning of what's sure to be a record-shattering career and one nearing the end of one.

As I was thinking about these two superstar QB's and the mental strength it took for each of them to not only get to the NFL but to the Super Bowl. And multiple

times no less, it led me to today's topic, which is about **Soothing Your Inner Critic**.

In my practice, I work with clients looking to either up-level their corporate career OR make the transition into entrepreneurship.

But a specialty area for me is helping people overcome feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty so they can do the things they want from a place of ease and confidence.

So, quieting the inner critic is key to that.

The inner critic is that negative internal voice that accuses and demeans and says super nasty things to us.

And that keeps us playing small or shrinking back from our dreams because our inner critic has convinced us we're not enough.

So, in this episode, I wanted to talk about where the inner critic comes from. And why it does what it does.

Because I believe we can learn to sooth our inner critic by first understanding why it's doing the things it does. After all, it's an inner critic. It's not external. It's PART of you.

So there has to be a good reason it keeps doing what it's doing. Let's work to understand it.

To learn why it flares up.

And what we can do about it.

Sound good? Let's dive in.

Let's start with what triggers our inner critic.

Usually, it's triggered by an event or an interaction that our brain classifies as disappointing, painful, or threatening.

And that makes our brain serve up a thought about that event or interaction that basically blames YOU. It tries to convince you that this threatening thing is happening or about to happen because of some defect you have:

- Lack of motivation
- Lack of intelligence
- Lack of skills
- Lack of likeability
- And the list goes on.

It's our biggest accuser.

Your inner critic might say things like:

"I can't **believe** you did that."

"You're so stupid / irresponsible / fill in the blank."

"You can't do it."

"You are SUCH a loser."

"It's all your fault."

"You just didn't **try** hard enough."

Most of us are well acquainted with that voice.

I know I am. For sure.

So we know it's triggered by a potentially disappointing or threatening situation.

But why?

Well, it's kind of like those scary movies I used to love in junior high.

The enemy is coming from **INSIDE** the house.

Your inner critic isn't coming from outside.

You can't shut down contact.

You can't label it as toxic and stay away.

It's there inside your brain.

It's **ALWAYS** there.

So, if it's going to be your constant companion, best to try to understand it. Maybe even make friends with it. And most certainly, to learn how to soothe it.

So it can calm down. And stop trying to scare you to death.

But more on that later.

First, let's look at **WHY** your inner critic does its thing. Because once you know that, you might actually start to feel a little compassion for it.

It comes down to three reasons.

- 1. It's trying to motivate you.**

This is the mental equivalent of 'cracking the whip.'

Your inner critic wants you to be prepared so it's trying to galvanize you through motivation (on the positive side). Unfortunately, most of the motivation also comes with a negative twist.

It might tell you things like:

“Stop being **so lazy**.”

“You better get busy **or else**.”

“You better move it, **or it'll be too late**.”

While it's not **MY** preferred, this kind of negative motivation **CAN** work in specific circumstances.

For example, it's used a lot in sports.

And for some, when used in our youth and for something we're highly motivated to do, it can sometimes give us the grit to dig deeper and motivate us to work harder and do better.

Unfortunately, when this approach works, it can become a non-virtuous cycle of trash-talking that – while it might have some limited upside in our youth – over time, it scares the be-jeepers out of us.

For me it's those phrases “**or else**” and “**or it'll be too late**”.

They're threatening.

This scary dialogue wears you down over time.

And eventually, instead of motivating you, you start to **BELIEVE** what the inner critic is saying.

You start to **BELIEVE** you're lazy or unmotivated or whatever.

And you start to be there might be dire consequences if you **DON'T** do it and/or that you're not too old to do it.

Both imply that you're doomed.

So, while your inner critic might be trying to motivate you, its negative approach is harmful – especially over the long-term.

2. It wants you to feel more in control.

By criticizing ourselves, our inner critic is trying to give us the illusion that we're **IN** control by making ourselves responsible for the bad thing that happened or that might happen.

By trying to convince us that if we just try harder or do better, we can make the situation or interaction turn out differently.

But here's the truth.

We're **NOT** in control of most things that happen to us.

All we can do is try our best. Show up fully. Bring our best to the situation.

But much of the time, the outcome isn't entirely in our control.

So back to the Super Bowl example.

The outcome of this year's game is anybody's guess. We'll find out this evening.

Both teams are fierce competitors, or they wouldn't be there. And to a large degree, the outcome will depend on how well each team responds to the situations that occur by taking advantage of opportunities where they can and reducing the impact of the negative when possible.

The same is true for you.

Maybe you didn't get that job you wanted. Or you got passed over for promotion.

And your inner critic is trying to tell you that it's your fault.

But the truth is, maybe you did your best, but another candidate was more qualified. That happens. And it doesn't mean you're lazy, bad, stupid, or doomed.

It just means that wasn't YOUR job.

No matter how hard we try, we don't have control of all the situations we experience.

But unfortunately, our brain likes certainty.

So, the inner critic launches its attack to ensure that NEXT TIME, you work harder or are more prepared or whatever, so you CAN control the outcome.

The brain is wrong of course.

We are not in control of most things. We are only in control of how we choose to respond to or think about the things we encounter.

And that leads us to the last one. **Reason #3 is it's trying to keep you safe.**

When the brain sees what it thinks is a potential disappointment or threat, it'll rely on the inner critic to scare you by accusing YOU of being the problem.

That is your brain's way of ensuring you avoid putting yourself out there.

It keeps you playing small, so you stay safe.

The problem is that by convincing you that YOU are the problem or are to blame, instead of motivating you or keeping you safe, the inner critic is ACTUALLY eroding your self-esteem because you start to believe you can't trust or count on yourself.

And you'll KEEP playing small.

You'll believe you can't do it.

This is not helpful.

For our caveman ancestors, the primitive brain's ability to identify potential threats was very helpful. It kept our ancestors from being eaten by the lion.

In today's world, we don't have to fear the lion.

Only our brain.

So now that you know the three reasons – keeping us motivated, helping you feel more in control or keeping you safe – it's time to talk about what to do about it.

Notice that I called this episode "Soothing Your Inner Critic".

Because it's coming from inside the house, I don't like to talk in terms of silencing, killing, or taming.

Your inner critic is not your enemy.

It's your misguided friend.

It's trying to HELP you. Granted, not in a very skilled manner. And it's actually not helping.

But the point is it's trying to.

And you're never going to be rid of your inner critic because it's actually just your brain serving up thoughts that are trying to protect you.

So, the key is to be compassionate.

To understand that the motivation here is that it's trying to help you.

There are three key things to do with your inner critic.

1. Notice the thoughts and stay aware of them.
2. Acknowledge the thoughts in a loving way.
 - a. Say "Hey, I see you."
 - b. "Thanks for trying to keep me safe."
 - c. "Thanks for looking out for me."
3. In just as loving a way, say "let's do this another way."
4. Then, proactively choose a different thought when you think about that thing your inner critic is warning you about. Maybe it's something like:
 - a. "I'm going to give it my best shot."
 - b. "I've got this."
 - c. "I'm all in."

These thoughts come from a place of confidence.

And now that you understand that your inner critic is really that part of your brain that is frightened. That wants you to be safe. Then you know that a thought like "I've got this" is going to soothe that frightened critic.

They may still be a bit fearful, but when the confident part of you assures them that you're all in and going to give it your best, your critic will relax.

It'll let the confident part of you take control.

And when you're feeling confident because you're thinking "I've got this", what will you do?

You'll prepare and then give it your best effort.

And in doing so, you'll be doing everything you can to make that thing happen.

Will you succeed? Maybe.

We know we don't always get everything we want. But then, that's not REALLY the most important thing, now, is it?

The most important thing in life is in fully showing up. In being true to what we want and who we are. And in giving it our best.

It's who we are being as we're going for it.

And if we fall short as we sometimes do? It's okay.

You've learned.

And next time, you'll show up as an even stronger version of yourself.

So don't try to silence your inner critic.

See it.

Appreciate where it's misguided attempts to motivate or scare you are coming from.

Soothe it. And then, show it who's boss.

Until next time, make it a great week my friends.