



# MASTERING

## YOUR INNER CRITIC

**AND 7 OTHER  
HIGH HURDLES TO ADVANCEMENT**

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HOW THE BEST WOMEN LEADERS  
PRACTICE SELF-AWARENESS TO  
**CHANGE WHAT REALLY MATTERS**



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*A Sneak Peek*

## **Stop the Madness: Coach Your Critic Every Step of the Way**

### **The Big Question:**

Is your Inner Critic stifling your voice, preventing you from making decisions, stopping you from realizing your dreams, hampering your relationships, or minimizing your joy?

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### **The Big Lie:**

The Inner Critic is my moderate, accurate guiding light.

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### **The Big Opportunity:**

Reaching your full potential and helping others to reach theirs by clueing in to what's informative, and distinguishing limiting beliefs.

### **What Are We Talking About Really?**

You may ignore it for a little while, but at your most vulnerable times (for instance, when you're feeling stressed, insecure, unhappy, exhausted, or unclear), an inner voice expresses judgment, frustration or, at its extreme, harshness and contempt. This "inner voice" can be instructive, and clue us into some feelings or thoughts that might be helpful as we navigate life and relationships. When extreme, this inner voice can also hurl offensive assaults on us and others. Despite where the Inner Critic is aimed, the commentary is anything but happy, loving, compassionate, and curious.

## What Is an Inner Critic?

For me, it's that voice inside our head that is critical of ourselves **and** critical of others. The Inner Critic can be instructive. If we find a person or situation that irritates us (either about our self or another) it is most likely for good reason. When we have that initial judgmental thought, chances are there is a person or situation that isn't quite right. Something is off. We have a moment – even a flash – of helpful “say what?”

But when the Inner Critic lingers, harps every day, becomes increasingly harsh, its utility I would argue has passed and she needs to take a *time-out*. Busy well-intended working women need a debilitating voice in their head about as much as they need to be jumping 3.5 feet in the air at a moment's notice (the average height of a high running hurdle.)

When we catch ourselves being self-critical, we need to practice abundant self-compassion. When we catch ourselves being critical of others, we need to practice compassion for the other and get exquisitely curious about them and/or the situation. It's that easy and that hard.

So what are some examples of the physical, emotional and mental characteristics, actions (or lack of), or daily decisions your Inner Critic may berate you for and trip you up on? The Inner Critic has the power to latch onto what could begin as a miniscule insecurity and enlarge it to a size that shatters your self-esteem and destroys your opportunities for advancement—if you let it. The seven other hurdles we'll be exploring in this book can serve as the symptoms and the early warning alarms that signal the ferocity of your Inner Critic. *But it's equally true that your Inner Critic can make you blind to the other hurdles and incapable of gliding.* Essentially, you have to pay equal attention to these hurdles to increase your chances of mastering your Inner Critic. And you have to learn to coach and re-direct your Inner Critic so you can glide over the other hurdles.

There is no way I could recognize (much less glide over) any hurdle if I didn't learn how to bring myself back to a place in my mind of knowing that I am worthy, whole, complete *no matter what*. I spent most of my formative years *appearing* self-confident and friendly, and *feeling on the inside* desperately not good enough.

Most of my “not good enoughs” were localized in body image issues. At 5'9 in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I was too big, too tall, wore glasses, and nothing seemed to fit me. *I* didn't seem to fit me, and more often than not, I felt uncomfortable in my skin. Especially around more petite, more fit, thinner, perfect-sighted girls. I stood out in ways I never asked for. I felt different, and thus, had a fairly well-honed Inner Critic at a very early age ready to remind me how totally different—and not good enough—I was at a moment's notice. It was only a bit later in life, when I gained some self-confidence in my abilities to lead and get stuff done when I (unconsciously) developed that not-so-nice, often unspoken, aspect of the Inner Critic: pointing that judgmental and critical voice in my mind *at others around me*.

The only thing that could derail me from being blissfully unaware of my impact on others (especially when I felt I knew better than them) was when I caught a view of my image in a mirror, which would cue the blaring and well-used tapes to play of body-hating self-talk. Too big. Too much. *Yuck*.

I was first introduced to the impact of these mean voices on me and my relationships while working alongside best-selling author and nationally-acclaimed psychotherapist, Terry Real. As managing director and then president and CEO of Terry's Relational Life Institute, I had the good fortune of attending hundreds of hours of trainings offered to certify mental health professionals in a methodology for counseling couples, and to equip couples themselves. The Institute also held relationship boot camps for couples, offering tools to better manage their most intimate relationships.

As with many useful conceptual frameworks aimed at changing behavior, managing relationships starts with *us*. I learned from Terry to cast aside the all-too-familiar (and, arguably, easier) pattern of analyzing others, and to begin with better managing my own thoughts and feelings. Job No. 1 was to notice what I came to lovingly call my Inner Critic, and how she wreaks havoc in my life.

What I learned from Terry and many of his seasoned and exceptional student-turned-teaching therapists, was this: I don't have to be in so much emotional pain about how I am *not good enough*. My relationships can be easier. I can navigate conflict with more ease and less stress. I can have a practice all my own that will leave me feeling worthy in any environment I am in, and sensitive to the unique value others bring. What has evolved for me since being introduced to these concepts is a moment-to-moment practice of *returning* to a place of 1) feeling worthy, whole, complete (compassion for self) when I am introduced to all the ways I am imperfect, and 2) curiosity and compassion for that person/s who I find myself being critical of.

I want to emphasize that this is a practice where we *return* to a place of compassion and curiosity (a place I call "Compassionate Center") because, as a human who is in relationship with other humans, I am bound to get triggered.

### **When Your Inner Critic is Directed at Others**

You may find that when your Inner Critic is directed not at your own shortcomings and imperfections, but at another, it is usually because you are communicating with someone who (for you) is showing up as know-it-all (*what a jerk!*), or lacking in curiosity (*such an idiot*), or as arrogant and thus, unaware of their impact (*total monster!*) Rarely will you say these things out loud. However, let's not confuse your expression of these thoughts with the

level others *feel or sense* from your unspoken, non-verbal, maybe even self-righteous contempt.

Here is one of the magic bullets about managing the Inner Critic when its wrath is pointed at someone other than you: You can't be simultaneously peering down your nose at someone in an internal swirl of "what an idiot" and be genuinely curious about that person or the situation you find yourself in.

So, you need to build an internal mechanism to notice the feelings (anger, annoyance, disgust) and then notice the thoughts (jerk, idiot, monster) and then push *pause*. Once you pause your own thinking, you then can consciously switch to thinking with curiosity. For example, let's say you are confronted with someone who is angry or overly emotional and you are annoyed. Instead of brushing them off or engaging in kind, a shift to curiosity would include first *noticing that you are annoyed and pausing that feeling long enough to get curious*. "I wonder what's making him so angry? Is this how she is typically or is there something triggering this behavior?"

For practice with the routine of inquiry, check out the work of the Inquiry Institute. Founder Marilee Adams, Ph.D., coined the concept of QUESTION THINKING™, based on brain-based knowledge about the importance of questions in thinking and communication. Besides compassion, curiosity is the most powerful opponent of the Inner Critic.

### **When Your Inner Critic is Directed at You**

A trigger that fires up my nastiest inner critic is when I realize I came across with a tone I didn't intend (*you're so intense, Susan!*) or when I say something that I wish I framed differently (*think more carefully before you speak!*) or at the moments that I see the discrepancy between what I teach and what I catch myself sometimes doing (*you're not very good at this either, huh? Who are you to teach this work?*).

I dressed up as my inner critic for our Halloween work party a few years back. My hair was in a very tight bun. I was dressed very conservatively in a high-collar shirt, tweed blazer and pearls. I had small glasses on, resting at the tip of my nose. The only posture this physical manifestation of my inner critic needed to make was (with pursed lips and an expression of scrutiny) with one hand on the hip and the other hand lifted up (as if in your face) with the index finger poised to take you down. That's my girl! She can get cruel. And she's *really* good at her job.

In their book, *How Women Rise: Break the 12 Habits Holding You Back From Your Next Raise, Promotion, or Job*, Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith posit that forgiveness and self-forgiveness are the most powerful tools they know for women with a tendency to judge or second guess themselves. I would add: forgiveness of self and others on an ongoing, sometimes moment-to-moment basis, is essential if we wish to manifest the life we women want and realize our full potential.

It is imperative to at least think seriously about your Inner Critic and how frequent it may get in the way of your life quality, personally and professionally, as it assaults your sense of self-worth, and your sense of the worthiness of others. Coaching your inner critic is vital to your success as you scale each of the hurdles in the coming chapters. As you take risks, as you try on new ways of thinking and acting, you will need an internal "muscle" of personal power and centeredness. When you stop the madness of this sabotaging self-talk and replace it with compassion and curiosity, you liberate yourself and those in your sphere in ways that will be life-changing. It's really hard to make a change and/ or come to accept something (really, genuinely accept – even embrace the possibility of a person or situation) if your Inner Critic is leading the way.

Imagine a day where you felt good in your skin more often than not, where you had less conflict with others, where you weren't so exhausted from trying so hard, where



you weren't accepting things you shouldn't, where you had people tell you that something about you seems.... More open, somehow happier, less "wound up", *different?* What would be possible?

Imagine a day when instead of feeling insecure, and either making yourself small and giving up or turning to the outside world for affirmation by way of acceptance from another, or acquisition of a material item, or gratification from an accomplishment (which are all arguably positive yet fleeting alternatives) you *paused\_in* your vulnerable moment and breathed in some compassion for yourself, reminding yourself that you are *enough and worthy* right this very minute, and it felt *real and good?* What would be possible?

Imagine a day when, instead of shutting out those who disappoint and anger you (doing what you want anyway despite the impact on others), or lashing out and giving yourself permission to express when contemptuous (demanding things be done your way despite the impact on others) you *paused* in your self-righteous "I'm right / they're stupid" moment and breathed in some compassion for others, reminding yourself that they are worthy as human beings to be treated with respect and curiosity? What would be possible?

### **Mastering the Inner Critic: A Personal Journey**

*Before I ever even considered writing this book* I often shared with others the role my own Inner Critic has played in my life and the simple (yet challenging!) practice of coaching those distracting—often harsh, always judgmental—voices in my head. The Cliff Notes version is that my life has been a near-perfect-how-to design of events for honing a very over eager Inner Critic---and producing an abundance of hurdles. Yet these same life events have also given me a will to master my Inner Critic and the courage and support to learn how to glide. Let me explain.

I relate to the story, *The Jungle Book*—only instead of a little boy being raised by a family of wolves, I was a little girl raised by men. At a very young age, I wasn't a "tom-boy" nor was I a "girly-girl." I didn't fit any stereotype; I didn't think at all about my girl-ness. The thing I share in common with Mowgli is that I belonged in the world in which I was raised because I was accepted and loved and encouraged.

This sense of belonging came at a time when I wasn't fully aware (but would be in years to come) of my awkwardness. Not only was I a little girl who was being raised by a single father; I had curly, red hair cut short like "Little Orphan Annie," "Flintstones"-brand eye glasses, (which, for a time, covered up an eye patch over my right eye, in an effort to strengthen my left) and pants and shirts that were just a snitch not long enough on my taller-than average, little-girl frame.

Feeling the discomfort of being different as a kid was mostly neutralized by the love I felt from my father. He was funny, loving, warm-hearted, attentive, encouraging and also had a gift with words. He did what millions of women (and a few men, too) have done: He took on the sole responsibility of running a household, providing income, and caring for children. Dad never set out to raise two kids as a single father. He did eventually find a new life partner in my step-mother, Maria, but that wasn't until I was an early teen. Until he had Maria's support, Dad managed it all, and did so with an abundance of love. My parents had divorced when I was 3, and my brother and I stayed on the small New England island where we lived with our dad; our mother moved off island and out of state and we visited with her several times a year. It wasn't ideal, but I had the benefit of learning from two very different worlds: my on-island world with my single dad and small community, and my off-island world where my mom and her side of the family introduced me to New York City, Broadway shows, and the world of business.

My stepfather, David, married my mom when I was 8. He worked in New York

City for a big publishing company, where he was ad director and then publisher of a major magazine. It was in late middle school when he invited me to join him for a day in the office. I recall this experience like it was yesterday. The hustle of the city was thrilling to me. The sky-rise where his office was located was in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, and it felt like everything important happened within a block radius. The foods, smells, people, and speed—electric! But what I recall most is walking in with him and being greeted by a very nice woman who sat outside his office. She took his coat, got him coffee, and handed him his agenda for the day. He was friendly and appreciative (an extrovert’s extrovert). He had a corner office, and his furniture and walls were littered with beautiful knick-knacks and paintings.

I recall thinking how lucky David was to have someone help him organize his world. My mom was a personal secretary for an insurance agent back in the Connecticut suburbs, and every so often, I would go to work with her and help with filing or mailings. I had seen office life before, and my genuine appreciation for those in “support functions” is real—likely because I saw how things functioned *because* of those like my mom, who helped organize everything. But this world of David’s opened my eyes to the “other side” and before I knew it my awe was reinforced with his words that day: “Honey, you can do this, too, someday you know.” The combination of encouragement from all of my parents made me feel confident that I could do anything I set my mind to.

Somehow, this “I can do it” tween morphed into a very active yet insecure high schooler, an overachieving college student and a very driven young professional who, when she wasn’t being a competitive workhorse was wracked with self-doubt. Who was this monster Inner Critic and where did she come from? And what on earth could I do to remove her stunning power over me? It turned out, I had access to the remedy within me, I just didn’t know it. You do too. Enter compassion.

## <H1>Accessing Your Compassionate Center

You think “accessing a compassionate center” sounds a little hokey and new-age-therapeutic? Stay with me. At its core, compassion is the desire to relieve suffering. If you feel stressed, frustrated, unsafe, unproductive, indecisive, that is indeed, some measure of suffering. The scale could be miniscule or mammoth. You don’t need to create the compassionate center; you just need to access it. In the interest of the premise of the seven other hurdles (and their mother!), your compassionate center is the place you dwell where you fully understand that you are okay, worthy, enough right now. This is the place where you deeply believe you are no better or worse than another human being. Accessing your compassionate center is believing that there isn’t anything out there in the world (a person who will love you, a material item that will delight you, or an accomplishment that will gratify you) that will make you more worthy than you are right now (as you read this). There is no language you will speak, there is no salary you will make, there is no house or town in which you will live, there is no lover you will find, there is no mountain you will climb that will make you more worthy as a human being—and thus, *more okay*—than you are this very minute. The belief you must cast aside is that your worthiness (your “okay-ness”) will be found *outside of yourself*.

Does it feel awesome to be loved and accepted? Oh, yes! Is life easier to afford when we make more money? Yes! Does it feel great to learn a skill and master it? For sure. Is it rewarding to be offered a promotion? I believe it is. Is it awesome to set a goal and accomplish it? Uh-huh. Yet the big lie you tell yourself is that these things will result in your lasting peace and happiness. That when you XYZ (fill in the blank), *then* you will be enough. As if there is an arrival at this thing called “worthiness.” So, you buy the beautiful things. You seek to be loved and accepted and win over others. You achieve bigger and

harder goals. Only to want...more. Only to feel like perhaps the *next* brand-name handbag (or designer suit, luxury car, bigger house) will make you feel the way you want, the *next* person who accepts or loves you will fill that hole inside you, or when you reach the *next* goal (title, role, level of leadership responsibility) you'll finally be satisfied.

I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news. The "if only I XYZ" strategy of worthiness is not a winning strategy. Trust me. I have tried it all on for size and it doesn't work. I have witnessed others buy or hustle for their worthiness too. It doesn't work because there is no permanent arrival to this place called worthiness. While an entire chapter is devoted to the topic of confidence, it's important to note that worthiness is different than confidence. But the two get confused. Worthiness you *believe*. Confidence you *build*. Think about it: if you want to more confidently speak a third language, the best way to go about it is to study and practice speaking the language. As a result of your effort, your fluency will likely improve, resulting in your increased confidence when speaking that language. This results not in your being better than others generally, but in you being perhaps better at speaking the language. Where there is confusion between confidence and worthiness is believing that when you speak that third language more fluently, you will be a better human being—somehow more worthy and thus, better than others as a result of your newfound skills. In actuality, this is a false sense of worthiness. Why? What happens if you can't conjure up the right word, in a high-stakes moment or in your third language? How do you feel now? You may be able to speak the language better than many others and as such have increased confidence speaking that language; you won't be better than them, however, and this doesn't change your worthiness as a human being – or theirs. You were worthy before you learned any of the languages you speak; they are worthy too.

Let's play this out: You're overseas attending a global conference and find yourself making small talk at a reception. What a great opportunity to speak in your

newly-minted third language. You ask in that tongue if anyone speaks the language and your question is received with some blank stares and then one person replies “I can speak so-so, not well.” You then probe further, in the third language, and find that in fact, you are SO MUCH BETTER than this other person. You feel triumphant. Holy cow! Doesn’t she LIVE in the country that considers this language their first language? Aren’t you the bomb for being the one with fluency in three languages! Ha-hah! You feel your shoulders swing back, your chin lift up, you are best.

A few more people enter the room, and overhear you speaking the language. They dive in with speed and delight and you find yourself utterly lost in the exchange, unable to keep up with their accent and speed of delivery. You feel about an inch high. You thought you improved so much more than you actually did. These people are so much more fluent than you are. You are embarrassed about being puffed up, feeling better than others, only moments earlier. You find your shoulders have dropped a bit and you look for a reason to exit. The external locust of control that is in charge of your worthiness (in this example, speaking a language) is designed perfectly to inflate or deflate your belief in yourself and in others.

You might be thinking, “Wait – isn’t this perfect? Life *should* lift us up and knock us down. Isn’t that how we learn resilience and agility and humility?” Well, not exactly. The difference between a life lesson (becoming aware that we are human and thus imperfect) and how we get there (extreme thoughts of being superior or inferior) is the challenge. In my experience working with women in particular, the “extreme” nature of moving from feeling better than another to feeling not good enough is what causes them and the people around them pain. Men have Inner Critics, yes, but women want (and need) to name it and discuss it, and coach it. Feedback from thousands of women has confirmed for me that the Inner Critic is more acute for women (often wreaking havoc in our lives) given

the hurdles we have to surmount. This is why accessing the compassionate center, and taking action from that place is so critical.

Picture your compassionate center as a place inside of you that you can conjure up whenever need be and return to it when you need to. It's a place of forgiveness, empathy, compassion and humor. Just thinking of it reminds you to get gentle with whatever you're contending with. Your compassionate center is the part of you that takes a child in her arms, whispering "it's okay" and "I'm right here for you" when they are crying after falling off their bike. At its core, it is love. It is acceptance. It is where safety is created. If compassionate center had a slogan on a T-shirt, it would say, "You are enough and you so very much matter."

By not having honed access to your compassionate center, you may have looked for your worthiness everywhere but there. The good news is that your muscle for compassionate center and thus, the core ingredient to your practice of mastering your inner critic, has been there all along. You just have to get to know it and use it. If you are an adult, it is not the job of your father or mother or partner or colleague or daughter or friend to bring you back to feeling worthy. It helps if you have people who believe in you and encourage you to take action. However, if you avail yourself to the part of you that can tell yourself you are worthy, whole, complete, right here, right now before looking for that elsewhere and setting yourself up for potential disappointment when other people and things don't suffice, why wouldn't you?

My goal is to mindfully be in compassionate center with myself and others as often as humanely possible. This is a choice, a practice, which has become a habit. It is rooted in goodwill, in generosity, and in abundance. The moments when I live and lead from compassionate center look like this: I am open hearted to myself and trust that I bring something of worth to the situation / conversation. I am aware that I am no better or

worse, fundamentally and as a human being, than whomever I am connecting with. (This includes both the multi-millionaire CEO of a several-billion dollar enterprise and the garage attendant with whom I left my car.) I am respectful and open-hearted to others and trust they bring something of worth to the situation / conversation. I am looking for connection points. I am thinking in questions, seeking to learn and grow. There is an abundance of appreciation for others and also for me and my own gifts and talents. I consciously experience gratitude, and find myself feeling thankful. When I am living and leading from this place, I deeply accept my awesomeness in the world and I deeply assume the awesomeness of others. I am aware that we are all human and as such, utterly imperfect. I am no less awesome, or imperfect, as a human being than anyone else. This, you could say, is my “happy place.” And it is available to me anytime I want. You can have one, too.

But let’s be honest, life doesn’t always allow us to be kicking around in the “happy place” of compassionate center, does it? We get triggered, because we are confronted with evidence that we are, in fact, imperfect (not enough in a specific situation) or we are confronted with feelings of disappointment or even anger about someone else being imperfect (not enough in a specific situation). This is where the madness begins. Let’s say it’s been eighteen months since you first raised the case for a promotion. You’ve been turned down due to a “salary freeze” or an “average performance review.” You know you’re already performing the duties that this upgraded position entails, and you’ve had eighteen months to practice the duties and document the results you garnered; you need the title, accolades and raise to make it official. In the corporate world, this is both a common spot to be in and one that the Inner Critic loves to swim and splash in. “Why ask again since you’re obviously inadequate?” “Stay safe; at least you have a steady



paycheck!” “They’ll find another reason to decline, so don’t bother.” “That other fool is just waiting to sink his teeth into the title.”

If you think that this negative self talk is not madness, consider this: The Inner Critic feeds off of negativity, insecurity, isolation, stagnancy, and misery. At its strongest, it makes you more miserable because you’re losing out on precious time and experiences—the fruits of life.

**Action:** *Envision your compassionate center somewhere in your body. I think of mine where my bellybutton is because it is the center of my body. Feeling my diaphragm move when I inhale the thought of that compassionate center and exhale the madness of the Inner Critic helps me to physically center. If your heart area is a better place for you to think your “center” lives, great. I like to hold my hand literally over that space at times and take a few deep breaths. It helps to bring me back there.*

### **Noticing When You’re Triggered**

*Trigger scenario #1:* You are thinking about this crazy-sounding place of bliss called compassionate center, and your thoughts are interrupted by an incoming call. You look down and see it is your manager. You pick up. He asks, “Did you get those slides done for the board presentation yet?” You immediately check the schedule, confirming they aren’t due to him for another three business days. In this moment, you want to SCREAM. Your Inner Critic just took command and is furious at him, and you find yourself thinking: “Seriously? Is he going to pull this again – where he acts like I’m late on a deliverable when I’m not? He just wants to cover his ass. He sucks.”

*Trigger scenario #2:* You are thinking about this crazy-sounding place of bliss called compassionate center, and your thoughts are interrupted by an incoming call. You look down and see it is your manager. You pick up. He asks, “Did you get those slides done for the board presentation yet?” You immediately assume you have missed the deadline and that you messed up. In this moment, you want to SCREAM. Your Inner Critic just took command and is furious at you: “Seriously? Can you manage to do anything right and on time? Way to win over the boss and show him how much value you bring. You suck.”

Noticing when you’re triggered is not that hard. In fact, you likely have been triggered in the last twenty-four hours. If you live with children, potentially a few times. Being triggered, in the domain of Inner Critic mastery, is when you find yourself either in an active reaction or you find yourself ruminating about how you suck or about how another person sucks. It’s the same voice and energy, just pointing in different directions. The trigger is fueled by harshness, contempt, criticism, feelings of annoyance. When you are triggered, disgust rises. When this energy is pointed at you, the aim is to (sometimes with excruciating detail) berate yourself about how you “shouldn’t have”, “should have”, “were supposed to” and any other active nastiness you can dish out about the level to which *you* suck.

When this energy is pointed not at you but at others, the aim is to (sometimes with excruciating detail) berate others about how they “shouldn’t have”, “should have”, “were supposed to” and any other active nastiness you can dish out about the level to which *they* suck. Most workplaces these days value being a “great place to work” and won’t tolerate bullying behavior. I want to acknowledge that the Inner Critic isn’t always “inner”. It does turn “outer.” Let’s stay focused on what we think and feel, knowing that this will eventually

(or quickly) impact what we say and do. When we slow down and first become aware of what we think and feel, what we say and do is far more intentional and productive.

Your Inner critic voice is how you know if you are triggered. Who and how you get triggered depends on you, your life experiences, your chosen attitude, your beliefs, your education, your expectations, your disappointments, your moments of pride, and your own “filters.”

To be triggered is to be human. People will make you angry. You will miss the mark. People will make mistakes. You will make mistakes. It’s all normal and comes with the territory of being human. However, how you think and feel when you are triggered, what you give yourself permission to say and do, and the actions that you take in those moments where generosity is decidedly lacking, is what self-mastery is all about. The consequences for how we manage ourselves is the business case for self-awareness. The aim: Return authentically to compassionate center as quickly as humanly possible and lead your life powerfully from that place.

In his 1995 best-seller, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goldman popularized “EQ” and the crucial skills needed to master it. Why? He suggested by mastering EQ, our success in relationships, work, and even physical well-being would be positively impacted. In the book, the power of the amygdala, the part of our brain that handles emotions, is reviewed. The amygdala can get triggered with an immediate and overwhelming emotional response out of proportion to the stimulus at hand. Since this seminal work, many in the field of psychology, neuroscience, and behavioral economics have added incredibly to our understanding of the human mind, and how we can manage our bodies so our brain is high-functioning (as Dr. Tara Swart suggests in Chapter 4 on the hurdle of Clarity). What hasn’t changed since the discovery of the amygdala in early 1820s, is that this part of our brain handles emotions and we, as humans, run the risk of our emotions

overpowering our sensibility in the moment. Most of the time, we know not to express, but sometimes, we literally can't help it; we get "hijacked" in the moment. This does not excuse us from having to take responsibility for the impact of our reactivity. It does, however, prove that you aren't crazy. Getting triggered as we navigate through our day is part of how we're wired.

I raise the activity of the brain when triggered because depending upon the situation and how triggered you are, you will want to have a range of options when it comes to how and for how long you practice pausing.

### **Pausing**

You know now what Compassionate Center is. You know now that it's almost impossible to stay there 24/7/365 because life happens and you will be triggered. Now what, you ask? It isn't any more or less complicated than taking a pause to *return* to your compassionate center. When you notice your Inner Critic is in control, pausing simply means you push pause. First, you need to notice the Inner Critic at work, then you need to PAUSE her. The more triggered you are, the longer your pause will need to be. If you're full-on swept up in a reactive hijack, your brain needs time to calm down. Take a walk. Get it out in a journal. Sit with it and do nothing but breathe.

#### *Pausing when your Inner Critic goes after you*

Do not seek out another until you have paused and returned to Compassionate Center. Here's why: If you are triggered into a place of hell where you are the worst (mother, employee, manager, wife, partner, sister, friend, daughter, etc...) on the planet, chances are you are experiencing shame. This is a great time to seek out someone who adores you

so they can tell you what you want to hear, right? Not so fast. Of course leaning on others to remind you of your awesomeness is a great way to come back to Compassionate Center from your self-berating walk down the hall of shame. That said, this is the moment when you can practice flexing the muscle of pausing. Resist the urge to *do* anything. Tune into the most compassionate part of you, the one who is finding little you just skinned her knee and is in need of big love. That's the purpose of the pause. To breathe and return to a place of compassion. Take a page out of my mantra if need be, and call yourself "honey." As in "oh, honey. You try so darn hard and you are so perfectly imperfect. You have gifts and talents galore, and, like everyone you are not above and beyond learning. It's okay. You are okay. This will be okay." It might even make you laugh, all this sweet talking you'll be doing with yourself. I laugh at myself all the time.

This self-forgiving talk I give myself isn't the same as being off the hook for repairing with another if need be. It's just the first step so that when you take responsibility for your imperfection / miss / mistake / unintended impact, you can be sure you do so from compassionate center. If you don't take this step, you might be at risk of apologizing over and over for your mishap, or ducking and hiding in the halls of shame and never taking responsibility for yourself, or running around in desperation to everyone you know looking for affirmation and confirmation that you don't suck *that bad*. These options, while familiar, will take more time and often won't result in you *really* feeling any better. Instead, you have access to an awesome coach who is at your disposal every hour of every day. Use her.

*Pausing when your Inner Critic goes after someone else*

Do not seek out another when you are frustrated with them until you have paused and returned to Compassionate Center. Here's why: If you are triggered into a place of self-

righteous indignation where the person you have been triggered by might be the worst (mother, employee, manager, wife, partner, sister, friend, daughter, etc...) on the planet, chances are you are experiencing grandiosity. You don't feel harshness toward yourself; you feel disgusted or in judgment of another. If you choose to confront this person while your Inner Critic is in command, I promise you that it won't go well. If you do take action in reactivity of your triggered feelings, you will run the risk of coming across (even if you try really hard not to) as patronizing, condescending, or downright insulting. This runs the risk of inviting three knee-jerk possible reactions from the other party: They will argue with you about the merits of their side (fight), they will want to run away from you because you're being mean and / or they don't like conflict (flight), or they will feel compelled to fix the situation, likely before fully hearing you out (fix) or perhaps before you have had time and space to get clear about what you need to make the situation better for you. Instead, if you take pause before you seek out the person until your state of fury has mostly passed, chances are you'll have a more productive conversation.

The work to do when you're triggered by someone else and you think they are the problem is no different than the work suggested when you are triggered into the halls of shame. Take pause and actively think with compassion about the other. (I can hear you say "What? Are you kidding me? Why on earth would I be compassionate when they are such a jerk?" ) Any activity in this book is, first and foremost, for you and your own sanity and second, to narrow the gap between your intention and impact with others. The reason you take this getting-off-your-high-horse business seriously is because it can change your life and relationships for the better. The work to be done when you notice your Inner Critic going off on another is to first pause and say "huh. That wasn't a very nice thing to think." Is there something I might be missing? Is there something about the other person that I relate to? Is there something that I could learn from this person or situation? Could I

confront the situation with greater levels of curiosity? Here's a little secret: you can't be genuinely curious and indignant at the same time. Compassionate Center is fueled by love and curiosity. Taking the pause simply means giving yourself the space and time to get there.

Upon hearing about the two-way street of the Inner Critic (she is so *not just here* to judge and criticize you, everyone is fair game for her), many people wonder "well, what if the other person is wrong, what if I'm right and they are XYZ (arrogant, stupid, an idiot, incompetent, a control freak, a maniacal perfectionist, a liar, etc.)? My reply to this is: So, what if they are? Are you giving yourself permission to think and behave in ways that elevates you into a place of being "better than" this person? If so, it's for sure a losing strategy. Don't confuse human BEINGS from human RESOURCES. There are a lot of good human beings who are the wrong resource for the job. Be careful here. Don't confuse the two, or how you would want to be treated if your judgment or behavior is in question: You would likely prefer to be treated from a place of curiosity and a sprinkle of benefit of the doubt. I have caught myself thinking a critical thought of another and have pushed pause and asked myself: Are you needing to be right, or are you concerned about how they are seeing or thinking about the situation? So often, I need to reflect on that. As I have disclosed in Chapter 5, I like things done my way. So my "good judgement" can in fact be a bit of covert desire to do it my way instead. When doing it my way isn't the issue (because the same end will be reached should different paths be taken) and I find myself concerned with something someone did or said, I need to quickly get curious about why. My Inner Critic tips me off. She is useful that way. And then I ask her (ever-so-politely) to sit the hell down. My compassionate center is beckoning, and my first order of business is to take pause.

## **Channeling All the Compassion and Curiosity You Can Muster**

I feel compelled to share a truth I learned over and over from several brilliant clinicians with whom I worked while at Terry Real's Relational Life Institute. Our shame causes us pain. We are more motivated to get to compassionate center from a place of feeling not good enough because it hurts to feel not good enough. We are more likely to try on calling our self "honey" than lingering in the depths of our *not-good-enoughs* for a moment longer. On the other hand, our self-righteous indignation (implicit or explicit) feels good to us (who doesn't like being right?) and hurts others around us. Thus, we are likely less motivated to push pause and seek compassionate center when the person who is the jerk (or the utterly incompetent one) is someone else. This creates a dilemma, where we run the risk of not being as intrinsically motivated to stop the madness of the Inner Critic when she's on fire about the idiots around her.

This is the most important part of this book. If you get nothing else, get this: your power to lead in your life and at work will multiply and magnify when you lead *yourself* from compassionate center. Your power rests in your own capacity to return to compassionate center with swiftness and intention. No one wants to be around someone who overtly or covertly exudes that they think they are better than others around them. I'm not talking about confidence. I'm talking about arrogance and the belief that you are better than another. If you lead from a place of thinking you know it all and others are idiots, you will eventually be that leader who is having a walk alone. No followers. People will leave you at work and at home. (Either forever or in the moment, mentally or physically.) Don't give yourself permission to be a know-it-all jerk. Just don't. If you are triggered regularly by the same person or situation into feelings of annoyance or disgust, here are my questions for you: What is not okay for you about this person or situation? Get specific. What do you want to see change? What do you need from that person or



situation to engage fully and in a spirit of abundance? Take this seriously. Senior leaders derail most often because they can't manage themselves and their relationships, not because of technical incompetence or a shortage of IQ. The first relationship we need to manage is the one with ourselves, beginning with the understanding that what we think and feel drives what we say and do. If you take action (speak, complain, make a request, and seek to repair) in the absence of compassion and curiosity for yourself and the other, please understand this will continue the unnecessary cycle of blame and shame. Instead, take pause. Do whatever it takes to return to your compassionate center.

Bringing yourself back to a place in your mind of knowing that you are worthy, whole, complete *no matter what* will help you courageously scale the hurdles. As discussed in our chapter on Recognized Confidence, all the self-talk in the world won't help you scale. You need to take action. You need to *Just Do It*. Where coaching the inner critic can help is having a dialogue with yourself rooted in compassionate center as you take risks and take courageous action.

You don't have to be in so much emotional pain about how you are *not good enough*. Your relationships can be easier. You can navigate conflict with more ease and less stress. You can have a practice all your own that will leave you feeling worthy in any environment you are in, and sensitive to the unique value others bring. What can evolve for you is a moment-to-moment practice of *returning* to a place of 1) feeling worthy, whole, complete (compassion for self) when you are confronted with your imperfections, and 2) curiosity and compassion for that person who you find yourself being critical of. The one you have been waiting for is you.

Forgiveness of self and others on an ongoing, sometimes moment-to-moment basis, is essential if you wish to manifest the life you want and realize your full potential. Take it a moment at a time, make the return to center more and more frequent. Breathe in

compassion. Breathe in forgiveness. Breathe in curiosity. Laugh out imperfection. And from  
compassionate center, let's look at these other hidden hurdles, shall we?