



7 TOOLS TO COACH YOUR

inner critic

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Hi, I'm Beatrice Zornek.

As a career coach, I support Highly Sensitive People (HSP) in leadership and career transitions. I believe we deserve to do our work confidently, to know what's important to us and lead our work (and lives) from the heart. But how do we achieve this when we are so hard on ourselves?

I started my journey with my inner critic many years ago and this has been one of the biggest pieces of self-development I've ever embarked on. Coincidentally, this is the piece that many clients bring to our coaching work together. This is what inspired writing me to write this ebook.

I have a degree in psychology, certifications in transformative coaching and coaching supervision, and I am credentialed with the International Coaching Federation (ICF).

Beatrice Zornek



*“Remember, you have
been criticising yourself
for years and it hasn’t
worked. Try approving
of yourself and see
what happens.”*

—LOUISE L. HAY





INTRODUCTION

“You are stupid”.

These three little words started my journey with my inner critic over 17 years ago.

Someone told me these words in an online game.

Admittedly, it was for making a mistake which cost quite a few people time and effort. But these words really got to me. I couldn't brush them off. They stung.

The next day, I found myself crying in the bread aisle of a supermarket.

And then I realised: the reason those words got to me wasn't because someone in a game thought I was stupid, but because deep down I've been telling myself similar things a lot of the time.

With this, I discovered my inner critic. And in that moment, I made a commitment to destroy it.

This book summarises key tools that have supported me on my journey with my inner critic.

The first step to coaching your inner critic is to know it. We can't work with something that's unclear, unknown or fuzzy at best.



TOOL
01

KNOW

WHAT ARE THE MESSAGES
FROM YOUR INNER CRITIC?



01 / KNOW YOUR INNER CRITIC

It goes by many names: the saboteur, the voice, the gremlin, monkey brain, chimp and others. But what is universally true about the inner critic is that it's a voice we initially learn from parents and significant adults while growing up.

It's almost like our parents installed an app in our brain of all their (supportive, but often high) expectations of us. We take this app into adulthood, replaying and reinforcing it over and over.

Maybe criticism was given out of love and care. They wanted us to do well in school because they wanted us to be successful and not struggle in life. They wanted us to be kind and supportive because the world is harsh, and it pays to help others. They wanted us to work hard like they did. These messages may have come from a loving place, and they have also helped us immensely. They probably shaped you into a conscientious, caring, hard-working, successful person and helped to develop many other qualities. So why would the inner critic be a problem?

The problem occurs when this voice becomes thwarted and overly harsh over time. When we feel like we need to work hard to the point of distress and burnout to feel like we've earned our success. When we are so conscientious that we fret over minutiae. When we focus on success at the cost of everything else, and if we fail to be perfect, we become our own worst enemies.

As a Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) I have learned that my brain takes information in at a deeper level. So criticism (whether external or internal) can be experienced much more intensely for HSPs.

01 / KNOW YOUR INNER CRITIC

The inner critic's reach is extensive:

- **Perfectionism** - because if you do everything perfectly, you can't be criticised
- **Overthinking** - by ruminating over what you could've done better, you feel more in control, but also beat yourself up for what you haven't done perfectly
- **People-pleasing** - you can avoid criticism if you can get everyone to like you
- **Workaholism** - if you work harder than everyone else, you are less likely to fail
- **Imposter syndrome** - you tell yourself you are not good enough (for this job) so you will do everything to avoid people finding out that you don't actually belong here

Do you resonate with any of these?

Exercise: take a few moments to identify the key messages your inner critic gives you. What areas of your life does it latch onto? Is it more likely to push you to perfection, to be liked, to be successful? Is it telling you that you're a procrastinator, that you don't have enough credentials, or simply that you're not good enough? Does it have an obsession with your work, your family life, your parenting?

Don't try to make a "perfect" list, but do identify a few key areas where your inner critic is most active. This will enable you to apply the exercises in the ebook to your own lived experience, not just conceptually.



TOOL

02

SEPARATE

IS YOUR INNER CRITIC
ALL OF YOU?



02 / SEPARATE YOUR INNER CRITIC

For many of us, this inner critic voice is so embedded in our psyche that we become identified with it. We can't tell the difference between "me" and "my inner critic". As a society, we are on a quest for perfection, success, everlasting youth, the perfect body, the perfect marriage. Just watch 10 minutes of adverts! Many of them play on our inner critic to get us to buy their products. So in a world that normalises the inner critic (and even "pedestalises" it) it's easy to become identified with it.

"I should go out for a walk and not binge on Netflix."

"I should do this presentation perfectly because a mistake could cost my clients a lot of money."

"I should work hard because I should progress in my career."

To some extent there's nothing wrong with these statements. But when they're driven by a harsh inner critic, you know there must be healthier ways to deal with it.

One of these healthier ways is Separating. Separating your inner critic from your true Self will enable you to discern whether you are beating yourself up into achieving things, or achieving them with love and care, in a sustainable way.

When we are slaves to our inner critic, we do everything to avoid criticism. We use a lot of internal resources and energy. When we move from an authentic space, we can make win-win decisions. Authentic goals give us energy. Goals we criticise ourselves into, deplete us.

02 / SEPARATE YOUR INNER CRITIC

The inner critic makes you act out of (self) disapproval, and your authentic Self acts from (self) love.

Exercise: spend a few minutes to separate and visualise your inner critic. Perhaps close your eyes and allow the image of your inner critic to emerge. What do they look like? Are they a specific gender? Are they even human? What's their posture, movement, traits? Do they look at you, sit, stand, hover, fly?

There is no right or wrong answer. It doesn't matter how it looks (though that can be revealing in itself) but that you're able to see or imagine it almost as a "part" of yourself rather than all of you. The more you're able to "see" it as separate, the more you will be able to work with it.

For some people it's easy to journal about words it says, or how it looks. For others it could be visualising it in your mind's eye, drawing, painting, or expressing it in a different creative way. Let your own intuition guide you, rather than my suggestions.

What do you notice? Can you give yourself space to reflect on your experience, or is your inner critic rushing you to complete the exercises quickly?

As we go deeper into this ebook the techniques I will share are more advanced. The next one is to have a dialogue with it.



TOOL
03

DIALOGUE

BEFRIENDING
YOUR INNER CRITIC



03 / DIALOGUE

Richard Schwartz started his career as a family therapist. He worked with families to help them resolve issues between its members. Through his work, he discovered that we have two families: our external family (husband, daughter, mother, siblings), and an internal family. In other words, it's almost as if there are "people" inside us (which he called "parts"). These parts can come into conflict and experience relationship issues, just like families do. Do you ever feel like "a part of me wants to go for a walk, but another part of me wants to watch Netflix?"

This is how his process, called Internal Family Systems (IFS) was born.

Richard Schwartz's process includes a dialogue between your Self and this inner critic part.

The Self (using a capital S so we can distinguish when we're referring to this part) is your true/authentic Self. Schwartz's premise is that our parts aren't evil, horrible or bad, which is why he wrote a book entitled "No Bad Parts". His point is that every part, no matter how awful it seems, is here because it is trying to help us in some way. Sometimes it might do this in a thwarted way (like the inner critic pushing us on the brink of burnout) but it is trying to help nonetheless.

This dialogue can help you know this part without judgement, to know why it's there, how it's trying to help you, and how you can support it.

The next exercise is a condensed version of Schwartz's IFS process. Many people (including myself) regularly use this with themselves. If it resonates with you, have a look at the References section where I've included some further reading materials.

03 / DIALOGUE

Exercise:

1. Connect to your (true) Self. If you've ever meditated, you might recognise its quality straight away. But don't worry if you're finding this step a bit difficult. Once you've managed it the first time, it will become easy to access in the future. The Self is the authentic part of you that doesn't have an agenda, doesn't push us to "achieve" something. It's the part of us that's focused on "being" rather than "doing". A space from which we discover the most sustainable, healthy solutions. You can recognise the Self by the 8 C's and 5 P's of Self-leadership. You don't need to experience all of them, but they are a guideline to help you identify the internal qualities of the Self. This makes it easier to do this work in a Self-led way (rather than led by the inner critic).

8 C'S AND 5 P'S OF SELF-LEADERSHIP



03 / DIALOGUE

2. Invite your inner critic in. “Dear inner critic, thank you for showing up.” It can help to use the exercise in Chapter 2 (visualise and separate your inner critic). Separate: remember what I said before about being identified with your inner critic? If your inner critic is activated in the moment you’re doing this exercise, it can be difficult to separate from it and connect to your Self. If that’s the case, you might ask it “please would you separate (or unblend) from me so I can communicate with you?”. This might take a few minutes. Keep your eyes closed, allow it to emerge in front of you. I usually see it emerge almost like a genie from a bottle, and then it sits in front of me. But for you it may not be visual. It may be a feeling, a physical sensation, a thought, a movement – allow it to emerge in whatever form it does for you.

3. Check: are there other parts activated? Let’s say your inner critic is telling you to work overtime to finish this project, but another part rebels against work and just wants to shut the laptop and watch Netflix. You might invite in the rebel, separate/unblend from it, and ask it if it’s willing to step away from the room for a few minutes while you speak to the inner critic.

You might feel tempted to order parts to do something they don’t want (such as “go away”). That’s understandable (especially with parts we don’t like). But remember they are parts of YOU: a complex, sometimes fragile and vulnerable group of parts that don’t always get along. Treat yourself (and, by extension, your parts) with respect, compassion, patience and care.

Your role as your Self isn’t to get parts to do something, but to facilitate an internal conversation, and stay open to whatever emerges. When you foster this openness, you can discover new ways of relating to your parts (and yourself). You can replace self-flagellation with self-care and compassion.

03 / DIALOGUE

4. Ask: once you find curiosity and compassion towards your inner critic, you can start asking it questions. Curiosity and compassion doesn't mean you agree with what it says. It means that when you internalised this script or app, it was the only way your young brain knew to cope with life. This app or script may have worked 20 years ago, but now with your current operating system it seems to have glitches and bugs. What we want to do is to update this app so it helps us rather than hinders us. In reality, the inner critic isn't an app, but a living part of us, so we need to treat it gently. Can you find compassion towards yourself for doing the best you could with what you had, and acknowledge your inner critic for wanting to help you in the best way it knows how?

You can do this by journalling, or visualising a dialogue in your mind's eye. Some questions you can ask it:

- Would you share with me what made you come up now? (What activates it)
- What role do you fulfil for me? (What it's doing for the system)
- How are you trying to help me? (Identify what it wants to achieve)
- What would happen if you didn't fulfil this role? (The danger or fear that drives it)
- What do you need from me? (Ensuring it doesn't feel alone in fulfilling the role)

These are some questions to get you started. You can also develop your own. Some of the dialogue might emerge based on the answers it gives you. Is the inner critic afraid of something? Then how can your adult Self support with this fear?

03 / DIALOGUE

Often, our parts take full responsibility to “solve” an entire area of your life. But you (the adult Self) might now be able to unburden the inner critic from this huge responsibility. For example, is it afraid that you won’t get the promotion? If so, how can your Self take more responsibility for your work, rather than let your inner critic lead?

As you speak to it, can you identify healthier, kinder ways to achieve its purpose? Let’s say your inner critic “just wants you to be happy”. But perhaps its definition of “happy” is outdated. It may focus on your career success, but ignore your health, well-being, friendships or hobbies. Can you help it update its definition of success to include the areas that are important to you?

5. Close with respect. You wouldn’t hang up on a family member after a difficult conversation. Thank your inner critic for speaking with you and for choosing to answer your questions. If other parts left to another room (like the rebel in the above example), thank them for stepping away and invite them back “in”. This way, you’re enabling healthy dialogue and parts feel safe that you won’t leave them out in the cold after you’re done.





TOOL

04

THE CRITICAL PARENT AND
THE NURTURING PARENT

HOW TO DEVELOP
YOUR INNER NURTURER



04 / THE CRITICAL PARENT AND THE NURTURING PARENT

When I first went to therapy at 23, I worked with a therapist specialising in Transactional Analysis (TA). This method was a revelation for me because it gave me simple language to explain dynamics between me and others, and the dynamics between me and myself.

Transactional Analysis has a simple model called the Parent-Adult-Child. Eric Berne, its creator, says that in every one of us, there are three “parts” (called ego states): a Parent, an Adult and a Child.

In my early career I was working for a multi-national company back in Romania. One of the senior people in my team had a tendency to bully me. Whenever he did that, I would freeze and feel lost for words. I worked with a coach who was also familiar with TA to help me get unstuck. Because of his “authority” in the company and aggressive language (at least in my perception), I would instantly revert into feeling like a child who was scolded. I ended up feeling hurt, stuck and miserable in my job. My coach helped me to see I was experiencing a parent-child dynamic with this person which made me feel like a child in a grown-up body. I didn’t have access to my full Adult resources which contributed to perpetuating our dynamic.

When I work with professionals in my own work now, many years later, I often encounter parent-child dynamics, especially between employees and their managers. Many of us have an “authority complex” either because we project a lot of authority on senior people and find them intimidating, or because they assert and impose their authority on us by being intimidating. This creates dysfunctional and disempowering dynamics between people, and the more they are repeated, the more they are reinforced.



04 / THE CRITICAL PARENT AND THE NURTURING PARENT

The **Parent** represents messages we've internalised from parents and significant adults growing up (see figure on next page). These messages can be nurturing, loving and supportive, or they can be critical, demanding or rule-focused. This is why Berne further divided the Parent ego state into two: Critical Parent and Nurturing Parent.

The **Child** also represents a part we developed in our childhood and it reflects how we were as children. Sometimes as adults we can experience the same joy, freedom, creativity and spontaneity we experienced when we were little. Or, in moments of high anxiety and stress, we might freeze or feel lost for words, just like I did with this senior person at work.

The Child can be **Adapted** - a part that follows rules and complies to everything. But while following the rules, it can repress other feelings and it might freeze. Or it can be a **Free** Child: curious and creative, but on the downside, it might also be rebellious and act without thinking of the consequences. We'll talk about the Child more in the next chapter.

The final ego state is the **Adult**. The Adult is much like the Self in IFS. It's the part of us that's resourceful, rational and able to make healthy decisions, while considering the input from other parts. For example, if the Critical Parent wants you to exercise, and the Child wants to binge on Netflix, your Adult might decide that you'll first go for a short brisk walk then you'll watch 2 episodes of your favourite show.

THE PARENT-ADULT-CHILD MODEL

PARENT

CONTROLLING

- Directive, critical, patronising
- + Providing structure and direction

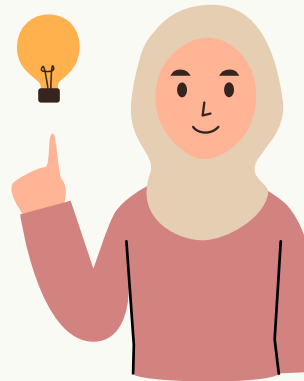


NURTURING

- Smothering, over-protective
- + Caring, supportive, encouraging

ADULT

Adult is present in the here and now
Able to make rational decisions
Calm, assertive, confident
Adult doesn't have a positive and a negative side



CHILD

ADAPTED

- Compliant, passive
- + Disciplined, respectful



FREE

- Rebellious, tantrums
- + Curious, creative, carefree

04 / THE CRITICAL PARENT AND THE NURTURING PARENT

In an ideal world, most workplace communication would be Adult-Adult. But since we all have our “stuff” we can often get stuck in unhealthy Parent-Child (or even Child-Child) dynamics which reinforce dysfunctional communication.

These negative cycles don't only happen in relationship to others. When the inner critic says “you won't get this promotion by watching Netflix”, we're also having a dialogue, except it's an internal one.

Exercise: look at your own Parent: how often does it show up in a critical, harsh, imposing rules, schedules and “shoulds” on yourself (Critical Parent)?

How often are you nurturing, compassionate and kind towards yourself? Can your Nurturing Parent continue to be kind even when you make a mistake?

The Critical Parent isn't inherently “bad” and the Nurturing Parent “good”. They both have positives and negatives.

The Critical Parent plays an important Structuring role. It ensures we follow certain rules which helps us to stay out of trouble. It helps us to have ambition and focus on our goals. Without a Critical Parent, we might stop brushing our teeth, we might go to work naked, or not go into work at all! The problem isn't that the Critical Parent exists, but that it became tyrannical over the years.

The Nurturing Parent can be smothering and suffocating, which inhibits us from taking healthy risks and developing our autonomy. Think of a manager who cares about her employees very much.

04 / THE CRITICAL PARENT AND THE NURTURING PARENT

But she is so concerned with their well-being and success that she “checks in” often, giving you ideas, support, care, frequent meetings and advice. When this becomes too much, we might either become overly reliant on the manager (and thus not develop our independence in doing our job), or we might feel suffocated by all her attention.

Helping our inner critic isn’t just about working on our inner critic. For example, if you want a goalkeeper to defend more goals, you don’t just work with them to improve their defensive skills. You also build a strong defending team. The better your team’s defense, the better your goalkeeper.

What kind of “team” can you develop around your inner critic so that it doesn’t have to do all the work for you?

If you think about the Parent part of yourself, what % of it is Critical and what % is Nurturing?

Ideally we would have a balance of 50-50% and we’d be able to bring out the positives in both. If this is you, great!

However, many people who have a strong inner critic usually struggle with the Nurturing Parent. This is either because the Critical Parent is too loud, or because there wasn’t enough balance of the two growing up.

04 / THE CRITICAL PARENT AND THE NURTURING PARENT

Now that you know your own percentages, what is one action you can take to develop your Nurturing Parent?

If you're struggling with this step, here are some prompts:

- What were the nurturing messages you enjoyed as a child? Think about a family member, a teacher or a role model whose love and care you appreciated.
- What were the nurturing messages you would've loved to receive as a child? Sometimes our carers showed us love in the best way they knew how, but it may not be the way we wanted to be loved. If you could add new messages into the app or script, what would they be?
- If your best friend was overly critical towards themselves, how would you support them? (Just make sure you don't go into fixing it for them, this is about showing emotional support).

We all have a Nurturing Parent inside us. It's just that we're usually rrrrrreallllly good at orienting it towards others, but haven't oriented it towards ourselves as much.



*“There is a battle inside
us all between two wolves.*

*One is anger, greed, guilt,
inferiority and ego.*

*The other one is peace, love,
empathy, compassion.*

Which wolf will win?

The one you feed.”

—CHEROKEE LEGEND





TOOL

05

THE INNER CHILD

COMING HOME
TO YOURSELF



05 / THE INNER CHILD

When the Inner Critic is activated, we automatically turn our attention towards it. Arghhh, you again!

I compare the inner critic to a torch or flashlight. When the torch is on, the light is blinding. But what do we tend to do? We focus on the source of that blinding light, causing ourselves even more pain by focusing on it. We say: why are you so blinding? Why are you on? This is so painful!

This is what we do with the inner critic.

But what if you're not meant to stare into the blinding light, but instead turn our eyes to where it's pointing *towards*?

This is where you will discover your inner Child.

In other words, the inner critic is speaking to the inner child. But most of us will usually focus on the blinding, painful light of the inner critic, instead of who it's speaking to.

How does your inner Child feel in the face of criticism? Not great.

So how can we create a healthier way of relating to ourselves?

The following exercise is a gentle, yet powerful tool to connect with your inner Child. However, each person is different and so are their life experiences. For some people, this exercise might be too difficult. Don't force yourself to go somewhere you're not ready, read it first and then decide if you want to go ahead with it.

05 / THE INNER CHILD

Exercise: (you might want to grab a pen and paper for this).

Step 1: when you connect to the messages from your inner critic (see Chapter 1), what does the Child part of you experience?

Instead of focusing all your attention on the inner critic, focus on the Child instead.

Step 2: Look at some of the language you came up with in the previous chapter (Nurturing Parent). If you speak these nurturing, caring words towards yourself, what shifts for your inner Child?

This reconnection to your inner child is the way back to yourself.

As grown-ups, we think we “must act our age”. Yet why are we just big children most of the time? It’s not unnatural to be a child. What’s unnatural is to deny and ignore the child that we all are.

This doesn’t mean we should go around acting childish and ignoring consequences. But it does mean connecting to this young (and very real) part of ourselves. The Child is often a very raw part of us. If we tap into it and re-establish a connection with it, we are welcoming it back home. This work is key in many therapeutic and coaching methods, called “re-parenting”.



05 / THE INNER CHILD

Step 3: to “re-parent” our inner Child, use the Dialogue technique we discussed in Chapter 3 where we connect to the part and communicate with it. It’s important to do this work slowly, with the care and respect our inner parts deserve.

Connecting with your inner Child might be difficult even if you’ve done it before. A powerful exercise can be to imagine that you have a child (if you’re a parent that’s even better!) and they’re sitting in front of you. They’re telling you “I’m sad and hurt, and I feel like I’m not good enough”. What would you tell your child if they said this to you?

Don’t just answer this question from your head, but connect with your heart. You will recognise it if you feel an emotion rising while you do it.

Through this exercise, we are switching the focus from the inner critic, and create a connection between the Nurturing Parent and the inner Child.



Just like between two people in a dysfunctional relationship, we’re developing new, kinder ways of relating.

At first, this might feel clumsy and it may not be easy to find the words. Let yourself be guided by your heart about where you want to go and how far you can go in one session. This work can be very deep, transformative, and sometimes vulnerable and painful. Give yourself sufficient space to go through this exercise and to be present with what comes up.



TOOL
06

RE-DECISION

HOW TO RE-DECIDE DECISIONS
YOU'VE MADE EARLY ON



06 / RE-DECISION

The word re-decision comes from therapists Mary Goulding and Robert Goulding. They posit that self criticism comes from decisions we've made early on in our lives. If self-criticism doesn't work, then we have the ability to change those early decisions with something that does work. I'll share three particular points that made the Gouldings' approach so powerful: Ownership, Re-decision in the present and Re-decision in the past.

1. Ownership

Andrew is a busy HR manager. In our first session he tells me about this vicious inner critic he has and that he wants to get rid of it for good. He talks about its tyrannical voice and how it's so different to him. If only he could get rid of it he'd be happier and more fulfilled. He sees no connection between him and his inner critic, other than feeling tormented by it.

In previous chapters we talked about separating the inner critic from you. In Andrew's case, he took this separation so far, that the inner critic became an entirely different entity to him, which he felt no connection to - or **control** over. This is why it's important to be able to find a balance between separation and ownership.

What does "ownership" mean? In the re-decision approach, it means replacing "inner critic" with "I". The Gouldings posit that people use third person language as a way to avoid responsibility for problematic issues in their lives, and in order to begin solving them, it's important to own them.

Let's imagine someone says "I have an inner critic which constantly criticises me. It's telling me I'm a fraud. It's awful towards me."

If you replace "inner critic" with "I", it becomes: "I am constantly criticising myself. I'm telling myself I'm a fraud. I'm awful towards myself."

06 / RE-DECISION

As you read these two versions, what do you notice?

When I first read the Gouldings' re-decision book, it was a powerful (yet painful) revelation. By replacing "inner critic" with "I" we start to realise not only that we are the ones doing this to ourselves, but also that if "I" am doing this, then I have control over it, rather than the other way around.

If I am doing this, it means at some point I have decided to do it. And if I have decided something, I have the capacity to re-decide.

2. Re-deciding in the present moment

In their book "Re-decision therapy" the Gouldings describe a group workshop where they worked with a therapist who was writing his PhD thesis. Or rather, procrastinating on writing it.

He would go through cycles: push himself to work on it, but he would never feel motivated enough to get started. The more he thought about how he's not working on it, the guiltier he felt. The guiltier he felt, the more he felt like he wasn't good enough to complete a PhD programme. He was getting stuck in a Child state where he felt not good enough. And this is not a resourceful space from which to write a PhD thesis. So this became a self-reinforcing cycle.

Robert Goulding pointed out to him: when you guilt yourself into writing it, it's not working. And every time you don't write, you guilt yourself for it. Next time, rather than guilt yourself, have a sexual fantasy instead.

06 / RE-DECISION

All the observers in the session started laughing. Sure, a sexual fantasy seems a bit radical. But is there method in this madness?

The Gouldings point out that self-guilt is a decision, and if it's not working, we can actively make another decision. Whether you choose a sexual fantasy, or a different decision, you have the power to disrupt a self-reinforcing cycle.

Exercise: What might be a different thought or action you can employ to disrupt your own inner critic cycle? You can use this as a journal prompt or a different way to reflect on this question.

3. The Time Machine

The premise of the Re-decision approach is that as Adults, we make decisions based on messages we received in childhood. So when our inner critic was born, we made a decision to internalise it and make it our own. Of course, as children who are dependent on our carers and have limited capacity to decide what's good for us, we had very little choice in making that decision. However, you are not a child now. You are older, wiser and stronger, and can make healthier decisions.

The purpose of this exercise is to “go back in time” as if you had a Time Machine, to that first moment when you learned your inner critic messages.



06 / RE-DECISION

Frances grew up with her grandmother who was very strict when it comes to grades and accolades in school. Anything less than a top score would receive “the dreaded raised eyebrow” as she called it. She would never say anything to Frances, but Frances knew what it meant. Her grandmother pushed her out of love and Frances was very intelligent and capable. However, in this process, Frances learned that in order to receive validation and affection from her grandmother, she had to be perfect. This affected her in her current job where she was very successful but was nearing burnout. She knew something had to change.

Using the “Time Machine” exercise, Frances went back to the first scene she could recall where her grandmother was teaching her to put her toys away in boxes. She would tell her to do it in a certain way which felt very overwhelming for Frances who was only 3 at the time.

By using the Time Machine, you go back into your own body at that time when you learned the message, and meeting the person who gave you the message. But what made the biggest difference for Frances was that she was no longer 3 years old in this exercise, but a 34-year old accomplished and self-aware woman. She was able to bring her wisdom, compassion and knowledge to that conversation that happened over 30 years ago.

Frances connected to her Child self and could feel how worried she felt about tidying up the toys in a way grandmother would approve. She loved her grandmother very much and wanted to make her happy. But she felt very tense and overwhelmed by the task, which she never told her grandmother.

Using her Adult wisdom and knowledge, she was able to be present to her Child feelings and experience and to have a dialogue with her. She spoke to the Child part of herself as if she was little Frances' parent. She told her she understands the frustration and overwhelm and that this task was too much for her to take on.

She told her she loved her very much and that would never change, even if she doesn't put the toys away in the way grandmother wanted. She could feel little Frances relaxing when she understood that the task was too advanced for her age.

Then, still as her Adult self, Frances spoke to her grandmother: *"Granny, thank you for loving me in the best way you knew how. I realise now that the toys, the grades, the accolades were how *you* wanted to do things, not how I want to do them. When I was little you decided for me how I needed to do things, but now I am a grown-up woman and I decide to re-define success to include my well-being, my friendships, health, and not just accolades and work accomplishments."*

As you read through this exercise, what are you noticing in yourself?

Let's break down how Frances completed this exercise:

- First, she brought to mind the early scene she could remember when she first made the decision she wants to change now
- Then, she was able to connect to little Frances and bring to mind the feelings she experienced when she was asked to do something in a way that was beyond her capacity
- She spoke to little Frances and offered her the nurturing care she deserved, which helped little Frances relax and feel supported
- Then, she spoke to her grandmother as Adult Frances and communicated her re-decision to her

06 / RE-DECISION

You can also complete this exercise with a little ritual, for example by writing a letter to your grandmother and then setting it on fire (in a safe space!) or burying it in nature, in a place where you'd like to say goodbye to that old decision that no longer serves you.

Several years ago, I went on holiday with my partner and his family in France. We were surrounded by scenic hills, forests and fields. As is always the case in large groups holidaying together, people sometimes have different ideas about how things should be done and emotions can run high. I can't recall the exact event (probably because it wasn't that important) but I remember being very upset with something that was said, and I asked my coach for a session. During our session, I was sitting on a terrace in a private garden at the top of a hill. I remember my coach asking me how something made me feel, and I just blurted out *"I felt like my mother scolding me when I was three!"*

My coach, noticing my beautiful surroundings, had the presence of mind to suggest that I have a dialogue with my mother (because it was in fact my internalised inner critical mother).

I walked to the edge of the terrace, overlooking the expansive French hills and vineyards. I imagined holding my mother's hand, looking at her and saying: *mum, thank you for being with me all these years. You've helped me so much and I know everything you've done was out of love and care. But now I am grown up and I am ready to live my life the way I want to, not the way you want me to. I want to make my own choices. And this doesn't mean I don't love you. I love you very much.* And with that, I let go of her hand and said goodbye, imagining her walking on the beautiful pathways and fields.



TOOL

07

THE NEXT LEVEL

THE SUBTLE LANGUAGE OF
THE INNER CRITIC



07 / THE NEXT LEVEL

As I was working through this ebook, I had a rough idea of this last chapter but couldn't put it into words.

The answer came coincidentally (or not?) in a coaching session I had just this morning with my coach. I asked "Why can't I do X?"

My coach pointed out that she perceived something punishing in my question "Why can't I". As I reflected on it, I realised I thought that I "should" be able to do it. This was a powerful moment for me. I saw that in the question there was a degree of criticism for not being able to do X. As I'm writing this now in the garden, a butterfly just flew and rested on my knee.

Butterflies are symbols of transformation and it's so resonant as I'm writing the last chapter of an ebook about transformative tools.



Why is it important to look at my question of "Why can't I do X"? Had my coach not picked up on the inherent energy in my language, we might have worked on this question in the session and got to an answer. But by looking at the question, and realising the criticism in it, I was able to ask a better question.

As you can see from my own example, the inner critic shows up in subtle ways. Even when you have worthy goals like progressing in your career, eating better, exercising - and even being kinder to yourself! - we can very easily criticise ourselves into achieving them. When we criticise ourselves into achieving goals, we bring tension to the process. And tension is the enemy of flow.

07 / THE NEXT LEVEL

Some other language you might look out for:

- “Why can’t I...?” or “Why don’t I...?”
- “I should/must/need to...” A priest once said “the only thing we must do is die. Everything else is optional.” When you look at it this way, you can begin to realise how many rules we impose on ourselves.
- “Why does X happen?” - sometimes we seek understanding not in order to support ourselves, but to give validity to X happening. An experience we are having is valid because we are having it, and not because we understand it. From this space of self-validation, we can explore how we navigate whatever X is.

In addition to this subtle language, let’s also look at **expectations**.

Clara was an executive leader in a growing start-up. She was working long hours to get the business off the ground, speaking to investors, growing the team and feeling that there aren’t enough hours in the day to do everything. She was eating at random hours or forgetting to eat altogether, and when she was very hungry she would reach out for anything she could find, which was often someone’s birthday cake or snacks in the office.

She wanted a better life-work balance, to plan her meals and start exercising again. But... she wanted to achieve all this while also doing everything she was doing. By exploring this together with Clara, she realised that she was setting herself up for failure. I asked her “in order to implement these habits, what would you have to remove?” At first, she felt frustrated and misunderstood - she didn’t want to remove anything. She couldn’t!

07 / THE NEXT LEVEL

But with some gentle exploration she realised that it's not just her habits that have been affected, but her stress levels and overall well-being. When she imagined herself in 6 months' time, she realised she is heading for burnout. Her eating and exercising were just a signal of something deeper that was predicting stress-related challenges.

By bringing awareness to her overall state she was able to reconnect with what was important to her. We focused a lot of our work on her new goals which included delegating, reducing meetings, hiring a COO, clearing up her diary of endless meetings and empowering her team to take more responsibility. This way, she was able to have a bigger-picture perspective and reduce her stress.

When she was calmer and felt more in control, she automatically prioritised her health, healthy eating and exercise and discovered that a walk at lunchtime every day helped to clear her head and she would often get new ideas and solutions to organisational issues. By exploring her expectations of herself she was able to see how critical she was in trying to get everything done herself, and was able to re-decide the script that was running her towards burnout - and make healthier choices instead.

Exercise: consider the subtle ways in which your inner critic infiltrates (even the healthiest) goals for you. As you went through the examples above, did you recognise yourself in any of them? What would you add?

Notice how it "feels" when you set goals from your inner critic, vs goals from your supportive, caring and realistic Self. When you criticise yourself into a goal, what's your internal experience? What happens to your shoulders, abdomen, thoughts, emotions? How about when you make supportive, sustainable, kind decisions towards yourself?

07 / THE NEXT LEVEL

This awareness of your internal state can help you to figure out when your inner critic has tricked you into fulfilling its agenda. Your body will give you the answer about whether something is sustainable or not. Of course, if you tense up at the idea of taking a walk at lunchtime, it doesn't mean you should sit indoors and watch Netflix instead. But consider why you're doing this in the first place?

How can you shift the energy so it's more supportive and kind towards yourself? What might you need to remove in order to achieve this goal - and are you willing to make that sacrifice?

FINAL REFLECTIONS

As you reflect on the chapters in this ebook, what stands out for you?

What did you learn about yourself that you didn't know before?

I hope that by taking this journey together with me you have brought awareness to the ways in which you might undermine yourself, and found instead some healthy, gentle and supportive tools to be there for yourself.

Because when the inner critic comes up, it's not an opportunity to abandon yourself, but to be there for yourself.

And as for my own journey... you can probably tell it's work in progress. But I have learned (still am!) to welcome all parts of myself, including the ones I despise. This is the real transformative work. When you're able to find detachment from its tyrannical grip, you can make decisions while taking into account what it says, without being its prisoner.


*Getting to know your
inner landscape
enables you to make
decisions together
with your parts,
rather than letting
parts act on your
behalf.*

- BEATRICE ZORNEK



REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

Are you a Highly Sensitive Person?

 [Click here](#) to take the test.

Article about the Internal Family System process. [Click here to read.](#)

No Bad Parts” - by Richard Schwartz
[Click here to view on Amazon.](#)

“Self-Therapy” - by Jay Earley
[Click here to view on Amazon.](#)

“Re-decision Therapy” - by Mary & Robert Goulding - [Amazon page](#)

“TA Today” - by Ian Stewart & Vann Joines
[Click here to view on Amazon.](#)

ARE YOU SOCIAL? CONNECT WITH ME





KIND WORDS FROM CLIENTS

“

My initial goal working with Beatrice was to successfully transition into a new leadership position at work.

I didn't just achieve my initial objective from working with Beatrice. I achieved so much more, a much deeper sense of self. Beatrice is brilliant at getting you to reflect and think at a deeper level which helps you to identify blind spots and recurring patterns of behaviour.

In reality what I have done with Beatrice is self-discovery, which has allowed me to be braver and more decisive in the choices I make. This has had a positive impact on all areas of my life.”

—SHARON NOLAND, HEAD OF OPERATIONS

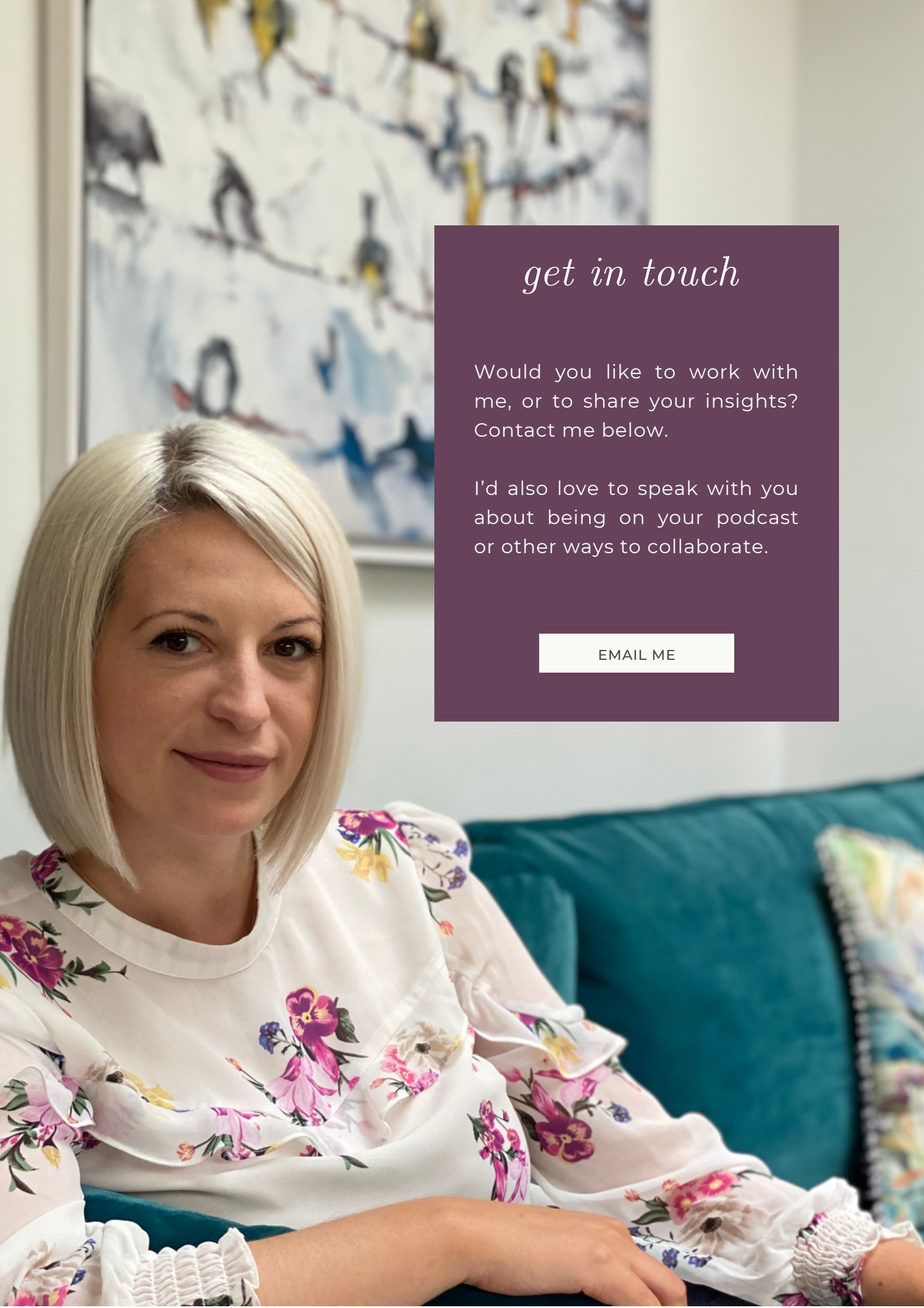
“

I was overwhelmed with my work situation after taking on new responsibilities and struggling to find time for self-care and even just self-maintenance!

I developed tools with Bea, which help me to cope better in the moment and see the bigger picture, which ultimately helped me to begin to understand what I want longer term.

I'm particularly drawn to the blend Bea has of business know-how, creative thinking and also a very spiritual connection. I think that blend is very rare, and I found it very easy to connect and feel inspired because of that.”

—MICHELLE PINCHARD, PARTNERSHIPS LEAD @ PINTEREST



get in touch

Would you like to work with me, or to share your insights? Contact me below.

I'd also love to speak with you about being on your podcast or other ways to collaborate.

[EMAIL ME](#)