

Better Together

Month 3 Supplement

*with Kara Loewentheil, JD and
Master Certified Life Coach*



Kara Loewentheil, J.D. is a Master Certified Life Coach, host of the top-rated podcast UnF*ck Your Brain, author of the forthcoming “Enough Already” (Penguin Life 2024) and creator of the Clutch, a feminist monthly coaching program.

A graduate of Yale College and Harvard Law School, she did what every Ivy League feminist lawyer should do: Quit a prestigious academic career to become a life coach! Five years after leaving the law she has taught thousands of women how to identify the ways that sexist socialization impacts their brains, and how to rewire their thought patterns to create true authentic confidence from within.

Her podcast, UnF*ck Your Brain, which combines evolutionary biology, cognitive psychology, and feminist theory in concrete and practical teachings and tools, has more than 20 million downloads. And thousands of women have joined her coaching community, the Clutch, to learn how to live the lives they want even in our complex, imperfect world.

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The Shame-Blame Game

If you've ever ruminated over a conflict or an interaction, you know that your brain will go over and over what happened without coming to any new conclusions. That's because we often are caught in what I call the "shame-blame game." It's a mindset where if we have a negative emotion or something went wrong outside of us, we subconsciously believe that we have only two options. Either the other person is to blame, or we are to blame. If we are to blame, we feel ashamed of ourselves. We hate the feeling of shame, and we want to protect ourselves from it, so we want to blame the other person or the circumstances. But if we are socialized as women, we've been taught to doubt and blame ourselves, so we can't feel settled in blaming the other person either. This is the ping-pong effect of the shame-blame game. It keeps us stuck either way, and we never reach a "decision" about what to think. This exercise will help you work through the shame-blame game so you can walk away from the ping-pong table for good.

What is an area or conflict or relationship in your life where you find yourself vacillating between doubting/blaming yourself and resenting/blaming someone else?



The Shame-Blame Game

What are the thoughts you have about yourself and the other person in this scenario?

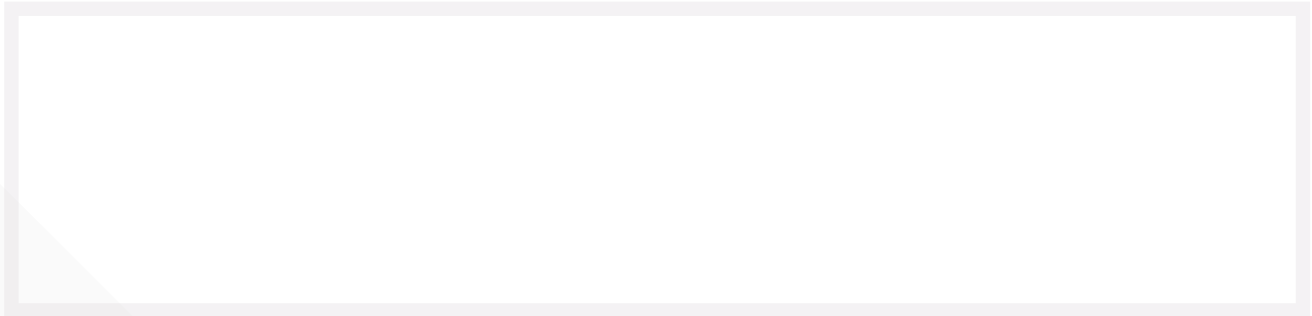
How do you show up in that scenario and your life generally when you have these kinds of thoughts?

Let's assume for a minute you were not going to blame them or shame yourself. What would be a more self-compassionate thought you could practice thinking about this scenario or relationship?

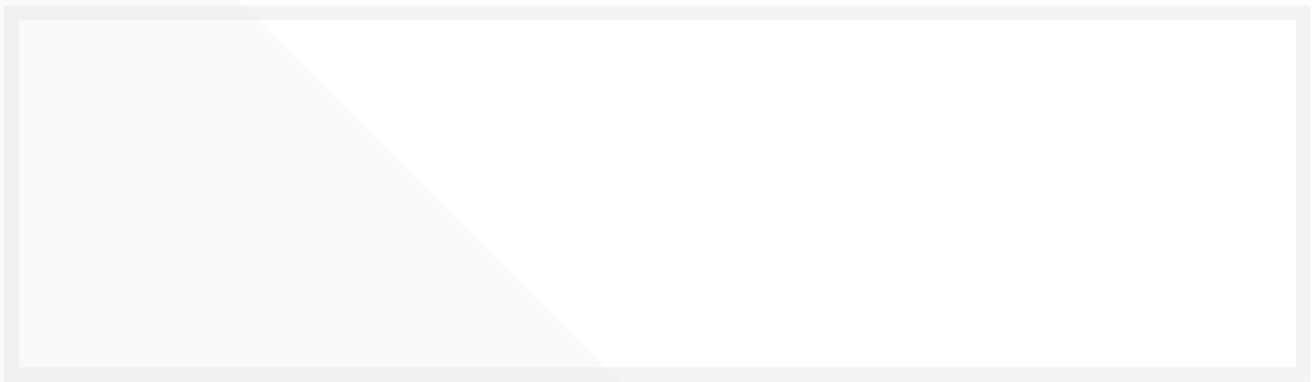
What are you afraid it would mean if the person's opinion or feedback were true?

The Shame-Blame Game

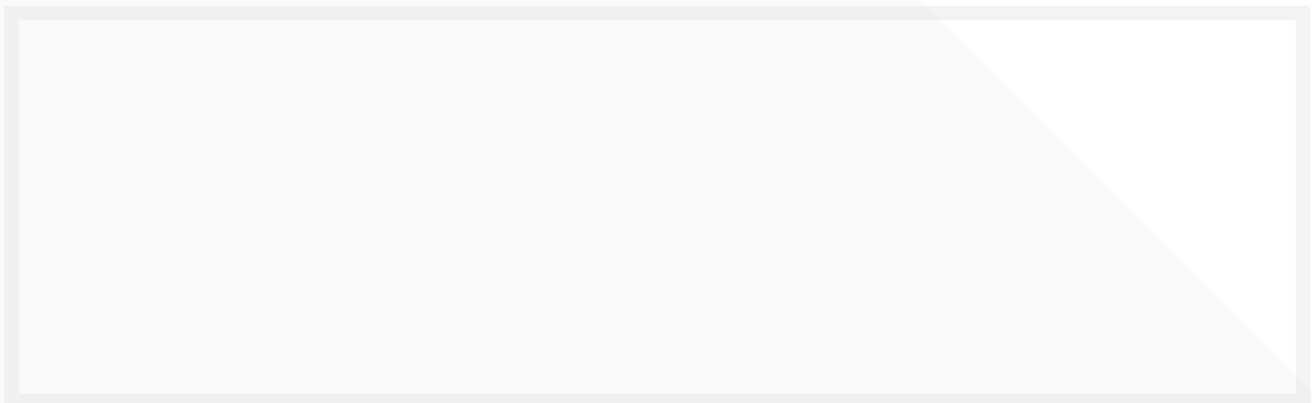
How do you feel when you think that thought?



How do you think your actions would change?



You do not have to have compassion for anyone you don't want to. You always get to decide. So only answer this question if you are interested in developing more compassion for the other person involved: What would be a more compassionate thought about them that you could practice thinking?



Getting Off the Perfectionist Fantasy Merry-Go-Round

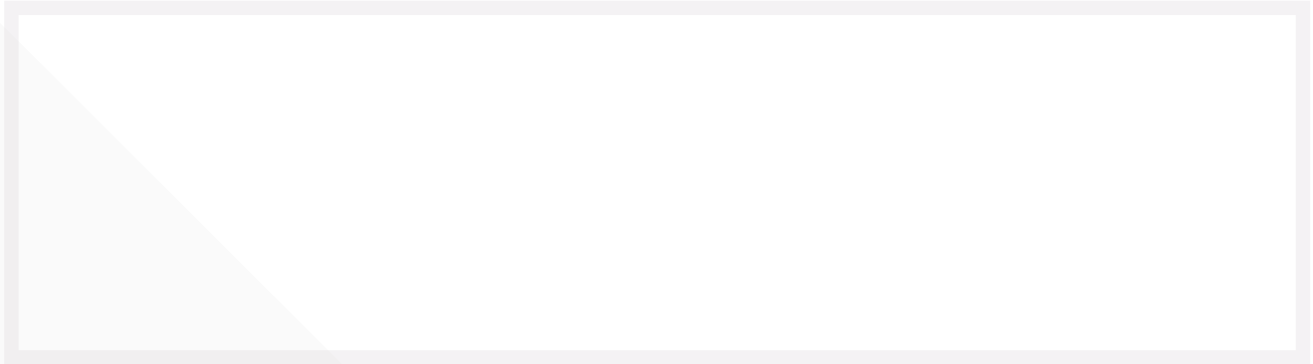
Perfectionist fantasies are recurring fantasies we engage in about how we will do something differently and perfectly in the future. For some people this might be a simple thought like “starting Monday I’m going to go off sugar, for real.” For others it might be elaborate plans, like spending hours checking every yoga studio in the city, transcribing all the classes onto a Google calendar with the plan of attending 3x a week, and then almost never looking at it again. Whatever your perfectionist fantasy is, it is delivering dopamine and a respite from your negative self-talk, but in return it keeps you from being present in your current reality and from making sustainable change. This exercise will help you tune into the feeling you’re trying to get with this fantasy and how you can start to create it in reality.

What is a perfectionist fantasy that you often return to? A good clue is if it’s something you’ve told yourself you should do for years, something you’re always vowing to “finally” do, and sometimes start, but never accomplish. (E.g., finally lose 20 pounds, finally get your house organized, finally go to yoga 3x a week, etc.)

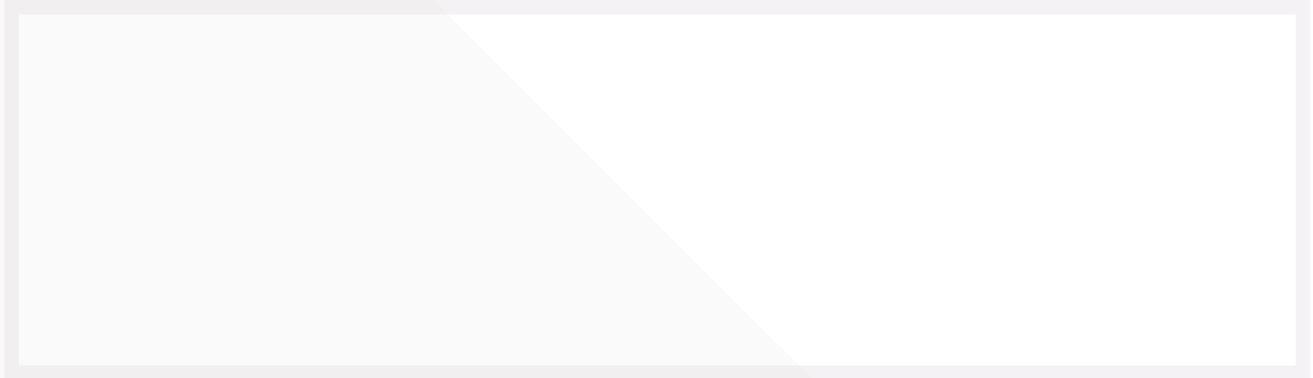


Getting Off the Perfectionist Fantasy Merry-Go-Round

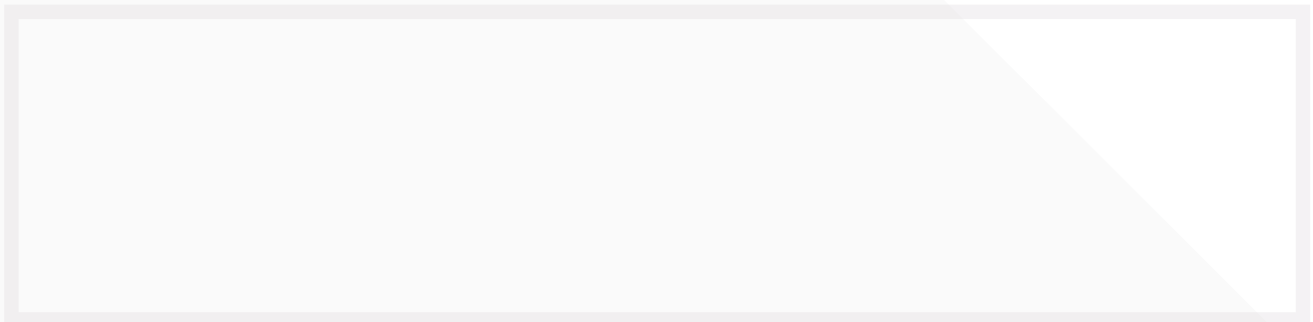
When you imagine that fantasy, how do you feel? Include any time you make planning how you will get to the goal (but not actually taking action).



What do you do and not do when you are engaging in this fantasy?

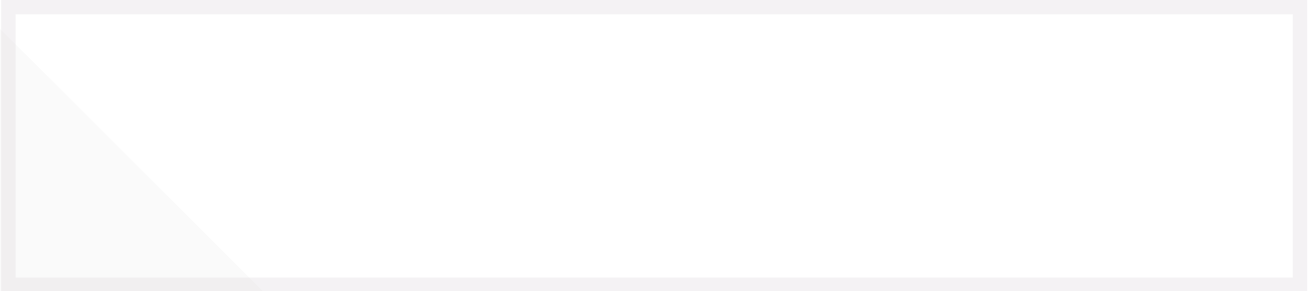


If you have tried to actually take steps towards the goal, what happened?

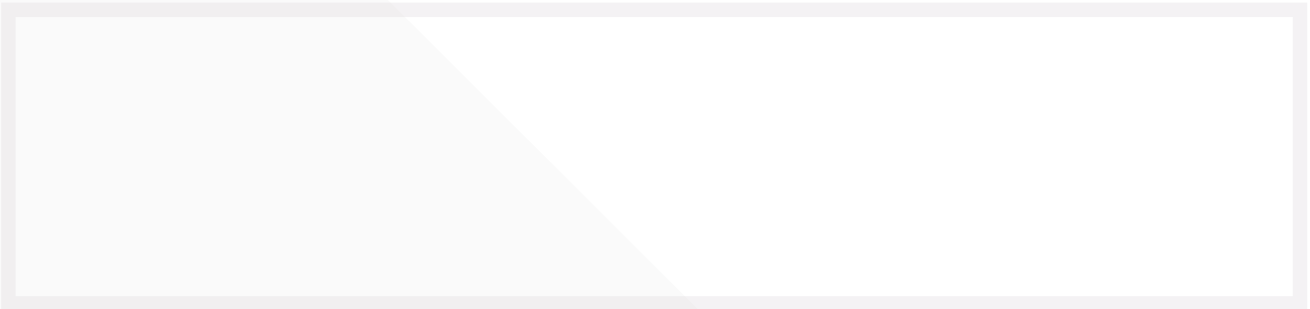


Getting Off the Perfectionist Fantasy Merry-Go-Round

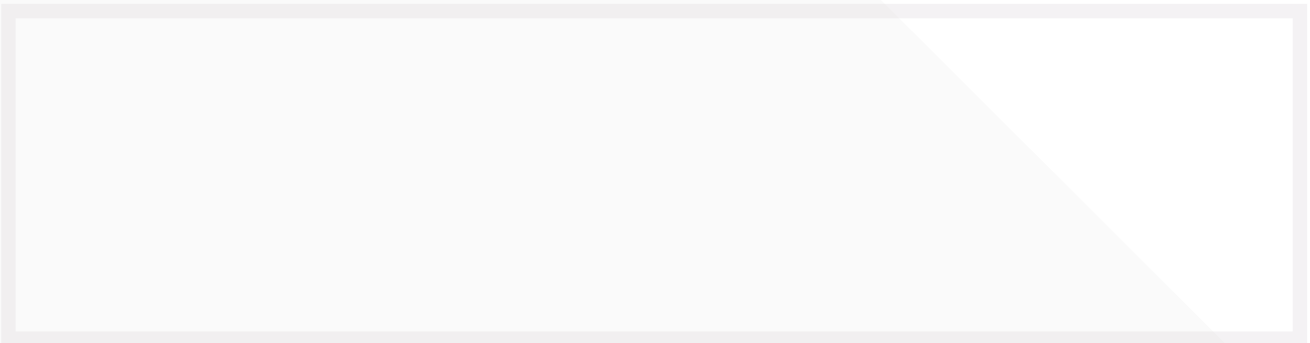
What do you imagine you would get to think and feel if you actually executed the fantasy?



What kind of evidence can you find in your life that you already ARE the things you believe you have to achieve the fantasy to be?



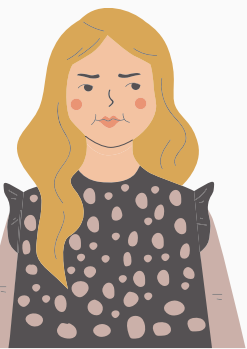
What thought can you practice now to create the feeling you want to create by achieving the fantasy?



How to Diffuse Defensiveness

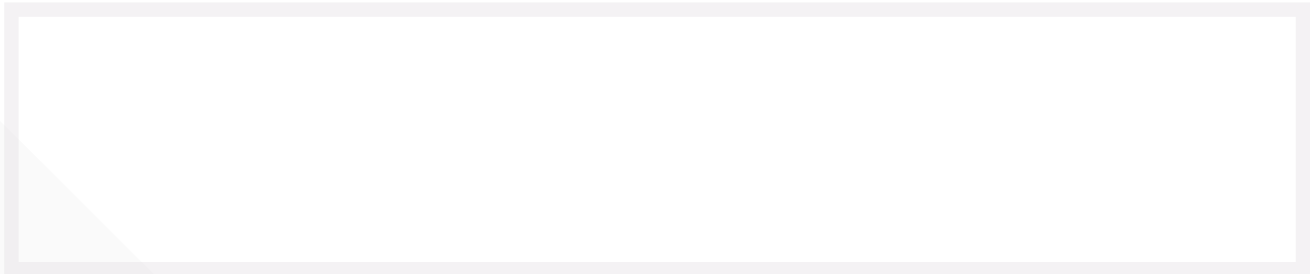
It's human nature to feel defensive when we believe we are being attacked. We have an entire nervous system operation designed to throw us into a state where we run away, fight, or freeze when we are in danger. If you're someone who gets defensive, you're more likely to have a fight response tendency. So feeling defensive doesn't make you a bad person. But your perception of "attack" is what is actually setting off the defensive reaction, and that perception is created by your thoughts. If you've been socialized to criticize yourself constantly and undervalue your own worth, you're going to be more afraid of hearing any feedback you think is negative, and your brain is going to be more likely to view it as an attack. That's why in order to defuse defensiveness, we have to work on establishing safety and self-acceptance first.

What is something you feel defensive about? This could be an area of your work or life where you feel defensive about any feedback, or a specific time you recently got feedback or heard someone's opinion about you and felt defensive.

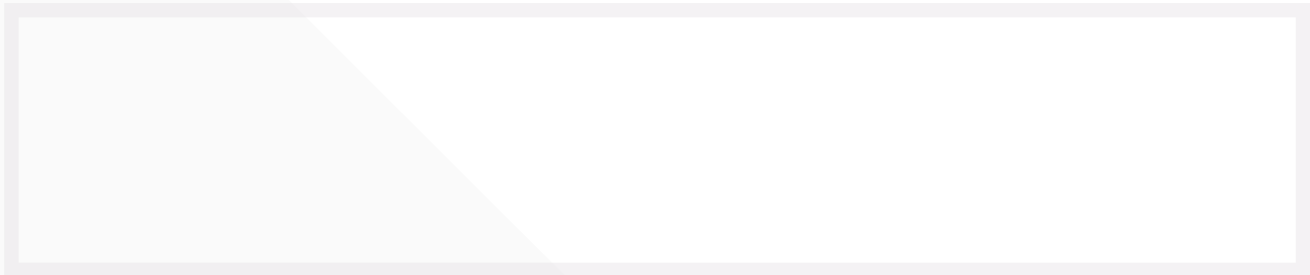


How to Diffuse Defensiveness

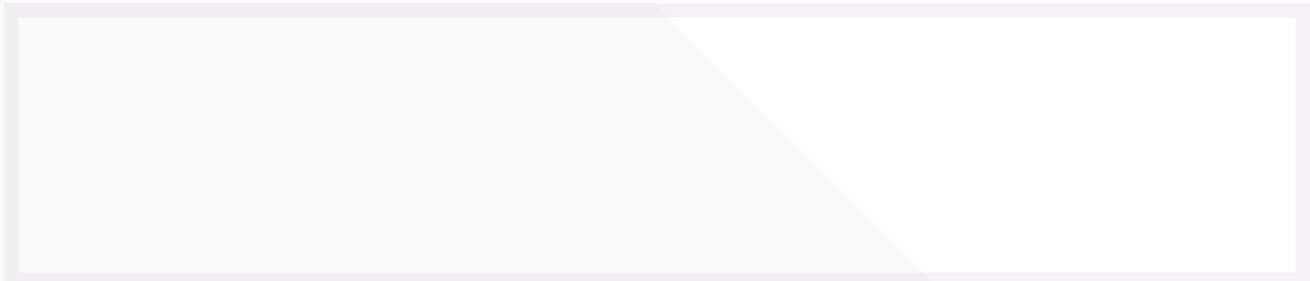
Why did/do you feel defensive about it? (These are your thoughts).



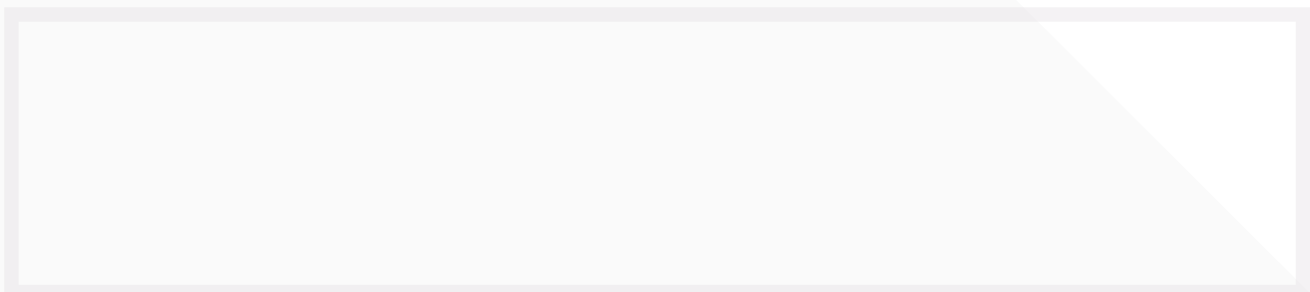
What are the physical sensations in your body when you feel “defensive”? (These are your emotions).



How do you show up when you feel that way? (What do you do or not do?)

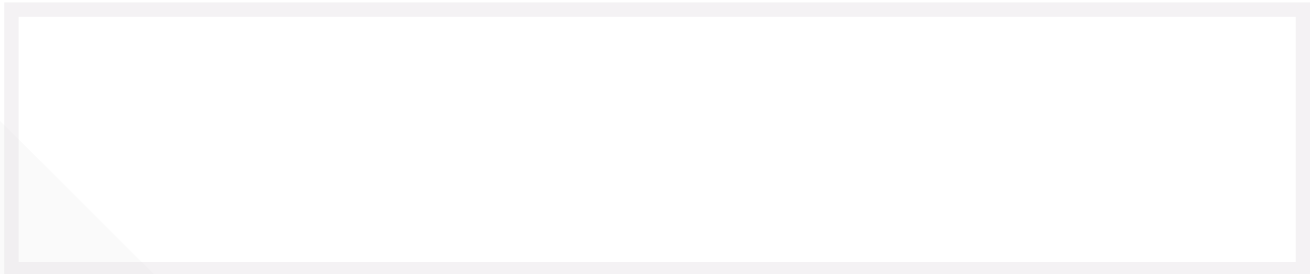


What are you afraid it would mean if the person’s opinion or feedback were true?

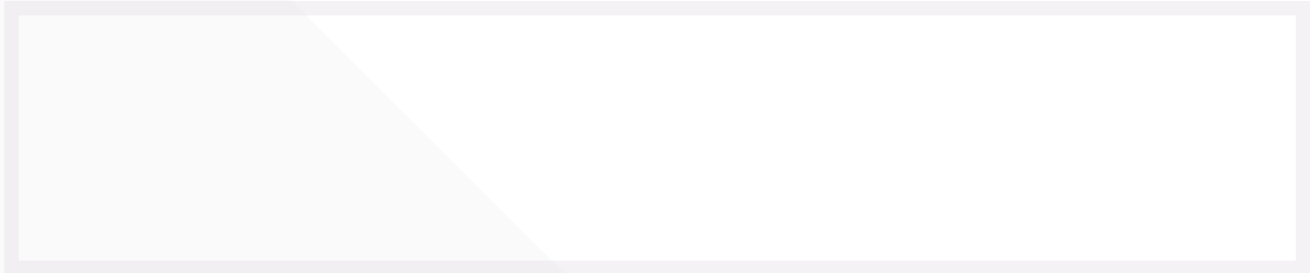


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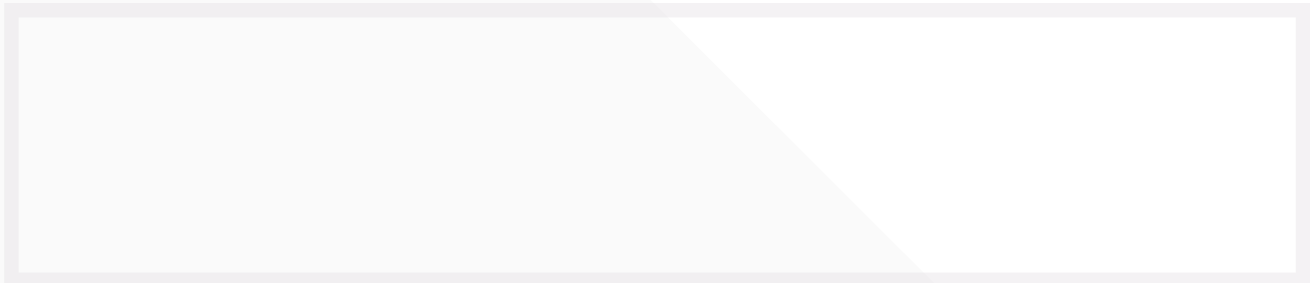
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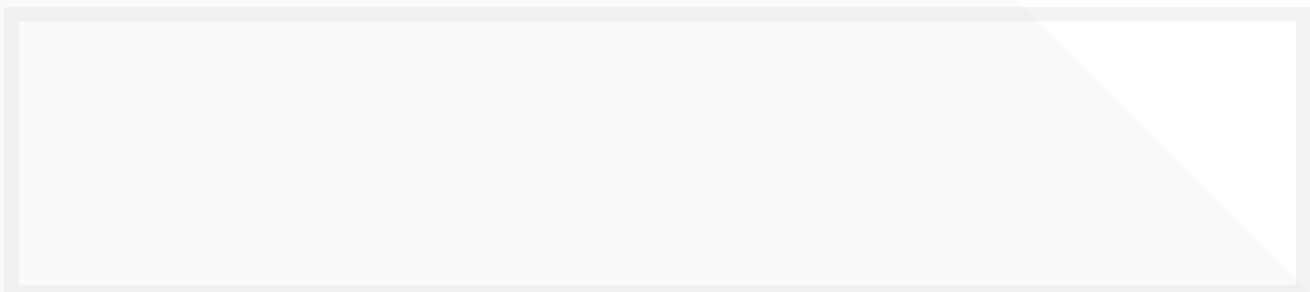
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How to Diffuse Defensiveness

Now, imagine you have two things:

- a. Complete love and acceptance for yourself, even when you don't act like your best self, and
- b. Complete faith and trust that your future is bright and successful.

If you had both those things, and you would not make the feedback mean anything about you or your future – would you see any truth in it? If so, what? If not, why not?

Given your answer to #5, how do you want to think about this feedback going forward?



How to Change Any Thought Even When Your Brain Won't Cooperate

When you are trying to change a thought, creating a ladder/bridge thought is a great first step. But not every thought works in the same way. Not all thoughts are created equal. In order to get the most out of using this tool, you need to be able to troubleshoot when a new thought “isn't working.”

Sometimes it's the thought that isn't working, and sometimes you're not working the thought. This checklist will help you diagnose what's happening when you find a bridge/ladder thought isn't working, so you can fix it and get back to changing your brain.

Checklist: If you're having trouble changing a thought, see which one of the following is happening and try the proposed solution.

Thought Trap #1: You didn't actually pick a bridge/ladder thought, you're just trying to practice your goal thought.

Solution: Brainstorm 3-5 bridge/ladder thoughts and pick one of those.

Thought Trap #2: Your bridge/ladder thoughts are too ambitious and not crappy enough.

Solution: Remember the 10% less crappy rule. Your bridge/ladder thought should just be 10% less crappy than your current thought. Don't get too ambitious right away.



How to Change Any Thought Even When Your Brain Won't Cooperate

Thought Trap #3: Your bridge/ladder thought you chose to practice doesn't resonate, because you picked something you thought "sounded good" or were "supposed to believe" but didn't check in with your body to see how it actually felt.

Solution: Back to the drawing board. Brainstorm a few thoughts and check in with your body to see which ones feel 10% less crappy than your current thought.

Thought Trap #4: You are still experiencing your old thought and you think that means something has gone wrong.

Solution: Nothing has gone wrong. There's nothing to do. Just keep practicing the new thought.

Thought Trap #5: You aren't actually practicing the new thought consistently.

Solution: Practice the new thought. Every day. Multiple times a day. You need to practice ahead of time so your brain is used to it and can deploy it when needed. Don't wait until you're in the middle of a triggering situation to try to believe it.

Thought Trap #6: You've been practicing the thought, you totally believe it, and you don't feel any change when you think it anymore.

Solution: This means the thought is now a belief that just feels true to you! It's now your default belief. Back to the ladder/bridge to create the next step up thought you want to work on next.