



Zooming Out

Bringing Awareness to Your Inner Critic

Objectives

- ▲ Identify common triggers for the inner critic during FFTs (Frightening First Times).
- ▲ Build awareness of the inner critic's voice as separate from reality and your inner wisdom.
- ▲ Practice tools to create perspective, compassion, and alignment during transitions.

"Know yourself and you will win all battles." - Lao Tzu

Your inner critic gets especially loud in times of transition or FFTs (F*\$%* First Times). Its job is to keep you safe—by warning you of risks, embarrassment, or failure. But when it runs the show, it can hold you back from growth.

Awareness is the practice of zooming out. It means observing your body, emotions, and thoughts with curiosity—not judgment. From this perspective, you can separate your inner critic's voice from your inner wisdom and choose how you want to respond.

You met your Inner Critic in BT1, but let's get to know them more intimately:

- *What's your inner critic's name?*

- *What do they look like? Favorite outfit, style, or even a car*

- *What energy do they bring when they show up*

- *What does your inner critic want for you? (Safety? Control? Perfection?)*

- *What is your inner critic afraid of?*



Zooming Out

Bringing Awareness to Your Inner Critic

Let's look at common triggers during an FFT.

What does your inner critic say in times of:

- Uncertainty:

(ex: "You should already know how to do this.")

- Comparison:

(ex: "Others are handling this better than you.")

- Perfectionism:

("You only get one shot to get this right.")

- Loss of control:

("Why are you so unsure?")

- Visibility:

("Everyone will find out you're a failure.")

Inner Critic and Inner Wisdom: A conversation.

Write a memo from your inner critic to you about a triggering situation.

MEMO from Critical Kerri to Kerri Thurmon Regarding how to show up as an attending:

Subject: How to Show Up as an Attending

Kerri,

You need to get it together. You're not a trainee anymore, and everyone is watching. You should have the answers before anyone asks the question. You're supposed to be confident, decisive, and calm—but instead, you look uncertain. What if the residents notice? What if your colleagues think you're not ready? You've worked too hard to lose credibility now.

You need to show up perfectly every single time—no hesitation, no mistakes, no "I'm not sure." You're the attending now. That means you should never ask for help or admit you don't know something. Remember, once they see doubt, they'll stop trusting your leadership.

So before you walk into that OR, take a breath—but not to center yourself—to steel yourself. Smile, act confident, and don't let them see you thinking too hard. That's what an attending looks like.

Sincerely,

Critical Kerri



Zooming Out

Bringing Awareness to Your Inner Critic

Now, respond, line by line, from your curious, non-judgemental inner wisdom. Try on responses with pure interest, humor, amusement, playfulness, and radical love.

There's no "right" answer here.

Critical Kerri	Inner Wisdom
You need to get it together.	Oh hi, urgency! What if "together" means "present as I am, right now"? Spoiler: that's already happening.
You're not a trainee anymore, and everyone is watching.	True, I graduated—yay me. And if they're watching, they'll see a human leading with care. Front-row seats to growth!
You should have the answers before anyone asks the question.	Delightful fantasy. Also, teams exist for a reason. Discovery is allowed in surgery and in sentences.
You're supposed to be confident, decisive, and calm—but instead, you look uncertain.	The calmest confidence I know says, "I can pause." Uncertainty is not a flaw; it's my brain loading the best file.
What if the residents notice?	Then they learn that leaders think in real time. Modeling cognition > miming certainty.
What if your colleagues think you're not ready?	People think many things between coffee and lunch. My readiness is evidenced by my practice, not their projections.
You've worked too hard to lose credibility now.	Exactly—my credibility was built on integrity, teachability, and outcomes, not on perfect theater.
You need to show up perfectly every single time—no hesitation, no mistakes, no "I'm not sure."	Cute myth. Surgical excellence is rigorous, not robotic. Micro-hesitations save lives. "I'm not sure" invites the best idea in the room.
You're the attending now. That means you should never ask for help or admit you don't know something.	Plot twist: leadership <i>asks early</i> . Safety loves humility. Curiosity is sterile-field approved.
Remember, once they see doubt, they'll stop trusting your leadership.	My team trusts transparent thinking plus clear plans. Doubt + data + decision = trust.
So before you walk into that OR, take a breath—but not to center yourself—to steel yourself.	I'll take two breaths—to center and to smile. Steeled nerves are brittle; centered presence bends and doesn't break.
Smile, act confident, and don't let them see you thinking too hard.	I'll smile and <i>be</i> confident—and I'll think out loud just enough to teach and to safety-check.
That's what an attending looks like.	This attending looks like integrity in motion. Watch this: values-aligned, team-attuned, patient-first.



Zooming Out

Bringing Awareness to Your Inner Critic

Now it's your turn -

**Write a memo from your inner critic to you about a triggering situation
and respond with your inner wisdom:**

Inner Critic	Inner Wisdom



Zooming Out

Bringing Awareness to Your Inner Critic

EXAMPLES:

Strive to be the best, always. → “Huh, I wonder what you think the best is? Are you sure that being the best is the right thing always? Aren't there some people who are always the best that get under your skin? What's up with that....”

Don't let anyone see that you don't know something. → “Wait, really? You are always espousing 'lifelong learning', so wouldn't that erase that?”

Make sure you look pretty, and seem attractive and charismatic. → “Oh, huh. You think what you look like has something to do with your skills as a doctor? Weird. I wonder where that came from. That sounds hard to weave into your narrative of success!”

Don't let your body go, keep working out hard. → “Wait, go where? I'm right here...”

Don't be a show off. But definitely show off quietly. → “Wait, what?? Please explain. I need specifics. Oh, weird, you don't have any? Maybe we can drop this weird vague request?”

Your arms should be skinnier and more defined. → “Why though? They work fine...”

Oh, you're overwhelmed? You shouldn't be. Read more. → “Huh, do you think reading more will not be overwhelming? You sound confused. What do you need right now?”

Oh, you're overwhelmed? You shouldn't be. Have a glass of wine. → “I see this. It feels good! I agree. I appreciate the offering. Here's the thing though. I don't feel great afterwards, so sometimes I'd rather not. Sometimes, I might though, and that's OK.”

Oh, you're overwhelmed? You shouldn't be. You need to set an example. → “Maybe you're right! What would happen if the example were that this is what it looks like to be a first year attending.”

You're lazy I guess. → “Wow, rude.”



Zooming Out

Bringing Awareness to Your Inner Critic

Ask: "What does 'good enough' look like right now?"

Give your inner critic a name to separate it from you. Write it down here. What do they look like? Do they have a favorite outfit? Do they drive a certain car?

What do they want?

What are they scared of?

What is an FFT you're working through right now?



Zooming Out

Bringing Awareness to Your Inner Critic

What is your inner critic saying to you about this?

How have you navigated hard firsts in the past?

What would "good enough" look like in this stage of your transition?

What would your wise mind tell you in this situation?