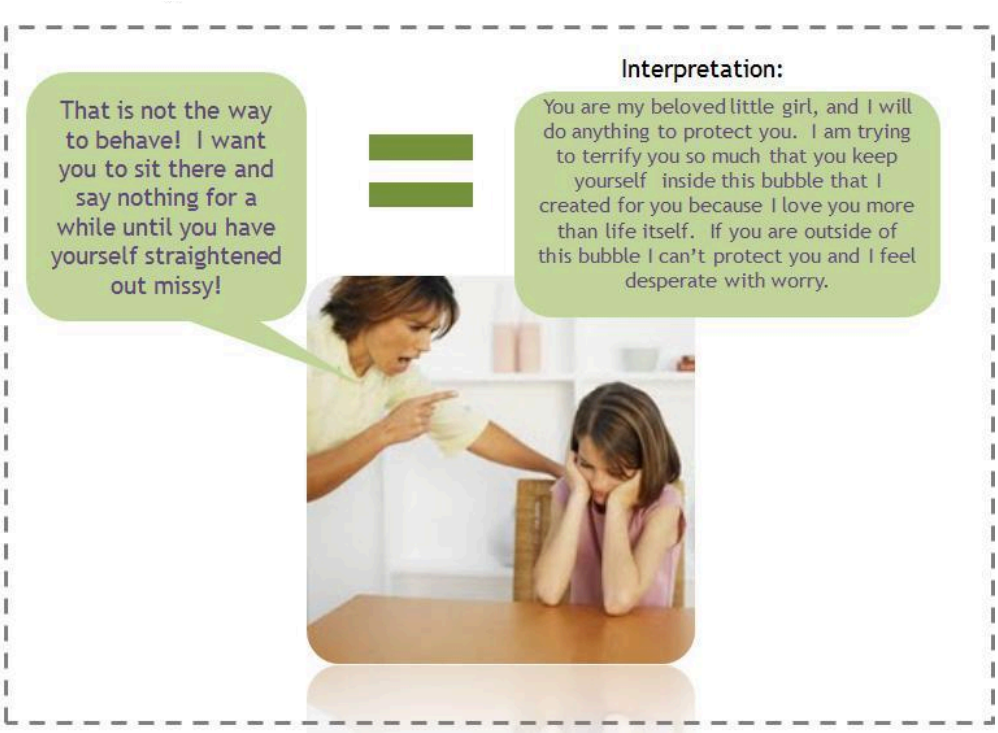
“I Love You,” said the voice.

How to quiet a troubling inner critic

By Wendy Louise Nog

Instructions: Read through this document. Print out the last page multiple times to do the exercise.

I stumbled upon the realization that we all truly believe inside that we are amazing. How do I know this? Because I see it in my children. We all start out that way, as young children, feeling in our very core how amazing we are. You can see it reflected in the faces of toddlers as they take their first steps. Somehow soon after the toddler years, the knowledge that we are amazing is often lost. How does this happen? When does this start to take place, and what causes it? I believe that this feeling is still there, tucked away for safe keeping, still intact, and our interaction with the outside world is a direct reflection of how carefully we need to protect that inner sense. If we grew up feeling in danger, it is tucked even further away. As adults, how do we un-do whatever it is that hides our true feelings for ourselves at bay? Why are some of us so hard on ourselves? Why do we have such negative message ringing out in our heads? I have discovered a nine step process that will rid you of this problem for good. Yes, a cure. The following paragraphs will introduce you to my perspective and how I arrived at this solution, followed by the nine steps and a worksheet to walk you through them.



My Journey

I went to a yoga writing retreat that to my dismay spent a great deal of time asking us to write about anger and depression and they wanted us to explore those emotions…examine our self-loathing. Rather than feeling uplifted by the experience, I felt completely annoyed. I did not believe that anyone benefited from wallowing in negative emotions for hours.

To really change something in your brain is work. Just like our bodies move with muscles, our brains also have been conditioned to operate in a certain way. This is a work-out for your brain that I hope will help to adjust your perspective of yourself and the world around you so that you can live to the potential you believe you have.

What I see so clearly, and what the yoga retreat, along with so many other specialists have wrong, is that there is no such thing as self-loathing. Actually, we love ourselves. There is no self-hatred, there is only disappointment in the world around us. Some of us unlucky ones began to experience that disappointment at a very young age, some later in life. The feeling has been miss-interpreted somehow, like when we used to believe that the sun revolved around the earth. We don't loathe ourselves, we actually all still believe inside of us that we are amazing, and it hurts that the world does not reciprocate that feeling back to us. That is the foundation of the inner critic.

In the winter of 2011 I had a conversation with a friend. I told her that when I completed my master's degree with straight A's, because of those high marks I immediately began to doubt the credibility of the institution, determining that it must be a house of cards, giving out easy A's and that my degree is valueless because of it. I even called and confronted the department head who informed me that in fact, most people do not get all A's. My friend described how she had attributed her acceptance into Parsons to her small town art teacher in rural Kansas who she was convinced must have somehow had connections in New York City. Certainly, she believed, it wasn't her talent that got her in! The voice in many of our heads is destructive and debilitating. Even incredible successes are stolen away by this voice.

I have seen friends and family and people around me devastated by inner negative messages, preventing them from feeling joy, and experiencing life as it should be. My conversation with my friend made me determine to find a way to quiet this inner voice. I felt convinced at that moment that somehow I have within me the answer. I did. I do.

I have a memory of standing on a sidewalk island between lanes on Guerrero Street in San Francisco with a mother and her two young children. The young boy, maybe just four years old, suddenly stepped onto the street and his mother grabbed him and yanked him back just as a speeding car whizzed by. She screamed at him, "What the _uck are you doing!! Never EVER do that again!" The anger that she had, the berating she gave him, was because she loved him more than life itself. I didn't understand at the time, and thought it was horrific that she would speak to her own child that way. I wouldn't understand until I had my own children and watched in horror as one of them ran out onto a street filled with traffic. I screamed at them out of terror! I had held on to this memory for twenty years, knowing that it held some important piece of information. As I began to work though this puzzle, I realized that this is

what our inner voice is doing, screaming at us to look out. It is trying to protect us. We know through studying biology and evolution that our entire system is designed to protect us, and to keep us safe and alive. The inner voice is trying to prevent us from being in a situation that will be painful, separate us from the safety of a group, or bring us sadness, which makes us vulnerable. The inner critic isn't a voice of self-loathing, this is a voice of self love and preservation.

My dear friend and I came to this conclusion together, and it really clicked when she pointed out that she had never been in an abusive relationship. In spite of having had a difficult childhood, she has a good job, is extremely healthy, and has a comfortable happy life. We both agreed that this voice, in spite of its hurtful words, had kept her safe from many of the problems people with stressful childhoods like hers encounter. The problem we had both experienced is that our inner voices went too far, and kept us from living to our fullest potential.

The Cure

So how to get rid of this voice? I decided to follow it through logically, and came up with an actual cure! I found that by following nine steps with several of the negative messages that I was getting, I actually began to sense a change in my inner voice. A year later, its negative messages are gone. Occasionally a message begins to form, but because I have re-trained my brain with this process, the negative message melts away, unexpressed. I can tell in an instant if the message is really important, or over-protective. The main idea here is that your brain has worked very hard to position you in a safe place by poking and prodding you into a predictable environment. All messages, both positive and negative, are formed to maintain that position. Our current brains, bodies and body chemistry were formed at a time when there were many dangers in our environment and unpredictable food sources. We have to look at these messages through that lens.

Below is the series of exercises to do. You may have to do them over a day or a week or longer. It takes work and practice, as I said. You may need to do it with many messages, and modify it so that it makes sense to you. You may begin to experience relief once you do so. It would be good to write things down as you go through each negative message that you choose to work with. The last page has a blank form that you can print out multiple times. Print several copies out and carry them with you. Have a notebook handy so that you can write down your responses and the journey through the steps for each message. If you discover that your inner voice is correct, that you should stay away from someone who is dangerous, or stop certain behavior that is harming yourself or others, please do take action to relieve the voice by eliminating its need for concern.

Nine Steps to a quiet inner critic

I am using an example that I often struggled with in the past. Many times in conversation, I would have concern that I didn't get my point across, and the person I was speaking to either couldn't follow me, or didn't care. I am a bit quirky and struggle to get my thoughts out verbally, but I shouldn't be beating myself up over it, or avoiding conversations, because I actually love meeting people. Now when I observe that I have had an unsatisfactory exchange with someone, I can still close the conversation with a smile, put them at ease, and let it go. This is a change from what used to be a totally debilitating problem for me, preventing me from even starting up conversations. Here we go!

Step	My Answer
1. What is the negative message?	You are a terrible speaker. Your answers are too short and don't reveal any interesting information. You should just not talk to people. Try to look too busy to talk, and put an apologetic too busy to talk smile on your face.
2. What is the negative message protecting you from?	Being looked down on by others, thus being isolated. The voice is trying to protect me from being alone.
3. Identify the state that the voice is **trying to maintain**	The state of being respected i.e. included in a group, which is evidence that you are loved, cared for, and that you will be safe.
4. Identify the concern that the voice has	Your status may be diminished, resulting in isolation.
5. Take time to ponder the above	(Take minutes, hours, days, to recognize and feel how the voice is trying to protect you, not harm you.)
6. Thank the voice out loud, silently, and on paper for its protection throughout your life, and for trying to take care of you.	Thank you voice, for trying to take care of me, for protecting me from dangers, and for recognizing how much I need to be connected to others, which makes me feel loved and safe.
7. With humor, identify the worst possible scenario if this situation was to the extreme, and come up with a plan for how you would handle it	**Worst Case Scenario:** You say accidentally say something really strange sounding on live TV just before the Super Bowl kick-off when the whole country is watching to the President of the United States! **The Plan:** you look at the camera, laugh, and say, "well that was embarrassing"...people are put at ease when you can laugh at yourself...

8. Tell the voice what you will do, and reassure it that you will be o.k. even if it does happen. And you will be famous!	See? I am prepared, and even if the worst case scenario happens, I am still alive! I am still loved! And I managed to get the President to laugh!
9. Smile at your amazingness, and at your inner voice with gratefulness and reassurance for minutes, hours, days, what ever it takes.	I am amazing!

Keep doing this as messages occur. It will feel strange at first, and the hardest part is discovering the true intentions of your inner voice. Remember to think back to cave man days when analyzing the message and it's goal. You may have to dig really deep. It will become easier, like doing sit-ups become easier as you do more, and you will recognize without a doubt that all along, your inner voice really was just trying to help. After a while, the voice will barely get one word of a sentence out and you will be able to quiet it with an inner smile. It will begin to accept the idea that, gosh, you can handle it! And you will be o.k.! The goal is to begin to train your voice to be less worried, and to eventually let go.

The next step, of course, is to figure out how to get that voice to turn completely on its head and to begin encouraging you. That is another paper. In conclusion, "You are amazing!"

With love and hugs,

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"I love you, said the voice!"

Nine Steps to a Quiet Inner Critic

Step	Answer
1. What is the negative message?	
2. What is the negative message protecting you from?	
3. Identify the state that the voice is **trying to maintain**	
4. Identify the concern that the voice has	
5. Take time to ponder the above	
6. Thank the voice out loud, silently, and on paper for its protection throughout your life, and for trying to take care of you.	
7. With humor, identify the worst possible scenario if this situation was to the extreme, and come up with a plan for how you would handle it	
8. Tell the voice what you will do, and reassure it that you will be o.k. even if it does happen. And you will be famous!	
9. Smile at your amazingness, and at your inner voice with gratefulness and reassurance for minutes, hours, days, what ever it takes.	

Please e-mail me with an update on how you are doing! wirewendy@gmail.com