

**Kari Burch:** Hi, I'm Kari and I was so excited to talk with you about having *Boundaries Against Praise and Criticism: How to Take Feedback like a Boss Bitch*. This is so important to me because I spent the majority of my life terrified of feedback. I remember when I was in graduate school, I cried during almost every practical exam, which is a hands-on exam where you had to demonstrate your skills. I used to shake so hard during presentations that my voice became squeaky and warbled like Minnie Mouse yodeling. Whenever I got even tiny pieces of feedback, I literally cried. I really couldn't handle any feedback.

This topic is so near and dear to my heart, so I'm excited to talk with you about it today. I'm really giving this presentation in honor of younger me. It's all the things that I wish I knew and all the things that I'm still practicing. I am a doctor of occupational therapy. I'm a professional coach and an author. I really love dogs, my kid, who's almost two, talking about patriarchy, combusting internalized patriarchy. I love reading, I love food, and I love tarot and oracle cards.

There's this model in the occupational therapy framework called the Person-Environment-Occupation Performance Fit. For a long time, society has been telling women, people socialized as women, and neurodivergent people that there's something wrong with them, and that's why the fit is subpar. The reason that you're having trouble doing the things you need to do in our society and in our structures is because there's something wrong with you. We know we want to focus now on, let's assume that everything about us is actually fine and as it should be.

Instead of trying to adjust us to our environment and the occupations or things we're trying to do, what if we try to match the environment and the tasks we're trying to do to our capacity, and we just come at the assumption that there's actually nothing wrong with you as a person, you don't need to improve or fix yourself in any way? This is the framework that we want to take intentionally. When it comes to receiving praise and criticism, obviously, this touches a lot of things in us. This touches potential insecurities. This touches specifically maybe RSD. It touches social anxiety.

It touches a lot of things that could really bother us. Maybe we spent a lot of our lives receiving criticism for things that actually aren't wrong with us, it's just things that society hasn't embraced. We're going to talk about that a lot today. I really like this visual from New Happy Co of your work, someone's opinion about it, don't let it diminish what you made, it's just one point of view, and really how to internalize this into something useful that we can use whenever we're working in our businesses and we're seeking feedback or we are receiving unsolicited feedback, how do we take it in stride? Here's another visual I really liked from New Happy Co. Someone's actions aren't about you, they're about them.

Why do we need boundaries around praise and feedback? Essentially, all significant work, all norm-challenging work is going to bring criticism. You can't get around it. If you are doing something big, you are going to receive praise and you're going to receive

criticism, especially if you're a woman, especially if you're in a marginalized group, including neurodivergent people.

When it comes down to it, if you're worried about what other people think about your work and you're editing what you do in order to appease people and prevent receiving feedback, you're going to be self-censoring and you are going to be limiting your creativity and your joy. We don't want to that, so that's why we want these boundaries. The reasons why we tend to be unbounded around praise and criticism is that, especially if you've been socialized as a woman, you were raised to have a very strong relational focus and awareness of others' reactions. Essentially, you were raised to emotionally care or tend for everyone around you.

In addition, for society, most of the time people socialized as women required approval from others, especially their families and men, in order to survive. You needed to be likable. You needed to have social influence to survive. You weren't allowed to have credit cards. Until the '70s, you weren't allowed to have your own property, your own bank accounts. For so long, you were dependent on others, so you needed them to like you. When it comes down to it, there's a lot of real visceral reactions we have to not receiving approval because it's not safe to not have approval. That is what our bodies know.

In addition, we are a lot of times unbounded with praise and criticism because if you're socialized as a woman, there's such a strong, I misspelled it, cultural focus on women's and girl's appearances that we just take it to be okay for people to be giving feedback about us. That is just something we expect and it's something that tends to matter, and it's just something that's accepted, we receive feedback all the time. In addition, we were often raised to have good student conditioning. Especially if you're neurodivergent, a lot of times we were raised to believe there's certain ways of operating like following the rules, doing what you're supposed to do, maybe not questioning how it's done.

Basically, conform yourself to the patterns and the rules, and the examples and templates that exist that suppresses your dynamic, power, and creativity as a neurodivergent person. I forgot to say this earlier, but I have ADHD and anxiety and depression, and I think OCD. I'm one of those people that's questioning like, "Am I also autistic?" That's about where I am. If you relate to any of those things, it really applies here.

A few quotes. "We often say things like 'boys will be boys,' allowing room for messiness, misbehavior, deviations from what adults might like to see. However, there's a strong focus on girls being good, saying and doing the right things, and achieving academically." "People, in general, are going to have an opinion and think that there's a right way to do things. If your way is different than what they know to be safe, predictable, relevant, you're going to get challenging feedback from people." Actually, that's good.

Let's talk a little bit more about good student conditioning. We are conditioned to be nice and likable. We're conditioned to not rock the boat. We're conditioned to be consistent and predictable. Also, you're not supposed to be angry or aggressive, or arrogant. Also, with good student conditioning, you're supposed to fit the mold, you're supposed to do things the proven way or the right way, and you're supposed to be consistent and steady, and stick with an idea and don't change it. Obviously, all of those things may go against a lot of what actually works for you if you're neurodivergent.

Another thing I want to address is that there's so much research that feedback for women in the workplace, and this includes in business, in your own businesses, tends to include more commentary on their personality than specific performance, so like being too aggressive. I think this applies a lot of times for neurodivergent people too, like you are being too wishy-washy, you're changing, you're focused too much. There's a lot of commentary on that that's more focused on you as a person than it is on, actually, how's it going, how is your business doing?

In addition, the Leadership Research Institute notes that, compared to men, women tend to be harder on themselves when receiving feedback from others, which goes back down to if we think about historically, that feedback we received was so important for survival to be able to have resources. Women are also hard on themselves when they self-assess, tending to underrate their own abilities. There's a lot of research that a lot of times, women won't even apply to jobs if they don't think they need all the qualifications, but men will apply to jobs that they think that they have more than enough-- that men will apply to jobs knowing they don't have qualifications. There's a lot of societal stuff here.

In addition, women can also feel overwhelmed or report that they're crushed by feedback. Because of this also, women tend to get softer feedback from others despite the fact that rigorous feedback is one of the ways that leaders strengthen their capabilities. This is what I'm talking about. It's like we want actually to get feedback and we just want to help address that really difficult societal history of being socialized as a woman and being neurodivergent from the feedback.

Identity stereotypes for then presenting people is often people get feedback that they're too abrasive or aggressive, too emotional or intense or too direct or harsh, or too quiet and not authoritative enough. Don't be too aggressive, but don't be too quiet, don't be too gentle. It's an impossible standard. You can't possibly meet all of these at the same time. For neurodivergent people, a lot of times the stereotype that we get is you're changing too much, you have too many things going on, and also especially you're too intense, et cetera. If you have any others that you think, what types of stereotypes do you tend to hear or have you received? This would be really great to put in the chat.

Also, if you were socialized as a woman, you're likely to get feedback about how you should be as a person, like about your personality or how you present, rather than helpful feedback about skills or techniques. If you're neurodivergent, you're likely to get feedback based on methods, thoughts, and experiences of neurotypical individuals. I

just want to go back to the PEO model, Person-Environment-Occupation. The feedback that I'm talking about about personality and how you are as a person, that's in the person sphere. We are going to operate with the assumption that nothing is wrong with your personhood.

No matter what feedback you get about what you should be, we want to retain that belief that actually, nothing is wrong with you as a person. How can we just shape the environment and the things that you're doing to meet your needs so that you have the right fit between all of these? The right fit leads to your maximum performance and success. If the feedback includes something that involves stereotypes of how you are supposed to be, I want you to intentionally discard anything that is about your personality or state of being. The next few strategies here will give tools to do if that's challenging.

Side note, I'm talking about the environment here. This is a series of factors of the environment. [coughs] Sorry. Excuse me. I've had a cough for like three weeks. Oh, see, I wrote here. I forgot what I put in the slide. Being an entrepreneur is the shit because actually, you can adjust your environment to match what's supportive to you instead of trying to fit into places that suck or that don't match your needs, that don't create the right fit.

When we think about environment, you're thinking about your own internal environment like all of your internal voices in the different parts of you. We're thinking about your family or your immediate surroundings. Then the next level of environment is your community, school, or workplace. Then the larger environment is your society, your culture. You want to think about we actually have so much power in your own business about how you curate your environment, and we just want to be really cognizant of that. Here are a few things you can do to take feedback like a boss bitch.

The first thing is to reframe the feedback from being about you to being about the person giving the feedback. Here's how to do this. First, you want to reframe and ask, "What does this feedback tell me about the person giving the feedback? What does it tell me about their perspective, their preferences, and their unique person factors and systems that have worked for them?" You want to reframe it back to their PE, their person factors. This is where this is coming from is their own unique PE of it. It's not about yours, so you have take it from their lens.

The next step is to assess relevance. Is this feedback necessary to incorporate my goals or achieve my objectives? You have to say, "Let's see where this feedback is coming from. Is it even relevant to me?" Then you decide, do I discard it? Do I apply it?" Then how you think about revising is the next step. What might I want to do next to help me better achieve my goals or better engage or work with or interact with this person? I'll give you some examples of what this looks like. For yourself, and feel free to put this in the chat, I want you to recall an experience of getting tough or negative professional feedback.

Just for the purposes of this exercise, think about something that was moderately difficult, mild to moderately difficult to receive for you. If it's too intense, sometimes it's hard to think through the exercise because there's probably so much hurt and feelings there. Think about something mild to moderate. Then you want to reframe. What did that feedback you received tell you about the person giving that feedback? What did it tell you about their perspective, their preferences, their unique person factors and systems that have worked for them? If you want to share that in the chat, that would be awesome.

Next, I want you to think about your experience and assess the relevance of the feedback you got. Was that feedback necessary to incorporate to achieve your goals? Then last, if you were going to revise, what would you want to do to better achieve your goals and/or better engage with the person who gave you the feedback? Feel free to write that in the chat as well. Actually, that was all about negative feedback. You know what? I thought I was going to give an example. Maybe I'll give an example.

Let's see. I'll take my example of my negative feedback was I received feedback from my partner actually about work and feeling like I was focusing on too many things. If I were to reframe this about being about the person, I would probably think about their perspective preferences, their unique person factors is they're not coming from an entrepreneurial mindset. They're working a 9:00 to 5:00 job. In these jobs, the sturdiness and working within your scope and doing the things that you're told to do is what's important. That's something I would want to note.

I also want to think about they are such a steady, reliable person and they like consistency and routine and straightforwardness. That's something important to note. Then I want to assess the relevance. No, it is not necessary to accomplish my goals. Revising them is, what would I want to do next to help me better achieve the goals or better work with this person?

One is I would want to think about what will help our relationship, that engagement there is probably for me to have good parameters around what am I seeking feedback about and what am I not, and being willing to say, "I'm not looking for feedback about that," or being willing to say, "I think this is a bigger discussion about what my interests are and how it actually works well with my business that I have different focuses." There's just different ways I can decide how do I want to proceed with that.

Next, I want you to recall an experience of getting positive feedback. Take a minute just to think about what's the time that you recently got positive feedback. Then we're going to do the same thing. What does that feedback tell you about the person giving the feedback, about their perspective, preferences, priorities, or their own person factors? Feel free to put that in the chat. What does that feedback tell you about them? Then you want to assess relevance. Is that feedback necessary to incorporate in order to keep accomplishing your goals or your objective? Yes or no? Then revise. What might you want to do next to help you better achieve your goals or better work with this person?

If it's positive feedback, there may be less to puzzle through there than if it's negative feedback, but it's still just important to take stock of that. It goes back to the point of when someone is giving you praise. We could go into a whole another talk about projection, about people like what they see when it matches their own values or their own things they like about themselves. That's a whole another thing. Just knowing that even when people give you praise, it's likely about them and their values, and you happen to be matching.

The next thing that you can do for feedback is to take an extra peek at the feedback that hurts. Some things you can do when you receive feedback that really hurts is to really take an extra look. A few questions to help you reflect on this, and feel free to put this in the chat as well, is what criticism do you most fear receiving? It's really helpful to acknowledge this. When you receive feedback that's negative and you feel strong activation for it, you want to ask what's the matchup, how does this criticism touch on a negative belief or a doubt I already had about myself anyway?

An example I heard once that is low stakes that's helpful is I have blondish hair. If someone were to come up to me and say, "I hate your blue hair," I would probably be like, "Okay," because I don't have blue hair. I'd be like, "Okay, interesting." That doesn't affect me because it doesn't match a belief that I have about myself. If someone came up to me and said something that I do have a belief about like I've had to work through a lot of thoughts about being responsible for being messy. Now I realize, oh, that's totally ADHD stuff. When I received comments about being messy in the past, it really hurt because I believed that that was something morally wrong with me in the past.

That's a helpful thing to just note when you are receiving feedback that touches on something that you also believe or have internalized about yourself, what is that? Then it's helpful once you've identified what that is to figure out where did this self-concept or this doubt originate and where did I learn that this was bad about myself? Then it's helpful to ask, is this true? What's even the evidence that it's true? Like for me, being messy or doing too many things at once, what's the evidence that that's bad? Then you can ask, would it serve me to update this belief about myself? If so, what would I like to replace this with?

Here we want to really think about reframing criticism. Criticism isn't necessarily bad, it's actually something that just comes with doing important pioneering work and criticism is about the person giving the criticism, not about you. You decide what you take as relevant and how you will revise. I think that's most of it about criticism, but the next few questions are about praise because, like we talked about a little bit before, praise is often people projecting what they like onto us.

If you are seeking praise, it's going to affect the things you do, but really the praise is about the other person and what they like, not necessarily about whether you are good in and of yourself. It's about that person's PE chart, not about yours. Barriers against praise, it's helpful to think about what in my life am I doing or saying primarily to gain praise or approval. Feel free to think on this for a minute and put it in the chat. What are

you primarily doing right now to gain praise or approval? Think about your business specifically, what are you doing right now primarily to getting praise or approval? Doing or not doing?

Then ask yourself, what are the costs of that? I don't know. It could be so many different things my brain is thinking about. Like the stuff that I say on social media, maybe sometimes I'm trying to sound really smart or cutting edge or something instead of just being authentic. I think maybe that's coming up for me right now, and probably the cost of that is I'm trying too hard and it's not as fun because I'm trying too hard to be fancy, to be smart. What is the praise I'm most seeking? Ooh, [chuckles] that's my question. For you, what is the praise you're most seeking to know that you're smart, competent, responsible, attractive? See if you can pinpoint that. I'm going to cough for a second. [silence]

Then one last question. You probably already read for you. Ask yourself the question, if I were less dependent on praise, I would-- Feel free to put that in the chat. [coughs] One more question. What is more important than being praised? Essentially here are areas for barriers and boundaries against praise and criticism, is reframe the feedback you got to being about the person who gave it, assess the relevance for you, revise what you want to do to achieve your goals, or better engage with that person you gave the feedback. Just keep revisiting your ultimate goals and your purpose. [coughs] Remember the Person-Environment-Occupation chart, you are the ultimate expert on you and your creative process.

Here we go. Remember, at the end of the day, you know a good fit for you and what your business feels like. No one else can give that to you and no one can give you feedback about what feels right to you. Consider finding a coach who gets how to modify the right things for your business, AKA, not you. You don't need to change, you're perfect the way you are. [coughs]

I just want to reference some of these strategies are from Tara Moore's book *Playing Big* in the *Occupational Therapy Practice Framework*. You're welcome to download a free eBook that I wrote called *Better Boundaries in 5 Steps or Less*, and that's at [boundariesarebrave.com](http://boundariesarebrave.com). Connect with me @boundarybish on Instagram. [coughs] Sorry for my cough. Thank you. Thank you so much for listening and I welcome all your questions. [silence] I'm trying to figure-- Oh, here we go.

**[00:27:32] [END OF AUDIO]**