

116. Befriending your mind: A Powerful journaling practice to shift away from negative self-talk

Vanessa 00:00

Welcome to the Empowered brain, the only podcast using science, psychology and coaching to help you rewire your brain and create a life you love with your host, Dr. Vanessa Calderon, a Harvard grad physician, master coach, and mother of two.

Hello, sweet friends. Welcome back to the podcast. I am so thrilled to be here with you today. And the inspiration for today's podcast episode comes from a recent coaching session that I had with one of my students. So you know, I was coaching one of my students, I'll share this quick story with all of you before we jump into the episode. And she just started a morning journaling practice. So we teach my students often to start this journaling practice to really help them get in touch with their intuitive self, because for many of us, we're always on the go on the go on the go.

We never have time to pause to really check in with ourselves and see how we're doing. So she started this morning journaling practice. And she was shocked because she said that there were times when she was journaling. And she had so many negative thoughts come up that before she would put them down on paper, she'd pause and say Holy smokes, like I can't believe I'm thinking that about me. I don't want to write that stuff down. You know, when she shared that was me, I had so much compassion for her. Because I know exactly where she's coming from. How many of you have some negative thoughts and times and you're just shocked when you tune into your negative thoughts about what's coming up for you. And I remember, you know, when I first started this work many, many years ago, and I actually did not think I had a problem with self compassion. I thought I was glowy confident. I didn't think I had a problem with insecurity. I didn't think I had a problem with impostor syndrome. I didn't think I needed any of this kind of work. And of course, because I didn't think I needed it. I was hyper stressed out hyper vigilant, always on the go, never pausing, never taking time for myself. And when I finally slow down and got in touch with myself, and I started this journaling practice, I remember being super shocked.

There were times where I was like, Whoa, holy smokes, did I really just write that down? I would say things like, what was he thinking? It's so stupid. Really, like I'm so stupid. Like I would say things like that about myself in worse. That's like the most benign thing I would say, I would say things that were much worse. And so I just felt so much compassion for my student because I know what that's like. And here's the thing. The thing is that I've been doing this work for, you know, 10 years or so. And even though I've been doing this work for that long stuff still comes up for me, negative thoughts still come up for me. Sometimes I surprise myself in my journaling practices when I'm writing something down, and that stuff still comes up, shocks me. And so I created a practice for myself so that I wouldn't necessarily

police my thoughts because I wanted to get them all out of my brain and on paper. But I also wanted to come back and notice what I said to myself and really show myself compassion in those moments. And that is what I want to teach you today is how to show yourself compassion in those moments when you're journaling things and you're just shocked about what you're saying to yourself, how to show yourself compassion in those moments and shift.

Okay, so let's first talk about journaling practice. So I'm gonna first introduce you to a journaling practice. And then I'm going to show you the counter practice to really show yourself compassion in those moments. So if you don't already have a journaling practice, I'd recommend you go back and listen to my episode. It's number 56, where I teach you a very simple morning journaling routine, it takes like 1015 minutes, the entire episode is about I think 11 minutes long. And the practice itself is pretty short. So I recommend going back to that, but just in quick review. So when I started this, I had read a book called *The artist's way* by Julia Cameron. And she's a, she's this incredible artist. And what she does is she says to get in touch with your creative brain with your creative self, it's really important to just get really in touch with your intuition and your intuitive self. And the way to do that is with the morning journaling practice. And so she called her practice morning pages.

So I started calling mine morning pages too. And her recommendation was to get up first thing in the morning and before you do anything else, you know, get up before your kids are up if you can Nik, and before you do anything else, before you check your phone before you check your emails before you check social media, or whatever it is you do in the morning, before you do that, grab a journal and start writing. And her recommendation is to fill up at least three pages with whatever's coming out of your brain. Don't police it, don't try to stop it, just let it flow and don't overthink. And so when I read the book, I took her challenge. And I started doing that. And I bought this nine and a half by 11. Page ledger, I think that's the size, you know, there's like legal pads that are yellow that you flipped from the top. And I was filling up three pages of those every morning. And by about week three or so I started to notice recurring themes coming up. But I also started to notice how in touch I was with myself and my thoughts. And I would do that first. And then I would sit to meditate. And when I would sit to meditate, I would notice how my brain was totally blank, how it was so easy for me to sit, meditate quietly and calm my mind.

Because I had gotten everything out and put it on paper, it was really, really fascinating. So if you don't yet have a practice, you can start with something like that, an easy thing to do also is to set a timer, maybe you set a timer for 10 minutes, and you just sit and you're right, as long as you can, for 10 minutes, just let whatever it is come out and put it down on paper. Again, the reason why you do this is because it really helps you connect with what's going on in your brain, it helps you get everything out of your brain. And the reason why you want to get everything out of your brain is because whether you get it out or not, it's there and it's influencing you. And it's either influencing you subconsciously or consciously. And when you can see it on paper, you can then choose how you want to be influenced by those thoughts. You can look at the stuff that you were thinking, and then you can say, Okay, well, I'm going to be intentional, I'm not going to think these negative things about me. I'm going to think this instead. And that's how you start to live your life on purpose. That's how you start to choose your thoughts on purpose.

Okay, so you get everything out on paper. And then what I want you to do. So once you get everything out, again, no filter, let everything out. If you notice that a lot of negative things are coming up, what I want you to do is go back to the journaling that you just did grab a different color pen, go back to your journaling. And notice what came up for you. If you see things that are negative, go back and underline those things that you notice that are negative. If it's helpful, you can use that cool mnemonic that I taught you COAL and episode 115. That's a great mnemonic that teaches you a mindfulness tool that you can use in real time to notice your thoughts and just see them with curiosity. So use that mnemonic if it's helpful. And so you underline all those things that are negative. Notice if there any of those are recurring themes. So for me, for example, some of the recurring themes that will come up for me that were negative, especially once I decided to go all in on starting my own business and becoming an entrepreneur.

What would come up for me all the time is when when things would get hard for me or I would feel like I was failing, I would have this recurring thought you should just quit. This is so stupid. Why are you doing this just go back to being a doctor. Like going back to being a doctor so bad, right? But that that would come up for me all the time. And so what I noticed there is my brain offering me the thought that I should quit my brain offering thought that this was stupid. And you know, offering me a way out like this backdoor just go back to being a doctor. So notice for you, if you have any things that come up for you any of those negative things that come up. And when you see those negative thoughts. Notice that seems and then what you want to do is you want to look at those negative thoughts and see them with compassion. In fact, I just did this exercise for myself very, very recently. Just last week, I did this exercise for myself.

Just last week when I was journaling. I put everything down on paper and I was going through some Sh*t, I was going through some Sh*t let me tell you, I had some thoughts. And I was feeling really disappointed in myself. And I wasn't entirely clear what the block was. Again, I've been doing this work for 10 years and this stuff still comes up for me. And so I just decided I was going to do my journaling practice and so I let everything come out on paper and I was shocked at what I found. I was shocked at what I said. In fact, I have my journal hair in front of me right now. I was saying things like you're so disappointing.

Vanessa 09:57

What were you thinking this is so stupid and At that same recurring thought you should just quit came up again. So what did I do? I got my different colored pen after I was done with the journaling. And I went back and I noticed the negative stuff and I just lightly underlined, I noticed the things that were themes like, oh, there's that thought again about quitting. Isn't that interesting? I use the corner. Manik Oh, interesting that my brain offered me that. And then what I did is I shifted to self compassion. What I want to offer for you is you can look at those thoughts that you wrote down, and you can see them with compassion, you can offer yourself thoughts like, Oh, of course, my brain is offering me this thought of I should just quit. That's what my brain offers me. And then you want to give yourself some love in those moments. So I literally in the margins are right above some of the negative things I said, I wrote things like, Okay, well, we're never gonna quit. But I love you, though. Thank you for offering me that. Or for this other one, like, you're so disappointing.

Okay, I see that you're thinking that I love even assets, okay. And I just went through, and I did that for all of those negative thoughts. I saw it with compassion. And then I wrote down with a different colored pen, a really kind note to myself to offer myself some love. And once I was done, offering myself love, I felt so many different ways. I felt love for myself, I felt compassion for myself. But it also felt so silly that like, when I went back and read what I had written in the first color, I wrote in black, and then I wrote in pink, my love letters. When I saw what I wrote in black, I just had this kind of like smirk on my face, like, Oh, you silly brain, thinking that you can offering me these things, you know, and be like this to me, but really, like, I just really love myself. And I want to be kind to myself, and I'm not going to let you talk to me like this. And so at the very bottom of the paper, I had some space left. And so I just wrote myself a really nice love letter. It's like four or five letters, four or five sentences long. And it was just really sweet to tell myself how proud I am of myself that I'm not quitting, that I'm choosing to give myself self compassion, that I'm choosing courage and determination. And that in this moment, when I had felt like a failure, I am recommitting to my goals to my purpose. And I'm going for it. And I just wanted to offer you that because I know that my student who had coached isn't alone, because that's happened to me. And my sense is, it's probably happened to a lot of you. And we don't have to police our thoughts. We don't have to be like, we don't have to be mad at them mad at ourselves, or feel ashamed of the fact that we're so mean to ourselves.

Honestly, those mean thoughts come up for everybody, not just you. And really the trick is not to try to be perfect or not to try to not have those thoughts. But instead, to notice those thoughts, notice the themes and just see them with compassion. Be curious about the Muse that corner Manik that I taught and really treat yourself with love in those moments and offer yourself the kindness and the love that you would offer your best friend, that you would offer your child if they came to you with these types of things. offer that to yourself. Because you deserve it, because you're worthy of it. And because that's self compassion, that is the ticket to you shifting. And when you're able to offer yourself that compassion in those moments, you move from feeling stuck for feeling disappointed from feeling sad, to a state of activation. And that my friends, that is how you keep going.

That's how you get more done. That's how you recommit. And really, that's how you choose courage over fear. All right, so with friends, I hope you found this helpful. Please, please, please use this for yourself if you found this helpful. And if you want help, using all of these tools on a really like on this granular level, where you're not just learning these things on a podcast, but really applying them to your own life. I want to invite you to join us inside the journey. The journey again is my comprehensive coaching program where I work with you specifically, to help you move from where you are now many of you are stuck. Many of you are procrastinating many of you are not reaching your potential because of something holding you back. Maybe it's imposter syndrome. Maybe it's guilt. Maybe it's shame, whatever it is, it's keeping you stuck. I can help you move past it. Alright, sweet friends. Again, it's VanessaCalderonmd.com/join. That's how you'll find information about the journey. And if you want to connect with me, I'm on Instagram at [@Vanessa CalderonMD](https://www.instagram.com/VanessaCalderonMD). And please, please, please, if you found this helpful, share this episode with a friend. That's how we can help so many more people and the more people practicing self compassion, the better this world will be. So please share this episode with a friend with a colleague with a family member. All right, friends, I will see you next week.

Vanessa 15:05

Hey sweet friends, if you love what you're learning, then you've got to join us in the journey. It's my all inclusive program and the best community out there giving you the education you never knew you needed to help you create a life you love. Join us at VanessaCalderonmd.com/join. I'll see you there.