

Ep #6: Vulnerability vs. Victim Mentality



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Brooke Castillo

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Ep #6: Vulnerability vs. Victim Mentality

Welcome to The Life Coach School podcast, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Brooke: Hey, everybody. What's up? So glad you're here today. I have a great topic that I want to talk about today. We're going to talk about the victim mentality and how that is different from the experience of vulnerability. I think that those two need to be really looked at and examined so you can look at your own life and see where you fall because it will determine whether you have the life of your dreams or the life of your nightmares.

Before we get started, I just want to share with you that of course, I'm brand new to podcasting, so I'm just figuring this all out, and I also have a blog over at 'TheLifeCoachSchool.com', and I have never taken comments on my blog before. It was just a decision I made years ago and I've never done it. On the podcast, I am taking comments and I am learning how to interact over there.

If you would do me a huge favor and practice with me, I would love it. To go over to "TheLifeCoachSchool.com/6", then it will take you to the show notes for this episode and we can chat and make comments together and talk to each other. The comment that you make has to be approved because I have 5,000 things of spam, but I will respond to every single comment that is made there.

If you have comments for me, if you have questions for me, if you have things you'd like me to cover on this show, or you just have something specific you would like a little coaching on, I am happy to do it over there in the comments and would love if you would be willing to practice with me over there. Okay. That being said, let's talk about the difference between the victim mentality and vulnerability.

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Now, the victim mentality, many of us have don't realize it. There's so many of my clients that I work with that would never present with, "Hey, I'm a victim." Most of us don't choose that consciously. I know for so many years, I had the victim mentality and of course I didn't realize it. I thought I was very strong, capable woman, "How could I possibly have this victim mentality?", but I totally did.

I'm going to describe what it is so you can have a look at maybe if you have it in your own life. Now, be careful because it's sometimes pretty sneaky because it's justified, especially if you've been harmed in some way in your past, you may really identify with being as a victim and not even realize it. One of the things that's really important to remember is that when you identify as a victim, you are losing all of your power, and it really affects the way that you live in your life.

The main way that I see the victim mentality show up in my clients is with blame. Now, they don't see it as blame, they see it as just an explanation as to why they're miserable is someone else's fault, if their husband ran the business better, if their husband hadn't abused them years ago, if they didn't have such a nightmare of a boss ... Right? Looking at other people and giving them all the power for how we feel is the victim mentality. It's completely abdicating responsibility for how we feel because of some powerful perpetrator in our life.

Think about that for just a minute. Is there someone in your life that you think is the cause of your pain? Is there someone in your life that you feel is really causing you a lot of trouble? Now, here's a hint. If when I asked that question, if you felt defensive, if you felt like, "Woah, she doesn't know my life. My situation is very different." If you felt like you needed to puff up and maybe explain to me, then you may be in the victim mentality.

The victim mentality is ripe with defensiveness. I love the way Byron Katie says that, "Defense is the first act of war." If you feel like you need to defend against other people, you're probably in the victim mentality. You need to defend yourself. Okay?

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Blame is really the main characteristic. The other characteristic that you'll see in yourself possibly or in the clients that you may be coaching is that when we have the victim mentality, we want to hide. We don't want to put ourselves out there. It makes sense, right? If we feel like we're being victimized, we don't want to put ourselves out there and have someone attack us.

I just want to say that the victim mentality is not a sign of weakness. It's a belief pattern that we've established in our brain that affects our life, but it does not mean that we aren't intelligent, capable, amazing people, and it certainly doesn't mean that we're not strong. It just means that we have this mentality, the looping in our brain. It's very similar to with my weight loss clients, 'The diet mentality'. It's a way of thinking about food and diet and eating that perpetuates our entire life. That's the same with the victim mentality.

If you have the victim mentality, you will catch yourself complaining a lot. You'd probably be negative. I know that for me, when I was in that space of being in the victim mentality ... and by the way, I still am sometimes. I complain, "Poor me," I blame other people, it's a habitual thought process that spins into self-pity and feeling sorry for myself and feeling trapped.

You will notice that when someone is in the victim mentality, they are always the victim of their story. What I mean by that is not necessarily, "Oh, they attacked me," but "They did something to me" is how they interpret most stories with the people that they're in relationship with.

If somebody doesn't invite you to a party for example, you may feel like "They did that to me. They excluded me on purpose." What really happen is they just didn't invite you, but you spin that or if I'm doing it, I spin that to make it mean they did it at me. They did it to me. I am the victim of their invite list. Really subtle.

You could say to your friend, "Hey, that's so rude. Why would she do that to me?" Whatever reason why someone doesn't invite you to a party

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may have nothing to do with you at all. When you're in that victim mentality, you can't help but make it about you.

Now, let me tell you, most people have this victim mentality from many years ago. They've usually had an episode in their past where they were a victim maybe as a child, and they've adopted the mentality even though that event is long over. I know for me, when I was really spinning out the victim mentality, I was always referencing my childhood, always referencing the events that happened to me when I was a child to basically justify my victim mentality.

A lot of the victim mentality has its roots in past focused, and so looking into the past to really find evidence for why it's justified that I'm feeling this way. For me, it was my relationship with my dad and how he treated my mom and how he treated me always left me feeling a victim. Even the way I thought about it long after my father had even passed away was still identifying myself as the victim.

I just kept blaming him for everything that was going on in my current life, which when you think about it, it doesn't make any sense. My dad was long gone. He passed away of alcoholism, and I was still living my life as if he was my perpetrator.

I wrote a blog post that was titled I think a couple of years ago that was titled, 'Every Victim Needs a Villain'. It's really true. I see that that is my pattern in my life. When I am in that victim mentality, I am looking for someone to blame. As soon as I find someone to blame, I put them ... and I do this unconsciously, right? I put them in the position of the villain, and me in the position of the victim.

Even though I could get lots of people to agree with me that it's true, and even though it's justified that I do that, I'm still the victim. The problem with being the victim is that I have now given all my power to the perpetrator. I have done this inadvertently in my mind, but I'm also acting that out. I'm creating feelings of helplessness and disempowerment and anger and fear within myself, and oftentimes, the person who I've identified

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as my perpetrator doesn't even know that that's what I'm doing, but yet I've created this relationship where they are now in charge of how I feel.

I'll say something like, "I'm just so pissed that they did that to me. I'm just so hurt that they did that to me." Usually, when I think about the person that I have qualified as my perpetrator, I would never delegate my emotional life to that person, and yet, that's exactly what I've done, and never would I consciously choose to be the victim in any situation and yet, that's exactly what I've done.

Let me give you an example. Let's say I go to a family dinner party. At the family dinner party, one of the members of my family says something to me that is derogatory like, "Everybody thinks you're a lot older than you are," which is actually something that could totally happen at my dinner table, right? Let's say someone said that to me. I could immediately go into this place of really feeling hurt and projecting hate and frustration and anger onto this person that's a member of my family. Then, I could go complain to my husband about how rude everybody is and especially this person and about how she's so mean, and then I've just spun myself out into feeling sorry for myself and blaming someone else. That is the victim mentality.

Alternatively, I could have that exact same dinner part, someone could say something like that to me, a member of my family, someone I really care about, and I could acknowledge, "Yes, that's your opinion. Maybe your opinion is true, and maybe there are a lot of people that would agree with you, but it has nothing to do with me, and I'm not going to take that on. I'm certainly not going to spin out into a space where I'm giving you control of how I feel emotionally." I get to decide in that moment how I want to feel about that comment and about that person. In those situations, I choose not to go into the victim mentality because I choose not to give my power away to that person, and in fact, I have found that I don't even really want to be angry in those situations or upset because it doesn't serve the situation I found, and it makes me feel angry and upset.

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Oftentimes, I will say back to someone like, “That was an unnecessary comment. Can we move on?”, or I’ll say, “That’s an interesting opinion that you’ve shared there.” It’s usually after someone’s had too much to drink too that these comments come out. It changes my experience of the world and it changes how often I feel victimized.

I always take responsibility. “Okay. Does this tell the truth?” I don’t always take responsibility. I attempt to always take responsibility for how I feel in my life, for how I feel in every moment because I recognize that it is my responsibility to determine how I feel, because all of my feelings are caused by my thinking.

Now often, when I introduce this concept to students, they’ll come back and say, “Aren’t you just being a doormat then?” I mean if somebody can just say whatever they want to you and you don’t get upset or you don’t say anything back, aren’t you just being a doormat? I actually think the opposite is true.

I think that when somebody says something and you allow it to devastate you, you have given all your power to that other person you have identified as the victim, and that is much more of a doormat than when you allow people to be who they are and say what they’ll say especially if it’s to you. It doesn’t mean that you don’t say something back, it just means that you don’t say something back out of anger or out of negative emotion that you’ve created based on what they’ve said.

I mean, you guys know this, like if somebody says something to you that is derogatory let’s say, and you just blow them off, you’re just like, “Yes, I hear what you’re saying. It’s an interesting opinion you have right there,” or “You know you just said that out loud,” it changes the whole experience versus if I coward down and accept what they’ve said and say, “Don’t do that to me. That’s so rude,” and now all of a sudden, I might crawl up in a ball and lashing out like an emotional child, instead of just knowing that that person’s opinion that what that person says has everything to do with that person and nothing to do with me.

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In fact, when you're able to handle situations like that, you stay in your integrity, you stay in your emotional happiness, and they appear to themselves and to everyone else as in the negative emotion that they are, because typically people say things like that when they aren't being aware, when they aren't paying attention, and when they aren't in a positive place. Most people when they're in a positive place say really nice, wonderful things, and so you can either go to that level and accept their comment or accept what they're doing as a victim, or you can handle it as someone who is not a victim. Very different experience.

Now, I want to add one more thing. That does not mean that if in that moment, when they said that, you have a negative emotion and you experience something like humiliation, or you experienced something like shame. It doesn't mean that you pretend to yourself that you're not experiencing that.

Here's the key. The reason why you are experiencing the negative emotion in that moment is because of a thought you're thinking and not what they said. I cannot emphasize how important that distinction is, because if I'm the reason that I'm feeling shame in that moment, I still have all my power. If I give the credit for feeling shame to that person, then I have then handed over my power to them and I am now in the victim mentality.

Let me give you an example. This is the example I use all the time with my students. If somebody says to you, "I really hate your blue hair," and we're assuming you don't have blue hair. Some people do have blue hair, but we're assuming you don't, right? If someone says to you, "I hate your blue hair," you're probably not going to start crying, you're probably not going to say, "That really hurts my feelings," you're probably not going to drop in the victim mode because there's no part of you that believes that you have blue hair so you probably won't slip into the victim mentality.

Most of you won't. Some of you could even go there. I mean, if you are really into that victim mentality, you could use that as a reason. The reason why is because no part of you believes it. When somebody says

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something to you and you do believe it, there's a part of you that believes it, that's when it really gets to you. The reason why is because of the thought you're thinking that believes the thing that they're saying.

Now, this does not mean you have to give you power to them, and often, all it means is that later on, you need to have a look at that thought and you need to take care of yourself and really understand what's going on with you. It can be an opportunity for you to truly connect with the part of you that does believe that negative comment.

Now, I had one last thing that I think is really powerful. This recently happened to me and an example of how you can work with all of these kind of mentalities. I had someone send me an email that said, "Hey, I was talking to a colleague of yours that you used to do a lot of work with. Here's all the things that she said about you." She listed them, and they were all derogatory, rude things. I mean, let's just be blunt.

Immediately, as I read this list of things that this other person had said about me, I felt myself get defensive, and that's always a clue. Whenever you feel yourself get defensive, you have to remind yourself, "Uh-oh, I'm going right into that victim mentality. Poor me. How could they say all this about me? Oh my gosh. I can't believe they did this to me." That's what happened in my mind in about three seconds. Just like that.

When you feel that defensiveness, when you feel yourself getting ready for a fight and needing to defend yourself, that's when you can take a deep breath and say, "Woah. I am not going in the victim mentality. I am not going to turn this person who said these things about me, or the person that emailed them to me into my villain. What I'm going to do is just take a deep breath and see why this bothers me."

Now, when I read through the list, I could find the truth in almost everything that was said. I could see how someone could say that about me, and it could be true. By the way, that's true for most things. If someone says, "You're mean," you can probably find why you're mean. If someone

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says you're inconsiderate, you could probably find why you're inconsiderate.

This is a process again that I learned from Byron Katie is when you're willing to just accept the parts of you that aren't perfect, you maintain your power. You maintain your ability to not be a victim, because nothing can be used against you if you admit it if it's all true. That's exactly what I did. I went through the list, and I saw where I could find the truth in all of it. I replied back and said, "That's all true." That was the end of that discussion.

It was an invitation for a brawl, and I immediately went into defensive mode, and then released it, and it did not affect me after that. That is magical. When you find yourself being defensive, if you can find a way to release that desire to fight, release that desire to defend yourself to know that there's nothing that needs to be defended, that other people can have whatever opinion they want of you, and you don't have to argue with it to prove your own worth because you know your own worth, and you know what's true about you, and some of the things they say may be true, and some of them may not be true, but you don't need to defend yourself to anyone. That's a game changer, and that is what vulnerability is.

Now, I'm going to talk about how vulnerability is very different than the victim mentality. Now, you can't even talk about vulnerability without talking about Brene Brown. Brene Brown wrote a book called *Daring Greatly*. We read it two years ago in my master coach class. It's a game changer. It's a life changer. It's a beautifully written book. It is written by someone who has researched both shame and vulnerability extensively.

She really has a way of teaching it that will help identify what vulnerability is. A lot of people when they think about vulnerability, they think about weakness and they think like if someone is vulnerable on the battlefield, you think, "Oh my gosh, they aren't able to defend to themselves. They don't have weaponry." That is what it is.

In this day and age, it is one of your best assets. It is the opposite of the victim mentality which creates defensiveness and learned

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helplessness. Vulnerability is showing up being all in and being willing to experience any emotion that comes up for you. The reason why the book is titled, 'Daring Greatly' is because vulnerability requires courage.

What I mean by that is that if you are going to be willing to feel any emotion that comes up, any emotion that you create with your mind, you're going to have to be courageous. You're going to have to walk into that experience with yourself and know that there is no emotion that can kill you, and there is no emotion that will ever require you to hide from yourself.

When you are in a relationship with someone that you love deeply, you are going to be vulnerable because they will say things and do things that will trigger you to think and feel things that may be difficult. If you're in the victim mentality, you're going to hide from that experience. You're going to reject anything that is said to you that isn't wonderful and loving, and you're going to try and control that person so they will only say things that you want them to say because you're so terrified of them being a perpetrator.

What's interesting about the victim mentality is it can make people act crazy and controlling. That doesn't seem like a victim mentality. It seems like they're yelling and screaming and controlling, but underneath that is that immense fear of feeling any emotion, any negative emotion. Vulnerability is the opposite. It's like, "Bring it on. I'm willing to put myself into really intense, wonderful, risk-taking, life-altering situations, because I am willing to feel any emotion." We're willing to expose ourself to our emotions without defense, without avoiding, without hiding.

If you're able to hear someone's feedback, hear someone's opinion, hear something that they're saying without being defensive, that is the deepest form of intimacy. That is true not only with other people that you love in your life, but also with yourself. When you can hear your own opinion of yourself without getting defensive and without starting a battle, that's vulnerability. That is where so much strength lies, because think about it, if I am willing to sit across from you at a table and hear your opinion of me, whether it'd be good or bad, that's a very vulnerable position

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especially if I'm not going to defend myself or attack you. I'm just going to be in that space. That requires so much strength.

What that person says to me may bring up a lot of my emotion. If I can take responsibility for being the creator of that emotion because my thinking is creating that, whether I'm believing them or not is creating that emotion, then I am in the power position, and not only that, I can engage with that person and connect with that person no matter what. That's where that unconditional love comes in, and that's where that intimacy comes in between two people. It is a beautiful, beautiful thing. It is the opposite of the victim mentality which in that situation would go to blame.

I love the way Brene Brown talks about blame. She says, "Blame is simply the discharging of pain and discomfort." What she means by that is when you're in a situation where you are experiencing pain and discomfort, instead of taking responsibility for that and acknowledging that to yourself, you would discharge it by attacking the other person or hiding from the other person or avoiding the situation. So many of us drink alcohol, smoke, eat, workaholicness instead of actually being willing to be open and vulnerable to whatever emotion comes up.

My weight loss clients, myself included, whenever I would get an inkling that a negative emotion was coming up, I would not take responsibility for it. I would avoid it completely by eating every single thing in the house, and then I would beat myself up for eating every single thing in the house, and that would be a pretty good distractor from any emotion that I was going through. Then of course, I felt so out of control that I identified myself as the victim of my own self. I created myself as the perpetrator who wouldn't stop eating and also as the victim of the perpetrator who wouldn't stop eating.

The victim mentality doesn't have to be someone outside of you, it can be you. You can be your own villain and your own victim. It's very clever how we do this with ourselves. If I'm willing instead of eating, if I'm willing to be vulnerable, which means open without defenses for whatever emotion comes up, then I don't need to eat. I don't need to avoid myself by

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overeating food. I don't need Oreos. I can experience whatever emotion is coming up for me and I can really hear myself out.

Not only that, then I can find the cause. I can find the thinking pattern that is creating that emotion and then I can change it. That done over and over and over again, eliminates the need for overeating. When you eliminate the need for overeating, you lose weight, and that is all my work with my weight loss clients. That's all the work we do at our program called 'The Weight School', which is at 'Theweightschool.com'.

We work with our clients on helping them discover the reason why they're overeating. You cannot discover that reason if you aren't willing to be vulnerable with yourself. Notice, if you are listening to this and you have an issue with overeating, notice how often you choose the victim mentality. Do you blame the program you're on? Do you blame the food you're eating? Do you blame people who bring food into your house? Do you blame the girl scouts for coming to your door with those? Who are you blaming for your weight loss?

That includes, are you blaming yourself? Are you playing both the victim and the perpetrator, and the villain in your own life, because that will get you nowhere. The only power play you have is the ability to be vulnerable. Now, one of the things that we're defending against when we have this victim mentality is the belief that there's something wrong with us.

When we are identifying ourselves as a victim, you will notice that that's usually paired with some flavor of "There's something wrong with me. I just can't lose weight. I'm not like other people. There's something wrong with my metabolism. There's something wrong with me. I am unable to lose weight."

Notice if that is the way you're thinking, that's a clue that you're in the victim mentality. All that means is that you have a pattern of thinking that you're identifying yourself as the victim. Vulnerability on the other hand is knowing that you are enough, you are perfect exactly the way you are.

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Now, that doesn't mean perfect by societal standards, that means perfect in that the way that you were created.

I say to my students all the time like, "You don't get to decide whether you're enough or not, because that's clearly already been decided. You are here. You are enough." When you can believe that no matter what emotion comes up, you know that it doesn't mean that there's something wrong with you. It just means you're having an emotion. That's when you can tap into vulnerability, and that is where all your strength is.

Remember, if you're willing to feel any emotion, there is nothing that's too scary to do, because the reason why something is "Scary" is because you don't want to feel fear. If you're willing to feel the fear, if you're willing to hear the feedback because you're willing to feel any emotion that comes up from that, that is your power play. That is your strength. That's where vulnerability will really trump the victim mentality any day of the week.

Here's one of the things I'd like you to do, and that's something that I've done pretty regularly is I've had a look at my life and I've asked myself, "Where am I unwilling to feel my emotion? Where am I avoiding it? What things aren't I doing? What dreams aren't I pursuing? What conversations am I unwilling to have because I don't want to feel the emotion that I'm going to create?"

Alternatively, who am I blaming for how I feel? When I feel anger, who am I blaming? When I feel sadness, who am I blaming? Am I blaming myself? Am I blaming other people, or am I being vulnerable and open and willing to feel whatever comes up, and knowing that when that emotion comes up, I can feel it all the way through and I can identify the thought pattern that is causing it. I can take a hundred percent of the responsibility for how I feel. In that place when I do that, I am in my most vulnerable with myself. That's when I can find the deepest connection with not just myself, but with the part of me that is much bigger than the self.

That is the magic of vulnerability. I want to invite you again to come to 'TheLifeCoachSchool.com/6' and tell me when you are willing to be

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vulnerable and when you've noticed that maybe you're in the victim mentality. I would love to hear and discuss those thoughts with you. It's a huge issue for most of us, but it is a game changer if we can get a hold of it.

Until next time. Please open yourself up to vulnerability. Pick up a copy of Brene Brown's book. She also has a TEDx talk that's fantastic. You should absolutely check it out. I'll see you guys next time.

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