

Ep #8: Owning Negative Emotion



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Brooke Castillo

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Ep #8: Owing Negative Emotion

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.

Hey, everybody. What's up? Thank you so much for joining me today. I am just coming off nice long three day weekend where hanging out with my kids all weekend, just loving them up, loving my husband, four of us just really had nothing planned. We actually had something planned and then it got cancelled and so we were able to just chill and just be with each other and I have to say, I'm really committed to doing that more often. I just like hanging out with my people. Anyway, hope you guys had a wonderful weekend.

Today, I'm going to talk to you about owning negative emotion. Are you excited? Does that sound fantastic? You can't wait to talk about that? I think that it's such an important piece that kind of goes unsaid a lot in life coaching and in weight coaching especially in weight coaching because it's such an important piece of losing weight is the ability and the willingness to feel negative emotion which most of us for some reason are very resistant to doing.

I do think that with all of this positive thinking and think positively and have positive emotion, there's this misconception that that's what life coaching is all about. It's about only feeling positively and about finding ways to feel positively and only focusing on positive affirmations which of course is a huge piece of it and who doesn't want to feel great.

There is nothing that we teach that says we're supposed to be happy a 100% of the time and I do think that that's a huge misconception and actually, I think that when some of us don't feel, I mean none of us feel positive emotion all of the time, we feel guilty about not feeling positively. I get this with a lot of my students who have gone through my training and

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who have really learned how to manage their mind. They think that that means that they should be feeling positive all the time.

That isn't a really important thing that I want to make sure I make really clear, is that being alive on the planet, being here on earth I do not believe is about feeling positive emotion all of the time. I think that's what heaven is for or whatever version of heaven you imagine when we're not alive. I think it's just all blessed out all of the time. I try to imagine a simplified version of this, if you're happy all of the time do you even know that you're happy because everybody's just happy all of the time.

I remember reading, I think it was a fable a long time ago about everybody winning the lottery and everybody finding the love of their life and everybody having the perfect body and that being with the world would be like, and I remember thinking that would be terrible. Don't we all want abundance for ourselves and for each other, so why would that be so terrible?

I think because happiness requires that they're be unhappiness, right? There is no happiness without the other side of it. I think that we sometimes forget that and I think we try and push away any kind of unhappiness or disappointment or fear or frustration and we especially keep all that stuff off of Facebook. We only want to present with our most happy, cheery, lovely rainbows in unicorn self.

It's really easy to get caught up in that. It's really especially when you're in our industry which is about really making our good great and taking ourselves to the highest level of that. I think that we can end up believing that negative emotion is something how in contrast to that.

I like to consider the concept that maybe we are supposed to feel negative emotion, let's just say 50% of the time. I immediately feel a sense of relaxation and peace not only around my own when I think that but also around all the other people in my life because I think it's so easy to expect everyone to be pleasant and lovely and happy and in a good mood all of the time and we get frustrated and upset when they're not. Then, we also

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can do that same rocket to ourselves and saying, “Oh, we should be positive 100% of the time and we should just constantly be glowing and happy and alive and grateful.

It’s just not realistic and nor do I think it’s healthy. I think that having a full healthy life means really embracing the contrast in the world, right? I think that there is contrast in our world and it includes meaning negative emotion is part of that experience and in fact, negative emotion can be part of our experience of happiness. It can make our happiness even better.

The definition of happiness is not the absence of negative emotion and never experiencing negative emotion and just being in a state of bliss all of the time. I think that my favorite definition of happiness is the joy you feel when working towards your potential and of course when you’re working towards your potential, you’re going to be facing lots of obstacles.

First of all, you’re working so that may not feel a 100% positive all the time and when you’re working towards your potential you’re having to overcome all of those obstacles in between you and your potential. As we’ve discussed on this show many times, our obstacles between ourselves and our potential is really our mind and our emotions. Part of that joy of working towards something that’s difficult is facing all of that negative emotion.

It kind of bust that idea that we shouldn’t have any negative emotion, that we should just skip our way through our lives. I think the best example of this is having children. When you have a child, you are opening yourself up to the most pain, the most frustration that you will probably ever experience in your life.

For those of you who have children or even for those of you who love children that you may be have nieces and nephews or other children in your life and you love them so madly, it also because of that deep primal love, you also open yourself up to the most excruciating kind of pain. I have never felt as much love as I feel for my children and I have never felt more pain since I have had children.

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I think that welcoming both of those into our lives is part of the human experience and I think most of us go into having children knowing that we're going to experience a lot of pain with having children, really intense pain and we still are all in. We still go for it knowing that our heart is now going to be running outside of our body, right, in our child and wanting our child to always be happy.

That's the other piece of this too, right? I notice this in myself so often is that, I really want my child to be happy all of the time. I have this sense that that would somehow make a better life for him. I have to remind myself consistently that his ability to deal with negative emotion and I have two sons, so I'm thinking of either one of them when I say this, his ability to deal with negative emotion is going to come from experiencing negative emotion and if I'm constantly trying to dismiss negative emotion or control his life in a way or he won't ever experience negative emotion, he's really going to miss out on half of the experience of being alive.

We can stay in our homes and never leave and never enter into any relationships that will cause us pain and never have children which is going to open us up to a lot of pain and avoid those experiences of contrast and negative emotion but we're also going to miss out on the full experience of being alive. I think the more alive we're willing to be, the more negative emotion we're going to experience.

Now, that's not to say that we don't create that negative emotion because we do. We create it with our thought patterns or with the way that we think but that doesn't mean that something has gone terribly wrong, right? A lot of times when we feel negative emotion, things are going terribly right and those can be our indicators that it's time to connect and become more conscious and dive into ourselves.

I think that most of what we are experiencing with our clients through life coaching and through weight coaching right now is I would say an epidemic of people resisting and avoiding emotion. I think they are spending so much time trying to be happy without actually being happy and making the effort to do that by resisting anything that feels like a negative vibration in their

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body. The way that they do that is by pretending it's not there, pushing it away and avoiding it.

I think that really understanding that the way to enjoy life is not by putting the brakes on negative emotion and in fact, it's the opposite. It's by really opening ourselves up to diving in to the negative emotion that gives us the full experience of what it means to be alive. I think that is ultimate happiness.

When you think about the love you have for your child and how mixed in the fear is and the pain and the frustration, right? It's all mixed in to having that child, I think that's the taste of what true aliveness and true happiness can be and I think it the way that it's meant to be.

One of the first things that we do with our clients especially our weight loss clients because what they're doing is they're eating instead of feeling negative emotion. They're actually eating instead of feeling positive emotion. They haven't established the skill of feeling and they haven't given themselves the time to actually experience negative emotion during their day. They're spending so much time avoiding it by overeating that they're just compounding the issue by resisting it.

One of the questions that we get sometimes is because we talked about contrast and we also talked about resistance and what are the difference between those two and it's a really important distinction. I just want to clarify that contrast is how the world is set up, it's like the yin and yang of the world, right? There's the positive and then there's the negative. That creates the contrast and that something that everybody will experience and it's the reality of the land, right?

The resistance is our inability to accept that. The resistance is our desire to make that not be true. Resistance creates so many problems because what it does is it denies truly our experience of being alive and we spend so much time running away from ourselves and diving into unconsciousness and pretense that we miss not only the experience of being alive but also

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the experience of experiencing ourselves and what it's like to be alive inside of our own body and experiencing everything, right?

It's like we create this side life that's whatever we do to avoid, some people it's drinking, some people it's eating, some people it's overworking and we pretend like that is our life, right? We create that experience as if that is our life while missing out on the true experience of emotion. One of the things that I always teach my clients to do is I teach them how to feel and it sounds funny. I'm learning how to feel my feelings. It sounds, I don't know.

My son said to me the other day. He's like, "I'm not a girl. I don't spend time talking about my feelings," and I think he had heard it on a show or something. Then I said, "Why not? Why don't you spend time talking about your feelings? Those are the most important things, right? That's what it's like to really connect with someone is by sharing your feelings and that's how you really connect with yourself."

It's kind of become this like soft version of accomplishment, right? Feeling your feelings, it's for girls. It infuriates me because I think that feeling your feelings is the most courageous thing anyone can do and when you're willing to feel any emotion, that's when you're going to be willing to take any action because you won't be afraid of the emotion that might accompany it, right?

One of the things that I want to suggest that you may practice doing is taking time each day like even just 10 minutes and allow yourself to feel the negative emotion that you're feeling.

With our weight loss clients, the way that we do this is we have them notice when they want to overeat and they're not hungry, right? We call this fog eating. When they have the desire the fog eat which is really check out at their own life, escape their own emotional experience, we ask them to just practice for 10 minutes, instead of eating, instead of avoiding, practice feeling negative emotion. The way that we have them do that is by sitting down and describing that emotion inside of their body.

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What is this business that we're trying so hard to escape from? What is it that so awful that we have to eat a bag of Oreos? What we realize is because we've been resisting our emotion for so long, we don't even know what it's like to experience an emotion. We only know what it's like to resist an emotion and avoid an emotion. What it's like to actually feel it?

For so many of us, this experience of taking this moment to be in that discomfort of a negative emotion is the first I've ever even done it. It's like someone, it's the first time I've ever lifted weights. It's like, "I'm not lifting weight. That looks like it'll hurt," and it does hurt a little bit but the benefits of experiencing it are tremendous and it's the same with experiencing negative emotion.

If you give yourself a certain period of time everyday to just allow whatever negative emotion that you're feeling to come up and be experienced to flow through you with full acceptance, you will actually learn the skill of how to feel a negative emotion. When you learn how to feel a negative emotion, you also learn how to feel a positive emotion. You're learning how to feel.

Many of us have learned how to resist emotion and avoid emotion for so long we'd literally don't know how to feel. The best way to do anything is to do it and do it consistently. Ten minutes a day when you feel yourself wanting to escape, you know what it is you do to escape from yourself, right? Instead of doing that, invite whatever ugliness you think is inside of you to come up and just notice it with fascination and with curiosity and not with judgment. For some of you it may be rage, for some of you it may be sadness, for some of you it may be depression, it may be disappointment.

Can you give yourself 10 minutes to experience that emotion in its purity and really notice what it feels like and what it's like to experience it? How long does it really last? Do you know how long a negative emotion last? Most of you are going to say no because you've never even allowed it to come through.

I recently had what I call a complete shame attack. I've talked about this before but I want to bring it up here because it's really important. I noticed

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that I was feeling shame and I could not talk myself out of it and I really noticed that I wanted to avoid it.

I was on a vacation in Mexico at the time and there were lots of margaritas available that I wanted to drink in order not to feel my negative emotion of shame because I think shame is one of the doozies right? For me, shame feels like someone is inside of my stomach gripping with all of their force and then sending vibrations throughout my body and just waves.

What I did, instead of resisting it, is I just allowed myself to feel it and the way that I did that is anytime I felt it, come up which shame comes in waves, I would name it. In my mind, I would just say, "Shame. This is shame." I would relax my body because all emotions grow when you resist them and I always say shame likes it when you hide it and likes it when you pretend it isn't there and likes it when you resist it. It feeds it.

Instead, if you just allow shame and you don't treat it as anything less than, meaning shame is just as much a part of the human experience as happiness and in fact, I love the way Brene Brown says this. I say it all of the time is, "If you are a human being, you're going to experience shame. The smartest, most talented, most successful people in the world experience shame. The only people that don't experience shame are sociopaths."

If you can embrace shame as if, "Oh, this is good news. I'm not a sociopath and I'm a human being," then you're going to allow it in a way that maybe you wouldn't before. When you think about, "Okay. Oprah Winfrey, she experiences shame. The president experiences shame. My most favorite singer in the world, the most beautiful woman in the world experiences shame."

Whoever you look up to the most, they experience shame. The people that you love the most in the world, they all, we all are in this together. We're all experiencing it together. Then, I can really allow it to come in and I can name it and really notice that it's just a vibration in my body. It's nothing other than that. It makes my heart open even though I'm experiencing

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shame. Ironically, it makes me feel courageous at the same time, right, because I'm allowing it to come in. I feel strong because I'm capable of experiencing an emotion like shame without resisting it.

It opens me up so much more than when I resist it and try to close it down. When I make space for that negative vibration in my body, I'm also opening myself up to positive vibration. What I noticed with shame is I probably experienced it pretty intensely for 24 hours. It came in waves and each wave probably lasted 60 seconds but it just kept coming back and back and back.

Now, I know that it was coming back because of what I was thinking and I kept thinking about something that was causing me shame and thinking about something that was causing me shame but there wasn't a way to think my way out of it, right? I had tried to run some new thoughts, try on some new thoughts, feel a different emotion it wasn't happening. I really just needed to be with the experience of this emotion and really see the thinking that was causing it and just be in that space.

I noticed though after I allowed it to come, I didn't fight it. I woke up in the morning, I know that some of you can relate to this experience where you wake up in the morning and boom, shame. Boom, right in the beginning and that's what happened to me. I woke up in the morning as soon as I was conscious enough to be awake. Boom, I felt it right in my stomach. I allowed it to be there. I said, "Okay. Here we go. There's shame, shame, shame," and just allowed myself to experience it.

We have a group at The Life Coach School of all of our graduates we call ourselves the awesome. It's a private board where we can go and ask for coaching and get feedback and help with our businesses and that sort of thing. I went there and I talked about my shame and I expressed what I was going through and really opened myself up to people that I know love me and talked about it. It was really powerful because shame comes from thinking that there's something wrong with you or that you've done something wrong.

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When we feel that way, when we have those thoughts that there's something wrong with us, our inclination is to hide and to go into the corner and hide from the world. Because I was allowing myself to feel it, right, I had the opposite experience, I really wanted to share it. I knew that there would be healing for me in sharing that experience. I did share that experience and continue to feel it.

Then I noticed, as the shame began to dissipate because I had allowed it, it turned into compassion. That was surprised me in a way that I wasn't expecting because when I think that all of us are experiencing shame as the human experience and I looked around and I had felt so much love from my community, the first response I got from one of my post was just a heart saying that someone loved me. At that moment, it's all I needed to hear because I was condemning myself so much and that's why I was experiencing the shame and to know that someone loved me was everything in that moment.

When I was done with experiencing the shame for this round of it, I was so aware of how deeply compassionate. I was feeling towards anybody else that was experiencing shame, toward any of my clients that were experiencing it. That level of compassion has stayed so deep for me since going through that experience of shame with so much awareness. It has turned into such an asset I think.

When someone comes to me and is saying that they're feeling shame or really what they're saying is they're resisting shame, I hear them. I know what they're saying and I really know how to help them because I've been there. I've done that. I think that when you think about shame can lead to compassion, think about the beauty of this, without any doubt in our lives, there's no reason to have faith, right?

Faith is our ability to belief in something that we doubt. If we don't have doubt then there's no need for faith and I think faith is one of the most beautiful emotions we can experience, right? It's that knowing that we can believe in something even when there's a lot of reason not to believe in it,

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right? That's where doubt comes in. Doubt makes faith awesome, right? Faith is an awesome without doubt.

I think that compassion is so much deeper when we've experience shame and there is really no feeling of success, no feeling of accomplishment if there's no such thing as defeat, right? We have these contrasting emotions that we want to dismiss and yet there are the ones that are creating the contrast for the ones we most want to feel. Without one, we don't have the other.

The idea of disappointment, right? Nobody's going to be like, "Hey. I can't wait to feel that." If we're willing to feel it, then our experience of desire, our experience of hope, our experience of, "We don't really wanting more is going to be intensified." I think by bringing in the whole experience and noticing that 50% of your emotions are going to be negative and that doesn't mean something has gone wrong. It doesn't mean you need to resist them. It just means you need to learn how to appeal them. You need to learn how to have the experience of a negative emotion and let it flow through you as part of your human experience.

Now, some people will say to me, "Well, if I'm going to be experiencing negative emotion 50% of the time, my family is going to leave me." That is actually not true and let me explain to you why. There is a huge difference between allowing yourself to feel a negative emotion and actually reacting to it. In fact, most of the time when you see someone who's in a bad mood, someone who's upset about something and kind of snarling at you about it, it's not because they're truly experiencing negative emotion, it's because they're resisting negative emotion.

When I was going through all of that shame and that experience of feeling shame, I was on vacation with my family. I was with my son on the back of a jet ski with him. I was walking on the beach with my family. We were going to restaurants and nobody would have said, "Oh, she's in such a bad mood." In fact, I think I was very peaceful because I was just allowing and being in the moment and I was truly present which with my experience of what was going on for me.

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I think when we are lashing out and snarling at people and in bad mood is because we're trying so hard to keep that negative emotion at bay that there's some strength that goes into that resistance and that's what's coming out. That's how we're reacting.

When I'm saying experience negative emotion and give yourself the time to actually allow that emotion to come up, I'm not suggesting that you're reacting to that negative emotion, right? I'm suggesting that you're just letting it be there and letting it be what it is. That's a very different energy. I think in the beginning, it's really important to give yourself some time, be like, "Okay. At noon, I'm going to sit down and really let my negative emotion come up."

If it doesn't come up, what I suggest is that you sit down and do a thought download. You just write down all the negative thoughts that are in your brain and know that there will be some negative thoughts in there and that's okay by pretending they're not there and you're not owning them, you can't change them.

I think there's real power in that word owning. I actually put this in my post when I went through my shame experiences. Shame, the emotion doesn't like to be owned, it likes to own you, right? That's how my experience is of it. When I own it as my own, this is my shame. I'm experiencing the shame. In fact, I'm creating the shame with my brain. This is my shame. It doesn't come over me. It doesn't attack me. It doesn't get me, right? I'm the one creating the attack. I'm the one owning it. I'm it. This is my experience too, fully accept and take responsibility for.

I will tell you what, that will change your experience about emotion and I can't say that it'll feel good because it won't. Most negative emotion doesn't. It doesn't feel great in our body but it is part of the experience and it is I think part of what it means to truly accept ourselves as we are.

It's like when you get the flu. If you try and pretend you don't have the flu, the flu will kick your ass. It will not go away. You have the flu, it's coming. It's going to get you. When you accept that you have the flu and you allow

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yourself to have the flu, then you can heal from it. You know that it's not going to last forever, you know that it's going to past through you and your body will take care of it and then you will move on.

I think emotions are very similar like when you know you're having a negative emotion instead of pretending like you don't have it and wearing yourself out by pretending, you just give in to it. You just allow it without reacting to it, right? You just be with it. I'd love the idea of just letting it be. Just be with whatever emotion is there for you right now. That's what it means to be alive.

When you look at you, the overall trajectory of your entire life, if you want the main experience to be some level of contentment and happiness, I truly believe that includes accepting the emotion that you're feeling and also not judging it as something that shouldn't be happening but also just allowing it as an experience of your life and then, really giving yourself access to what you're thinking that's creating it, without trying to change it.

I think that's the most courageous thing we can do is to be with ourselves like think about that with your children like it's so tempting when they're crying to say, "Oh, no. You're okay. You're okay. Don't cry, don't cry. You'll be all right. You don't cry. Toughen up, you can be good here. You got this," because we don't want our kids to cry because we want them to be happy all the time, right?

The same is for us, like we have some negative emotion come up. We're like, "Oh, no. You're okay. You're okay. Don't worry about it. Just eat something." Instead of, "No, no, no. Here's negative emotion. This is part of the experience. I'm going to take some time and really dive into this one and really see what this is all about. I'm going to let this be part of my life instead of pretending like it isn't."

Then, you will stop controlling everything around your life and stop avoiding things that you may want to do because of your fear of feeling negative emotion. The fear of feeling negative emotion and the resistance to feeling negative emotion are much bigger problems than the actual emotion itself.

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I hope that this resonates with you a lot. I feel like I'm kind of doing a sales speech on negative emotion. "Hey, come on. Let's all experience shame, grief, sadness, anger. Let's go all in." I think that those emotions are very appropriate and very much a part of our lives and I don't know, I think sacred in many ways.

Knowing that you're in a negative emotion and you're experiencing it, and staying present with yourself, I do think is a sacred, wonderful experience and a skill that you can develop and really work on throughout your life. The more you're willing to do it and the more you can teach your kids to be willing to do it, I think the more vast your experience will be.

Don't take my word for it, try this out. Take 10 minutes today, sit with yourself and see what negative emotion comes up and notice what it feels like, what is so awful about it that you're always trying to avoid it? Is it really as bad as you've told yourself, it was? Has resisting it been better than actually feeling it? Notice how long it lasts. Are you willing to stay with it long enough to let the discomfort of it happen and come out the other side of it?

It's part of being alive. What I wish for you this week until I talk to you next week is lots of negative emotion. Until next time, it's Brooke Castillo. I'll talk to you soon. Bye-bye.

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