

Is Your Inner Critic Toxic?



I've recently read the article [Three Steps To Confronting Your Inner Critic](#) by Olga Santo Tomás-Monroe. I was struck by the combative tone of the article.

“We all know who our Inner Critic is—the internal voice that is our own worst enemy, judge,

and jury that paralyzes our ability to go after what we want. Our Inner Critic is powerful. It is so powerful that we tragically think we can't manifest our goals; we become convinced that the best outcome couldn't possibly transpire. When faced with our Inner Critic, how do we keep our motivation going? How do we successfully fight something that lives within us?

Here are five basic steps on how to confront and control your Inner Critic:

...

Your Inner Critic is toxic. Allow yourself the gift of dis-empowering and controlling it. When you feel yourself succumbing to your Inner Critic, stop the battle raging within you and start the five basic steps above. Regain control. Defeat your Inner Critic.”

There is no doubt that our inner critics can be a pain and very destructive. They can get in the way and give us a hard time. But are they really toxic and do we have to fight them, confront them and regain control

It is an appealing argument. Why wouldn't we want to beat our inner critics down after they have given us such a hard time?

I think there are better ways to deal with our inner critics.

How To Acquire An Inner Critic

Let's dig a little deeper. Everyone learns their inner critic. Nobody is born with a critical voice in their heads telling them that they are worthless or should pull themselves together.

As we go through life we get all sorts of messages from our parents and caregivers about what we should and how we should behave.

If we are lucky this guidance is given with love and acceptance (even if that includes fierce guidance). We can take this guidance on board and use it to create our own inner guidance system, internalising the information we get from others.

If we are not so lucky this guidance is given with anger, hate and rejection. We too take this guidance on board and use it to create our inner guidance system. Unfortunately along with the information we get the emotional charge that went with the original 'training'.

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We can't help ourselves in this. It's not our choice. We are evolved to model the behaviour and attitudes of our parents as the quickest way to absorb the necessary information to grow up and cope with a complex and dangerous world. If we get the training with love, we get the training and keep the love. If we get the training with hate, we get the training and keep the hate.

In my opinion it's the hate and judgement that is toxic, the training may have something useful for us.

What Good Is An Inner Critic?

If we were to take out the poison from our inner critics I think we would see that the criticism we took on board had three broad categories of intention.

1. It was intended in some way to keep us safe
2. It was intended to motivate us to do better
3. It was intended to beat us down

Two out of three of those intentions are positive and the messages given might have been useful to us if they had been delivered in a better way. What we got was a good intention wrapped in poison and barbed wire. Now we are only aware of the wrapping because we are being scratched and poisoned and can't see the positive intention behind it. (Our parents or caregivers were responding to their own inner critics when delivering these messages)

The third broad category has no value for us at all and it is worth disposing of.

The Feeling Of Criticism

All these inner critics have one thing in common – a strong emotional charge that keeps them fixed in place. This charge is apparent in the tone of inner critics voice and the sensations we get in our body when they are at work.

We can be so conditioned by the emotional tone of this criticism that we can be paralysed into believing what is being said is true. If you could take out the emotional charge then it would be easier to evaluate what we are being told and accept or reject the messages.

With the emotional energy dissipated it would be possible to retrain the critics with worthwhile intentions to do a better job of helping us and retire the inner critics who have no value for us.

Inner Peacemaking

As a therapist working with people who give themselves a hard time I have a process that I use based on Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) and Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) that follows these six steps.

1. Externalise the inner critic (much as Olga describes in her article)
2. Use EFT to dissipate the emotional charge of the inner critic – this can be very intense.
3. Explore the intention of that critical part.
4. If there is value in what the inner critic is attempting to do. Invite it to develop new and better ways of achieving those intentions. This is retraining the inner critic.
5. If there is no value in what the inner critic is trying to do. It's time to retire this bully – using EFT to dismantle that construct and send it on its way.
6. Re-integrate the useful parts of whatever is left back into the system.

At the end of this process you either have peace and quiet or an inner coach or mentor. Taking out the strong emotion allows many inner critics to transform themselves in to much gentler, supportive inner coaches.

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If you are a therapist / counsellor with EFT experience working in the North East of England I am running an [Inner Peacemaking](#) training on July 9th.

This is not the only 'non-violent' approach to inner critics. There are several NLP processes that would be useful, also the work of Hal and Sidra Stone [Embracing Your Inner Critic: Turning Self-Criticism into a Creative Asset](#).

For a Zen based mindfulness approach check out the work of Cheri Huber, especially [There is Nothing Wrong with You: Going Beyond Self-Hate, A Compassionate Process for Learning to Accept Yourself Exactly as You Are](#).

These process all have an integrative rather than a combative approach to working with your inner critic. If it is true, as Carl Jung said, that what we resist persists, which would you prefer for your inner critic: retraining and retirement, or eternal combat?

Image courtesy of [eek the cat](#).