How to Quiet The Critical Voice in Our Head

by FLISS BAKER

Bipolar and Feeling Like a Failure

Why do so many of us feel that horrible, haunting feeling of failure deep in our stomachs? For some of us, the feeling is fleeting, but for others it sticks to the gut with a permanent residency, ready to strike at any time.

Is It Society?

Does our feeling of failure manifest itself in society's cultural values?

We are flooded with the constant reminder that success equals achievement, yet how is success defined? Money, career, social status, the model of the car you drive, where you go and who you socialize with. There are so many factors that piece together each individual's idea of whether we perceive someone to be successful or not.

If we can feel failure then we can feel achievement. In my opinion, it shouldn't be triggered from anything outside the mind and body — it should be something we feel for ourselves.

Were we brought up with such constant criticism that we never feel good enough? When we achieved and were commended, what happened if we didn't set out to do what we intended to do? Did we perceive ourselves as failures?

Me and My Family

I was brought up in a middle-class family with working-class roots. My dad's parents saved to give him the best education in a private school. His parents wanted more for him than what they had, and it worked to an extent.

My dad had a lengthy career that most would describe as successful. However, he had health issues and was forced into early retirement, and it's interesting how he now sees himself as a failure because of it.

Looking back, I realized my dad had a huge impact on me.

I used to bring work home from school and if he checked it, he would scribble all over it with a red pen. He would rewrite every sentence and I felt totally demoralized. My mum recognized this and would compliment my work.

The trouble is, one criticism overrides hundreds of compliments and creates the voice inside us that beats us up.

In a different way my critical voice got louder as I grew up. My mum was a dancer, as were all her sisters, and as a result they were all body-and food-conscious. I remember a few comments as I grew up about how I would look better if I were slimmer.

It became a running joke that I would go for seconds at the buffet and I laughed and fueled the joke further. I felt

uncomfortable and used humor to deflect my insecurity.

Next page: the lifelong desire to feel good enough

Me and My Family

I wasn't to know that at the age of 24 I would use exercise and food to try and control my out-of-control life. I fell into the trap of thinking, "If I become skinny, I will feel better, I will be happy and I will feel good enough."

It always comes back to *"I want to feel good enough."*

Language

Let's look at the words 'better,' 'best' and 'successful.'

They are 'nothing' words to me.

They don't bring me any visual imagery and offer nothing for me to feel. They make me think of striving for something but I don't know exactly what I'm striving for or at what point I will become better, best or successful.

They are unobtainable, and in all honesty, that scares me.

These words push you towards metaphorical golden gates but in fact, you don't know where the gates are, how far away they are, and if they even exist. No wonder the push to use these words at an early age leads to anxiety-ridden, critical voices in later years.

Maybe to some, those words bring a bright beam of hope. But at what point can we stop, appreciate and feel that sense of achievement and say, "This is enough," "I am happy I got this far," "I accept myself" and "I am my own success."

Or simply, "I'm OK."

Depression Makes Critical Voices Louder

It took years of professional therapy to work through the web of thoughts in my mind and quiet my critical voice. It is still there and it drowns my thoughts when I hit an episode of depression.

Sometimes I need to tell people I need to go to lie down because everything is too much. I could be in a quiet room at the time, but it's my head and my thoughts are beating inside my brain, overriding everything from listening, talking to even watching TV.

They bully, beat me up and kick me while I'm down. Everything I've ever enjoyed becomes obsolete and socializing becomes nearly impossible.

I am nothing, I am not worth living, I am an absolute failure and there is nothing I can do about it.

Next page: some ways to challenge the critical voice in your head

How Do I Feel Now?

Let's inject some positivity into this article! There is help out there for negative thoughts, and I thought I would share the things I do to help me drown out the voice that tells me I'm a failure.

1. **I don’t need throw-away phrases such as ‘be the best,’ ‘work harder,’ or ‘you can do better.’** No thanks. *I will do my best when I can.* Sometimes it takes me an hour to write an article and other times it drags over days when I can only do short paragraphs at a time. What more can I do? What more can people possibly ask of me?
2. **It is good to achieve things and have a future plan, but we need to specify what we are striving for.** If you want to learn to drive the goal is to pass your test, not to pass it first or be the best driver your instructor has ever seen. If you fail your test, so what? It is a learning curve. You keep doing your best and the fruits of your labor will eventually pay off. This way you complete your journey but you do it your way, removing added stress and pressure.
3. **Accept everything about yourself — the good, the bad and the ugly.** Challenge your critical voice. Remember the best things about yourself and know the things about yourself you wish you could improve. Embrace it, accept it all, and quiet that critical voice.
4. **Once you have achieved something, stop.** Think about what you have completed. Too many of us have the next goal set in mind to the point we forget to appreciate the current work we are doing. We must stop and pat ourselves on the back. Never forget to appreciate yourself and the abilities you have. Many people are always multi-tasking, but I don’t want to dilute my experiences and increase stress by taking on lots and forgetting to appreciate.
5. **We need to stop comparing ourselves to other people.** I tell myself I have failed because I see other friends with nice houses, strong relationships, fast cars and disposable income, and I wish for a fleeting moment I could go back to the old me where everything felt possible. Then I force myself to remember that I became ill as a result of that life and I refuse to be drawn in the materialistic world where all that striving allegedly brings happiness.

We are not failures in life, we just believe we are from the external influences we encounter.

We can change our critical voice to be more supportive, or at the very least challenge it to prevent it getting louder. I recommend talking therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) because it helped me.

Remember unobtainable goals and comparing ourselves to others will break us down, while more appreciation and acceptance of who we are will build us up. Life is about experiences, and everybody’s paths are very different. If depression hits and the voice telling us we failed gets louder, we can try to quiet it down by reminding our tired minds that we are ill and this is a symptom we have to ride out.

I hope this article makes people feel a bit more comfortable with themselves. It’s important for our recovery to do so.