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**Your Inner Critic**

## Silencing Your Inner Critic

The Inner Critic – it's a phrase that sparks instant recognition. "Oh, yah, that's the mean voice in my head." Yes, but it's more complex than that. Let's take a look at this phenomenon and then at some tips on how to handle it.

Freud called this aspect of the personality the superego. It's like the control room for the personality; once your personality patterns are in place, the Inner Critic becomes the enforcer. It's there to make sure you follow your Enneagram type's "rules."

The Inner Critic does this in an often-misguided attempt to protect you. "This behavior is acceptable in public, but this is not." "This is wrong and that is right." How it determines what is wrong and right is based on a combination of factors: parental values, cultural standards and any religious mores that may be at work in one's life. These are all filtered through a person's particular personality type.

Which means the superego's rules are largely subjective and made up. It gives us – and those around us – gold stars and pats on the back for meeting its demands and demerits for not measuring up.

However, not all Inner Critics are equally mean. Some are judgemental toward the self, some toward others, and some are equal-opportunity judges. How "mean" your Inner Critic is has to do with two factors: your Level of Development and your Enneagram type.

### Level of Development

Riso & Hudson pioneered the concept of Levels of Development, which add "vertical" dimension and understanding to the nine "horizontal" Enneagram types. [\*The Wisdom of the Enneagram\*](#) explains that the Levels "offer a way of observing and measuring our

degree of identification with our personality structures.” The three main Levels are Healthy, Average and Unhealthy.

The Levels reveal your emotional and mental health, as well as your ability to be present and aware. Your experiences in childhood determines the default Level you operate at. This makes sense on a practical level, since the quality of parenting you got, whether you were bullied at school, if you experienced trauma or not, and many other factors play a role in your emotional and mental well-being. For example, if you had a really judgemental parent, your Inner Critic is likely to have that same voice. If you had a happy childhood with stable parenting, your Inner Critic will be less judgemental. There’s no exact formula, but you get the idea.

Your Level can change, either in small daily ways – due to stresses or positive events – or in larger ways over time as you commit to personal development. For more information on this critical understanding of personality, I recommend *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*.

## Enneagram Number

Your Enneagram type brings with it a worldview – how you tend to see life and its events. Some types are naturally more optimistic than others, and some are more anxious. For instance, as a Type Seven, I come hard-wired with a positive outlook, so my Inner Critic can be mean to other people but is not to me.

There is one set of numbers that has a harder time of it. Types One, Two and Six have what Riso & Hudson call “fat superegos.” These types have Inner Critics with particularly harsh and judgy voices aimed at themselves. That’s just the bad luck of the draw.

However, just as you don’t have to stay at your default Level of Development, you don’t have to deal with a harsh Inner Critic your whole life.

## Silencing Your Inner Critic

After learning about and working with the Enneagram for years, I have gathered a variety of tactics for dealing with the superego. Some of these come from Riso & Hudson trainings and some from The Diamond Approach of A.H. Almaas. Not every tactic will feel right to you; experiment with them and see which ones help the most.

The one tactic I strongly recommend that EVERYONE do is keep what I call a Judgements Journal. Get a small notebook, or use the notes function on your smartphone – whatever works best for you. I keep a little pad in my purse that's dedicated to this purpose. Use this journal to write down Inner Critic messages, both negative and positive, about yourself or anyone else. Remember, this inner voice rewards you and others for complying with its laws and criticizes you and others for failure to comply.

Here are a few examples from my own journal to help you get a sense of what to look for:

- “Good for you for exercising” – This seems harmless at first glance, but if you look just under the surface, the message is “You are bad if you don't exercise.”
- “She is so socially inappropriate” – Meaning, “Don't be like her if you want to be accepted.”
- “People with a ton of apps on their phones are lame” – Totally subjective judgement to shore up a sense of superiority for not being addicted to technology.

Look back at your judgments every evening. Notice what categories of things your superego pays attention to. See the patterns. Realize that these judgments, though there may be a kernel of truth in them, are based on lies and, most importantly, that they are NOT you.

Believe it or not, this simple act can revolutionize your life. Just learning to identify the Inner Critic's voice begins to create some space between that voice and your

understanding of your true self. You start to realize, “Hey, if I can observe this voice, then the voice is not me.” The mere act of observing starts to take away the Inner Critic’s power, because it’s no longer running the show unseen and unquestioned. You are challenging its authority. You are pulling back the curtain to reveal that the Great and Powerful Oz is nothing more than a trickster.

Eventually, you will move from just noting your judgments to becoming curious about what caused them. “Hmmm...why did that just make me mad?” “I silently belittle my wife for being too emotional. Why is that?” So, instead of feeling like a terrible person for being mad or judgmental, you can start to see what’s beneath these judgments, recognize the patterns and understand that they are not you. At some point, this process will become automatic, and you won’t need the journal anymore.

## An Inner Critic Bag of Tricks

Now that you know the voice in your head is not your actual self, you can dialog with it.

What does a person say to their Inner Critic? Experiment with the following:

- Exaggerated agreement: “You’re right, Inner Critic. These pants DO make me look fat. In fact, I am the fattest person who’s ever lived!”
- Laugh: The Inner Critic is very self-serious. You can disarm it by laughing at it. I recommend doing it aloud (if you’re in an environment where you can without looking...odd).
- Tease it: Again, this addresses the serious nature of the Inner Critic. “You’re so silly, Inner Critic!” is one of my favorite lines.
- Be sarcastic: “Thanks so much, Inner Critic! That judgement was awesome. What would I do without you?”
- Lob a bomb: Create an image in your mind that represents your Inner Critic. Then throw a grenade at it or drop a bomb on it and watch it disappear in a puff of cartoon smoke. (This may be too violent an idea for some folks; again, do what’s comfortable and what works.)
- Share your pain: “Inner Critic, I know you think you’re trying to help, but it hurts me when you speak to me like that.” See if that helps.
- Tell it to shut up: This one’s straight and to the point. Again, I recommend doing this aloud when you can.

The Inner Critic means well, but it's outlived its usefulness in our lives. As we become more aware of it, an amazing thing happens: its grip on us loosens. We become less identified with our personalities and the limited choices they present. In short, we start getting closer to our true selves.

I hope you'll try these tactics – especially the Judgements Journal! And let me know how you're doing at silencing your Inner Critic.

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And if you'd like to know more about how the Enneagram can help you find and live out your purpose, check out my book, [Becoming Your True You: God, the Enneagram and Your Unique Purpose](#).