

Ali:

Hello, everybody. I'm here today with my dear friend and colleague Miriam Meima, who I'm delighted to say was my first coach probably over a decade ago now. And it was life-changing. And since then, I would say we just have a lot of fun together in life. So it's a delight to have you here and to be bringing some really interesting wonderful issues to the surface for our audience.

Miriam:

Oh, such a pleasure to be here.

Ali:

The topic that we wanted to talk about today, or that you highlighted, which I thought was so great, is how to play to your strengths and owning your strengths. And one of the ways that you kind of talk about this, we've kind of talked about this is how to just let yourself be amazing. So it's something that I don't think a lot of folks really think about, because we always might think about how do I like shore up all of my weak points and blah, but it's like, how do we look at that differently? And how do we...I don't know, anchor on what's like really solid and really true and really there for the you that's you in this world.

Miriam:

Yeah, all the time I'm working with executives, they go over feedback and they just want to gloss over the strengths so that they can get to the real stuff, they get to the meat. I'm like, well, what if they're both meat, they're equal quantities of meatiness. And so I think that was one of the inspirations for this topic is how can we honor our strengths? How can we own them? How can we use them to help with our sense of identity because we're so focused on what we aren't yet and that creates this mindset of deficit and therefore we're constantly trying to fill it. And I really believe that the better we get, and this is true for me too, the better I get at understanding who am I underneath and then therefore how can I express that in a way that we would call a strength. The better I get at that, the more...the clearer I am, then the more likely it is that I can organize my life and my career to support me in truly showing up that way, which is better for everybody.

Ali:

Yeah, especially you, right? Or those of us that are not struggling and just trying to fit in and fill out our weak points. It's more like, no, let's just stand in the place that just feels easy and natural and true and something that we can do that maybe not other people can do as well.

So I don't know, where do you kind of want to like dive in here in terms of point of departure for really surfing around the facets of this?

Miriam:

Yeah. Well, where my head goes to is being in early in my career when I made the transition from letting my self critic have the mic almost all the time to actually passing the mic to myself. Advocate first, I had to figure out what the heck that was, but I guess I can tell short story about

how much I tortured myself and then how I got myself out of it.

And I do believe that there's value in being able to assess ourselves honestly, and maybe even critically. But early in my career, I really, I can flash back to being in my office and surrounded by my colleagues. And it didn't matter who I was with or what the context was, if it was a meeting, if we were actually just chatting literally by the water cooler or having lunch. I would always replay what I had just said and criticize myself and not even slightly. I mean, I was very harsh.

I would tell them, "I can't believe you said it that way. You should have used this tone. You should have used that word. You sound so stupid. Those people know so much more than you. You should really let them speak more. There was, oh, you should have spoken up more."

I mean, there was no winning. There was nothing I could do or say that would have my inner voice say, great job. I was just constantly looking at what I could have been doing better. And I don't think anyone externally could have noticed that, but what was happening for me internally was I just never ever felt good enough. And I was always just focused on woulda coulda shoulda have.

And at some point, I just got so tired and just felt beat up to the extent that I was like, wow, what if what if I just flip this on its head? And what if I'll, any positive feedback that comes my way, I actually believe that it's true. And to the extent to which I've been believing these thoughts in my own head are true. And so I essentially shifted the weight that I was giving things. And I was shifting the weight from what I was telling myself to what I was hearing and from the negative to the positive. And all of a sudden I started to be able to relate to my presence in the world with more clarity, a little bit more neutrality at first, and then eventually starting to actually recognize the value that I had been having all along, but hadn't given myself any credit for.

Ali:

Wow.

Miriam:

Do you relate to that at all?

Ali:

Yes. There are days when I don't feel my best and my brain doesn't feel super healthy. I think, you know, back out there being chronic illness where I, it's like, how whatever the brain chemistry is, like, I cannot meet the world with any sense that of like worthiness. I mean, it's like, it's like I start, I'm, I'm living it, I'm living through things and everything's coming through this filter of me, which is in a really dark place. And it, I've learned how to live with that filter on those days and not really believe it.

But it is, it's a burden. It's a burden to like have those moments, to live through them. And I just literally like inch by inch, minute by minute on a day like that. Because I also know like this

greater reality, which is “OK, but I am pretty great at certain things and I am doing well in other things,” even though like my whole existence or my whole existence, but like this big part of my inner narrative right now is saying. Nothing but an inner critic garble of nonsense that doesn't really hit like nonsense, you know.

Miriam:

Yeah, but what you said is so important is just to not really trust or believe those thoughts in those moments because we all have them. The question is how sustained are they or how close together are they. And that's individual. I mean, that has a lot to do with physical health, and mental health. It has to do with how much we slept and what we've eaten and what we've been exposed to and whose energy we've been around and how much outside of our comfort zone we're expecting ourselves to perform and there's so much that goes into how we're feeling and then those words come up that critic shows up and then do we believe it or not and how much weight or how much truth do we assign to those thoughts and those moments and it sounds like you've come so far and holding it lightly and being able to trust yourself.

Ali:

Yeah, and the trusting yourself thing is really key. So I'm curious how that played in to your experience. And I can say like, prior to going through like this chronic illness thing, I never saw myself as like a dark, I didn't feel like I spent a lot of time in kind of those dark spaces. I felt like I was very self-assured and very kind of bold in a...you know, silly or playful way in the world. And, you know, I knew my fear edges, but I was always willing to say, okay, I can feel that edge, and I'm gonna be bold enough and brave enough to move past it and try something new and just keep expanding. And so really it wasn't until like chronic illness that, you know, that really that darker backdrop and that more negative narration really took hold and but yeah, it's, and then yeah, the self-doubt kind of starts clinging in, right?

It's like, wait, is this the real reality? It's like, or is this, is this just where I am right now? And I need to like, bracket this as a moment and just like live through it until my body has something else to give, you know, and I can go back to another state that I also know that is not enhanced in any way. I mean, it was very much just like, I felt like who I was.

So having that comparison is interesting from my perspective, because it's like, wait, I've known something so different. And yet I don't know for others what that experience is for them, right? And sometimes I think like the negative voice gets so entrenched and that it becomes that inner bully, right, versus the inner advocate.

Miriam:

Yes, that's such a good way to phrase it. Yeah, the inner bully. So it goes beyond being the self-critic or evaluating ourselves from that place. I think that's the problem is probably everybody listening to this podcast is ambitious and interested in self-inquiry. And so if we have that combo, sometimes we can feel a sense of responsibility for really having a healthy kind of analysis of ourselves. But then when it goes beyond that to criticizing because there's that

sense of negativity and it goes beyond criticizing to actually bullying ourselves when our internalized voice has that, what's the word, the flavor to it. And that can be quite toxic. And it really becomes this hole that we have to pull ourselves out of.

Ali:

Mm-hmm.

Miriam:

And that's where our strengths come in. And I remember how you used to be so rooted in that. I love that how you're talking about it. Cause I got to witness that and how clearly you knew yourself and how special you were. I don't think you would have ever used those words, but I would have. I think other people, everybody who knows you, everyone who did know you would just couldn't think of you without associating with you with energy and aliveness and a sense of possibility. And the fact that you had, so you had connected with that part of you, I think probably serves you well in those moments of challenge.

And so I guess for people who haven't yet tapped into that, that's where it becomes really important to have strategies to figure out, how do I know the parts of me that are solid, that are unwavering strengths? How can we come to know what those are if we don't yet? And I think that, I mean, it really can be as simple as literally read the first part of your feedback, read the strengths maybe regularly.

I have people who literally every morning, they read a doc of feedback that they've gotten from people that was very affirming and it wasn't overly glowing, it was just affirming and they need to remind themselves of that to ground themselves into a new day. And especially if they're, again, stretching themselves outside their comfort zone or not feeling that very authentically. That can be, it's a simple little tool to help people connect with what's true. And also just asking other people, what do you see in me that's good? Or what do you see in me that's helpful? And then start to relate to that as our true self and believe it when people reflect that back to us. Really, truly believe it.

Ali:

Yeah, yeah, I've, there are a few people that I reach out to for pep talks when I get like really, really low. And I've even like written Cliff Notes for a pep talk that I'll hand to my partner and I'll be like, look, you're the only one close right now. I need you to read these words to me with conviction.

Miriam:

Yes.

Ali:

You know, like I am in a moment and I need like relational help to, you know, boost me and remind me of who I am, because on the inside, it's starting to feel a little slippery.

Miriam:

Yes, yes, that's a beautiful strategy. And because there's so many people who love it and it's probably not hard to read that with conviction because it's so obvious, right, to those close to you and your partner can definitely do that. But that we need to find that slippery. I love that visual. When it feels slippery, how do we find solid ground again? And then from there, what becomes possible? Usually we can start to think more strategically. We can start to evaluate things more honestly, but first we need to find that solid ground, which is remembering who we really are.

Ali:

Yes. So I'm thinking about this, like outside of a 360. 360s are so, I mean, they're in the moment, it's a bracketed amount of your life, right? A slice of your life that's being evaluated by subjective others that you're close to. So there's a lot to sift through in a 360 anyway. I'm not discrediting anybody's strengths or telling people that they don't have weaknesses. But to...I think to debrief your 360 review well, you know, do it with a coach, do it with someone trained. And there's a lot of benefit and gain from having, you know, a series of debriefs around that report that help you absorb what's good, help you really suss out the weaknesses and where they show up and where you might want to bolster them.

But outside, like for people that don't have the 360 you know, as part of their, you know, executive tenure or their work environment, where do we begin to look to start seeing and locating our strengths so that, I don't know, to me it's like this inner knowing of like, I know this about myself. And I can begin to trust this and start finding this as my ground or coming back to this as the ground of what I know to be true about me.

Miriam:

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, if it's not in a 360 or just annual performance review, if that's not done in a meaningful way wherever someone works, I just start with literally asking people that you... let me be really careful with my words here because I think if I ask that part, the version of me that was so hard when I was so hard of myself if I were to go out illicit feedback, I would have gone to the people who would be most critical, who would most likely echo the voice that I have in my head. So especially when we're talking about moments where we want to connect better with the parts of us that are amazing, so special, and the strengths that we have, I would go to people who see the best in us. And I would have people go and just ask literally the question, what words would you use to describe me?

Ali:

Yeah.

Miriam:

Or what do you believe are my strengths? And not actually asked the balancing questions and therefore what should I work on them? It's first let's get solid ground and connect with what

makes me special. I know this, that every person is unique. And I know that uniqueness makes them special and that I have infinite curiosity about someone's uniqueness and I find each human to be amazing. Some people have yet to find that in themselves. And so that's a beautiful journey to be on.

Ali:

And what a journey it can be. I just thinking about, you know, all of the ways in which we get shaped in life, and the beliefs that we can carry about ourselves because of the ways we've been shaped or the people we've grown up around or the relational situations that we've had where we've gotten messages that we start believing about ourselves, right? But it's not the whole picture of who we are. And oftentimes that some of those beliefs aren't accurate or true, but they're like those intense emotional moments where we're like, oh, wow, I must be this worthless person or, you know, it's in the, I mean, grappling with self-worth is, man, like, that's just such a rough one because that's...that's right where your inner, it's like the feeding zone for your inner critic and imposter syndrome.

Miriam:

Mm-hmm. Yeah. When you were using the word shape and I kept thinking you were going to say shamed, like, but I think that in some ways they have both come together and how we've essentially internalized whatever messages were intended, it doesn't matter. Really what matters is what's lingering from those messages and often we experience them as shame and that's what we make sure that we don't ever want to experience again.

Miriam:

So as little people, we said, oh, wow, that hurts. It hurts to be looked at that way. It hurts to be spoken to that way. And we start to look at ourselves of like, what did I do to lead to this result? And so how can I do the opposite? And then that whole journey of moving through life, we can lose ourselves because we're just trying to not only be shaped by the outer world, but how we're relating to it and responding to it and avoiding the things that hurt.

Miriam:

And that's why it's letting go of being perfect and focusing on just, Oh, who am I underneath all of this? And let me stop seeking something external. And let me start just taking an exhale and trusting that somewhere in here, there's someone amazing, someone special, someone unique, and who is that person? And let me, let me remember or get to know that person, meet that person connect with that person and that's our true selves.

Ali:

Yeah, I think the Buddhists would call it like that inner goodness, or maybe something along that. And that's like kind of the crux of developing that much stronger relationship with self and becoming much more resilient in the face of all the things that are going to come at you and knock you off base.

Miriam:

Exactly. Especially if we think about resilience. I love the definition of resilience is when we are knocked off base, how quickly can we come back to center? And that the amount of time it takes is a measure of our resilience. So the faster we come back to center, the more resilient we are because we know life happens. We will be knocked off our base. But the harder and harder and harder it gets to be knocked off our base, essentially, the more resilient we are.

And that comes from knowing ourselves truly. And in that requires us knowing our strengths and trusting that we are enough and that our strengths are enough to get us through.

And that's why I love it so much when you talk about even those moments of challenge. And I can relate to that. There's days where I'm just like, don't listen. Don't listen to what's happening in my head right now. Don't pay any attention. Just...

Ali:

Yeah.

Miriam:

Either I need to distract myself or I need to get to bed as quickly as possible. And it might be 9 a.m. I'm like, that's all right. Just get through the day and you'll get to sleep and you'll reset. And tomorrow's a new day because it can be really hard to be in the presence of our own thoughts sometimes.

Ali:

Mm-hmm. Yes. I always say to myself, all right, today is not a day to make big decisions. It's just, it's just, we just need to get through this one.

Miriam:

Exactly.

Ali:

The word unfuckwithable came up or came to me as you were saying, you know, talking about, I mean, really the power of what it is to stand in your strengths and the things that you can believe to be true about yourself and come to just innately know to be true about yourself and undeniably so because when you have that, it's your ground, it's that, it's part of that resiliency quotient and it's, you know, someone who's not having a good day can, you know, their, whatever stuff, their emotional shrapnel could come at you sideways and you'll just be like, oh cool. That's not me, you know? And there's a way to, the recovery time, I guess, is, it's built in, you know? Because you know yourself so well, you can move through life really unfazed by a lot of the external things that maybe prior to, would have easily knocked you off base.

Miriam:

Yes. And to me, that's different than an ego-based defense mechanism. To me, I think what

we're both talking about, I know what we're both talking about is something else, which is there's humility and assuredness together that are constant, that are the sense of truth and connection with that truth. And there's not really a need to defend because there's nothing to talk about when you really can connect with yourself. I know that that's true for me. It's like when I'm really connected with myself and someone comes at me, I'm just like, oh. And then I get curious about the other person.

But when I'm off-center, I'm not connected to my true self or my strengths. And someone comes at me, I'm like, "oh, you didn't. No, you didn't. Let's go." And it becomes like a, you know, I get pulled in and that's, that's the major difference. And it's no fun. And I get pulled into the draw and then it's like, I'm swept up in it and the adrenaline's going and I feel like, oh my gosh, haven't I evolved past this? And I'm like, no, not yet. I guess not yet.

Miriam:

And take a breath and remind myself of who I really am, which is someone who wants to come at things with clarity and curiosity.

Ali:

Yeah, I think even I just to go back to that self-advocate, advocate move, you know, it's, I think a lot of the work is identifying what is what is my inner critic, or being able to observe the thoughts, first of all, and to be like, wow, this is a really what I talked to my best friend this way, would I talk to my pet this way, someone that I love and like, just really respect and get curious about that, I would say, for oneself, and to then wonder and be like, wow, is this really true? Is this the whole picture? And what else is there?

Miriam:

Exactly.

Ali:

So then, right, you're beginning to like shift into, I need, I'm doing that thing to myself again. How do I bring in my self-advocate?

Miriam:

Mm-hmm. Exactly. That's a great point. It starts with widening the aperture of, is this the whole picture? Is this really true? What else could be true? And widening our understanding. And then a considerably, okay, maybe not. And then if we can have that moment of doubt, then we can move into that observer mode. And yeah. But from there...we can access all sorts of things. Yeah, all sorts of parts of ourselves. A lot of people haven't learned how to be their own self-advocate yet.

Ali:

Yeah, I mean, where would they find a model?



Miriam:

Right? I mean...I think we will answer that literally, like how can people find a model? But I think how I also hear the question is we don't often have our life filled with models. Our news is not filled with models, our conversations with colleagues, family members aren't necessarily filled with models, but I would suggest finding them.

Ali:

Yeah.

Miriam:

Yeah, whatever medium people like to consume, I'm always trying to curate my feed, whether it's literally television shows or podcasts or social media. How can I make sure that I'm injecting my brain with as much positivity as, it's not just positivity. It's balanced reality I guess is what and it's not skewing one way or the other and that I learn how to appreciate things and see the good.

Ali:

Yeah, yeah which a word that I always associate with you is celebrate. When I think about being one's own self-advocate, it's like, what can I celebrate about myself today? But it's bringing that language into your inner dialogue or your journaling practice or you know, letting that become a question that you literally ask yourself, even in your inside voice of nothing else, you know, every day, like, what can I celebrate about myself today? Or what can I celebrate about myself in that moment? It just can be really gentle, like reaffirming ways to like re-anchor, you know, within who, you know, the wholeness of ourselves.

Miriam:

Yes, that's exactly right. And to ask other people, what can you celebrate? And then it starts to become more of a snowball effect. And now that I've asked one person, maybe tomorrow they'll ask me. And maybe as a team meeting, we're gonna once a week, we're all gonna call out something we can celebrate and finding ways to make sure that we are affirming the things that are good in our life, in our personality in our leadership in our world.

Ali:

What else is there to speak to around this?

Miriam:

Where I'm going in my mind is this, what I believe for both of us is the starting point, which is a belief that everybody is amazing. Each person is amazing and that everyone has strengths and that everybody listening has strengths. And those are worthy of being seen and connected to, and that when that's happening, when we're really connected to it, things are possible. So I know we've said that, but I just want to call out that underlying assumption and belief.

And I, the, the part of me that, especially the part of me that is critical and cynical for a very long

time, didn't even want to subscribe to that belief or, or sign off on that belief. So what I'm asking myself is what was the shift? How did I start to even convince my inner critic that was true and I think for me it is in having conversations with others. It's in seeing in others how lovable they are and how special they are even when they're not on their best day. I needed to believe it about others before I could believe it about myself and maybe others are wired differently but for me I started to ask myself what could be true about others. Similar to like you were saying of like how would I talk to my best friend? How would I talk to my pet?

So I guess I'm saying that out loud just as an example of how I've navigated this, but also maybe an invitation for others to think about what are the underlying beliefs that they have right now and are they serving them? And if not, what's a new belief and how could you go about affirming that new belief? And maybe it's looking outside yourself first and then inside.

Ali:

Yeah, you know, we don't really navigate life with a complete picture of ourselves. I think this is why like 360 reviews can be so impactful because it's like we get, we get a more reflection of how we're showing up and the impact we're having. But even in our day-to-day, right, like even in our family life, assuming it's, you know, not incredibly dysfunctional like we actually want feedback from the loved ones in our life, maybe our chosen family, right, at times. But we walk through life with the inner to outer kind of knowing about ourselves. And when we let, when we lose the anchor in that core of our self-knowing, that core of knowing who we are, when we lose that anchor it's really easy to be caught by the wind and the whim and the whimsy and, um, you know, the, the negative wits by others that may come at us. We may start to believe those.

But there's also this other reality, which is from, I would say, other people's experience than of us as humans in the world. Like that, that's a whole other experience, which really, when you step back, that's more of a complete view. This isn't to say you let someone else's perspective be your whole perspective because you are the one holding perspective, but if you're able to widen your perspective enough, right, to begin to see that how you are in the world, how you're being in the world, who you are in the world, and then the ripple effect and impact that you have with others and with people that you resonate with and that resonate with you, that's a big kind of, I don't know, harmonic resonance opportunity, so to speak, in terms of feedback and how we begin to know ourselves in a greater capacity.

Miria:

Yes, yes. And then when someone tells us, oh, you're so kind or you're so loving or you're so thoughtful or you're so inspiring, what if we believe them instead of, oh, if you only knew, if you only knew what I was thinking in my head or if you only knew what I did yesterday or if you only knew, and then we actually, instead of picking apart their reality, what if we take it and just for a moment savor that reflection and try it on. What if that's true? What if the whatever words they're using to describe me, what if that is true? What is that is my true self? Just try it on and then see. Yeah.

Ali:

Yeah. And to loop that back to the being amazing piece, it's I think a more common experience for the majority of humans is to be kind of caught up in the tumult of being not good enough and that inner critic voice and whatever volume that is in your own head. And to go through life that way, but to really, you know, turn the volume down, be able to turn the volume down on that channel and to turn the volume up on another channel so that you're leading life from a place of, wow, I am good. I am all these lovely and true things and my way of being in the world is felt in this way. And I can trust that. Life life changes. Your experience of life changes. And it's like you've just, just by tweaking those dials, you know, you modify the filter by which your whole mind-body complex is perceiving the life that's coming at you.

Miriam:

Yes, exactly. And I was, as you were just talking, I was picturing Star Wars and other movies where it's like light versus dark. And I honestly had never really made that connection for myself before. So it was in listening to you that I started to visualize that and how obvious it is when we're a spectator and we're watching a film and someone's giving into the darkness and it starts to change the way they're...their mood is and the decisions they're making, what they care about and who they're spending time with. And then you're rooting for them to come to the quote-unquote light. And then all of a sudden it shifts their alliances and who they're spending time with and what they're doing and what they care about. But I've never really realized that's what's happening for me internally. It's essentially, it's kind of the two wolves is another, I guess, way that we talk about it. There's two wolves inside us, which one are we gonna feed? And one is the one that's more of our self-critic and one is perhaps our self-advocate.

And I'm remembering that just yesterday I woke up feeling just, I just, I wasn't not in the mood. It was like, it was, it was a, I was fine. Everything was fine. You know, I was just fine. But I wasn't like ready, like excited for the day. I was just like, it's fine. I was just not really in the mood. And I guess one of my strategies yesterday for pulling myself out of that, and sometimes I don't want to and I don't try, but yesterday I just, I did kind of want to feel differently and so I tried and I was like, okay, what are the things that people use to describe this? I'm loving, I'm like, okay, what could, what loving act could I do in that mood? In that mood I was not, I couldn't come up with anything. And then I was like, try harder, you got this. And then I was like, oh, that's right. I sent someone a text.

Miriam:

And then I, I like, I just did the little things, acts of love, acts of kindness to people that I care about. And that helped me feel more like myself and it served as a buoy and it made me feel more buoyant and lighter and more...like I could take it. Whatever life was gonna throw at me, I was much more capable of moving through it with a sense of grace and ease than I was 10 minutes earlier.

Ali:

Yeah. Yeah, it's like you threw yourself a lifeline or a life jacket. But there's your self-advocate,

like coming, not coming to the rescue in like an uber-heroic way, but like really bringing you back to shore, like to ground again, right? Like saying, hey, this isn't the whole story. I've got you here. Even though right now it feels cruddy on the inside. Yeah.

Miriam:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, exactly. Like, what have you got? Use your tools. I know you don't want to. I don't care if you want to, like, do it.

A client texted me yesterday. Do you have five minutes? I was like, oh yeah, let's hop on the phone. We hop on the phone. "I'm spiraling again. I can't remember what I'm supposed to do when I spiral, which is such a great talk about reaching out for a lifeline, right? Because it's like, I know there are things I just literally for the life of me. Can't remember what they are right now. And it was, and this person was like, tell me again, would you tell me every time I'm in this situation? And I was like, I can't. There's not one thing that I tell you or anybody what to do in this situation. But what's coming up for me right now is talk to me. Tell me what are your thoughts. Tell me what's happening. And then take some breaths. What's happening in your body? What's happening with your heart rate? And we could just move through the thoughts, the feeling, the body, somatics and start to slow it all down and connect back with what's real. And therefore, what do I want to do? Because as business leaders, we go through this and we lose perspective and everything starts to feel really hard or really big. And in those moments, particularly, not just to stop the spiral, but to reconnect with our strengths and reality can mean the difference between making a really bad call or giving yourself the beat that you need in order to gather more information, thinking things through things with more clarity and making a decision that's much more rooted in the fullness of reality.

Ali:

Yeah, or just being able to say, I need to take five on this and call one of my or make a lifeline call, you know, I need someone to throw me a throw me a floaty. Bring me back to shore. Yeah, there's no shame in doing that.

Miriam:

Yeah, totally.

Ali:

Thank you so much for joining me and for being the light of realness that you are. It's, I've never had more fun learning and laughing about humanity than I do with you.

Miriam:

Plus one, absolutely. So fun to be continued.

Ali:

To be continued, yes, in our next episode we're going to cover imposter syndrome, which I don't know who deals with that, but I'm sure there's a few people out there.

Miriam:

Yeah, we'll deconstruct it and help people feel like it's no big deal.

Ali:

Yes. Awesome. I look forward to it. Thank you.