**Lesson 5: Let go of control**

This topic is not an easy one to hear, but if received with an open mind and heart, could truly change the course of events in your life.

There is a huge cost associated with being controlling. This negative impact is not only on us and our well-being, but also on those we love, the people we work with, and everyone around us. Some of the biggest costs include joy, peace, freedom, energy, creativity, support, ease, connection, and love.

There are many reasons, beliefs and emotions that lead us to feel the need to control others, situations, circumstances, etc. However, here are three things that are usually underneath our controlling tendency:

Fear – We worry that things won’t turn out, we will get hurt, bad things will happen, etc.

Unworthiness – We don’t feel as though we deserve support, help, or for things to go our way.

Lack of trust – We’re scared to let go, count on others, and to believe that things will be OK without us managing every aspect of the situation, relationship, conversation, etc.

There are several things we can do to let go of control. With compassion for ourselves, it’s important to remember that this is a process and something that may not come all that easy. Many of us have been trained (directly or indirectly) to be controlling, and in certain environments and situations (at work and at home), being controlling is even encouraged or deemed necessary for our own survival.

Here are some things you can do and think about to expand your own capacity to let go of control in a positive and liberating way:

1. **Be honest with yourself** – Make an authentic assessment about your controlling nature, especially in the most important and stressful areas of your life. With empathy and honesty, look at where, how, and why you hold on tight to control in whatever way you do. Be real with yourself about what your controlling behavior costs you and how it impacts you and those around you.
2. **Ask yourself, “Am I willing to let go of control?”** – This is an important question to ponder and to answer honestly. In some cases, and in certain situations, the answer may be “no.” It is important to honor that if that tis the case for you. And, at the same time, the more willing you are to ask and answer this question, the more likely you are to start letting go of control consciously (assuming it is something you’re truly interested in doing). You may not know how to do it or what it would look like, but the authentic willingness is always the first step in positive change.
3. **Consider who could support you** – Getting support is one of the most important (and often most vulnerable) aspects of letting go of control. Even though we sometimes feel like we’re all alone, that no one gets it and/or that we couldn’t possibly make ourselves vulnerable enough to ask for help, it’s difficult to let go of control without the support of other people. Many of us don’t feel comfortable asking for help and fear it makes us seem weak or needy. We can’t do it alone. The good news is that most of us have many people in our life that would jump at the chance to support us if we were willing to ask for help more freely.
4. **Surrender –** This is the bottom line of letting go. Surrendering doesn’t mean giving up or not caring, it means trusting and allowing thing to be taken care of others, by the process and by the Universal Intelligence governing life- some call this God, some call this Spirit, some call it “the Universe”, some don’t call it anything, but most of us have experienced it at some level. Surrendering is about consciously choosing to trust and have faith. It is something that can liberate us in profound ways and is all about us choosing to let go of control.

Stressful things happen in life. We can’t change external events in our lives, but we can choose to surrender to what we can’t change rather than resist it.

When we look back on our lives in hindsight, we usually see things happen for a reason. Letting go of control is about loosening our grip, allowing ourselves to be supported and trusting that things will turn out as they are meant to.

Is this easy? Not always, although it can be. However, as we practice this and expand our capacity to let go, we’ll be able to release and transform a good amount of unnecessary stress, worry, and anxiety from our lives, our work, and our relationships.

**TAKE ACTION:**

1. Jot down your fears and assess them with a rational mind. Digging deep into the root of the fear could even cause you to notice the fear is invalid, which will make it much easier to let go of. It is important to remember that surrendering control doesn’t mean you’re giving up. It’s simply about not holding on so tight, and allowing things to work naturally.
2. List aspects of your life where you feel you could lessen your control. Then list the benefits you'll encounter when you release control over one or more of these areas.

**Lesson 5a: Let Go of Perfectionism**

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A close cousin of controlling behavior is perfectionism. It is important to recognize the difference between healthy striving to do your best and unhealthy perfectionism. Perfectionism is not about healthy achievement and growth. According to Brene Brown, Ph.D., Perfectionism is the belief that if we live perfect, look perfect, and act perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgement, and shame. It’s a shield.

Perfectionism is, at its core, about trying to earn approval and acceptance. Most perfectionists were raised being praised for achievement and performance (grades, manners, rule-following, people pleasing, appearance, sports). Somewhere along the way we develop a belief system of “I am what I accomplish and how well I accomplish it.” *Please. Perform. Perfect.*

Perfectionism is deeply rooted in the fear – fear of not being good enough, fear of not being worthy of love, fear of appearing imperfect to others. Perfectionists are often “people pleasers.”

Perfectionist often suffer from procrastination and analysis paralysis. They may wait for the perfect opportunity to do something, but then find that the perfect time never arrives. Perfectionists set unrealistic goals and harsh expectations for themselves, then beat themselves up with negative self-talk when the goals or expectations are not met.

Perfectionism hampers success. It can lead to depression, anxiety, addiction, and life-paralysis. Life paralysis leads refers to all the opportunities we miss because we’re too afraid to put anything out into the world that is imperfect. It’s also all the dreams we don’t follow because of our deep fear of failing, making mistakes, and disappointing others.

To overcome perfectionism, we must acknowledge our own vulnerabilities and become more loving and compassionate with ourselves. We must explore our fears and change our self-talk. In addition, we must learn to stop judging ourselves and others and begin to operate from a place of “We’re all just doing the best we can.”

Next, we can surrender our need to be perfect. To do this, we must first make the decision to surrender control– a.k.a. surrender the goal of perfection *(because we all know perfection is impossible, right?)*. This means fully accepting our imperfections as perfection, accepting what the future holds and having faith that everything will work out accordingly, because it will. This isn’t always easy, and many objections will arise in your mind.

Here’s a great example of surrender from someone who has not only experienced this transformation herself, but is also THE expert in the area. Human behavior researcher, author, and storyteller Brené Brown went on a 6-year mission to put order to life’s messiness by researching, measuring and analyzing human emotions and needs, such as connection, shame, vulnerability and control. You know what she discovered? That embracing our vulnerability – accepting imperfection and not having control – was the key to personal power and happiness. That discovery led Brown to a near nervous breakdown and a year-and-a-half of intensive therapy! As she put it, she could not believe that her “mission to control and predict had turned up the answer that the way to live is with vulnerability and to stop controlling and predicting.”

**TAKE ACTION**

1. Listen to Brené Brown’s full [TED Talk](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability?language=en) or read the [transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability/transcript?language=en). You can also check out her audiobook, [The Power of Vulnerability](https://itunes.apple.com/us/audiobook/power-vulnerability-teachings-authenticity-connection/id653836450).
2. Think about areas in your life where you may have perfectionist tendencies. Can you identify the underlying fear for your perfectionism? Be aware of how you talk to yourself. Are you speaking from to yourself with negativity, or with compassion?
3. Check out Dr. Kristin Neff’s website [www.self-compassion.org](http://www.self-compassion.org) for a self-compassion scale and other wonderful information.
4. Consider reading Brene Brown’s book, [The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are](http://amzn.to/2BImSfs) . This book was life-changing for me.