

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral



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Lori A. Harris

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Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

This is episode 24 of the *Unlock Your Life* podcast. I'm Lori Harris. Today we continue to get real in this month of reflection. Has anyone ever really just ticked you off? Left you feeling really, really mad? That happened to me recently. I found myself in a thought spiral. So I'm thinking I'm going to share it with you and what I did to get out of it. Let's get going.

Welcome to the *Unlock Your Life* podcast, a podcast for highly successful visionary women who want more out of life. If you feel that ache of unfulfillment in your soul, you're in the right place sis. Join life mastery consultant Lori A. Harris as she teaches you how to stop living for others and finally put yourself first. Let's dive into today's show.

Hey there. Hey. So this week we're talking about thought spirals. You might be saying to yourself, "What's a thought spiral?" Well, a thought spiral is something I described as when I feel multiple thoughts that don't serve me. Don't serve my greater good. Don't serve my purpose. Don't help me to get where I want to go. I find myself still in it going round and round and round, the same little merry go round of frustration. Quite frankly, it doesn't feel good.

The key to all of the work that we're doing, the work that we're doing here on the podcast, the work that I do with my clients is to notice our thoughts, take responsibility for our thoughts, and the feelings that we're having. Because thoughts and feelings play a role in producing the results we're having in our life.

It's imperative that we stay mindful of the thoughts and feelings that we're experiencing and take responsibility for it. When we're having an experience that's not leading to a peaceful life, it's on us to do something about it. We're with ourselves all day every day living inside our bodies. We're responsible for the thoughts that we're thinking. We're responsible for the experiences that we're having.

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

The feelings that we have are linked to our experiences. With that is really good news because once we notice it, we can change it. So I'm happy to share with you what my experiences were this week.

Now I have provided you with a cute little graphic that will remind you of what we've been talking about all along. Thoughts become things. There's a graphic to show you how that happens. So go to the show notes, and you can see an illustration of what I mean when I say our thoughts and feelings and actions result in the out picturing of our lives. That results in the results that we're living and experiencing. I would love for you to check out that graphic and a worksheet that might help you in moving forward when you find yourself in a thought spiral.

So I had this experience this week. I felt I had been wronged. Someone did me wrong, and I was mad about it. As I continued to have those thoughts, I noticed that I was having them. And I decided that I wanted to do something to change it because like I said, I'm living with me all day every day. Where this supposed wrongdoer was, nowhere in sight. They weren't with me. They weren't in the room. They weren't in the house, yet I was allowing myself to get worked up, to get upset, and to experience negative thoughts. The only person that could be hurt by that was me.

So I asked myself a series of questions. You can use the same questions and tools to help you. We talked about the fact that everything is created twice. We know that thoughts become things. So rather than to allow myself to get more and more angry, I paused. I used my own internal pause button to notice my noticer. I noticed that I was feeling bad. I noticed how I was feeling bad.

You know we want to be impeccable with our thoughts. There's this great tiny little bit called *The Four Agreements*. In *The Four Agreements*, the author Don Miguel Ruiz suggests that we should be impeccable with our words. I'm going to take it a step further and say we should be impeccable

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

with our thoughts. Let's be impeccable with our thoughts because they play a role our day to day experiences.

So we want to guard the portal of our mind. Guard our mind as Ralph Waldo Emerson says. Let's be impeccable with their thoughts. So we have to look at and remind ourselves not to allow ourselves to be carried away with negative and painful thinking which leads to negative and painful results.

So one thing we can do when we notice our thoughts is we can look at the language we're using. There are a series of questions we could look at and ask ourself, "Hm, am I acting like a victim here? Am I talking about this situation/condition/occurrence as if it was something that was done to me? As if I was done wrong? Is that how I would describe this incident, this occurrence? Am I being neutral?" This is what happened. These are the facts.

I've already told you that I noticed a bit of victimhood in my language. They've done me wrong. They shouldn't have done it. I don't like what they're doing. When I was using language that suggested I didn't have any choice, there's things that we can look at and look for in our own language. So let's roll it back. Roll back the tape.

Even at the beginning of the show, I said someone made me mad. That's showing a little bit of victimhood right there. That language takes away my ability to exercise free will, exercise my ability to choose and my ability to respond as opposed to react.

Other things we can do is we can look for self-deprecating language if we're in a thought spiral. Where it's saying, "Oh I hate this about myself. Oh I'm so stupid. Oh I did that again." That's not language that's going to help us to stay inspired.

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

So look for using negative self-deprecating language because that is going to make the situation or condition that you're working through seem even more difficult. It's more difficult to build momentum when you are in a negative thought pattern and directing negative thoughts and negative feelings towards yourself. So it's best to do what you can to be at least neutral if you cannot yet be kind.

It's good if we can reduce language that suggests self-harm and reduce language that continues to build up that feeling of anger, and use language that allows us to feel more compassion for ourself and the other people that we may be interacting with.

So are we being limited? Are we being fearful? We can check in with ourself and say, "Hm, what's the story I'm telling myself about what's happening here? Is it so limiting that I can't even have good things to say and believe about myself?"

We all have a story. Some of those stories can be really sad. Some of them are unfortunate. We've all had experiences. They don't have to define us or define our lives or day to day experience. We can look for something more empowering to look at the situation, look at the occurrence, look for some powerful lesson that can come out of the situation we find ourselves in.

So watch the internal conversation I'm having with myself, and make sure you eliminate and notice the story you're telling yourself. Sit with the situation as neutrally as you possibly can in that particular moment.

Now in my situation, I noticed that the person I was interacting with had promised to do X. The evidence suggested that they didn't do it. That's a neutral description of the situation. However, prior to working my way through the thought spiral, my language was not neutral.

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

My description of the situation was they promised to do X. They didn't do X. They failed to tell me that they didn't do X. In their failure to tell me they didn't do X and making a request of me as if they had done X, that was a lie. That was a lie by omission.

So I told myself that, and then it allowed me to get even more angry. So now I not only was angry about the situation, but now I'm angry that they lied. They told me a lie, and that made them a wrong doer doubly so. First they didn't keep their promise, and second they lied about it.

So I was getting myself really, really worked up. I was describing the situation. I was a victim. This other person was a perpetrator. A perpetrator of harm. A wrongdoer. I was the victim of that wrongdoer. Let me tell you, it didn't feel good. That train of thought did not help me move towards creative solutions. That train of thought didn't help me in any way, shape, or form.

So when I noticed that I wasn't feeling good, rather than staying on that train and that way of thinking, I asked myself, "What are you thinking right now? What are you feeling right now?" I paused and I said to myself, you know Lori, is it true? Is it true that they didn't do it? Is it true that they withheld information from you? Is it true that they tried to pretend that they did it? Is there any possible way other than that interpretation that I could look at it? Is there another way to see it?

I had to realize there are other possibilities for discerning and unpacking the situation without attributing fault, without looking for blame, without making someone a wrong doer. When I did that, I felt less hurt. I felt less angry. I felt less fearful. Fearful about the situation and what the results might be. When I'm in the blaming mode, then I cannot feel compassion or feel closer to this fellow human being who's walking here on planet earth. That's not really how I want to be. That's not how I want to live my life.

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

So I looked and I said is it true? That was my first question. Then I asked is there another way to look at it? What else could be going on? Is there another way to interpret these set of facts? Rather going to my aggressive, angry, lawyer mode, I rolled it back and said, "Let me play out the situation. On the other side of anger is usually fear."

So I had to check in with myself and say well what are you afraid of? I had this general fear that everything's going to go wrong. Everything's going to be messed up. This larger form of life that you stepped into is all going to blow up when you should have just stayed small.

So then as I'm thinking about this and I'm seeing that I had this very generalized fear that it's all going to blow up, I confronted myself and required myself to get more specific. What was I concerned about going wrong? I played it out and I said, "Okay so if that happened, then what? If that happened, then what? If that happened, then what?" I kept at it until I got at my fundamental fear. I realized all the things that I'm afraid of, if that happened I would eventually deal with it. I could handle it. No matter what's going on, I can handle it. I will be okay.

So then I checked in back to my original experience. I'm feeling all this anger and resentment and pain. So do I want to be feeling that right now? No. Am I happy with my interaction with this other party? No. But it isn't the end of the world. Can I handle it? Ultimately, I can.

So then allowing myself to have a little bit of self-compassion, allowing myself to tease out the issue gave me room to come up with possible scenarios to resolve the situation and get myself out of what appeared to be building up into a conflict. It gave me an opportunity to be more proactive in the situation.

Rather than reactive or worse, a victim, I don't ever want to be a victim. There's no reason for me to go to that place. So I decided to look

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

objectively at my role in the creation of this situation. I looked at my own behavior and I reevaluated and I said, “Are there some things that I could have done better? Is there a way that I should have responded and could have responded in a more effective way?”

Once I realized that then I could then offer some compassion for myself and toward the situation and toward the other party. It allowed me to notice places where I might have been better and shown up better and practice more self-care.

So once I paused and noticed my own role in the situation, it created an opening within me that I could look at the situation differently with more compassion for the situation overall, for myself, and for the other party that’s the subject of this occurrence. I notice when I’m being deliberate with my speech, I’m being intentional and not allowing to speak of the situation as if I’m a victim.

Something happened. I didn’t want it to happen, but it happened. It’s not pleasing to me and it’s not something that I wanted, but I can handle it. No matter how the cookie crumbles and everything shakes out, I will be able to handle it. It’s possible for me to get resources together to handle this situation in a way that feels better.

So when I roll it out and I get myself out of the thought spiral, I’m able to think of new creative solutions to respond to this situation that’s not pleasing to me. I didn’t like it. It’s not pleasing, but I can handle it. Already I feel better just from teasing out this situation.

So what were the steps? I noticed. I noticed what I was noticing. I used my notice. In order to do that, I had to pause. Then I asked myself, “What’s happening here?” I allowed myself to describe the situation. So first, I describe the situation the way I really felt. He did me wrong. By his failure

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

to do what he said he was going to do and suggestion that he had, that made him a liar. Okay.

Then I checked in. I said, “Lori, is it true? Is that really, really true? Can you be sure that it’s true? Is it possible that there’s any other way to look at the situation?” I create this opening withing myself to consider another way of observing this occurrence between two fellow human beings on planet Earth.” I practiced some self-compassion. I asked myself what did I want out of the situation, and I rolled it back.

Now, just because I'm a life coach, just because I have learned over time a series of practices that can help me, it doesn't mean that I'm always ready to go right in and do that right away. Sometimes you just can't get there. If that's the case, then you observe that and you be kind to yourself and offer yourself a different kind of self-coaching.

So when you can't get to a replacement thought, when you can't get to a more expansive way of looking at a situation, then I suggest that you allow yourself to sit with that and say okay, perhaps I need to have just a little bitty mini pity party. I'm going to sit with my feelings, sit with what has occurred, and let those feelings pass. Allow myself to feel what I feel. Tell the truth to myself about what—Right now I'm thinking this is what happened and this is how it feels.

Every party has an end. There's no 24 hour 24/7 party. All parties have an end. Even with the pity party. You can't just let it go on forever. I suggest that you schedule it. You schedule it for a defined period of time. It can be hours. It can be a couple of days. I suggest that you do not allow your pity party to go more than three days.

But rather than feeling stuck and constricted in a limited way of thinking. Rather than beating myself up and telling myself it should have been some

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

other way, it allows me the ability to feel what I'm feeling knowing that there's a container. That it's going to come to an end.

Then I can move back to being the more expansive thinker and person that I want to be. I can look for what possible good can come from this situation or occurrence. Then I can offer myself some self-compassion, then I can get back to those questions. Then I can ask myself what steps do I need to take to move this thing forward? Then I can get to a place of solutions, get to the land of the solutions.

So you want to contain those negative thoughts, limit your negative thoughts, and process your feelings without acting on them. So you don't come home and kick the dog, you don't yell at the kid, you don't curse out the store clerk. You just notice that you're having some feelings. You're experiencing some frustration. You're experiencing some disappointment. You move into the land of the solution with compassion.

So that's it. Sometimes we're going to have thoughts. Sometimes those thoughts are going to send us round and round and round. In our trials and tremulations that come to us throughout the day, sometimes we don't always respond the best way that we would have hoped. We're not always our best self.

When we find we are thinking from that victim point of view, interrogate that. Ask yourself some more empowering questions rather than saying to yourself, "Why would that person do such a terrible thing? How could this person be so awful? What am I going to do about this terrible situation?"

You can ask more empowering questions, check in with yourself. Notice that you're having negative thoughts about a situation or about a person. Pause and ask yourself is it true? Do I want it to be true? Is it really, really true? Is there any other way that I could possibly look at this? When you're

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

honest with yourself, most of the time there is another way we can look at it.

When we create that opening with our thoughts, we are opened to more and more creative solutions. It will have you in a place where you can come to a solution that allows you to feel good, to feel empowered, to not feel victimized, and to move forward in offering yourself some compassion, some grace. Recognizing your own role in the situation. Because in every situation, you all have some grain of participation in it.

So remember moving forward, as long as we're humans living on the planet, we're going to have interactions with people. Sometimes those people are going to disappoint us. Sometimes those people are going to officially make us angry. We can decide how we want to respond to that situation. So when you find yourself in a thought spiral, stop and pause. Your first tool. Notice what you're noticing.

You stop and you pause, and then you check in with yourself and find and identify the feelings that you're having. Are you sad? Angry? Mad? They're all about the same. You're feeling something. Identify what that is, and then look at it. Are you using language of victimhood? Of blame? Are you identifying someone else as the perpetrator and you as the victim? Sit with that for a minute. Then allow yourself to say, "What am I feeling? Is it true? Do I want it to be true? Is it really, really true?"

If it's not true, then check in with yourself and say, "Why am I feeling that? What was I thinking? What lead me to have those feelings?" Then you can ask yourself is there any possible other way of looking at this situation? Give yourself the opportunity to see it in a different format. Then that will usually create an opening within yourself to practice some self-compassion and to lead you to a place of discovering creative solutions.

Ep #24: How to Get Out of a Negative Thought Spiral

Finally done jump into this self-recovery from the thought spiral. If you're not quite ready, it's okay to give yourself time and notice the spiral, notice what you're feeling. Just pausing to notice it and pausing those thoughts, you don't have to go immediately into the land of the solution.

You can just pause and notice it and practice self-compassion by letting yourself feel what you feel. You put a container around your feelings and moving in that mode for a period of time. We call it a limited pity party. It's going to happen for either a few days, no more than three days. Hopefully just a day. You allow yourself to feel what you feel. You identify what you're feeling. Then come back and try to ask yourself the questions.

I hope this is helpful to you. It certainly was helpful to me this week in my thought spiral. This has been the *Unlock Your Life* podcast. I hope you're enjoying it. If you are, I'd love it if you'd look it up on Apple podcast. You can rate, follow, and provide a review. It doesn't have to be a five star review, but I'd love a five star review truthfully. I'd love to hear your feedback on what would make this podcast even more valuable. Thank you for listening. Remember. It's your life. Make it a great one.

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