

## The Passion Trap

### Module 2: The Truth About Authority

Welcome to module two. The Truth about Authority.

I don't know about you, but I am no rebel. I mean, I've been wearing glasses since the second grade. Real hard to be a rebel with glasses. I didn't skip school or thumb my nose at my parents. I didn't throw parties while they were away. I followed the rules. I thought you had to. The list is a mile long about how much of a rebel I am not.

And yet, my opinions, my lifestyle is considered in some ways maybe rebellious, definitely unconventional. I have never married. I have no kids, mainly because I didn't want to. And that might not seem revolutionary, but to those of you who have also chosen that lifestyle, you know that it is. I'm not saying it's special or better, but it's definitely better for me. And the fact is, I assumed I would always end up wanting what everyone wants.

I'm not that different. I'm pretty basic. I like my ugg, I like my pumpkin spiced whatever. I just know that this lifestyle was better for me. And it's not revolutionary, but it is different. This is not necessarily what most people do and a lot of people aren't given that option. And I think still other people think that once they've made a certain set of decisions, they can't make another, and that's not true.

Anyway, I didn't wake up one day and decide to be some kind of rebel <laugh>. No, I didn't decide to go consciously against the grain to be different. No. What I realized by degrees was that I didn't have to do what other people did or what other people wanted me to do or expected me to do. I didn't have to like what everyone else liked and I didn't have to have a life that looked like anyone else's. I could make mine up as I went along. It seems like not a revolutionary idea, but I kind of think it is.

In the end I, anyway, so far have gotten to choose what I wanted to do and also didn't have to apologize for it. Now note, I have a very supportive family and friends and no one has ever given me a hard time about I should have done this or that. I even <laugh> asked my dad, "are you gonna be disappointed if I don't do what my two younger sisters have done?" Which they are both married and had kids and all that. And he said, nah, do what you want. It's your life. And I was like, oh, I wish everyone thought that.

The fact that I do question and challenge some of the conventions in our world and the people who support them doesn't make me some huge badass. And I don't, as I said, do it to be a badass. I do it because as far as I know, as far as any of us know, this is the life we have and we have very limited time. It gets more limited by the day. And I don't think any of us has time to do things for the sole purpose of meeting someone else's expectation of them.

Do I care what people think? Of course I do. I'm not, uh, yeah, I know a lot of people like I don't even care what anyone else thinks. No, that is not me. Of course I care, but I only care what certain people think and I realize that how I choose to live my life is on me. And how happy I am is going to be a result of the choices that I make for me.

This wasn't one big moment. It has been an awakening by degrees. And now as a fully middle-aged woman, I can say that I am happier, more self-possessed and sturdy than I think I might have ever thought I could be, if we're being honest. And the point of this module is to wake you up to that, or at least remind you of that too, that you do have a choice. You have a choice for what you'll spend your time, money, and attention on.

In order to do that, we do have to start to uncouple ourselves from the ideas we've been given about who has a say over what we do and what the consequences are of ignoring them. This is not so easy for people who grew up in a culture that is bonded by a way of life, a way of doing things. And that to leave would mean being sort of, you know, exiled from their community. That is not an easy decision, but this is a decision we make for ourselves.

From the minute we realize what our smile can do to another person, the minute we smile as babies and see the effect it has on our caregiver, whomever that might be, we learn a lesson, a powerful lesson. Not only that we can affect other people, we can manipulate through our own actions, but also that it feels really good to please. And it comes with rewards.

We learned this through positive reinforcement, but far, far too many of us learn it through negative reinforcement. I'm talking toxic, horrible, dangerous, abusive reinforcement that to not please has consequences. We also learn how far we can go, and will go to make someone else happy. And we can begin to believe that this actually is our purpose. That our job is to make other people happy, to please others, to appease others, to do what is expected of us.

We might think as long as we can please people will have a role, we'll have resources, we'll have love when that isn't always true either. Pleasing doesn't guarantee anything except that you continue to put other people first. That's a choice. It's yours to make. But it is a choice.

We think that if we please we will have resources and protection and even love. And that's not always the case. You know, there's a big but coming, a big ass but. Because what happens when you put pleasing everyone else above everything else? What happens when you please yourself into a corner and you run outta resources and you run out of energy and you run out of will? You have no gas left in the tank. Or worse, you wake up one day and realize you don't know what you want at all and you haven't given yourself a minute to even consider it.

And that you don't know how to do anything unless it's for someone else. That is a scary moment. That is a shocking moment indeed. You are not different. If this is sounding familiar to you, you are not different. If you say, well, I don't need this, or I don't need this attention, or I don't need a lot of money, I don't need... Okay, maybe you don't need as much money as someone else thinks they need, whatever. That's not the point. The point is this belief that, oh, I don't need to do anything, I'll just take care of other people that will bite you in the ass. That is not true. And the more we push it down and pretend we don't need anything, the more resentful, exhausted and lost we can feel. I'm pretty sure that you agree with me there, or else why would you be here right now?

Because this is something we all need reminding of. Yes, our relationships, our communities, our world works when there's give and take. Got it. But too many of us think we have to give and give and give and take nothing back. And that somehow that will make us more worthy of attention or love. And we learn that giving and giving can cost us, that it doesn't necessarily earn. You might think it earns you some goodwill in some regard. Maybe it does, but it doesn't actually give you currency.

For obvious reasons, people and especially, but not limited to, women are incentivized to please to serve with little regard for what we want. Because that is how like culture and society has been set up for hundreds and hundreds of years. There's not even any point in like debating it or thinking, well, that's bad. It doesn't matter.

We've had our own ability to be free as, as women particularly, walking around, uh, being able to buy our own cars or have our own credit cards like two seconds ago. Like we just got the right to vote three seconds ago. This is all really, really new as far as the history of the world goes. And there's no arguing that.

I don't think I have to tell you this, but the world is not set up to empower people, especially women, to be sovereign and self-serving beings. It doesn't serve the larger machine that way. Hashtag patriarchy, industrial revolution, whatever you wanna say. The way our economy and life and culture is set up, it's not, why else is it so hard on women to raise kids and have a job and do all these things? That's a whole other thing we're not even gonna go into that right now.

But we have not been for the most part trained to do that. Maybe you have, I know I got a lot of support in that arena. Um, you know, I did, but even I have had to teach myself to do that and that it's okay to do that.

My point is this, if you want to start to discover something new for yourself to see what is possible for you now or next, I promise you it will involve not pleasing everyone. It's impossible. And I know it's scary because there's nothing scarier than the idea of being a disappointment, of letting someone down, of having someone mad at us. I get it. I have that same feeling of course! That is the price that we pay in order to do what we want. And if we allow the fear of disappointing to overrule everything else, we are stuck. You cannot live your life by consensus. Not everyone's gonna agree.

Let's talk for a second here about the culture of criticism, because it is the culture in which we live, and not just internet culture where people share their stupid ass opinions and do horrible and say horrible things to each other. I'm not even talking about that which is so super new. I'm talking about the culture of criticism in which we believe that the best thing to be is right. And that in order to be respected, we must prove that other people are wrong. Or in order to be a contender, we have to point out flaws, our own and others.

Now, is there a place for flaw finding? Do copy editors have work to do? Absolutely. My point is not that no one should ever be corrected, but we have an overdependence on the idea of criticism as a way to become better.

The first place we learn this is in school. I am sure some of your earliest memories involve doing something “wrong” in school. Getting an answer wrong, writing an essay and having it be given a D, committing to an answer and having it be wrong. Our errors are made painfully obvious to us in school. And that's how we “learn,” right? Sure, we do learn from those. Do we learn from mistakes? Absolutely. But how often, in school, are we encouraged or where is it pointed out to us, what we did well? Outside from regurgitating a correct answer and then being like, “you're a good girl,” “you're a good boy” that you got the “right” answer.

That's not the same thing. And our educational system and our life in schools, just about anywhere, are not set up to encourage individualism, creative thinking, critical thinking. We're told to memorize things and spit them back out. By and large. That is, I mean, prove me wrong.

There are some exceptions. And I had one of the most progressive educations. I was lucky enough to be in fantastic schools where I was encouraged, and even there, what were we afraid of? Getting things wrong. "Oh God, I got it wrong. I didn't get the A I didn't get this." That is hierarchical thinking. That's just how academics works.

But what happens is we glom onto this idea and we can't let go. And we spend our lives trying to avoid being wrong, getting anything wrong, appearing to have made a mistake. What's worse? The coverup is worse than the crime. Where do you think that comes from? The ego. That the fear of the death of that ego of being embarrassed or made to look dumb. I don't wanna look dumb either. That's part of the reason why people don't raise their hands when you say, does anyone have any questions? Or what do you think? All of it. The culture of criticism is in love with pointing out what's wrong. The problem is that that isn't always what works best.

One of my favorite articles to cite is a piece, a wildly popular piece that appeared in Harvard Business Review, and it's called "The Feedback Fallacy" by Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall. They said, people don't need feedback, they need attention to what they do best. They said that this is how we excel, is by being tuned into and aware of our moments of genius, which cannot be put in an instruction manual. They have to be witnessed and captured and highlighted and called out. And this is not most of our experiences at school or work for that matter.

The problem is that our brains, of course you've heard this, have a negativity bias. We tend to hang on to the negative information. It's a survival tactic, right? Oh, we tend to cling to, the bad things. We're like, no, just gimme the real feedback. We tend to discount things that are supportive or positive. We think it's fluff. But the problem is, that is proof positive that we have come to distrust ourselves as people, not just as students.

Think about the last time you were criticized publicly. I mean, it feels like you're being flayed alive. I mean, it's a terrible feeling of being exposed, right? It is not a comfortable situation, right? And we think that like, oh, that pain, that embarrassment is good. That's how we're gonna learn. And that we think that pain, that embarrassment is good. It's what's gonna teach us how to learn. And actually it does the opposite. If you've ever been criticized, even privately, you know, somebody goes like, can I give you some feedback? And you're like, yikes. You, you feel that contracting, right? That tightening,

that closing in, that's a survival tactic too. And when we're like this and we're in defense mode, we're not gonna be open to new ideas and trying new things at all. In fact, we're gonna be more cautious and we're gonna take fewer risks. That's the part of the problem.

This idea, which I talk a lot about in my book actually, you have to get outta your comfort zone. That's how you're gonna learn things. A lot of that is bullshit. Marcus Buckingham says it himself. He says, take us very far out of our comfort zones and our brains stop paying attention to anything other than surviving the experience.

That is not where we do our best work. It's not even where we do good work. It's where we do careful work. It's where we hold back. It's where we pump the brakes. He says, we learn most in our comfort zones. It's where we're most open to possibility, most creative, insightful and productive. So you see why, deciding that only criticism, you know, exposing ourselves to just the criticism, what we need to fix ourselves is a losing— It's a losing game. It doesn't encourage any kind of growth. It makes us more careful and more fearful.

That comes with— the problem is not just that. It's that we assume that the critic is the authority. It gives power away. And they actually, in that article, go into the different kinds of criticism. The idea that you're dumb and you're a dumb empty vessel and we just have to pour information into you cuz you don't know anything. Or you can't see how wrong you are. You need other people to point it out. All of these kinds of criticism are ways of taking power away from you.

And it's not that we don't need to learn things and learn to improve things, but this essential idea that we must be fixed, that there's something wrong with us, that the authorities that be think that we should do more to be better and to be more pleasing, more appealing and more correct, according to their standards, is why we don't feel the confidence to try the things that we might actually love to do, or explore, or take a risk. Why would we when we've been taught this?

Okay, so grab your notebook again. I'm gonna have you do a little writing.

Okay, here's the exercise. I want you to think about a time you were criticized. It could have been a small thing, it could have been not even a mean thing. You might have been helpful in some regard. But I want you to think about a time that stood out to you, that someone corrected something you did. Whether in public or privately, in person or email.

I want you to take a few minutes now and reconstruct that scene for yourself. Where were you? What was happening? What was at stake? What was the action that happened? What were the words that were said, and what was your response in the moment? What did you think about afterwards? I want you just to kind of go down the rabbit hole of that moment and just continue, even after you've recounted what happened. Keep going, keep writing. What do you think about it now?

Continue to unpack it like you're digging a hole and following where it goes. There can be a lot of things that you learn or remember that you didn't even know you remembered. It's an important part of accessing memory and story here, so that we can put this into context for you.

Set your timer for 15 minutes this time, and push yourself to write the entire time. Hit pause now and I'll talk to you when you get back.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>

Okay, so what was that like for you? Did it bring up a particularly painful moment or a funny moment, or maybe a moment that changed the way you saw yourself? What did you learn as a result of receiving that criticism and how did it feel? And what was it like to write about it? Because when you write about something you are re-experiencing and re-metabolizing that moment in a way that you haven't at any other point.

Part of what you're gonna learn the longer you stick with me, if you choose to, is an approach to writing like you're doing now. Generating ideas and exploring your own mind, accessing your own creativity. That is a very specific method that I studied, loved and became certified in called the Gateless Method. And you'll be learning about it as we go through. But suffice it to say this is a set of rules we use as a kind of container, to create a container within which it is safe to write, to share, to do all the things that we wanna do that we don't do cuz we're afraid of getting someone mad or hurting someone's feelings or displeasing them.

It's really a powerful transformational tool. It's usually done in a group, though you can apply the tenets to your work as you write and I'll be walking you through some of those. But the point being that in this method, which I did not invent, it was invented by a woman named Suzanne Kingsbury. She invented it to work with writers who were stuck with writer's block. But I have taken it and applied it and used it with people of all backgrounds, of all jobs and industries, who weren't even trying to be writers. Why?

Because in that method there is no criticism or judgment. We don't tell you what you should have done or what you did wrong or what isn't working. Because we find it doesn't help, not with the kind of work we are doing. And if part of your goal here is to wake up to see what's possible for you to see what you might create or make or do next, it's not gonna help to share it with too many people who are gonna tell you why it can't work. You're not gonna hear that from me because it's just not helpful.

So I say this because as you go through this program and you get excited about different things that you're, that are coming up for you, or maybe you wrote something you're excited about and you share it with someone. I'm just gonna say be really careful about who you share it with, because even people who love you may just like \*boop\* stick a pin in it and it'll blow up your whole idea or deflate you, right? So, when you share things with people who you are close to, when and if you choose to share any of this with other people, say this: "I'd like to share this with you. And right now I don't wanna hear any criticism of it. I don't wanna hear why you think it will or won't work. I just really would love to share it with you."

You can do that. You can tell people what kind of feedback you want. Because if you go around sharing an idea with a lot of people who all tell you why it won't work, guess what you're not gonna do? We're not gonna worry about what someone else thinks we can or can't do because that is giving away our power right now. It's just not something we need, not this early in the game.

Okay. Grab your pen and paper and I want you to do a short exercise. This is only gonna take a few minutes, and I want you to think about the sources of authority in your life. Who are the people or the institutions that you feel have a say? Who has influence over your life and your decisions? Not people you consult, cuz you might consult with a partner, but that doesn't mean they have authority over you.

You might have one source that is the authority and for you that might be the Catholic church. And if that's it, that's fine. That's your business. That's some institution that you believe has authority. Maybe you don't have any religion but what your mother says rules all. Take a few minutes now just set it for, you know, five minutes, seven max, and just quickly jot down all of the sources or institutions or people or whatever that have a say over what you say, do, think. Okay? Just set it for, you know, five minutes or so. Go ahead and start.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>



Okay, so you have your list. Now look down that list. Which of those sources of authority, I want you to rate how much of a say they have. Respecting the church is not the same as only doing what the church allows, right? So I want you to go down that list and on a scale of let's just say one to five, five being like you don't do a thing unless they let you do it. We're talking like cult master, like you can't do anything unless they do it. And a one is that they don't really have much say at all, but you know, you consider it but it doesn't really affect you. Rate those now.

<Pause for rating exercise>

<Resume after rating exercise>

So now that you've rated them, what do you see there? Does everyone have a big huge final say? Do they not have as much a hold on you as you think?

I want you to take a few minutes now, to write down something that maybe you don't share with a lot of people that you've kind of been wanting to do or considering and you're like, you kind of don't say it cuz you're sort of afraid of what someone will think. You're afraid of what a lot of people might think or you're afraid of that you're not allowed to. I want you to list some things that you're thinking, and maybe it's just one thing that you're kind of considering, but you don't know if you're really allowed to do it or, or if anyone would approve.

It might be a personal thing you're thinking of doing or it might be professional, you might be thinking of quitting, you might be thinking of starting your own business. You might be thinking about going back to school. You might be thinking about leaving your relationship. I mean moving. It could be anything. I want you to jot a few of those down. Ideally pick one and run with it. I want you to set a timer for 10 minutes and write about the one thing you're thinking of doing and why you know, why you're thinking of doing it and why you are a little worried about you know, why you haven't said anything. And I want you to explore where it bumps up against what you think you're allowed to do. Okay? Start writing.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>

Now, look at that list of all the sources of authority, the people and sources and institutions who you think have sway over you, who have a say and would be disappointed in who you're maybe afraid of disappointing.

I want you to look at the thing you're thinking about doing or exploring, just thinking about now. When you look at that list of sources of authority, pick the one that has the most say. Now explore the possible outcomes of exploring doing the thing you're thinking of doing and how that bumps up against these authority figures. The question to ask is who says, and so what? What would happen if you actually did begin to explore or even talk about the thing you're thinking of doing? What are the things that would, that you're afraid would happen and how likely are they to happen? What would be some of the things you'd have to do as a result? What changes or tradeoffs are you willing to make that are worth facing off with that authority? Set the timer for 15 minutes and start writing.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>

When I was a little girl, like maybe seven years old, there was another little girl who lived on my block and my mother would often say, go play with so-and-so. And I didn't really want to, but I did sometimes. And I found her to be a bossy little terror. She just was, she was not someone I actually considered a friend, and I didn't like playing with her, and she was always telling me what to do. And one day, a button came loose off her bedspread and she held it out to me and she said, "eat it." And I said, "wait, can you even eat that?" And she said, "sure you can. It's candy." And I didn't really believe it. I wanted to believe her, that she had a candy bedspread. But in my mind, I knew, in my gut I knew, this was not something you were supposed to eat.

But she insisted. She was not an authority figure, she was not an adult, she was another kid. In fact, she was shorter than me. I remember the feeling of crunching down on that button and realizing, yeah, this isn't candy, this is like plastic. I remember that vividly. It's a visceral memory. And what always bothered me about it is I was always kind of embarrassed that she got me to do something. For no other reason than because she made me do it because she was the stronger voice, because she was this bully of a kid. There was no other reason, and I didn't really have to, but I did it. She seemed to me someone who was in power, even if she wasn't in any real way. It didn't matter if someone in power told you something that wasn't true. You had to swallow it. And the idea of that bugged me, obviously for like over 40 years now.

We swallow a lot of things because people tell us to, we assume there are things that we have to do, um, in order to be loved or accepted or productive or recognized or whatever. And that alone, can be a huge wrench in the wheel of our forward momentum. So when you feel stuck, it's worth asking, well, who cares? Who says? So when you feel stuck, it's worth asking, who am I afraid of? Well, whose judgment am I

most concerned about? What will happen if someone “in power” to me, finds out what I do, or doesn't agree with a choice I'm making? It's time to question those sources of authority because it's key. Because if we don't question them, we can't uncouple ourselves from them. And then how will we get to do what we most wanna do? How will we get to even consider it?

Okay, that wraps up module two. It's a doozy. I know. And we'll see you in the next one.

<End of Module 2>