

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT



EPISODE 266

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# How to Change Your Identity

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## How to Change Your Identity

Happy 2022. Welcome to a brand-spanking-new year. I am so looking forward to what we create in this community over the next 365 days. And if you want my support in getting started in a fun, fresh, and life-changing way, I want to invite you to one of my favorite workshops that I've ever run.

It's called Live Like an Editor. You and me will be spending five days together in this virtual workshop. You will receive daily lessons, daily coaching with me, and inspiration to wrap up your evenings.

My intention for this workshop is that you begin to see yourself as an extraordinary masterpiece. And from that energy, you will learn how to create yourself from a place of love and excitement and joy, one edit at a time. This will be such a fun way to start your year and I am so excited to join you inside the workshop. So, again, all you need to do is head to [schoolofselfimage.com/workshop](https://schoolofselfimage.com/workshop) and I will see you there.

Welcome to the School of Self-Image, where personal development meets style. Here's your hostess, master life coach Tonya Leigh.

This is the first episode of the new year. And I've been wrestling with what should I do this episode on? And I had many different ideas. One of them were doing a word of the year, which I'm sure I'll do one of those in the near future. But we don't need to rush into that quite yet.

What I want to share with you in this first episode of 2022 is how to change your identity. The reason I'm starting the new year out with this topic is because no matter what it is that you want to create, you must change your identity in order to create it. So, let's start this off by defining what is identity.

And I came across this definition on Psychology Today and I thought it was really informative, "Identity is the memories, experiences, relationships, and values that create one's sense of self." So, I want to just stop right there and point out something. Your identity today is created from past memories, past experiences, past and present relationships, and values that you may or may not have consciously decided.

Some of you may be valuing what your parents valued, what society values, and never asking, "What do I deeply value?" Most people's identity is based in the past, which is why they keep creating the same old or similar results. Because in order to create new results, you must create a new identity that matches the results that you want.

Now, some of you listening may believe that your identity is fixed, meaning who you are is just who you are. It's something that happens to you, not something that you happen to it, meaning you decide and create it on purpose.

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This is all of the work that we do within the School of Self-Image. It's really about shifting your identity, how you see yourself, how you identify yourself as. Because that will be the result that you create. You cannot be rich if you are being poor. You cannot be calm if you're being overwhelmed. You cannot be successful if you are being unaccomplished.

So, what do I mean by being? It is how you see yourself. Are you showing up as the wealthiest version of you? Are you showing up as the most accomplished version of you?

What most people do is they try to take a lot of action and create a result from an identity that doesn't match the result, which is why we always come back to how we see ourselves. So, when it comes to identity, we have a physical identity. People want to see your ID. They want to see what you look like. We also have our social identity. That is how other people see us. And we have our self-identity. That is how we see ourselves.

We, you, I have the power to change our identities. I have done it. I have supported thousands of other women in doing it. Our identity is not fixed. It is something that we get to shape, refine, transform if we choose to.

Now, some people will say to me, "Tonya, I like who I am." And that is a good place to start. I too like who I am. And I'm also excited and constantly up-leveling my identity to allow for more. You do not have to hate yourself in order to transform your identity.

In fact, hating yourself keeps you stuck in the identity that you currently have. I know this firsthand because, for many years, I tried to hate myself into a new identity. And all that did was perpetuate the old one because I wasn't showing up as a woman who loved herself. I wasn't showing up as a woman who respected herself and held herself in high regard. And so, I kept perpetuating the old identity.

In order to finally change my behaviors, I had to change my identity. I could not do the necessary things to lead to long-term weight loss as long as I was being overweight, as long as that was my identity. Because we will always prove ourselves true. We will always live in our identity bubble.

And so, I had to burst that bubble and create a new identity of a naturally slim and healthy woman. I have used this process to become a successful business owner. I've used this process in creating wealth. I've used this process in creating an extraordinary community of people. It all comes down to identity, how you see yourself, your self-image.

So, how do you change your identity? Step number one is decide on the type of person you want to be. That's number one. This is why I choose a word of the year. It guides me every year. Who do I want to be this year?

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You can also think about, what is your goal? And who do you need to become in order to reach it? Do you need to become confident? Do you need to become confident? Do you need to become bold? Do you need to become powerful? Do you need to become patient, loving? You decide. But the first step, you need to know who you need to become in order to change your identity.

Step number two is to visualize the new you. The brain only knows two things; the images you hold and the words you speak. So, now I'm referring to the images. This is why Olympians, athletes, they will visualize the game, the run, whatever the event is ahead of time. They will practice it over and over in their minds before getting on the field, before getting on the ski slope.

They've already practiced it so much. They've told their mind how they want to perform ahead of time. We get to do the same. But we just will apply the same concept to our identity. I have been doing this for years.

When I was trying to lose weight, for example, I would visualize the slim, healthy version of me ahead of time. Before I would walk into a restaurant, I would see her. How does she show up? How does she eat her food? When does she stop? I was telling my brain, ahead of the event, how I wanted it to behave, what I wanted it to guide me to do.

I've done this around money. I had an identity of a poor person, someone who struggled with money. And so, I kept perpetuating that. But then, there was one day, I decided I want to be wealthy in all the ways. And I started to visualize the wealthy version of me, how she spends her money.

I would see her in my mind, how she carries herself, how she dresses, what her closet looks like, how she treats her money. I would imagine her sitting down with financial advisors and really being attuned to her money and respecting it and treating it well. And I practiced it so much.

And that practicing in my mind led me to make decisions that brought that vision to life. I've done it in my business. Three years ago, I sat down and wrote out my vision for my business. And guess what? I am living 95% of it today. It's crazy how I just visualized it. I closed my eyes and I saw myself in my daily business life, who I was talking to, how I was showing up, what I was creating, how I was using my time, how I felt, how I dressed.

And now, I'm living it. But I first imagined it because things are created twice. First in the brain, and then in real life. So, by imagining the new me, the new identity, I was training my brain as to what to create in terms of me as a woman.

So, step number one, decide who you want to be. Step number two, visualize her. Step number three is to think like her. So, we've got visualize. Now we've got think.

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How do you imagine the new version of you thinking? Because remember, the brain only knows two things; the images you hold and the words you speak. So now, we're talking about the words you speak, the words you speak in your mind to yourself and then the words you speak to the world.

What are the beliefs of the new you? Imagine you are that woman, you have this new identity. Are you walking around thinking, "Money is hard... I don't know how to manage money. I'm not beautiful. No one loves me. I'm not good enough. I'm overwhelmed. I don't know what to do. I'm confused?" No.

So, in order to become her and to create that identity, you must start practicing thinking like her. This is a lot of the work that we do within the School of Self-Image. It is the most important work of your life because you will create what you think.

Are you paying attention on what you currently think? Because that's shaping your identity. Your identity is shaped by your beliefs. And most people's beliefs are based on the past, what they've done in the past, who they've been in the past, and the results of the past. They look at the past and they create beliefs around it. And those beliefs create your identity.

I am asking you to look into the future, at the new you, what is she thinking? And that is your work, to practice thinking like her.

Now, there is a process for this that I don't have the time to go into today. But it's something that we teach within the School of Self-Image. Because if you've been thinking most of your life, "I'm not good enough," and you try to jump to, "I am fabulous," your brain is going to fight you every step of the way.

There are steps that one must take in order to change their beliefs. But all I want you to do right now is to play around with, what are the beliefs of the future you? How is she thinking versus how you're thinking today?

Okay, so step number one, decide on who you want to be. Step number two, visualize her. Step number three, think like her. And then the final step is to do what she does. So, we've got visualization, we've got thinking, and now what we're doing is we want to provide evidence that this is who you are becoming. Because the more evidence you gather to prove to yourself that this is who you're becoming, the more you're rooting yourself in that new identity.

So, let me give you an example of how this has worked in my life. Many of you have heard this story. It was one of those a-ha moments in my life when a doctor turned to me and said, "Tonya, who do you want to be?" I used to work as a critical care nurse. There was a night in the ICU and this visiting doctor, we were just sitting around and chatting, and he said, "Tonya, who do you want to be?"

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And I didn't know how to answer him. It was sort of an odd question. And I said, "I want to be a good mom and a good nurse and a good wife." And he said, "No, I'm not talking about the roles you play in life. Like, who do you want to be as a woman?" And I was like, "What? That's weird. Do we have a choice?"

But on the way home that next morning, the word popped into my mind of who I truly wanted to be. And immediately, my brain started laughing at me. My brain was like, "Yeah right. That is not who you are."

And the truth was, at the time, it wasn't. And as long as I continued to look into my past, I would never become that woman. You see, I grew up in a trailer in the deep south. I had someone tell me one time that I sounded like a cast member from Duck Dynasty. I had a deep Southern accent, y'all. You may even hear it come out sometimes now.

And I had this belief system that I wasn't smart enough, I wasn't good enough, I was broke, like all of the stuff that was shaping my identity. So, when this word popped into my brain, I was like, "What? There's no way."

So, the word was worldly. I wanted to be a worldly woman. Now, keep in mind, I had never really travelled the world at all. The most international travel I had ever had was at Epcot Center. Has anyone ever been? Got to go to Mexico and Paris and Germany all in one day. It was fabulous. But that was the extent of my worldly travels.

And so, this word felt impossible. But I started to visualize that version of me. And she was very different than the me at that time. She looked different. She carried herself differently. She spoke differently. She was a very different woman. But I started to have fun just thinking about her and seeing her in my brain.

And I could see her pretty clearly. And she felt impossible to me. But then, I was like, "What does that woman think that I'm not thinking?" Well, she had a completely different belief system. Hence why it's taken me so long to change. I've literally had to change almost all of my beliefs.

But I started to play around with thinking like her and doing the little steps that I teach within the school of changing our belief system. And then, I started acting like her. I would read the books that I imagined her reading. I would even attempt to eat like her.

Now, considering that all we had was a Food Lion – we didn't have Whole Foods where I lived. We didn't have any of the fancy restaurants. But I used what I had, and I started from where I was. I started trying to speak like her. I worked really hard on changing my accent. And this is something many of you have asked me about and a lot of you are curious about.

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And I think all accents are beautiful. And for me, I felt like my accent was holding me back in life because, number one, there was a lot of improper grammar that still slips out sometimes. I'm sure you all have picked up on it. I try to correct as quickly as I find out. But people made fun of my accent.

As long as I was in my little bubble, my 30-mile radius, I was safe, I was fine. But any time I ventured into a city or a new place where people didn't have my accent, it was very noticeable, and people would often make comments about it. And when I visualized who I wanted to be, she did not speak the way I spoke.

Now, some of you may be thinking, "Tonya, why didn't you just embrace it?" And that was an option. But I don't feel like that's who I was deep down inside. Now, for some people, it is. If they could go back and choose any of the accents that they have, they would choose the one that they have and they would do it on purpose and they would like their reason for choosing that.

But I wanted to change my accent, and I have no shame over it. I am so grateful I did it. And so, I started to practice speaking like her. And that took a long time to change. And again, you put me back in the South, it comes right back out. And I'm grateful for that part of me too.

She is a part of this story, and I will be forever grateful to her for getting me to where I am today. But the other things that I would do is put myself in new surroundings. You see, our surroundings, our environments shape our identities.

And if we keep plugging ourselves into the same environments day after day, it's just creating that neural feedback of this is who I am, this is who I am. And so, by placing myself in new environments, I challenge my way of thinking and my way of seeing myself.

So, for example, I would drive to the closest city to where I lived, and I would go sit in the nicest hotels that I could find that didn't cost me a thing and I could just be in that energy. Now, granted, it wasn't the Ritz Carlton. It was what was available to me at that time.

I remember also taking advantage of going to art museums. You know, I thought about a worldly woman, she's cultured. She knows about the arts. And so, I would put myself in art museums. I had no idea who these artists were. I could not pronounce their names at the time. But I still went. And little by little, my environments started to shape my new identity as well.

I also used style to change my identity. And I could do a whole episode just on this one topic. But there's a concept called encloded cognition and studies have been done to prove the power of our clothes and how we see ourselves. So, for me, I remember thinking that a worldly woman usually just wears black. Now I know that there's all kinds of versions of worldly woman, but I did not have a lot of exposure to style growing up.

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I grew up Pentecostal Holiness and the women around me, most of them didn't even wear pants. They wore long skirts. Many of them didn't cut their hair. They wore it up. No makeup. Style was not really a part of my upbringing. And so, I had to educate myself. And the examples that I had had of stylish worldly women, for whatever reason, most of them were Black.

And so, I started to invest in Black pieces to go into my wardrobe. And when I put them on, I felt a little bit more worldly. And then, I went to sommelier school. That was quite interesting. I don't know if you all remember the story. If you just started listening to the podcast, probably not.

But I grew up in a home where no one drank alcohol. It was not allowed. So, why I would want to go to sommelier school is still a mystery to me. Except for the fact that I wanted to be worldly, and I imagined a worldly woman, she knew how to order wine off of a wine list. And I had an Italian uncle who would come to visit us once a year and he was the only person in my family that my mother would allow to drink in our home.

And so, I would sit there and watch him drink wine and I was so intrigued. Thank you, Uncle Sal. Maybe you are part of the story that I'm just realizing. But anyway, I go to sommelier school and the first day, I'm so eager to learn – I'm such a good student. And so, I'm sitting in the front row and the sommelier instructor, who was French of course, asked the class, "What's your favorite wine?"

Well, consider I had not had many samples of wine. That's the funny part of the story. I think I had had merlot at the time, some white zinfandel. And so, I raised my hand, I'm so excited to answer, and I'm like, "I love rose wine." And the whole class just turned and looked at me like I was insane. Like, what is this gal doing here? And imagine me saying this in my country Southern accent. And later, I learned, "Hey, it's not called rose wine. It's called rosé." But hey, at least I was willing to speak up.

Any-who I go to sommelier school. What I'm trying to show you is the progression of what it's taken for me to change my identity. I kept visualizing, thinking like her, and then doing things to help me prove to myself that this is who I can become, this is who I'm becoming. Whoa, this is who I am.

And there was a day where I remember looking in the mirror and being like, "Whoa, sister, you are completely different, like a 180-degree different woman than you were all those years ago." And what it has taken is my willingness to feel the discomfort of change, because it's uncomfortable.

It's like letting a part of you die. It's like breaking up with the awful boyfriend who's a little abusive but you're used to him. You know he's always there. You know that when no one else is around, you can go back to the boyfriend, even though he may treat you like crap. It's like letting that go, that habit that familiarity. And that's what changing your identity feels like.



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And it's also taken me trusting in the compound effect. I talked about this in last week's episode, My Takeaways from 2021. That was one of the takeaways, trusting in the compound effect.

Oftentimes, we're so focused on the outcome and when we're not getting it immediately, we give up on ourselves. Our brain will tell us, "Well this isn't who you are. This is too hard," and all those kinds of thoughts are part of the past. They're part of the old you.

But when you listen to that part of you, you give up on yourself. And I was just determined, I was going to become a worldly woman one way or the other. And I failed along the way. I said rose wine. I wore awful outfits. And even to this day, I speak improper English, occasionally. But I've never let those little things stop me.

And over time, by visualizing her, thinking like her, and doing what she does, I feel in my heart I've become her. And I've used this process to build my business, to become a better CEO, to have better relationships, to build my wealth, to relax more, to enjoy my life more. This has been the process.

I've had to change my identity to allow for those experiences. So, I want you all to think about, who do you want to become this year? I want you to visualize her often, several times a day if you can, even for five minutes, two minutes. It doesn't matter. Just get in the habit of seeing her. Because if you want to become her, she's within you. I deeply, deeply believe that, or else you wouldn't want to be her.

So, you need to see her, the image of her. And then, I want you to just imagine, how does she think? What are her beliefs? And then, that's your work, to start thinking like her. And then finally, start doing what she does. Place yourself in new environments. Wear new clothes. Hang out with new people. Read new books. Try new things. Experiment in doing the things that you imagine her doing.

And I promise you, over time, if you commit to this process, you will change your identity and expand what is possible for you.

Hey, before you go, don't forget to sign up for my upcoming five-day live workshop called Live Like an Editor. You can head over to [schoolofselfimage.com/workshop](https://schoolofselfimage.com/workshop) and I cannot wait to see you inside.