



EPISODE NO. 376

The Fear of Being Seen

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "There's a certain kind of courage required to simply be yourself." Isn't that crazy? We have to have courage to be ourselves and especially to allow others to see us being ourselves, which is what we are talking about in today's episode. We are tackling the fear of being seen. So, let's dive in.

Welcome to the School of Self-Image, where personal development meets style. Here's your Hostess, Master Life Coach, Tonya Leigh.

Hey there, friends. Welcome back to a conversation that's close to every woman's heart, especially my own, because I used to struggle with this a lot, and I even find this fear creeping up from time to time. What is that fear? It's the fear of being seen. Yes, that little voice that whispers, "Stay hidden, play it safe. The spotlight isn't meant for a girl like you." At some point, I feel like every woman has heard this voice and felt the grip of it on her life and even let it dictate her choices. But today we're calling it out. We are going to shine a light on its shadow, unpack how it affects us, and most importantly, discover how to banish it back into the darkness because I want every single one of us to be willing to step into the spotlight of our lives.

So, think back to a time you hesitated, that brilliant idea that you had, that you kept bottled up, the talent that you tucked away, the opinion that you swallowed out of fear, maybe it was at a meeting, maybe it was in a classroom, or even in a casual conversation with friends. That hesitation, that flicker of fear before stepping into the light is our shared language. I think it's something that we all have struggled with. We as women often navigate a world that tells us; to be seen and not heard. We are sometimes praised for blending in. I remember one specific incident where I was in a group of people who I wasn't at all like, but because of how I showed up, how I didn't share my opinions, how I shape-shifted to match the energy of the people in the room, one of them said, "Oh my God, I had no idea, you're just like us." And I was thinking to myself, "No, I'm not. I think very differently. I have very different values," but I didn't speak up. I blended in.

And that's often been a celebrated trait for women. How many of us have been celebrated for following the script, the one that other people have written for us and tells us how to behave, how to think, how to act? What about not rocking the boat? These are attributes that are celebrated and when we're doing it, we may get a lot of positive feedback, but at the sacrifice of what? Our authenticity, our shine, what makes us such unique individuals, and when we dare break free, the fear of judgment, criticism, and even ridicule can rear its ugly head. And this fear has so many faces you all; the voice that tells us that our achievements are not a big deal, silencing our inner cheerleader and probably not even sharing your achievements with others, or the self-doubt that shrinks our voices and makes us hesitate to speak up and share our unique perspective.

Or maybe it's wearing the baggy clothes, as a shield, hiding our vibrant individuality. Or maybe it's the missed opportunities, the challenges that we tiptoe around, afraid to trip and fall into public view. Even the weight we subconsciously gain builds a wall of what we perceive to be protection between us and any unwanted attention. These are what I consider to be self-effacement acts and they may feel like protection, but they come at a big cost. Think about it; when you're not showing up and shining in your unique way, it's like you're stealing from your future. You're stealing from your own growth. You're stealing from your dreams. You're dimming your radiance. Because

when I think about going after extraordinary goals, one of the things that is required is that you're seen, on some level. Maybe you need to be seen for your opinions and ideas. Maybe you need to be seen physically on stages. Maybe you need to be seen in your community for whatever reason or even in your family.

So if we keep walking around, being afraid to be seen, we're basically walking away from our dreams. These acts of self-effacement, they silence our stories, our voices, and the very essence of who we are. But I'm here to tell you this; the fear of being seen doesn't have to be our sentence. It can be the starting point of a whole new rebirth, a reinvention, a journey to reclaim who you really are and embrace the power of visibility, because you may have the fear of being seen, but I want you to start to ask yourself, "How is it powerful for me to be visible?" Let's start feeding that narrative. Let's start feeding that belief system and look at all of the ways hiding and not being seen, what it's costing you, and then flip it, and look at all of the ways that being seen, and being visible is a superpower.

I was at a Mastermind not too long ago, maybe like three weeks ago, and one of the participants of this Mastermind was talking about her business and she was talking about all of the things that she's not doing. And her initial presentation of why she wasn't doing it seemed to be something that most of us would be like, "Yeah, I get why you're not doing that," because she just presented the superficial idea of what was going on. But once we started digging down, we realized that the reason why she wasn't doing what she knows she needs to do to grow her business is this one thing. It's the fear of being seen, the fear of judgment, the fear of public failure. And so it was easier for her to pretend, "Oh, it's because I have all these other things going on and this and this." But when we dug down, we're like, "Oh no, what's really going on is you have the fear of being seen."

And what I said to everyone in that room, I'm like, "I have never met a woman who wants to be invisible in her own life. Never. I've never met a woman that says, 'You know what? I'm really happy not being seen.'" Any woman that has ever said that to me when I've really talked with her and dug in, that sentence, that statement is coming

from fear, because she associates being seen with potential harm. And so she's convinced herself, "You know what? I'm okay being invisible." But really? Do you want to walk through your life not being seen or heard? I've never met a woman, who dig down deep, and that is her MO. Never. We all want to be seen and for the right people to appreciate us for our unique essence in this world.

And I know this journey intimately. I remember publishing my first blog post. It felt like launching myself into a piranha tank. What if my words were just babble? What if people thought I was a fraud? And those anxieties gnawed at me, but I pushed through anyway. And guess what? The world didn't explode. In fact, I found readers who connected with what I had to say, who resonated with my voice and my unique ideas, and who cheered me on. Some of them are still followers today. They still listen to this podcast. Some of them are members of the School of Self-image. All because I got over my fear of being seen. I was willing to be judged. I was willing to be ridiculed because I knew that what I wanted to share and the dreams that I had were going to require that I become visible and I learned a powerful lesson on that day.

Visibility isn't about perfection. It's about connection, about sharing the gifts that only you can offer. But the fear never fully vanishes, does it? I still get nervous before speaking on stages, my throat constricting around the words that I want to share, yet I climb onto that platform anyway, because the potential to inspire, to connect, to make a difference outweighs the fear, because visibility, again, is a superpower. So, how do we harness the superpower? How do we step into the spotlight without tripping over our own shadows? Well, here are a few of the tools that I like to use and I want to offer you. First, acknowledge the fear. Don't shame it, don't fight it. Don't judge it. Just recognize it as a normal human response, because you know what they say; what you resist, persists. So if you're thinking that the fear is something you need to get rid of and you're pushing against it, it's only going to grow bigger and it may never go away fully. So if we sit around waiting for fear to go away, we may spend a lifetime wishing and never having done.

And so I just like to understand it. What is causing it? What are the thoughts in my head creating the fear? You're going to fail. It's not going to be good enough. People are going to judge you. You're going to look stupid. You're going to look silly. You may fail. It's just recycled jargon that I know all too well. And so I just understand it and I like to look at the opposite. What if I do succeed? What if this touches someone? What if someone's life has changed because of this? What if this is going to help me become better and better? And by focusing in that direction, I build the courage to do the things anyway and to be seen. Also, sometimes it helps just to start small. Share your opinion in a small group. Wear that outfit that makes you feel powerful. Raise your hand in that meeting. Every step forward, however tiny, chips away at that grip of fear.

Also, it's important to build a support network of people who celebrate your unique voice, who celebrate your unique essence. So find those people that you can be your authentic self with who will cheer you on, even when you stumble, because their faith in you will be that compass when you feel like you're in the dark. Remember, and this is really important, visibility isn't about validation. If you go onto this journey of visibility wanting to be validated, you are going to, number one, be sorely disappointed, because although some people will validate you, you'll have others that don't.

So if you are stepping into the spotlight only for kudos and cheers and hoorahs, you are going to find that you're constantly looking to the external world as to who you should be, versus showing up and being visible as a contribution, as a way to express yourself to the world and then letting other people decide; do they resonate with you or don't they? And if they don't, then those aren't your people. Let them go. You want people in your life who are attracted to the true you, the real you, not the you that's showing up in the world, trying to get validation from other people. You being seen is about you leaving your unique mark on the world. And so if you are going on this journey just to be validated, you will dim your light.

You will constantly be shape-shifting to appease different crowds versus just being who you truly are.

The other thing I love to do is shift the narrative. A recent study from the American Psychological Association found that 75% of women experience imposter syndrome at some point in their lives. Now, that's not to say that you're a fraud because you're not, but rather that the fear of being seen as one can be paralyzing. But we can flip the script. Instead of seeing visibility as inviting criticism, remember that you're sharing your unique fire, your unique message, and your unique essence with the world. You're adding a vibrant thread to the tapestry of diverse voices, enriching the lives of those around you. Another survey, which I found fascinating, by Lean found that 56% of women reported holding back from voicing their opinions and meetings, because of fear of judgment.

Think about that. 56% of ideas, of solutions, of opinions were not shared because women had a fear of judgment. That's a big number. But by focusing on the positive, by visualizing the spark you might ignite with your words, the ideas that you will add into the mix that might be winning ideas, by stepping into that boardroom with the intention to inspire, to contribute, you transform the narrative. You become a catalyst for change, not a target for criticism. Now, that's not to say you won't be criticized. Anytime you are stepping out into the world, people love to criticize. And what I have found to be true in my business is that the more successful I become, the more I put myself out there, and the more criticism I get. But I chalk it up to, "Well, I'm just reaching more people." The percentages are still about the same. When it was just 100 people in my email list, I might get one or two emails. Now, you just multiply those numbers, but relatively speaking, it's still about the same. But so what?

Someone said recently, "No one doing better than you will ever criticize you." And I was like, "Oh, that's so true." It is very rare for someone who's doing better than you to criticize you because they're focused on other things. They're out there creating, accomplishing, and living their lives. They don't have time to be sitting around writing about you on forums, or posting about you in groups. They're out doing their own thing. And yet we give so much attention to people who aren't where you want to be. Focus on the feedback of the people that are where you want to be and stop giving so much attention to the people that you're so afraid of judging you, who you won't want to trade lives with.

And remember this too, perfection is an illusion. A Harvard Business Review study revealed that women are four times more likely than men to hold back from promotions due to self-doubt. But by embracing imperfection as a secret weapon, vulnerability, and authenticity, they're all powerful tools. People connect with your journey, not just the polished, end result. So take a deep breath and let your true self shine through. What I have known to be true is the more imperfect I am, the more vulnerable I am, the more I share the ins and outs of my life, the more people can connect to that, but I have to show up and be seen in order to get that message out.

The other thing you have to do to get over the fear of being seen is you have to challenge the inner critic, that voice whispering doubts in your ear, identify it, name it, and then talk back, seriously. When I was going through coach training with Martha Beck, she had us name our inner gremlin, and she was like, "I just want you to imagine that it's just sitting on your shoulder, just babbling all the time, just nonsense." Another study by the University of California, Berkeley, shows that challenging negative thoughts with positive affirmations can actually rewire your brain for optimism. So when you hear that little voice that says, "You can't do that," you need to counter back with, "I will do that." Or, "What if you fail," with, "Bring it on, I'm willing to fail and learn and grow." Remind yourself of your strengths, your past successes, and the value that you bring to the table, because you're worthy, you're capable, and you are enough. Now go out there and share from that place.

Also, take action one brave step at a time. Don't wait for the magic moment when the stars are aligned and everything is ready, and you have no fear. It's never going to come. Start small. Instead of hosting a big webinar with thousands of people, what if you just start by doing one video on your Instagram? Instead of publishing a blog post to hundreds of people, just share your opinion in a Facebook post. Instead of going all out and wearing that outfit that secretly you're dying to wear, but it freaks you out, wear one bold accessory. And start living in your own visibility. Because all of these things, even though they may seem insignificant at the time, there is a compound effect. You do this over and over, and not only are you building the self-image of, "I am a woman who isn't afraid to be seen, who is visible," but also all of these little acts add up over time, and it's so important for you to celebrate your milestones, big and small.

Acknowledging your progress, not just the final goal, is key to sustaining your motivation. I think we all should pat ourselves on the back more. For every victory, big and small, give yourself the applause. Give yourself the kudos for showing up and being seen, with sharing yourself with the world.

Also, I encourage you to find inspiration. Read about the women you admire who dared to defy the shadows. Expose yourself to positive role models to increase your feelings of empowerment and self-belief. Look for stories of those people who have conquered similar fears, who stepped into the light and made a huge difference as a result. And then finally, and this is a big one for me, and it's the one that I lean on when my fear wants to take over, and that is to remember your why. What ignites your soul? What impact do you want to have on the world, and why? Why do you want to do it? Hold it close. Let it fuel your courage and help you overcome your fears. Visualize your goals. Create a vision board if you need to. Write down your aspirations. Having that clear vision will keep you motivated, but understanding why you're going after it will hopefully be the crutch that you can lean on when you want to shrink or when you want to hide.

I know for me personally, my why is big. My why is not only I want to be an example to my daughter, but I want to be an example for all women that it doesn't matter where you came from, it doesn't matter about your past, you have the ability to change. You have the ability to create an extraordinary life. But guess what that requires? That I'm visible, that I'm visible to myself, which is important that we see ourselves, that we celebrate ourselves, but also that I'm visible in the world, so I can share my gifts, so I can share my knowledge and my wisdom that I've acquired over the years, and that hopefully it will inspire you.

So when that fear creeps in and my brain's like, "Tonya, you're going to fail. This is going to be the worst podcast ever. What are you doing?" I just remember my why and I'm like, "This isn't about perfection, it's about contribution." There's a big difference between the two. What I know to be true, and I said this earlier, no woman wants to be invisible. We crave connection. We yearn to contribute. We dream of leaving our mark

on the world. We dream of living beautiful, extraordinary lives, but the fear can hold us back. It can whisper to us all of these warnings of judgment and failure. But what if we didn't listen to the fear? What if we were willing to be judged and we were willing to fail? Think about how powerful you would be, because I think we go into this work, and we're like, "Okay, I'm going to do thought work that makes me try to believe that I can put myself out there and I won't get judged and criticized," and that's just not life. We can't control the people.

So I never want us to go into this thinking, "Oh, I won't be judged and I won't fail," because you may be. The work is being willing to be judged. The work is the willingness to fail because that's when you get all of your power back. The fear has no control over you in this part of your life when you're willing to be judged, when you're willing to get it wrong, when you're willing to be imperfect when you're willing to look stupid when you're willing to fail. All of a sudden the fear is gone. And that is a place where we get to reclaim our stories, our voices, our unique essence, and step into the spotlight of our lives.

I love watching children. Have you ever noticed children, before they've been socialized, they love being seen? I don't even know that they love being seen. They just love living life and expressing themselves, and the result is we see them, they draw our attention, and they draw our eyes, because of how they're living. I don't think they are like, "Oh, look at me." They're like, "Oh, I'm just going to have a good time. I'm going to do my thing." But then we lose that. So what if the work really is about you just falling in love with yourself and your life again and letting us witness it, knowing some people may not like it, but the right ones will."

So, you are worthy, you are powerful, and you are meant to be seen. Shine on my friends. Step into that spotlight and let the world see you, celebrate you, and trust that the right ones will find you. Have a beautiful week. I'll see you in the next episode.

Hey, are you ready to transform your self-image, but lack direction and support? If so, I'd like to invite you to join the School of Self-Image. This is an exclusive monthly membership where you'll create your own, powerful before and after story. Through

weekly classes and coaching, you'll learn powerful techniques on how to elevate the quality of your mindset, style, and surroundings to change how you see yourself and create extraordinary results in your life. Head over to schoolofselfimage.com/join to learn more.