

Ep #83: Caring About What Other People Think (Part 2) – How to Stop



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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You're listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast, Episode 83. Today, we're continuing to talk about caring about what other people think, Part 2. Specifically, how to stop caring about what they think. You ready? Let's go.

Welcome to *The Less Stressed Lawyer*, the only podcast that teaches you how to manage your mind so you can live a life with less stress and far more fulfillment. If you're a lawyer who's over the overwhelm and tired of trying to hustle your way to happiness, you're in the right place. Now, here's your host, lawyer turned life coach Olivia Vizachero.

Well, hello there. How's it going? As you already gathered from the intro, I am continuing this two-part episode about caring about what other people think. In the last episode, we talked about what it costs you to care about what other people think, the impact that caring about other people's opinions has on your life.

Quite typically, it's a negative impact that it has on your life, right? So, you've had some time to let that marinate, to start to create some awareness around what caring about other people's opinions is costing you. How it's impacting your life, whether it's on a day-to-day level or on a much grander scale.

I gave you some examples of ways that I've overcome caring about other people's opinions and how it's benefited me. So, hopefully, we've started to make the case for why you might not want to care about what other people think.

Now, I work with a handful of people that think it's important to care about other people's opinions, and I just want to offer you, it's okay to not care about them. Bad things won't happen if you care about your own opinion more than you care about other people's opinions of you. Okay?

If that seems foreign to you, you're going to have to trust me a little bit on this one. I want to walk through a framework that you can use in your own life, if maybe you're receptive to this, if maybe you're not resistant to the

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idea that it actually can be okay to not give so much credence to what other people think.

If you've gotten on board with the idea that you want to stop caring about what other people think, that you don't need to be preoccupied with it, that it's okay if you're not obsessed with controlling other people's opinions of you, and you don't want to devote all of this time, attention, and energy to caring about other people's opinions of you, then you need a framework to do it.

A lot of people feel like they don't know where to get started. They don't know how to not care about what other people think. So, that's what we're going to cover in today's episode; we're going to talk about the “how.”

Now, the first step to getting over your preoccupation about caring about other people's opinions of you, is you need to really understand why you care in the first place. There are a couple different reasons that we care. First and foremost, it's part of our primitive conditioning as humans.

Belonging to the group, belonging to the majority, being a part of that cohesive communal unit, that is a survival mechanism. It is a way that we ensure our survival. It's a way that we protect ourselves. I want you to think back to the hunter/gatherer days.

Your existence quite literally depended on your ability to be part of the group. You couldn't do everything that you would need to do in order to survive on your own, by yourself. You needed to rely on belonging to the collective in order to survive. And that's just a part of our human conditioning that we haven't evolved out of. So, that desire to belong, that push to belong, that's still within us.

Now, what's good news, is that we can be pretty self-reliant. I do believe that as humans we need other people in our lives, in different ways, in order to really thrive and be our best, and to have the most enriched experience on this planet during our time here. But for the most part, we

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can provide for ourselves. Very different from how we couldn't provide for ourselves in these primitive days, right?

So, even though we've evolved out of that, that we've advanced enough to where we can pretty much just provide for ourselves, we haven't evolved enough to the point where we no longer have this primitive condition where we have this desire to belong. This is just a protective mechanism.

You want to know that it's there, just to simply understand where this drive, this desire, this internal longing is coming from, to wanting to belong, to wanting to be accepted by the group. Okay?

We're also taught to care. In addition to our primitive conditioning, if you're thinking about the nature versus nurture, nature is the primitive conditioning, but nurturing, meaning how we're raised, also plays a big role in our caring about what other people think. So, we're taught to care about other people's opinions of us.

Think about what you learned growing up. Where did you learn to care about other people's opinions of you? You probably learned this both explicitly and implicitly. One of the ways we typically learn this growing up, oftentimes from our parents or other authority figures, they will say to us, "If you do X, people will think this about you. You can't do Y, because if you do it, people will think that."

So, we get taught that our actions determine someone else's judgments of us. That our actions beget a certain viewpoint, a certain opinion. That that is bad, and we need to protect ourselves from that happening. That we need to be concerned about what other people think.

Also, if we're being really honest here, this is a way that people control other people. I like to think of this as the poor man's control mechanism. As you go through life, you become intimately aware that you don't actually have the ability to control other people's behavior. We can't control what another person does or doesn't do.

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Instead of just accepting the fact that we don't control another person's behavior, what people will do is they will attempt to judge or shame or guilt someone in the hopes of altering their behavior. Right? If you fear judgment and someone judges you, or threatens to judge you, if you do something, you may not engage in that behavior to avoid the judgment.

Again, this is the poor man's control mechanism. It recognizes that people can't actually force you to do something against your will. But they can attempt to influence you by threatening to shame, guilt or judge you. This is very effective.

If you've been taught that you're responsible for how other people feel, and you're responsible for controlling other people's opinions, and that you need to guard against and prevent anyone else from having a negative opinion of you, this is an effective way that people can manipulate you.

We see this a lot in organized religion. Or with parents raising children, wanting to control their behavior. We also see this in friend groups and different relationships, even romantic relationships. Someone will judge or attempt to guilt or shame the other person.

Now, no one can guilt or shame you without your permission. So, you have to change your own thoughts, to feel ashamed or to feel guilty, in order for this to be effective. Another person can't make you feel those feelings. You cause yourself to experience those emotions because of the thoughts that you choose to think.

So, that's always within your control, whether or not you choose that emotional experience for yourself. But you want to be aware, if you are someone who chooses that emotional experience for yourself, why is this happening?

It's because you were taught to care about what other people think. And someone might want you to care about their opinion, in order for you to alter your behavior. Whether or not you succumb to this tactic is up to you though, it's optional.

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Now, another way that we get taught to care about what other people think happens in a more implicit way. It actually happens in both negative ways and in positive ways. So, one of the negative ways that I see this implicitly play out is by hearing other people judge other people. It's not being directed at you, but you're watching someone else have an opinion about someone else, they articulate it, and you bear witness to it.

You form a negative association with that person's opinion about the third person, and you want to protect yourself against it. So, you learn to care about what other people think and alter your behavior accordingly.

The other time this happens is a more positive experience. Which is where you receive praise for doing something that someone else thinks is “good,” or “acceptable.” There is no true, inherent good, that's just a subjective opinion about a particular action that you might take.

But when we receive praise for our behavior, it feels good because we then give ourselves permission to think positive thoughts about ourselves. And because that experience feels good, we learn to care about what other people think.

Now, unfortunately, if you care, in a positive sense, what other people think, you'll also tend to care in the negative sense about what people think, right? If the positive feedback and praise has you feeling excellent about yourself, then negative feedback and criticism and judgment will make you feel badly about yourself.

So, you really want to strive to get to the place where you don't care about another person's opinion of you, whether it's good or bad. You really just want to care about your own opinion of yourself.

These are some examples of why and how we're taught to care about other people's opinions in the first place. Actually, let me add one more example of how we're taught implicitly to care about other people's opinions. Think about the people who raised you, they probably care about what other people think as well.

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And when they model this for you, you will learn that it is important to care about other people's opinions, about other people's judgments of you, right? If your parents are concerned about what other people think it shows you that other people's opinions are important. So, this is another implicit lesson that we get taught, that we pick up over time as we're growing up.

Okay, now that you understand why you have this habit of caring about what other people think, why we as humans have this habit about caring what other people think, it's time to break the habit. In order to do that, we need to identify the judgments that you think people have about you.

We started this exercise in the last episode, in part one of this two-part series. But if you missed that episode, or it's not fresh in your memory, you can go through and complete this exercise again. I just want you to take a second and think about: What are you afraid other people think about you? Finish the sentence: People think I'm..., and fill in the blank.

Complete that sentence as many ways as you can think of completing it. You can even get more specific; you can identify specific groups of people. So, "My clients think I'm... My friends think I'm... My colleagues think I'm... My boss thinks I'm... My parents think I'm... My partner thinks I'm... My children think I'm..." Go ahead and identify all the judgments that you think people have about you.

Then, from there, you have to go through, and for each opinion that you're afraid someone thinks about you, for each judgment you're afraid someone's making about you, you have to go through and distinguish the facts from the story that you're telling about them.

So, the first question I want you to ask yourself is: Did the person or the people who you think hold this opinion about you, did they actually say this to your face? Is this a direct quote? Did this happen verbatim or are you reading this meaning into a situation? Is this just the story you're telling yourself about a particular set of facts? You really want to separate what did they actually say versus what are you making it mean?

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For instance, did someone tell you to revise something? If that's the fact, are you making it mean that they think you're not smart? Or that they think you're not a good writer? They didn't say those things, you're just assigning meaning to what they said. That's the opinion you're telling yourself that they have of you, even though they never articulated that opinion to you.

Did someone ask you to work over the weekend, and you make that mean that they think you're lazy? They didn't call you lazy, you're just assigning that opinion to the person even though they never articulated it to you.

When you do this, you're going to notice two different options appear; two different options become available to you. In the first instance, you recognize that you're just giving this additional meaning to the facts. Someone actually didn't express this opinion to you. Your brain is just offering this up to you.

So, in those instances, what I want to offer you is that you can check it with yourself. Option number one is, can you just make it mean something else? There's whatever they actually said or did, or they've never even said anything or did anything, but whatever the facts are, can you just tell yourself a different story?

Can you admit to yourself that you aren't a mind reader, that you don't actually know what they're thinking, that they might be thinking this instead? Can you put a more positive spin on the situation? Can you read different meaning into it? Read a meaning that's a lot less malicious, or a lot less negative than the one that you've been assigning to that story?

That's the first option. If you can tell yourself a different story, and you can just give different meaning to a particular set of facts, you're going to feel better. You just get to change the narrative about the opinion that the person holds. Because you don't even know what the opinion is to begin with.

However, sometimes that doesn't work. A good example of this is when I was getting started marketing myself on social media. I was creating a

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story in my own head about what other people thought. No one had reached out to me to tell me that they thought my marketing was stupid, that coaching was stupid, that I couldn't hack it as an attorney. No one was telling me that; that was all in my own head.

The facts were, I was marketing. I think that's the actually the only fact now that I think of it. No one was reaching out to say anything to me. The facts were, I was marketing, and some of my former colleagues were connected with me on LinkedIn.

Now, I can't even say that a fact was that they saw it, because I don't know that to be true. I would guess that it was likely that some of my former colleagues were seeing my stuff on LinkedIn, but I can't guarantee it. So, with that being said, at the time, the only facts that I had were that I was connected with former colleagues on LinkedIn, and I was also marketing and posting content on LinkedIn.

The story that I crafted in my beautiful brain was that they were judging me. That they thought what I was doing was stupid. That they thought I was a failure. So, option one, in this instance, when I go in and I separate fact from story, I could just assign different meaning. I could come up with a different story, a different narrative.

For instance, I could come up with the story that my colleagues, my former colleagues, were happy for me that I was pursuing something that made me happy, right? Or that they thought what I was doing was cool, or useful or valuable. I could have told myself that story instead.

But I'm going to be really honest with you, I tried to coach myself but this thought, these judgments, these opinions that I had come up with in my brain, they were really, really sticky. So, as much as I tried to tell myself a different story about other people's opinions about what I was doing, I wasn't able to get it to stick.

So, option number two, if you can't change the assumptions that you've been making about other people's opinions, or if the person actually said

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the opinion that you are now thinking about, if they actually said it verbatim, then here's what you need to do. Instead, you need to decide what you want to do about the judgment.

To start, you need to notice the impact that these thoughts have on you. How do you feel when you think them? How do you feel when you think, "People think I'm...? He or she thinks I'm...? They think I'm...?"

When you think about the opinion you're afraid people have of you, or the opinion that they told you they have you, check in with yourself? What's the one word emotion you experience when you think about this? Do you feel inadequate? Do you feel ashamed? Do you feel insecure? Or do you feel attacked and misunderstood?

If you're feeling inadequate, ashamed, guilty, or insecure, part of you is agreeing with this judgment. Part of you is agreeing with their opinion of you.

If you're feeling misunderstood, you probably don't agree with it. It's always important to check in here, does part of you agree with it? But if you don't agree with it, or there's a part of you that doesn't agree with it, then you're going to feel misunderstood. And based on how you're feeling, it's going to help you figure out how you want to move forward. How you proceed in light of this judgment that you're on the receiving end of.

So, if part of you agrees with the judgment, with the opinion, you want to start with asking yourself, do you want to agree with it? If you do want to agree with it, then there really isn't a problem here, you can release the negative emotion.

If you're like, "Yeah, that's kind of right about me. That actually makes sense," then you, and the person with the opinion, are actually in agreement and we don't have an issue to resolve here.

Now, if you don't want to agree with it, if part of you agrees with that, or all of you agrees with it but you don't want to agree with it, what you need to

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do is make the case for how it's not true. So, whatever the judgment is, make the counter argument. As you do this, you also are reiterating to yourself that opinions about you aren't true. Opinions aren't facts, okay? Opinions are just subjective statements about facts. They don't have truth to them.

They're just opinions, so make the case against the negative opinion. Talk through it: How is this opinion of me not true? And then, decide what you want to think about yourself instead? Then work on finding evidence to support that belief.

Now, if you fall into the second camp, if you don't agree with the judgment, if you don't agree with the opinion, and you're feeling misunderstood, you get to think about, what do I want to do instead?

A lot of people in this instance want to start to defend themselves. I really want you to question your urge to do that. I really want you to think through that. Does it make sense for you to defend yourself? For you to correct the record? For you to try and convince the other person that they're wrong about you?

Or might it be more effective, and a better use of your time, to simply allow yourself to feel misunderstood, to feel judged, to feel criticized? When you think about defending yourself, I want you to think about, what's your motive behind defending yourself? Are you hoping to convince the other person to change their opinion? Are you trying to change the other person's mind?

If you are, really question whether or not you want to invest time into defending yourself. The reason it's important to take a look at this, to slow yourself down and really question whether or not you want to do that, is because the truth of the matter is, you can't control what another person thinks.

So, there are two huge truths, when it comes to caring about what other people think, that you really want to internalize. Truth number one is that

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people's opinions of you are not true. Opinions aren't true. Facts are true. Circumstances are true. Another person's opinion of you is not true. It's also not false. That's not the measurement of an opinion. Okay? Opinions are simply opinions, and every person gets to form their own opinions.

Which brings me to my second truth that you want to accept, is that other people's opinions of you aren't within your control. Think about examples of things where other people have opinions that differ from you, and you don't even think to correct it, or you don't think to make the other person wrong.

Think about someone's food preferences. Some people like chocolate, other people don't. We don't make chocolate right or wrong based on people's opinions of chocolate. Same thing with, I don't really love kiwis. I think my cousin loves kiwis. I don't love the texture of them. Now, that doesn't make Kiwis good or bad. It doesn't make her right or me right, or her wrong or me wrong. We just simply get to have different opinions about kiwis.

Same thing with pineapple on pizza. It isn't inherently good or inherently bad. No one's opinion about pineapple being on pizza is right or wrong. We simply just get to have different opinions. Same thing with restaurant recommendations or movies.

Some people, my dad for example, he doesn't like *The Godfather*, he kind of thinks it's boring. It is my favorite movie. Now I don't make him wrong, he's right for him and I get to be right for me. But neither of us are inherently right or inherently wrong. It's simply, we hold different opinions about the same thing. Which we're perfectly allowed to do.

No matter how hard I tried to convince my dad that *The Godfather* is amazing, he still holds his same opinion, as is his right to do so. He's allowed to do that. Again, that does doesn't make him right or me wrong, or vice versa. It's just that we have different opinions about a thing.

Now, we mistakenly get taught growing up that we actually do have input and influence over another person's opinion. But if you think about the

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examples that I'm offering to you, if you've tried to convince someone's taste in movies to change and it hasn't worked, you've done it to no avail, you know you can't control another person's opinion.

For instance, a really good client and friend of mine, Jen, she loves the movie *The Matrix*, and I can't stand it. That doesn't make her wrong or me wrong. No matter how much she tries to get me to love it, I'm not going to love it. That's just my opinion about the movie and I'm not going to change it.

We notice our same lack of control about other people's opinions or judgments when we try and convince someone to change their political viewpoints. Right? Typically, that does not work. Same thing if you've ever tried to cheer someone up. I think there's really no better example of this, of our lack of control over another person's opinion, over another person's thought process, than when we attempt to cheer someone up and it doesn't work.

It's because we don't control their opinions. We don't control what other people think, and we don't control how they feel. So, you've got to, if you want to care less about what other people think, you have to accept these two truths.

You have to accept that other people's opinions of you aren't true. If you understand the other people's opinions of you aren't true, then you get to concern yourself so much less with what other people think. If it's not true, why does it matter?

Then, the second truth, which is, you don't actually have control over another person's opinions. They get to form their own opinions. They get to have them, and you don't get to change them. So, why expend any energy trying to change them if you can't? When you accept these two truths, you really free yourself from carrying about other people's opinions of you.

So, you want to figure out what you think other people think. Separate fact from story. If no one actually said the opinion verbatim, decide, can you tell

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yourself a different story? Can you change the narrative? If you can't, or someone actually did say their opinion to you, decide or figure out how you feel about it.

Do you feel attacked and misunderstood? Or do you feel insecure, inadequate, guilty, ashamed? Depending on how you feel, it's going to depend and determine what you do from there.

If you feel inadequate and insecure and ashamed and guilty, if you're feeling badly about yourself, a part of you agrees with the judgment. And you've got to figure out what you want to do about that. Do you want to agree with it, yes or no?

If you don't, figure out how the judgment or the opinion is not true. And then decide what you want to think about yourself instead. Make a case for it. Find evidence to support that new belief.

If you fall into the misunderstood, attacked, criticized camp, and you feel as though someone is being wrong about you, then decide if you can just release your caring about it? Can you just allow yourself to feel misunderstood on purpose? Can you just sit in the discomfort of letting someone be wrong about you, rather than needing to defend yourself? Or trying to control the narrative? Or get someone to change their opinion, get someone to change their mind?

Which, if you've had someone try to get you to change your mind, you probably know that's a futile exercise. So, can you just let yourself feel misunderstood? There's so much power in just allowing yourself to feel misunderstood. I truly believe this is a superpower when you learn to master it.

Lastly, one thing that I want everyone to practice, that will help you get better and better and better at caring less about what other people think, is really learning to cultivate your own self confidence. The way that we do that is, number one, develop your own self-concept.

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Figure out what you want to believe about yourself. How do you think about yourself? What opinions do you want to have? Make up your own mind before anyone else makes up theirs. Then evaluate yourself frequently. How do you think you're doing? Make up your mind before you receive feedback.

I do this every time I do a presentation. Before I ever receive feedback from someone else, I've made up my own mind. How do I think I've done? How do I think I did? What could I have done better? What did I do really well? What will I do differently next time?

You also get to decide, are you even open to feedback? Now, you can't perfectly control whether someone gives you unsolicited feedback or not, because people have free will. But I do like to decide, am I even open to feedback? Do I want to care about positive feedback? Just like I want to decide, do I want to care about negative feedback?

I really want to make sure I monitor myself for whether I am being intentional about being open to different types of feedback, whether it's positive or negative. If you care about the positive feedback, you're going to care about the negative feedback. So, take that into consideration when you're deciding what types of feedback to care about and to concern yourself with. Okay?

These are the steps about how to care less about what other people think. I hope you walk yourself through this process. This is a process that you get to bring with you into your day-to-day life to help you care less about other people's opinions of you.

I want you to go out there and develop a strong opinion of yourself. Develop your self-concept, evaluate yourself frequently, make up your own mind about you, about how you've done, before you receive feedback.

These are great ways to guard against being preoccupied with what other people think. But remember, no matter what someone thinks about you, their opinions of you are not true. You can't control their opinions, so don't

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concern yourself with them. Free up your time, free up your mental energy, to devote yourself to something that is within your control instead. All right?

Okay, my friends, that is what I have for you this week. I hope you have a beautiful week. I will talk to you in the next episode.

Thanks for listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast. If you want more info about Olivia Vizachero or the show's notes and resources from today's episode, visit www.TheLessStressedLawyer.com.