



## Episode 16: The Best Way to Stop the “Shoulds”

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. I have two questions for you today. Here's the first one. On a scale of 1 to 10, how critical are you about yourself? 1 means I always talk kindly to myself, and 10 means I beat myself up, I would never talk to a friend the way I talk to myself. What number did you choose?

Many of us have perfectionist inner critic voices that are quick to judge us, our actions, and even our thoughts. And the sad thing is that many of us see being hard on ourselves as normal and even necessary. I have clients who say, if I'm not hard on myself, I'm worried I will slack off or get lazy. Or that I won't do everything that I need to do.

Here's my second question. When you talk to yourself in a critical way, how does it feel in your body? When you use language with yourself that is full of should and I have to, and I need to, what do you notice? From my personal experience, I know that it doesn't feel comfortable at all. In my body, when my inner critic gets loud, it makes my head throb and my stomach get tied in knots. It makes me hold my breath and forget to fully exhale.

Being hard on oneself is detrimental to our body, our thinking, and our spirit. It undermines our compassion for ourselves and others. It keeps us from thinking expansively and optimistically.

So let's stop the shoulds. Let's shift our self judgement into greater self-acceptance. Are you with me?

The tool I'm going to share with you today is a powerful one that can help you stop the shoulds and feel more positive about the choices you're making and how you're spending your time. This tool will help you increase your peace of mind and help you quiet your inner critic – at least temporarily – so that you can enjoy your life a bit more.

This tool we're talking about today is a tool of permission. Permission means allowing yourself to try something out, to take a chance, to make space for something that's important. It's a concept, and it's also an actionable coaching tool.

When you use the tool of permission, and make it actionable by creating a permission slip, you are giving yourself space to try out a new behavior, see a situation from a new perspective, or even to not do an item that you feel like you should be doing.

Permission is powerful and as adults, we often forget to use this concept to help ourselves. Instead, we get stuck in the land of shoulds, the land of to do lists and high expectations. Our perfectionist inner critic tells us we have to do it all, and we have to do it perfectly, or else. Here's an example from one of my clients.

The other day I was working with a woman who's a leader in finance. One of her leadership goals is to delegate more. Delegating is challenging for her, because her inner critic tells her that she should only delegate tasks that are fully thought out and planned out, tasks that have clear guidelines and outcomes. Her inner critic says that if she's not completely sure about a task, she has to do it herself.

When I asked her what the cost was of all these shoulds, she got a bit teary. She said that they make her feel overwhelmed, like she isn't being a good leader, and this subsequently demotivates her. Because she feels like she can't delegate, she then spends her time in the weeds and she doesn't make time to do big picture thinking or long-term strategizing. Does this sound familiar?

So we talked about permission. And I asked her, if you were going to give yourself permission around something involving delegating, what would that be?

She said that she would give herself permission to not have the details fleshed out before she delegated a task. Now, my clients know that when they use that word not, I usually invite them to reframe it.

So I next asked her, if you do not have to have the task completely planned out, what do you have to do?

She said, I do get to frame it as a work in progress. I do get to ask other people for input. And just like that, she gave herself permission to delegate in an easier, less self-critical, more self-accepting way.

As we talked, she also gave herself permission to collaborate, to be transparent, to be messy, and to give her direct report an opportunity to build their leadership muscle.

When I asked her to check in with her body to see what she noticed now, she said that she felt lighter, more motivated, and like delegating now seemed easy.

Giving ourselves permission relaxes our body, and makes the hard stuff seem easier.

It also helps our brain. When we are in a permission mindset, our brain shifts its thinking. It shifts from rigid, judgmental thinking to expansive, positive thinking and seeing a way forward. Permission helps our brain out of the chaos and rigidity into action and what's really important.

Choosing to think, talk about, and grant ourselves permission is the first step. The second step is to operationalize this concept. This is the fun part, because it's about making a permission slip.

Do you know what I mean by a permission slip? It's essentially a signed agreement in which a named person is allowed to participate in something. It says that something's allowed to happen. When someone signs a permission slip, they are intentionally endorsing the activity.

If you were ever a kid or have kids you're responsible for, you've likely encountered permission slips. When my kids were in elementary school, it was exciting when they brought one home, because it meant that a field trip was coming up.

As adults, we can co-opt the permission slip for ourselves. When we create and sign permission slips for us, it can help decrease the shoulds, quiet the inner critic, and increase our peace of mind.

How do you make a permission slip? It's easy. Just take some paper and start writing. Start with I – and then put your name – give myself permission to, and then fill in the specific permissions you want to grant yourself at this time or around this situation.

You might give yourself permission to be messy, to not have all the answers, to ask one person for help, or to write a crappy first draft of a blog post.

After you write your specific permissions, sign your name at the bottom.

Then put your permission slip where you'll see it and remember it – maybe near your computer, on your fridge, or on your bathroom mirror.

Right now, I have a permission slip on the wall of my office that says I give myself permission to postpone sending emails at the end of the day. This is so that I can make sure to take a 20-minute walk to the river near my house.

Let's bring this tool of permission to you:

What do you want to give yourself permission to do or try in the next few weeks? In case you need some inspiration, here are some real examples from real clients.

My client who is looking for her next job is going to give herself permission to be in a curious and exploration mindset.

My client who gets bogged down during the work week is giving herself permission to set one hour a week aside for big picture thinking and writing.

My client who is overworked and overwhelmed from all of her job responsibilities is giving herself permission to limit her weekend social activities so that she can recharge.

In the next few weeks, listen to the shoulds you hear in your self-talk and when you talk about your life to other people. When you start hearing those shoulds, stop. Ask yourself, what do I want to give myself permission around right now?

Make a permission slip, sign your name, and place it where you'll see it. Then email me a picture to [deb@debelbaum.com](mailto:deb@debelbaum.com)

Thanks so much for listening and being part of my community. I hope that using this new tool of permission in the next few weeks gives you more ease of body, mind, and spirit. And that it moves your thinking in the right direction for you. Until next time!