



Episode 38: One Way to Avoid the Comparison Trap

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. Tell me if this has ever happened to you. You feel like you're doing great -- at your job, as a parent, or in life...and then you hear about someone else who seems to be doing it just a little bit better. Maybe you started out at the same time, and they're further along in their career. Maybe you're driving a 10-year-old minivan, and they just bought a new car. Or maybe you're worried about a personal situation, and they seem to move through their difficult times with ease and confidence.

When this type of thinking happens, we fall into the trap of comparing. One of my coach friends says that comparison is the thief of joy. So true. When we compare, we rob ourselves of happiness. We see scarcity instead of abundance. We hear our inner critic instead of our inner wisdom.

The cost of investing our energy in comparing is substantial. Being critical and frustrated with ourself causes a biochemical stress reaction in our body. When this happens, the increased stress chemicals course through our body and around our brain, and impair our effective prefrontal cortex thinking.

When we are in the comparison trap, our stress prevents us from thinking productively. Our energy is constricted, and our presence and confidence diminishes.

Now, I'm guessing you know that comparing is unproductive, and yet you might feel powerless to avoid it. The good news is that there is something you can do when you feel yourself getting constricted by comparing. There is a concept and tool that can help, and that is what we'll talk about today.

The concept and tool to use to escape the comparison trap is called the leader within. The leader within is a part of all of us. It's the essence of who we are: our strengths, our values, our personal power, and our purpose.

When you connect to your leader within, you shift the focus of your thoughts from comparing to others to celebrating you. Connecting to your leader within invites your energy to shift from constricted and tense, to calm and grateful.

Because I'm using the word leader, let's back up a bit to talk about this word and leadership in general. When I'm coaching my clients, I use the word leader a lot, because I believe that we are all leaders, regardless of our title or number of direct reports.

My framework for thinking and talking about leadership and what it means to be a leader comes from my coaching certification program, Coaches Training Institute. Their definition of a leader is someone who takes responsibility for their world. That's it. They define leadership as taking responsibility for how you show up, your impact, and your choices.

We are all leaders, because we all have an opportunity to impact our world, whether that's at home, at work, or in our community.

And there are different ways we can lead. The co-active leadership model builds on this core idea of what it means to be a leader and identifies different ways we might lead in different situations.

In certain situations, we might lead from the front of the room, literally and energetically. Being a leader in front means setting and sharing a vision with others and then enrolling them in that vision.

In other situations, we might be leading in other ways. We might be a leader beside, which is all about partnership and synergy, and partnering with someone in a mutually supportive way.

We might be a leader behind, leading by serving others. Also called servant leadership, this is when we step back into a supportive role, to empower others.

And sometimes we are leader in the field, which means we lean into our intuition to notice what's happening around us and what's needed, and then naming what we see and sense.

While each of these ways of leading is important, they all center around the critical foundation of the tool we're talking about today -- our leader within.

Our leader within is the foundation of all other ways of leading, because it's the part of us that knows that we are creating our world with every thought, action, and word we speak. Our leader within is the basis from which we want to show up in the world, because it's grounded in our strengths, values, purpose, and priorities.

We need a strong leader within to stay centered in this often chaotic world, because having a strong leader within allows us to trust our decisions more, to feel confident and advocate for ourselves, and to take action to move forward.

Making choices from our leader within feels empowering because those choices are grounded in what's most important to us.

This idea of our leader within is a concept that we can make real. It's a force that has power. And the cool thing is that there's a simple way to connect to and strengthen our leader within. Here's how. Take your hands and put them over your heart. You can even try it now.

When you put your hands over your heart and feel your heartbeat and energy, you are connecting to your leader within. And when you are connected to the power of you, it's easier to tune out the voice of comparison and tune into all that you have achieved, all the values that matter to you, all the purpose you focus on, and all the knowledge you carry. When you tune into all of this, the joy thief of comparison will lessen its hold on you. You'll be less preoccupied with others and happier and more confident to be you.

Here's a personal example. One thing that really gets my negative comparison mindset going is when I see others post easily and frequently about their achievements on social media. For some reason, this activates my comparison joy thief. It impairs my prefrontal cortex thinking and awakens my inner critic, making me doubt my social media and marketing abilities.

So, when that happens, if I want to feel differently, I can connect to my leader within. I put my hands over my heart, and I remember all the things I am working on. I think about all of the purposeful work I do. And I remember that I get to make social media choices that align with my values. When I reconnect

with my leader within, I immediately feel clearer and more grounded. I am able to celebrate myself, and, when I feel this way, I am actually able to celebrate others more easily, as well.

I want you to have a strong, authentic leader within, too, that you can use to when you feel constricted by comparison.

So let's bring this to you.

In the next few weeks, when you feel yourself getting jealous or falling into that trap of comparing, try this.

Take a deep breath, put your hands over your heart, and tune into your leader within.

Ask yourself these questions and listen for the answer:

1. What's my purpose?
2. What values matter most to me?
3. What accomplishments am I proud of?
4. What choices do I have?

Shifting the focus from others to you is an opportunity to celebrate you, all you've done, and all you're excited to do. When we focus on us, we direct our energy toward our values, purpose, and priorities – and what I know is that when our energies are focused toward these things, we show up clear, confident, and fully in our authentic leadership.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you found today's episode interesting and want to talk more about leadership, please reach out. Email me at deb@debelbaum or schedule a complimentary consult through my website: debelbaum.com. I look forward to it, because I'm here to help you create your best self at home and at work, so that you're confident you're moving in the right direction for you.

Until next time!