



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Episode # 29: The Skill of Being Kind to Yourself**

You are listening to episode 29 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. Nowadays, it's not uncommon for us to be a little more attentive to the importance of kindness in our interactions with others. But have you ever thought about the importance of kindness to yourself?

We high-achievers really don't invest much time in that. It can feel, well, superfluous. However, if you join us in today's episode, you'll learn that your power and influence really do depend on avoiding this blind spot. Plus, I'll share with you two very easy-to-implement practices that will help you build the skill of kindness to yourself.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to *Mastering The Power Skills*, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to grow your own

power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Well, hello, everyone. If you're listening to this episode on its original air date, then you know that today is Valentine's Day. And the topic we're going to discuss is my valentine to you, particularly if you're a high achiever because, let's face it, we high achievers need a little love too.

So okay, you high achievers, listen up. I know you're out there because, let's face it, who else would be interested in the power skills? Am I right? I suspect I am because, you know, I could write a book on high achievers. I'm certainly one of them myself. And not only have I worked my whole life with them, I like to hang out with them as well.

For me, there's so much to love about high achievers. For example, the way we not only look at life as an opportunity to learn and grow and become better versions of ourselves but how we seriously work hard at that and hold ourselves accountable to that goal. Or the energy we direct to generating good ideas and to mobilizing and aligning others around them. Or the value of the contributions we make and how they often result in our workplace becoming a better place.

And when we're at our best, the way we can bring heart and soul to the awesome responsibility of being a leader. So these are all really wonderful attributes to have, and no wonder I'm drawn to people who have them. Lots of us are. And you should own the specialness of that if you're a high achiever.

But can we also be a little candid here and admit that we high achievers can also be a bit, well, wobbly on some things? Some who don't fit the high achiever profile can actually be better than we are in certain areas. And in fact, there are one or two areas where we definitely can have a blind spot.

By blind spot, I mean that however smart and insightful we normally are, we collectively often don't see something. And when that thing gets pointed out to us, we can easily forget it or deprioritize it. And that's not good, guys, right?

So today, we're going to talk a little bit about one of those blind spots; the skill of being kind. Not to others; there's already a lot of good advice out there on that. And hopefully, that's something you're already attentive to. But high achievers usually are, well, kind of terrible at being kind to themselves.

Listen, there's nothing wrong with driving yourself hard to achieve important and meaningful things. But if you're at the same time also harshly judging yourself and

whipping yourself to perform at superhuman levels when you do that, well, that's just plain cruel.

Also, if you're constantly making up stressful stories about the events that are happening around you in the workplace, well, that's plain cruel, too. You may think the story you're telling yourself is reality, but we know from numerous scientific studies that you've merely developed a, well, hypothesis, I guess, to make sense of a series of events.

It might be a plausible hypothesis. It might even be what we could regard as an initial working hypothesis. But it's not in any way truly real. Why do I say that? Because you haven't objectively tested that hypothesis, and you haven't considered the merits of other versions. All you've done is create a possible scenario that hijacks your emotions and makes you feel stressed, anxious, and miserable.

Now, I could tell you more about why we high achievers are prone to being unkind to ourselves, but that's for another day. I think the more important insight we need to talk about today is why does it even matter if we're unkind to ourselves? I bet a lot of you are saying, "Well, who cares if I'm tough on myself? Who cares if I'm overreactive to things in the workplace and make up stories

about them? That's what makes me better and better at achieving big things. You know, no pain, no gain."

That's the sort of conscious or unconscious thinking I've been guilty of myself. But here's the thing, that is absolutely not true. If you're being unkind to yourself and you're still a high achiever, you're achieving in spite of your unkindness to yourself, not because of it. We know that for sure based on numerous behavioral studies.

In general, your effectiveness is diminished the more that you're unkind to yourself. You might be doing well, but you would be more effective, more impactful, and more powerful if you weren't always beating yourself up with these behaviors.

Being kind to yourself and creating a sense of calm and objectivity makes you more insightful. It gives you the perspective to see things broadly and to have a much larger array of possible solutions at your fingertips. And with more perspective and more solutions, bingo, you're the same you, but you're much more resourceful and powerful.

I often think this tendency to insist that our success is somehow dependent on us being unkind to ourselves is sort of like the person who insists that they drive well, and perhaps even better, when they're drunk. Maybe you know someone like that because I've certainly run into them in the past. Well, hopefully not when they're driving, but I've had people at parties talking like that.

And people like to point to never having been pulled over or having been in an accident as proof that they're a superior driver, but of course, we all can see the bad reasoning, right? Maybe their good driving skills have allowed them to be unscathed when they drive drunk, but being drunk certainly didn't make them a better driver. And think of the risk that they're creating for themselves and other people if they persist in this delusion.

And that risk I just mentioned, well, when we high achievers are unkind to ourselves, we're creating some big risks too. First of all, it's been shown that people who are unkind to themselves are likely to have a tough time being truly kind to other people. So all that effort you might be putting into being a decent colleague at work, other people may not see you in quite the same light.

And all the success that you think you can ensure by driving yourself in an unkind manner, again, studies show that you're increasing the risk that you might implode in some way. I bet you've seen a few high-flying colleagues crash and burn

during the course of your career, and if you have, you know what I'm talking about.

So at this point, you may be saying, "Well, Kathy, I hear you. I know I should be kinder to myself. But I simply don't have time for a spa, or a true vacation, or some other big form of self-care." And you could be right because there are always going to be those stages of work and life where a big solution just won't work. But your attitude and your ability to do small gestures is always available to you.

And many times, being the perfectionists that we are, we discount how really effective small actions can be. That's especially true of a quality like kindness. Whether we're directing it to others or to ourselves, the consequence is that we feel good. And the relief we feel from that momentary feeling of feeling good motivates us to be kind more and more.

Suddenly we begin to see a much larger positive impact on our overall mood and effectiveness. So as my Valentine's Day gift to you this year, here are two small acts of kindness you can direct to yourself to start to lessen that feeling of hustle and grind we high achievers sometimes experience in our lives.

The first is a deceptively simple little mantra. It's the phrase, "Making a good start is a good outcome." So, let me repeat that again, making a good start is a good outcome. This is an amazingly helpful thing to keep saying to yourself if you're the type of high achiever who is constantly feeling like you're getting behind in projects or that to-do list just keeps getting longer and longer, no matter how many items you keep crossing off.

It's a helpful reminder that consistent, focused action is the best guarantee of progress and achievement over time. Even on those days when we're unable to complete what we hope to, it's still a big win if you make a great start on that task or project. You're still much closer to the finish line and in a better place than you were today or last week.

Writing this mantra on the top of our to-do list, the mantra is making a good start is a good outcome, and saying it frequently to ourselves when we start feeling anxious or judgmental has been an amazing relief to myself and to many of my clients. It creates a lighter spirit and that sense of accomplishment that we all crave.

And here's the really incredible thing that we've discovered, saying this phrase frequently has actually made us more productive than not saying this phrase. Isn't that interesting? I can only guess why that is, but for me, I think I must have



originally been pushing off projects on some days, thinking I didn't have enough time to do them justice.

But when, instead, I started getting more focused on having a good start versus getting a lot done, I actually ended up working consistently and steadily. And I ended up getting more done that week or that month. Go figure. It's certainly been a great consequence for such a little phrase, so remember it. A good start is a good outcome. Try it out, and let me know how it works for you.

And my second Valentine's gift to you is a question to ask yourself, and that question is, what am I making this mean? So what am I making this situation mean? Let me give you a little bit of background explanation because, on its own, it doesn't sound like that's a significant phrase.

I'm going to walk you through something we all do as high achievers. When something happens in our work lives, let's say a colleague drops the ball on something or your boss makes an ambiguous comment, or you pass the CEO in the hall and he doesn't respond to your greeting. We're driven to make a judgment about the situation.

So we may think that our colleague is incompetent or trying to sabotage us. We may decide our boss is trying to deliberately avoid making a decision that we want him or her to make. When that CEO ignores us, well, it might be because he doesn't think much of us and prefers to do that.

This tendency to make a judgment about what we just experienced, we do because we're meaning-making creatures as humans, each and every one of us. In fact, this type of behavior, meaning-making, is often tagged by neuroscientists and linguists as one of the things that makes us uniquely human and different from other species. I think it's up in the air as to whether that's true or not. But I'm pretty sure that humans are so constantly engaged in meaning-making that we may have raised it to an art form for our species.

There are a lot of good outcomes from doing this that you can achieve from being a meaning maker, so I'm definitely not knocking it. But the problem is that the minute we come up with a meaning to a particular event, we can get stuck on it. I think that's probably particularly true of high achievers.

We want to move on, right? We want to move into action. We want to feel like we definitely know what something means, and then we start ruminating about what steps we're going to take about it. And you know what that's a perfect

recipe for? Winding yourself up and getting anxious and depressed or angry.  
That's what.

In other words, taking a neutral set of circumstances and then torturing yourself.  
That's not only an example of not being kind to yourself. Again, it's downright  
cruel. So how can you turn this around and be kind to yourself?

Whenever you're feeling strong and unpleasant emotions about a circumstance  
that has occurred, ask yourself the question, what am I making this mean?  
Because that's what you're doing. You are the one making it mean something.  
You've simply constructed a fictional story. It's fictional because you don't have  
enough facts yet to draw a rock-solid and accurate conclusion.

It could be that the story you're telling yourself that you just made up turns out  
to be true. And we also know scientifically that there's also an equal probability,  
and perhaps an even greater probability, that the story you just made up is false  
or at least it's lacking enough important details to make it less than accurate.

When you instead ask yourself what am I making this situation mean, you're  
reminding yourself that you have other, possibly more accurate stories available  
to you. Shoot, for every situation that occurs to you, there are probably at least

three to five explanations as to what's going on. Many of these other stories are at least neutral or even favorable.

When you ask yourself what am I making this situation mean, you're also asking yourself what other explanations that won't torture me could I choose to believe as well? Because in the moment, you might as well believe a positive story as believe a negative one. Both really have equal merit until you gather more facts and more insight.

The important thing for high achievers is to remind themselves they always have a choice. In fact, many choices as to how to view the situation they're in. Our heat-seeking missile energy, that hyper-focus and drive can create a blind spot in that regard. But the capability is always there, and all you have to do to access it is to ask yourself, what am I making this situation mean? And what other stories can I tell myself that are equally true?

Holding your judgment in abeyance in that way is doing yourself a kindness, and it's giving you the space to consider all your options, not just one. So sure, there may come a time when you really do need to lock down your view on why your colleague dropped the ball, why your boss made that remark, or why the CEO didn't acknowledge you in the hallway. And when that time comes, you'll hopefully have some good evidence to support whatever conclusion you reach.

And here's a hint, it's almost never as serious as your initial thought or feeling. But because you paused, however, and didn't allow your first story as to what was happening to be your only story, you'll also have more options available as to how you want to respond to the situation.

And with more options available to you, you'll always make better decisions. Decisions that work for you as a high achiever versus decisions that work against you. In other words, this simple act of kindness to yourself, this practice of asking yourself what am I making this situation mean, is a clear example of how taking care of yourself actually makes you a stronger person and a stronger leader.

Well, okay, my friends. I hope you take one or both of these Valentine's gifts to heart and start showing your own self a little love and kindness. And in the meantime, here's to an awesome week ahead for all of you. I'll see you in our next episode.

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