

Ep #4: Practice Towards Emotional Mastery



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Leah Badertscher

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There is this one powerful truth that when really understood and lived, it can dissolve blocks like stuckness, confusion, despair, and overwhelm, and that truth is this; when you are willing to experience anything, you become unstoppable.

The problem is though that very few of us are ever taught truly how to experience anything. There are usually things in life that we've avoiding or resisting, things we prefer to experience and very few of us are ever taught the skills to go very deep into a capacity of the human experience that's available to us all. And that's what I want to talk to you about today. I want to present you with a tool that is a total game changer.

You are listening to episode four of *The Art School Podcast*. Welcome to *The Art School Podcast*, a show for artists and creatives who want to become the next greatest version of themselves. Learn how to cultivate an extraordinary way of being and take the mystery out of making money, and the struggle out of making art. Here is your host, master certified life coach, artist, and former lawyer, Leah Badertscher.

Welcome back everyone. Today is a beautiful and cold day in Southwest Michigan and it's pretty perfect that this is the day that we're going to discuss the topic that we're going to discuss. Because today was the very last day, the last coaching call for *The Art School* fall 2018 session, and the tool that I want to share with you today was pivotal in me even ever having conceived of this course and offering and even this podcast, and then having launched this program and taken so many women through it.

And it was also a pivotal tool that I offered to *The Art School* clients and that I offer to my private clients. And so today's podcast is really going to be more tool-oriented and I want you to spend some extra time actually practicing and implementing this tool because I really believe that an extraordinary psychology is what helps to create extraordinary results. And since I work so much with creatives and with artists, I really believe that an extraordinary psychology helps to create extraordinary art.

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Now, there are plenty of people creating extraordinary art that may not have an extraordinary psychology, but that's not what I'm about and that's not what I offer. I like to offer the total package, that you can access a sublime creativity and an extraordinary creativity while also enjoying an incredibly robust, mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health.

And part of that journey of cultivating an extraordinary way of being, for me, it must include extraordinary emotional health. And how often do you think about your emotional health? That's just a question that - not just a rhetorical question - but I really want you to think about that because if you look around just at how many gyms there are and fitness centers and how we all know that we should eat well and move our bodies well and how many medical clinics, and we clearly know as a society how important mental health is but we don't really think about it until it starts to come off the rails.

And I rarely hear people in mainstream discussing emotional health in terms of having a really robust emotional health. And I am all for fitness. In fact, I've always been an athlete and I love to be in great physical shape and I use that as a metaphor for what we can do in other areas of our life as well. Because why don't we give as much attention and nurturing to cultivating and emotional strength and like, extraordinary agility and emotional mastery? Rather than just assuming that well, we're humans, we have emotions, we should know what to do with that.

Because we're really - we're not given a manual about that and we may have had some teachers in our lives or parents that have helped us along, but a lot of times, I meet with very high-functioning people and I find that for the most part, we have not had an education in our emotional experience. So how do we go about filling that gap? How do we become more intimate with our own emotional experience? That's a pretty tall order.

And the topic of emotions is fascinating and deep and broad but what I want to share with you today is a tool that has been very powerful for me

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and in the lives of my clients. And it's something that even sometimes seems to work like magic. I can't quite explain why it works but standing back and observing when people use it, things do tend to shift and change and I've seen that in my own life, and we'll get to that in a minute.

But I want to back up because it was actually in my childhood when I had these great stretches of time out on the farm that I first came upon this, because as a child I was so fascinated by the fact that I could lie down in the grass and feel like, sensations in my body, which I didn't know if I had the word emotion back then, but the Greek root of emotion is literally a movement through the body.

And I wondered, why is it that we all just assume that we have the same experience, the same inner experience of anger or sadness or love or even of colors, of how could I ever know what someone else's experience of a blue sky was? We named it the same things but something told me that we could just have agreed upon something that was external that didn't actually match up with that internal experience.

And something was also off to me in the way that we so quickly named things, that I understood it to be code for this much more complex experience, and I had the feeling sometimes of that the language actually eclipsed a deeper understanding of what the true meaning was, that people were quick to move on in this shorthand kind of way to naming things, and that it was keeping, in my sense, keeping me from a deeper understanding and discovery of what was really going on.

But time rolls on and you have to keep up and you have to learn these things. And then again, it was when I was in my late 20s and I was a competitive triathlete and I was not a collegiate runner but I was working on - I wanted to run like, three consecutive sub-five minute miles, which would have been awesome for me at the time. Definitely a PR. And I kept coming up against a wall, which felt like a pain wall.

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But when I used some yoga techniques and then also harkened back to my experience as a child of like, going more deeply into the physical experience without naming it, what I discovered was like, at those moments where I just couldn't see to break through my physical limitation, I discovered that there were actually two things going on inside my experience.

One was this like, screaming is the best way I can describe it in my mind, lots of intense sensation, lots of intense emotion, that I can like describe as like, severe distress, but that that was actually distinct from physical pain. And if I could get to that place of holding myself steady enough to remain steady in the midst of that sort of screaming distress that really seemed to come from my brain and be present with what the reality of the physical pain was, then I can know when I can go a little bit more and have more of a kick and push myself harder versus really going too far into physical pain, which was my body saying hey, back down, we're about to get hurt.

So that was fascinating to me and it wasn't white-knuckling, but it did take extreme amounts of focus and concentration to be able to distinguish those two things. And so that really fascinated me because I thought, well, where else in life do I do this? Where else do I confuse and conflate emotions? Like an emotion of fear, the fear saying something terrible is going to happen here, stop, with just something that is akin to fear but is really distress, that is more artificially manufactured and not truly based on something in my immediate environment or surroundings, or not truly something that was a result of having assessed the risk and then telling me, hey, best not to proceed.

And then as well, I had my experience as someone who practices yoga and taught yoga for several years where - I had a teacher once that loved to say, "The pose doesn't begin until the moment that you want to get out of it." And that too, those experiences of going towards extreme sensation in a pose and distinguishing sensation and being with sensation and knowing not to name it too soon. Sometimes naming it too soon just as pain when it

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actually wasn't pain yet but was just more mental distress could keep you from finding where your actual edge was.

And then this led me to wonder, you know, where - how does this relate to our emotions and to the creative impulses that we receive? Are those emotions? And I thought about my response to music. I would be hesitant to just always label something, well, that music makes me sad or that music makes me happy. That seems as utterly too simplistic. Or I could think of poems that I love in which some other human being had managed to describe an experience to me that I could never sum up in a simple emotional word, even though the experience was very much this internal sense of a physical vibration, something you might name as emotion, but once you did, you again would have eclipsed the true meaning.

And I thought of things that Georgia O'Keeffe had said about I used images and shapes and colors to paint things that there were no words for, or how Degas said, "To see is to forget the name of that what you see," or the countless mystics who have said, "Once you name god, you're no longer talking about god, or the finger that points at the moon is not the moon," and so on.

And so all of these ways in which when we're too quick to label things, we eclipse the understanding. And so how does this relate to your emotional health? And in addition to that, why should you care? Well, it relates to your emotional health really, I think, in countless ways. But the one thing I really want to get across today is that if you become more intimate with your own emotional experience, more familiar with it, more fluent with it, then you will no longer resist certain experiences, which goes back to the quote I mentioned at the introduction.

Because once you are willing to experience anything, that's when you become unstoppable. And all emotions too, as Carl Jung liked to say, have wisdom. So when you're avoiding certain emotions because you've labeled them as bad, it keeps you from going any deeper. Again, it eclipses the

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deeper meaning of them and it gives you only a shallow understanding of your own emotional life.

And the true tragedy in that, I think, is that you never really get to know who you really are and what you're really capable of. But instead, if you open yourself up to the full range of human emotion, you open yourself up to a more full range of human experience. And when I say open yourself up to the full range of human emotion, I'm not saying that you are going to act out on rage or act out on violence or act out on anything that would cause a destructive result, but instead you develop the ability to be with yourself through those difficult emotions.

A coaching great, basketball legend, Phil Jackson said, "Trying to eliminate anger never works. The more you try to suppress it, the more likely it is to erupt later in a more virulent form. A better approach is to become as intimate as possible with how anger works on your mind and body so that you can transform its underlying energy into something productive." And various teachers share a similar wisdom in that if you follow emotion down to its source, it's energy. Whether they call it life force, or prana, or chi, but at the root of every emotion is essentially life force.

So that if you are cutting yourself off from certain emotions, whether that's anger or disappointment or what your experience of failure is, or maybe you're somebody who keeps yourself from getting too excited or too happy, when you do that, when you cut off certain emotions, you're limiting the range of human experience, but then you're also limiting the life force that you have available to you.

So I have this amazing colleague who has a course called Alchemy, and her name is Christie Inge and she taught me this incredible tool. It's called the safe emotional container. So you should totally check her out and check out the Alchemy course, especially if you love deep dives into self-development topics. She is an amazing teacher and coach.

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And what she introduced me to, it took that intuitive experience I'd had of going deep into an emotional experience or an internal experience, but then put these bookends on it that she called the safe emotional container. And it's something that I love to recommend to clients and it's the tool that I mentioned that's a total game changer. Don't discount it because it seems simplistic. It really is powerful. It will allow you to acclimate yourself to some more - especially more difficult emotions so that you can learn as Phil Jackson said, how those emotions work on your mind and in your body. How you are with yourself when you're in those emotions.

So basically, it goes like this; you decide, depending on your experience and depending on the intensity of the emotion, whether you're going to set the timer for two minutes or five minutes. And you promise yourself that this is a safe space and that you're going to be okay on the backend of it. And so you set the timer and then you call up that emotion. You go into that emotion while that timer is set, you go into your body, into that emotion.

So I will tell you, I practiced this with disappointment for a year and it changed my life, and I practiced it with anger too, which also changed my life because I could see all the places that I was avoiding disappointment, and so instead of just avoiding that big amorphous idea of disappointment, I went into my body to see what is the physical reaction I have when I think I'm disappointing someone or I think I've been disappointing myself, and I acclimated myself to what happens in my body that I had been so averse to in the past.

So if you're a people-pleaser, doing this work around disappointment will change your life. And the same with if you're somebody who's always been taught that anger is wrong. This will also change your life because the remarkable thing that I discovered, I had heard, but this experiential discovery was completely different for me, was that once I went into the experience, anger and power have a very similar vibration. So it occurred to me in a lot of the places where I was actually starting to become powerful, I was shutting myself down by labeling myself as angry or bitchy.

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And this is not uncommon, I understand for women, and I work with a lot of women who have this. But if not for this practice of removing the label and instead going deep into what the internal experience is, I would have just stayed with anger and anger is wrong. But instead following it down to its source and experiencing it as a sensation in my body, with a particular intensity.

And it was an intensity I felt very uncomfortable with, but similar harkening back to my experience with trying to break my personal record for running miles, consecutive miles. I was able to then distinguish like, where is the intensity coming from a true source, where is my aversion to the intensity coming from the truth in that somehow the anger was out of integrity for me, and where was it just coming from a conditioned place where I had been taught that for me to feel that way, which was actually powerful, had just gotten labeled as something that was wrong for me or for a woman and had gotten labeled as temper problems or being bitchy and I had actually been shutting down my power.

So I highly recommend this exercise and again, depending on your familiarity with your own emotional already and how intense the emotions are, don't go over five minutes because that sort of betrays the trust and that violates your own safe zone. Really five minutes is enough. Don't think if you do it for 30 that that's just going to be six times as good. It's not how it works.

Now, this brings me to the part of the podcast where I want you to do more than just listen. I want this to be not just information that's insightful. I want to offer you things that are transformational. And in order to do that, I need you to really lean in here and work with me and coach with me.

So remember how I said in the intro that when you are willing to experience anything you become unstoppable? What I want for you to do is to pick one to three things that right now you are unwilling to experience. You think yep, I'm game for x, y, and z, but that other thing, nope, not that, not going

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there. That's what I did when I picked disappointment and failure, its close cousin. I thought, you know, in pursuing my dreams, I'm willing to experience anything but I can't do that, I can't go there. I've gone there too many times and I'm just not willing to.

And so of course, I eventually figured out after running into the same brick walls and after working so hard and not getting much traction that that's actually exactly where I needed to go, and I find that with my clients too. If they are spinning their wheels, if they are working so hard but with very little to show for it and or seemingly stuck in other mysterious ways, that there's usually something that they're avoiding, that they're saying nope, anything but that. Whether it's risking losing their job, or risking losing some amount of money, or risking a relationship, there is usually something where they're like, no, not that.

And then yay fun, that's exactly where we go, but then that's also where things really break open. That's where the breakthroughs happen. So I want you to think of one to three places where it's really hard for you to even admit to yourself that that's not where you want to go but then write it down. And then practice what it is that you're so scared of, that feeling, because guaranteed, it's not the circumstance that you're scared of. It is what the internal experience, what your emotional experience is going to be of the circumstance.

Whether you can identify the thoughts that create that emotional experience or whether it's just like, a tsunami of emotion takes you over. That's the thing I want you to practice in that safe emotional container. So choose whether you're going to do it two minutes, five minutes, and then do that every day for 30 days and when you're finished, just spend five minutes writing about what your experience was.

Try to stay away from language labels of emotions like I felt sad, that was hard, I felt angry, but instead, be very curious about the actual physical sensations and describe them as a scientist would in objective language.

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Was there frequency? Was there temperature? Was there movement? Where in your body did you experience the emotion? Did it move around? Was there any imagery associated with it? Color? Light? Whatever comes to you, you want to capture in that five minute debrief after the session.

And you don't need to do much more with it than that but just show up for yourself and be with yourself in a very compassionate, witnessing non-judgmental way for that safe emotional container exercise. And I promise you, this does result, it shifts and changes. And the safe emotional container exercise and becoming more conversant and familiar and fluent in your own emotional experience is an essential part of cultivating that extraordinary psychology that supports the creation of extraordinary art or extraordinary results in all areas of your life.

So don't wait to think about your emotional health until that point when you're feeling frayed at the edges and depressed or frazzled. Don't wait to think about it until you're feeling not emotionally well. Be proactive and think about what it would be like to have a robust emotional health. And when I say robust emotional health and when I say move towards emotional mastery, because I think that kind of excellence should be our target, I'm not proposing that in one podcast that's where you're going to be, but I think that can be our target and that should be what we work for and aspire to.

So emotional health and mastery is not about feeling happy and optimistic all the time. It's not about having your predominant emotional experience being characterized mostly with stereotypical, positive emotions. But what it is about is about opening your world so you know that saying, the world is your oyster? This is a way to really experience that. It's about expanding our capacity to feel a greater range of emotions without reacting to them, and also without them dictating our lives.

It allows us to develop a much more intimate understanding of our own deepest emotional experiences and it heightens our emotional fluency and

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agility so that not only do we understand ourselves better but we also are able to be present with ourselves in situations that could really open the world up to us before but we've been too scared of the intensity that it provoked within us.

And so instead when we know how to stand calmly amidst the distress in our mind and a situation that we're desiring, that's how you feel the fear and do it anyway but without white-knuckling. That's how you stay with yourself and go for what you really want but in a way that comes from compassion and grace and strength, and again, not just grit your teeth and sort of punish yourself all the way through the end.

I really believe that aiming for emotional mastery, having a practice that aims for emotional mastery is an essential part of being a powerful creator, and of creating more abundance in your life. I know this practice is really life-changing and I would love to hear from you if you try it. I'd love to hear about the shifts you make and the progress you make towards your own dreams.

Thank you again for joining me for *The Art School Podcast*. If you enjoyed today's show, it would be awesome if you would take a moment to write a quick review on iTunes. You can do this by heading over to www.leahcb.com/itunes.

When you're there, you can also register to win a free Creative Life Audit Session with me. If you're an artist, musician, writer, or other creative leader and visionary, and you feel blocked in your creative work or in your career, with relationships, health, financially, or really in any area of your life, a Creative Audit Session can help.

We'll identify the root cause of your most frustrating block, and together, we'll come up with a customized strategy to get you back on track and back into your prime creative and abundant flow. One winner will be chosen

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every week. Thanks again for joining me everyone. Have a beautiful week and I'll see you next time.