



Reducing Excessive Self-Criticism Journey

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Step 1: Broad Awareness

Reducing excessive self-criticism is a subject I have been engaged with for close to thirty years. From the moment I became aware of its importance, both for myself and for the people who went through processes of change and healing with me, it was clear to me that this is a vast field. A field with immense possibilities. Truly immense. It begins with awareness, but from there it opens into worlds of change, improvement, empowerment, and even transformation across a very wide range of areas.

From relationships with others, through the relationship with ourselves, to creative expression, self-fulfillment, problem solving, flexibility in life, greater joy, and greater satisfaction. All of these are directly connected to the level of excessive self-criticism that we allow to exist in our lives. Allow, because there is consent here. There is an unconscious choice. And we will speak about this a great deal.

The very fact that a person knows they have excessive self-criticism, and understands that it is an important task to reduce it, already says something very significant about them. A person who understands that their excessive self-criticism is a problem, a limitation, an unnecessary difficulty, is a person who can make a meaningful journey here. And if you have arrived here, you are likely that kind of person. And that is a good thing, because this is exactly what we are going to do here.

We are setting out on a journey, and its first part includes three chapters devoted to one thing: getting as close as possible to an intimate familiarity with excessive self-criticism. To get to know it, to understand what we are dealing with. Because the more we know what we are facing, even if it is something we have created within ourselves, we can begin to develop strategies, to reduce it, to bypass it, to outsmart it, to manipulate it, and most importantly, to free ourselves from it more and more.

Therefore, broad awareness of excessive self-criticism is essential for changing it. Essential. We live on a daily basis, almost moment by moment, under the presence and influence of excessive self-criticism, exaggerated, unnecessary, and redundant. And in most cases, we are not aware that it is so. We surrender to its internal logic, a logic that sometimes sounds very convincing, but in practice limits us, weighs us down, and instills within us concepts of incapability.

It generates excuses, explanations, stories of why it is not possible. Why it is not possible to do things that we actually very much want to do. It creates an internal language that diminishes us, that constricts us, that narrows our vision regarding our own potential. It introduces into our awareness messages of “it’s not possible,” “it’s not okay,” “why did you do that,” “you failed.” This is an inner voice that operates constantly within us, sometimes quietly and sometimes more openly, and our role now is to begin increasing our awareness of its presence.

One of the things I did at the beginning of my journey was to carry a small notebook with me. That was before the era of smartphones, but even today it is still relevant. Simply to write. To catch the critical thoughts as they appear and write them down. Suddenly something concrete appears before the eyes. A list of thoughts: I’m not okay, I won’t succeed, why did I do that, I shouldn’t have chosen that. And when it is written, something changes. It is no longer just a vague internal voice, but something that can be seen and observed.

Excessive self-criticism is present at many different points. It appears before action, preventing us from even trying, creating hesitation, fear, and excessive doubt. It appears during action, following us, not allowing mistakes, limiting creativity and flexibility, and creating an ongoing internal threat. And it appears after action, sometimes as self-beating, with recurring questions: why did I do that, why not differently, why did I choose that, why did someone else do it better than me.

At times this becomes an internal obsession of a negative relationship toward oneself. It is unnecessary. It can be reduced. But in order to get there, we must first acknowledge that it exists. That this mechanism exists. That this inner “monster” exists.

And it did not appear by chance. It is cultivated within families, within educational systems, within workplaces. We learn it, we absorb it, we internalize it. The messages around us, both explicit and implicit, teach us to be dissatisfied with ourselves, to doubt our abilities, to take failures too seriously, and not to see them as a natural part of the process. Sometimes it is even wrapped in humor, when a person says about themselves that they are not talented or not capable, and it sounds like a joke, but that joke continues to fuel excessive self-criticism.

In this way, without noticing, we give it reinforcement. And therefore, we want to get to know it. Not to agree with it. To be able to observe it and see how it hurts us, how it limits us, and how it confuses us with messages that sound logical, yet in practice diminish us and place weights on our feet.

We want to begin identifying it in real time. To say to ourselves: here it is, this is my excessive self-criticism. Here it has appeared. Here it is speaking. Here it is inventing reasons why not. Why to be afraid, why not to act, why not to try, why not to take risks, why not to initiate. It is there, sometimes openly and sometimes in a subtle, elusive way.

And we want to improve our ability to identify it, with a lot of self-compassion, with patience, and even with humor. Because it is a product of fears. Our fears, our parents' fears, the fears of our environment. It is a product of a lack of love and of an upbringing that did not encourage free, creative, authentic expression. And it is so common that many people do not even consider the possibility that it is possible to live with less excessive self-criticism.

But it is possible.

And it begins with a journey. A journey that begins now and will continue far beyond these chapters. A journey of listening, of practice, of increasing awareness. Each time a negative thought arises, not to accept it automatically as truth, but to pause and say: this is a product of excessive self-criticism trying to convince me that I am smaller than I truly am.

I want to learn to recognize it. It can begin simply, with a notebook, with a few days of documentation, and seeing what is happening inside. Awareness expands, and the more we recognize, the more we can begin to move, to reduce, and to free ourselves.

And gradually to discover all the treasures that exist in a place where we are less controlled by excessive self-criticism.

We have set out on the journey. It is going to be interesting.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. What are the first feelings that arise in you when you encounter the expression “excessive self-criticism”?
2. Are you aware of the extent to which your excessive self-criticism limits you?
3. In which area of your life do you currently feel the presence of excessive self-criticism most strongly?
4. How do you imagine your life would look if you were free from significant parts of the excessive self-criticism that currently exists in your life?
5. If you could convey a message right now to your excessive self-criticism, what would it be?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?