



Do This And Criticism Can't Touch You

By Neil Pasricha

True happiness is to enjoy the present, without anxious dependence upon the future, not to amuse ourselves with either hopes or fears but to rest satisfied with what we have, which is sufficient, for he that is so wants nothing. The greatest blessings of mankind are within us and within our reach. A wise man is content with his lot, whatever it may be, without wishing for what he has not.

—Seneca

I always set many writing goals for myself and was aggressive about achieving them.

At first they were small, maybe a few thousand hits on my blog. But they quickly became more ambitious—one million hits, then ten million—and I became obsessed with reaching them. The passing of each self-imposed milestone brought a new set of goals. I even wrote a book that became a #1 bestseller, but instead of being happy I was constantly anxious and stressed out. After working so hard for three years straight, lying in bed alone in my tiny apartment, getting three or four hours of sleep, eating takeout for every meal, developing black bags under my eyes, and losing touch with friends...I suddenly had a realization.

No matter how many goals I achieved...I just kept setting more.

When I was stressing about my blog and watching hit counters, bestseller lists, and award nominations, I was using *external motivators*. I wasn't doing it for me. *I was doing it for others*. I lost my self-confidence because I started outsourcing it to signals outside my brain, which I couldn't always control. When those signals were positive, I was flying. Lots of emails, piles of comments, and bestseller list rankings lifted me up and kept me going. But when those signs were negative, even relatively negative, I was devastated. Critical comments, a nasty review, and the inevitable slipping off the bestseller list—meant I was a loser. I had to find a way to block it all out.



Four simple words that block all criticism

1. Do
2. It
3. For
4. You

Do it for you.

Don't do it for others.

It's hard to compete endlessly because there's always more to compete with when you get there. Remember we will always be number two to seven billion at everything in the world. And every level we go up has new peers, new benchmarks, new competitors. A CEO once told me, "You always think the geniuses are at the next level."

But the next level never ends unless you are literally the best in the entire world. What are the odds of that happening? Well, they are one in seven billion. You have better chances of getting struck by lightning every single day of your life.

Why your dream job could be the worst job you ever have

It's not the critic who counts.

First, remember there are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic is internal. You're doing it because you want to. Extrinsic is external. You're doing it because you get something for it.

Guess which gets better performance?

Studies show that when we begin to value the rewards we get for doing a task, we lose our inherent interest in doing the task. Like, we *literally* lose interest—as in, the interest we have becomes truly lost in our minds, hidden away from our own brains, as the shiny external reward sits front and center and becomes the new object of our desire.

While at Brandeis University, Dr. Teresa Amabile performed experiments on elementary school and college students and asked groups to make "silly collages" and invent stories for them. Some were told they were getting rewards for their work and some were not. What happened? Based on independent judges, who didn't know who was getting paid, the least creative projects by far were done by students who were promised rewards for their work. Dr. Amabile said, "It may be that commissioned work will, in general, be less creative than work that is done out of pure interest."

Makes sense. When you're not **doing it for you**...you're not doing a good job.

James Garbarino, former president of the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development, was curious about this phenomenon. He studied fifth- and sixth-grade girls hired to tutor younger children. Some of the tutors were offered free movie tickets for doing a good job. Some weren't. What happened? The girls offered free movie tickets took longer to communicate ideas, got frustrated more easily, and did a worse job in the end than the girls who were given nothing except the feeling of helping someone else.



I was surprised by the studies, but they made sense to me.

I remembered writing articles for the *Golden Words* comedy newspaper at Queen's University every Sunday for four straight years while in college. I didn't get paid a cent but loved every minute because I got to hang out with a group of really funny people writing articles that made us all laugh. I loved it so much that I took a job working at a New York City comedy writing startup in my last summer at college. I rented an apartment on the Lower East Side and started working in a Brooklyn loft with writers from *The Simpsons* and *Saturday Night Live*.

Wow, I remember thinking. I can't believe I'm getting paid to do what I love.

But it was the hardest job of my life.

Instead of having creative freedom to write whatever I wanted, I had to write "800 words about the bright side of getting dumped by 5:00 p.m." for a client like *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Instead of joking with friends naturally, finding chemistry with certain people, I was scheduled to write with others. Eventually my interest in comedy writing faded and faded and faded...and I decided I would never do it for money again.

When I started writing [1000 Awesome Things](#), I said I'd never put ads on the website. I would have liked the beer money! But I knew the ads would feel like work to me. I might start writing an article to get more views on an ad. And I would be spending time checking invoices. Looking at payment transfers. It would take away—or just hide—my reasons for writing in the first place. I was smart about that...but not smart enough to ignore the other extrinsic motivators that kept showing up. Stat counters, website awards, bestseller lists. It was all so visible, so measurable, and so tempting.

I started looking into this whole "extrinsic motivators kill intrinsic motivators" phenomenon and kept finding studies showing this to be true.

When you don't feel like you're competing with others, you compete only with yourself. You do it for you. And you do more, go further, and perform better.

The 3 S's of success

There are three S's of Success. It took me a really long time to figure this out. The first step is actually figuring out what kind of success you want.

Sales success is about sales. Your book is a commercial hit! Everybody's reading it, everybody's talking about it, you're on TV. You sell hundreds then thousands then millions of copies. Your book becomes an "it book." A catchphrase. Dump trucks beep while backing into your garage to pour endless royalty payments.

Social success means you're a success among your peers. People you respect. This is critical success. The industry loves you! The New York Times reviews your book. You're short-listed for the Man Booker Prize. An influential author you look up to sends you a letter, which feels like gold.

Self success is in your head. It's invisible! Only you know if you have it. Self success means you achieved what you wanted to achieve. For yourself. You're genuinely proud



of your accomplishment, you're happy with your work, and, most important, you're satisfied. You want nothing. You feel contentment. Some people believe without self success, no amount of sales or social success will ever feel meaningful.

The 3 S's of Success apply to all industries, professions, and aspects of life. Success is not one-dimensional. You must decide what kind of success you want. Here's the catch: It is impossible to have all three successes. Know which of the 3 S's of Success you want.

The sad and unfortunate reason we listen to critics in the first place

We know we shouldn't listen to our critics.

We know we should do things for ourselves.

Morihei Ueshiba, founder of the Japanese martial art aikido, said, "As soon as you concern yourself with the 'good' and 'bad' of your fellows, you create an opening in your heart for maliciousness to enter. Testing, competing with, and criticizing others weaken and defeat you."

So why do we listen? What makes us interested in external measurements? Why do we take outside rankings, results, or opinions over our own opinion of ourselves?

There is a root issue, an underlying reason. The root issue is our lack of confidence. Self-judgment. We get lost in our own heads, we get confused with mixed advice, so we follow what we see. The root issue is self-confidence.

So what do the truly confident people have? They have a high opinion of themselves. And! They have a high opinion of others. That is the true definition of confidence.

3 simple steps to self-acceptance

How do we get to that dream place? How do we accept ourselves and think highly of others at the same time? How can we separate those two opinions in our mind so we can allow both?

There are three steps to achieving a high opinion of yourself. It is a tortuous path! But we go through this journey with every part of ourselves that we eventually learn to accept.

The three-step progression is to:

1. Hide
2. Apologize
3. Accept

And here's what it looks like: I went to Harvard for college, but at first I would never tell people that when they asked. I would hide it by simply saying "Boston." Most of my classmates still do this. But masking the truth is a form of self-judgement, and since I wasn't confident about having attended Harvard, I was worried about other people's perceptions. It wasn't humility, it was fear.



After a couple years, I figured this out and decided that from then on I would tell anybody exactly where I went to school if they asked. Of course, I did this in a tentative, awkward way. I would grimace and fumble my way through meandering justifications before finally saying the word “Harvard.” By acting awkward, I made things awkward for others. By apologizing for myself, I forced others to apologize, too. Eventually, I started realizing that apologizing was a form of self-judgment, too.

Eventually I realized this, and after a couple years of apologizing I finally moved on to the third and final step. From that point on, whenever it came up, I resolved to matter-of-factly say that I went to Harvard. Gone went the tendency to hide the truth from others... which reflected my desire to hide it from myself. Gone went the tentativeness and questioning...which reflected my tentativeness and questioning part of myself.

Replacing both came a clear and simple truth. Replacing both came a solid, grounded fact. By being clear and simple, without pretension, without assumptions, I consciously remove myself from any possible judgment that comes from any given statement. This allows whatever judgment that comes to be wholly owned by the other person.

Find what’s hidden, stop apologizing, and accept yourself.

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