



Telling Your Inner Bully to Shut Up

As an entrepreneur, wife and a mother of two, Jennifer cannot stop thinking about all the ways she falls short in her personal and professional life. Stevon and Juleyka discuss toxic self-criticism, and Stevon helps us interrogate our irrational demand for perfection.

Clip: *I wrote down, actually, what she said because it was so striking to me. She said, "I'm mad at myself because it feels like I'm not excelling in any area of my life and not doing anything well." Anything good, any area of your life? That's absolute, that says all of the things. And that cannot be true that there's nothing good you're doing, nothing positive that's happening. I refuse to believe that.*

Stevon Lewis:

What's up everybody? Welcome to *How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything*. I'm Stevon Lewis, a licensed psychotherapist. On this episode, we're going to get into one of my favorite topics, how to quiet your inner bully. But before we start, welcome Juleyka Lantigua, creator of our show. I'm glad you came to hang out with me today.

Juleyka Lantigua:

Thanks for having me.

Lewis: I seriously cannot wait to talk about inner bullies with you after we hear from our guest.

Jennifer is with us today and she's a hardworking business owner, doing her best to manage all her professional and personal responsibilities, but a little voice in her head constantly reminds her of all the ways she's falling short. Now that she's a mom, quieting that inner critic feels even more urgent than ever before. Let's get into it.

Jennifer:

I'm Jennifer Yopez-Blundell. I identify as Latina, Mexican-American to be exact. I am a mom to two young girls, three and four. I'm a wife to a wonderful supportive husband. And I'm also an entrepreneur. I'm a co-founder of DRAFTED, we're a sports tech company focusing on the Latina fan. And I'm also a podcast host. I host *Misma Project*, a collection of stories and conversations surrounding the US Latina experience. As you can imagine with all of those roles and all those identities, I'm usually stretched pretty thin. I think of it almost like a duck in water. On the surface level, it seems very easy and graceful, but underneath the duck is frantically pedaling in the water, trying to quiet the inner critic.

Jennifer: For me, it's not a matter of "if" the other shoe is going to drop, it's "when." Being the only Latina in white dominant spaces, I feel like I have to not only achieve but surpass this mentality.

It's in everything I do. It's being a mom, it's being a wife, it's being the daughter, it's being a co-founder. I feel like I have to be a very present mother and be on top of the school calendars, individually provide attention to each child in their love languages. My inner critic has been present for the longest time, but it wasn't until I became a mother that it really hit me in my face. And this is going to make me emotional because I am now responsible for raising these two beautiful girls to be the best, most empathetic humans they can be. And as a Latina and again as a high achiever, I feel like that responsibility is on me. And especially them being little girls. I have to model certain behaviors that I want them to see and I want them to embody themselves.

This inner critic really started to get louder. She always comes to me at night. At the end of the day when I'm in bed and I just lay there and I reflect on the day, did I give enough to my company? Did I give enough to my children? Was I present enough as a spouse? Did I call my friend back? Did I check on my nephews today? And I'm always critiquing myself, "You could do more. You need to try harder." I just want to get to a point where I can extend myself grace and say, "It's okay that you weren't there for everybody today." Or, "It's okay that you only showed up 50%." Because my 50% I can guarantee you is other people's 100%. I'm really seeing the patterns and trying my darnedest to change that, but it's just not happening quick enough. Which I laugh because I understand that's also my perfectionism of how can I perfect quieting this inner critic?

I think I'm lacking some of those skills to recognize her when she comes, to silence her or to take the lesson that she's trying to give me and move forward with it and not dwell on it. I'm so mad at myself because I feel like I'm not excelling in any area of my life, I'm not doing anything well and it's just not healthy because then I'm in a bad mood or I'm in a dark place and my children see that. And again, I

just want to really be a very intentional mom in how I'm showing up for them because they're going to get all of their life cues from me and I just want to make sure that they're getting the healthy ones.

Lewis: Jennifer, thanks so much for coming on the show and sharing your experience with us.

Lantigua: Okay, Stevon, there's a lot here, but what actually stood out to you?

Lewis: She puts an awful lot of pressure on herself to be perfect or to do all the things. She is really intentional and purposeful about wanting to do things, "right," that she's fearful that it'll come out wrong. She has some good awareness because she's aware of her inner bully, she's aware of what her inner bully says to her and the negative thoughts that it produces.

She's also adopted this thing of I've got to right the wrongs of the past, so she's got to model, and this is some of the language she uses, "I have to model for my daughters how to do X." That says then that if she doesn't do it, they'll never learn that lesson. That puts a lot of pressure on someone to have to be all the things to all the people. And then it makes it really easy to fail and very hard to succeed.

Lantigua: Okay. So what do we do, doc?

Lewis: So the first thing I would do is have Jennifer focus on her language. She uses what we like to call in the field demand states. That comes from Albert Ellis, his work in rational emotive behavior therapy. And he talks about "musturbatory" language, being absolute and exact so that there isn't really any possibility for getting another outcome that could be positive. So I'm thinking of things where she says, must, have to, need, should.

Lantigua: Okay.

Lewis: Those are problematic because then it says, well, if you don't do those things then everything else is bad. More on this after this short break.

Lantigua: So how do we rephrase some of those musts, shoulds, have tos?

Lewis: So what I would teach someone like Jennifer is to say "could," "it would be nice to," "I hope to," "I would like to." Small tempering of the language to allow for other outcomes to be favorable, positive possibilities.

Lantigua: Let me take you through some of the words that she uses to describe herself because each of these to me is a high pressure situation. So she's mom, she's Latina, she's high achiever, she's a professional, she's a role model.

Lewis: That is a lot and she has to do well in all of those roles.

Lantigua: Right.

Lewis: I say, well, but she alluded to perfectly. That there's no opportunity to not be perfect. And I think that part of, and I feel like I've said this before, the idea of incorporating a level of humanity or a level of imperfection into our definition of success so that it allows for us to be able to not be perfect and still evaluate or assess ourselves to have done a good job.

Lantigua: Okay, so I love that theoretically, how does that work out practically in the everyday? What is the affirmation? What is the behavior? What does someone like Jennifer do to really practice this?

Lewis: For sure. So an easy example is where she talked about the mother she wants to be. She says, I need to... Or I have to is what she actually said. "I have to model how to be a good standing individual for my daughters." That as the goal doesn't incorporate her humanity into being a positive place for learning. So by that I mean part of what I believe she's learned too, of how she wants to show up is because of what she didn't get and that's what she's trying to give her daughters. That is a good thing because then it furthers us, it undoes some of that generational trauma or it allows us to further the family and build on a foundation and a legacy.

And so I'm saying, well, if she's able to get that and be a better version of parent to the next generation, then also incorporate that into your understanding of yourself as a mom as well. So that you won't be perfect and that's not the worst thing that can happen. Your daughters will say, "Hey, mom did really good in these things, these things may be not so much. But that's okay because now I'm going to take that baton and then do better for the next generation."

Lantigua: That is something that I think a lot of high achieving women of color who are also moms struggle with. We have to undo so many things at the same time that we want to set a foundation of new ways of being. So you are demolishing and building, demolishing and building.

Lewis: That's exactly it. You are tearing down some of the things that weren't good and you're putting up new pillars that are going to be more sturdy to allow you to build that building higher. Also recognize you're not the final endpoint in the creation of this building. That her daughters will also engage in that same process to undo some stuff and build on it. That we are in pursuit of perfection that we're not going to ever really get there.

Lantigua: Wow. Okay. I need a moment because I never conceived of my children having to do some of this work. The work that I am doing to both undo the harm and build pathways forward also belongs to my children. That's radical, Stevon.

Lewis: I love that you used the word radical because that's where I want this conversation to go. Radical acceptance of self. And so I can be a work in progress and still working to be a better version of myself. At the same time, I can recognize that I'm doing a good job. And so for someone who's saying like, "Well, I didn't think it..."—someone, for you, Juleyka—who's saying that, "I didn't think that my kids would have to pick up that baton and do some of this work as well," then it suggests that you're saying you're going to find a way to solve all of those problems on your own, in your lifespan.

Lantigua: Exactly. Isn't that every Black and Brown mother's plan? That's our plan.

Lewis: It's a plan. It also is dependent on you being perfect, that you won't also cause some trauma or unpleasantness in the lives of your next of kin. Last time I checked, you're a human being, which means you're not perfect. So there's a possibility that you could impact kids in a way that you did not intend and they'll have to do some work and it'll be okay. And the same is true for Jennifer. She's going to do a phenomenal job as a mom because she is so focused on doing that and her daughters will learn some stuff from her and it'll come from the good things she did as well as where they want to do things differently.

Lantigua: Yeah. I'm going to have to go think about this for a while. Okay, Stevon. So Jennifer seems to have trapped herself in a vicious cycle of being self-critical and then criticizing herself for being self-critical. What say you?

Lewis: I wrote down actually what she said because it was so striking to me. She said, "I'm mad at myself because it feels like I'm not excelling in any area of my life and not doing anything well." Anything good, any area of your life? That's absolute, that says all of the things. And that cannot be true that there's nothing good you're doing, nothing positive that's happening. I refuse to believe that. I think Jennifer has to take a moment to do more of an assessment of what's been done, not focus only on what still needs to be done. Because if we spend an exorbitant amount of time looking at the unfinished part or how far we have to go to get to our vision of what we think life should be like, then it discredits and dismisses and doesn't factor in any of the good or any of the progress that we've made.

Lantigua: So maybe pick one thing to criticize per day.

Lewis: No. For someone like Jennifer, it's the exact opposite. Set up a time to reflect on what you did do and what you did accomplish. Do that daily. Because that's not

happening at all, then there needs to be a amount of time spent engaging in that behavior purposefully. She doesn't know how to do that naturally, then it has to be forced. Juleyka, it's always a pleasure when you show up on the show.

Lantigua: Of course. I'll be back next time too. See you later.

Lewis: It makes me really proud when I see high achievers like Jennifer achieving on their own terms. By trying to smooth out their rough edges, by having a strong desire to do a good job and by recognizing that patience with themselves will be a key part of their ability to reach their own definition of success.

And that's a wrap. Thank you so much for listening to *How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything*. We want you to be a part of our show.

We want to hear about your successes and challenges, your sacrifices and celebrations, and what's ahead on the journey for you. Send our Producer Virginia an email and we'll get your story on the show. She's at virginia@lwcstudios.com.

How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything is an original production of LWC Studios. Our show is produced by Virginia Lora, Tren Lightburn mixed this episode, Juleyka Lantigua is the Creator and Executive Producer. I'm Stevon Lewis.

On Twitter and Instagram, we're @Tal toAchievers. Bye, everybody.

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