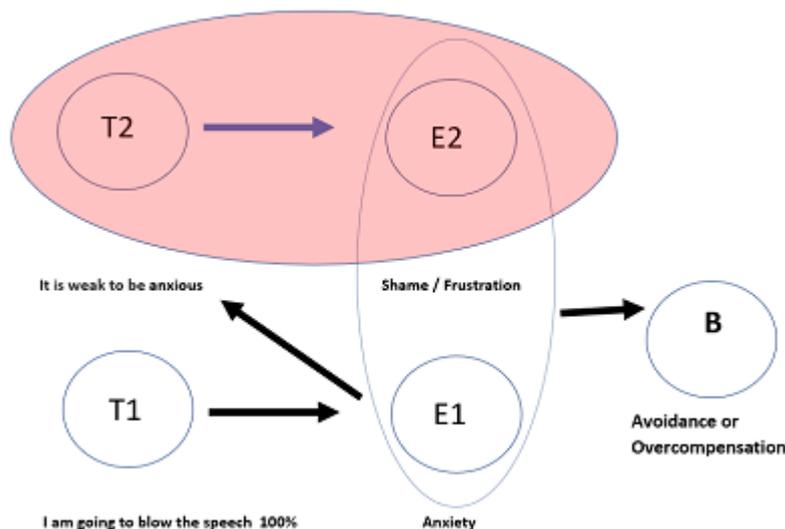


Self-Compassion and Self-Criticism: The theory

We will now lift our gaze to the upper level of the model. The **T2** and **E2** areas which are so often invisibly pulling the strings of our lives.



This is the only time we will need to glimpse the Model diagram in this chapter and the next. We will start to develop a deeper understanding of the **T2** and **E2** circles then look at ways to optimize them. This chapter helps create an understanding and the next chapter will focus on techniques to embed the principles. Self-compassion is far more than just a way to optimise the **T2** and **E2** space of the model as we will show.

Introduction

It is useful to remember that so much of what we are and the circumstances we find ourselves in, we had no say over: Who our parents are; the timing of our births; socio-economic conditions we were born into; how we are socialized and educated to interact with the world around us; how our brains are set up to process the world we encounter; the kinds of emotions we have to deal with; traumas that may come our way that may leave a deep imprint; our physical attributes; the list is almost endless.

So when our consciousness starts to take shape in our early years we find ourselves trying to make sense of it all as best we can. We are forced to drink from the proverbial fire hose of life.

At the same time, as we grow into adolescence and adulthood we somehow expect ourselves to manage these complex variables in a pristine manner, often assuming that others are doing this better than we are.

As if feeling emotions we don't really understand isn't enough, we can become self-critical, or at the very least not "have our own backs" as much as we could.

Definitions

Before we delve deeper into self criticism, we need to define our terms so we can be clear on the assumptions we are making. Our definition of self-criticism will be much broader than the conventional view of self-criticism.

For convenience we will break the concept of self-criticism into two arbitrary possibilities. We could break it into an infinite number of categories but we will use two for convenience as it will help us highlight the part of the map we want to understand better. The first category is what we will term Active Self-Criticism (ASC). This is closely related to the common view of what self-criticism is.

The conventional view usually holds self-criticism to be some sort of active negative voice towards the self in a particular situation or more generally. The intensity of this active negative voice could be on a continuum from "geez you stuffed it up again" through to "you are a complete idiot as usual" or beyond. Some people don't feel Active Self-Criticism (ASC) is an issue for them. However, some people create standards for themselves which are setup so there is little possibility of mistake or failure. Under these circumstances there might be very little awareness of any Active Self-Criticism (ASC) because everything is done to prevent it from arising. If the possibility of mistakes are rigorously avoided through processes such as avoidance and perfectionism then Active Self-Criticism (ASC) can be starved of oxygen. This doesn't mean it is not relevant it just means it could be hiding in the shadows running the show from there.

The second type of self-criticism will need a more detailed analysis. We label this form of Self-Criticism as Passive Self-Criticism (PSC). Initially, when we look deeper at this category you may be perplexed as to why this type of self-talk would be labeled self-criticism at all. In fact, many people initially think that what we label as Passive Self-Criticism (PSC) is a form of highly functional, pragmatic problem solving that would actually be the end goal in dealing with this part of their psychology, as opposed to something that would need to be addressed and optimized.

Let's distinguish between the two types of self-criticism with an example then dive deeper. An example of Active Self-Criticism (ASC) would be something like "that's the third time you did that this week, what is wrong with you!? You'll never get on top of this if you don't get your act together." This type of internal monologue is familiar to many people.

Now let's look at a Passive Self-Criticism (PSC) example relating to the same unnamed situation. Something like "That didn't work out. What's plan B?" On the surface that doesn't appear to be self-critical in the conventional sense of the term. It may even appear rational and objectively true. Why are we putting a negative spin on what appears to be functional, pragmatic thinking in the face of a problematic situation? Shouldn't we be supporting more of this type of thinking over the former Active Self-Critical (ASC) example? One reason we might come to this view is that we are only looking at the words and cognitions here. One seems painful and one seems pragmatic and therefore the pragmatic might be seen as an upgrade in approach in the situation.

But if we shift our attention to the emotional substrate below this we might see something slightly different. Neither the Active or Passive Self-Critical example have any sense of emotional safety underneath the statements. The active "that's the third time you did that this week, what is wrong with you!? You'll never get on top of this if you don't get your act together" might appear to be more active abuse, but we may come to see the passive "that didn't work out. What's plan B?" as a form of neglect. Neglect is harder to detect than abuse. It's not fully "having your own back" but not realising it. Abuse is like rotten egg gas, it has a strong smell and is hard to miss. Neglect is more like carbon monoxide, odorless, colourless but potentially even more dangerous.

Thus, Active and Passive Self-Criticism lie next to each other on the continuum of possibility rather than at opposite ends of it.

That leaves the obvious question "if that pragmatic problem solving approach which is labeled Passive Self-Criticism (PSC) is not the goal, then what is? What is the optimal approach to aim for if not that?"

Here we need to do a little thought experiment. I will give you a phrase to bring into your mind. It's perhaps a bit trite or cliched but we will proceed nonetheless. Imagine this phrase is uttered by someone you trust 100%, or your internal voice or even some metaphysical entity or god if you prefer to go that way. We are trying to embody a trusted source even if right now

you don't have anything like this in reality and it will be just theoretical.

When you utter this phrase you will be trying to tap into how it makes you feel rather than what it makes you think. What emotion comes up when you hear this voice. Suspend your disbelief in this phrase if you have some initially. Notice your reaction. There are many possibilities.

The phrase you will utter embodying this trusted voice speaking to you:

"I'll never abandon you no matter what happens."

Repeat this a few times to yourself gently.

What did that feel like to fully surrender to that statement. Could you do it? Was there resistance?

It is common for people to say they feel a certain comfort and safety when they say these words. Occasionally someone cries. It is also not unusual to say that a trusted voice can't really be accessed, that no-one can be completely trusted. Some feel a numbness or shut down their feelings when saying these words, almost like they don't want to wish for something that they can't have. Others feel slightly irritated that this is a "touchy feely" type of exercise and not "useful" to them.

If we just tap into the words again and the feelings that may arise when we do. Encourage a feeling of safety and warmth and comfort as best as you can in this brief time.

What are we trying to do with all of this? What is the purpose?

Well, imagine (if you can) a feeling of safety and comfort coming from those words **"I'll never abandon you no matter what happens"**. Then imagine that feeling being 100 times more intense and powerful and further imagine that this is the prism which you will live your life most of your waking moments through all the joys and challenges. That is what we are aiming at. It doesn't matter if we don't get all the way. Even a few steps further forward can enhance life in varied, immeasurable and remarkable ways.

But that is just the start. We are only beginning.

An almost universal experience for those who have realised that some form of self-criticism has been negatively impacting their life, is to struggle like a kitten with a ball of string to free themselves from it. Asking such a person what the negative impacts of self-criticism in whatever form it takes

usually lead to easily accessible answers relating to some form of emotional pain being involved. There is often a clear desire to shift that but the years then go by and it doesn't change or even gets more intense. Even if they actively search for a solution they may find that each new blog, book or seminar they consume doesn't make any long term renovation to their relationship to themselves and the self-criticism remains leaping out at them at certain moments.

Focusing just on what appears negative about self-criticism won't provide the impetus to transcend it because a large part of its maintaining mechanism is being ignored by such an approach. Some approaches see self-criticism as some sort of "bad habit" that can be alleviated with a bit of work and a few simple techniques. But weeks later these seemingly powerful techniques haven't really been worked on or they don't seem to have the desired effect. Feeling that either not enough effort was put in to the process or that the lack of change is more evidence of deeply embedded dysfunction is often the result.

A higher resolution map incorporates another set of crucial variables. People maintain their self-critical (passive and or active) orientations, not because of habit, but because of other factors such as deeply held and conditioned beliefs about the positive functionality of self-criticism in their lives. Thus, purely working on techniques to address the pain of self-criticism will be met with inner resistance because the mind believes that too much will be given up first to alleviate the pain of self-criticism. And interestingly, this will be built on another conditioned assumption that is shared by the majority of cultures in the world. A variation of the "no pain, no gain" principle. Thus subconsciously if work is done on reducing "pain" it is assumed that the "gain" part of the equation will have to be partially or largely sacrificed. And that is not a trade many people want to make. Therefore, most approaches not taking this into account will reliably fail to make a shift in a person's psychology. Unless this "no pain, no gain" assumption is addressed meaningful progress will almost certainly be doomed from the start and more likely just lead to a reinforcement of self-critical framework with a correlated depreciation in self-esteem along with it.

Sources of self-criticism

It can be useful to look at where self-criticism comes from. We can again break down these possibilities into two broad categories. The first one could be described as the Moral Source and the second one could be described as the Pragmatic source. We just scratched the surface of the potential Pragmatic source in the preceding paragraphs. Most people have a combination of the two sources in their psychology. For some it could be 5%

Moral and 95% Pragmatic, or it could be 95% Moral and 5% Pragmatic or anything in between.

Moral Source of Self Criticism

For some people a significant driver of Active or Passive Self-Criticism relates to ideas such as "I don't deserve self-compassion because of (insert reason)" or "I haven't earned it so I can't have my dessert before I eat my vegetables." We could call these types of reasons the "moral" position against self-compassion.

Pragmatic Source of Self-Criticism

Let's now look at the second main source of structural self-criticism. We will take a deep dive to fully comprehend this source.

We can investigate this in more granular detail. Ask yourself a question. If you make a mistake, drop the ball, do something wrong, fall short of your standards, what could be the benefit of being self-critical in response to this?

Many of us have one or two reasons that might rise to the surface fairly rapidly. After thinking for a minute have a look at the items below and see if any are relevant to you above and beyond any examples you thought of already. A non-exhaustive list of examples follows:

Being self-critical in response to a failure of some sort:

- Keeps me on track
- Being aware of your flaws can prepare you for attacks from other people.
- Avoids laziness
- Helps me achieve my best
- Helps me be honest with myself where others may feel unable to
- Is just what I learned growing up, to effectively manage the world when things went wrong
- Helps you be aware of your downfall so that you can fix them

Notice if any of these seem relevant to you. They may or may not but we are exploring at this stage.

The next question we could pose is almost the first question in reverse. What might be the risks, problems, dangers, downsides of being more self-compassionate when we are confronted with a situation in which we feel we failed or fell short of our expectations.

Take a minute to see if anything comes to mind. It may just be the opposite of the answers you gave previously but others may come up. Some people with a history of self-criticism say that self-compassion is positive and there is no risk to being self-compassionate. However, the fact that they are not acting fully in alignment with that theoretical view points to there being quite strong psychological forces working against this notion.

Again, here is a short list of possible answers to stimulate thinking:

If I become too self-compassionate in the face of failure or falling short of my standards then:

- I will become weak or soft
- I will drop my guard and my flaws will show
- I will change too much and become someone I don't want to be
- I will less likely be able to protect against bad things happening
- I will become egotistical
- It is delusional
- My standards will drop
- I will let myself off the hook for my mistakes and not improve

If we hold any of these beliefs in these sections and they are combined with "no pain, no gain" thinking then our brains will resist giving up these "apparent" benefits of self-criticism/risks of too much self-compassion to just have a little less emotional pain. The price will appear too high and self-sabotage will often ensue.

What do we do then? How do we avoid traps?

A useful step is to nourish and nurture an alternate assumption and replace "no pain, no gain" as your unconscious pilot with the more powerful and flexible "more output, less effort" paradigm to obtain the benefits of self-compassion with no cost. This sounds too good to be true to most people as they are deeply conditioned and invested in "no pain, no gain" as their unconscious autopilot. It may come across like a late night infomercial's hyperbole. Let's see how this "more output less effort" might be infinitely more realistic than it sounds.

Exercise in the Park

Let's just say you and I met up in a local park that has a big 4km circular road through it. People drive, jog, walk, ride horses and bike ride around this circuit.

And let's also say you are an Olympic champion in multiple running events at peak fitness and I haven't done any exercise in 12 months. I turn up in what appears to be jogging gear and challenge you to a race around the 4km circuit. It is also 40 degrees celsius. You quite reasonably think that I am being a bit unrealistic about this and think that I am trying to write a cheque my body won't be able to cash.

At the last minute I say "oh you will be running, I'll be riding my bike." We set off. Even though you are an Olympic athlete and I am relatively unfit, I finish the 4km circuit ahead of you on my bike without extreme exertion. Of course, you are not taxed either by this 4km run. We are both sweating lightly in the sun. However, this is where things get interesting. I now challenge you to another 10 laps. This will make the total distance greater than marathon distance. Now things are getting serious. Again, my moderate fitness is enough to allow me to complete the next 10 laps faster than you running. At the end I am feeling pretty tired and so are you. However, three days later I am in better shape than you as it will take you some days or weeks to recover. I'd be quite comfortable repeating the exercise a few days later. If we break this down, I was able to complete the distance in less time and with far less energy and wear and tear on my body even with only a very moderate fitness level. There was no trade off. I exceeded you on all metrics. This is the "more output, less effort" paradigm in action. We are aiming psychologically to metaphorically ride the bike rather than run. Most don't realise there is even a bike to ride.

Interestingly lets look at the bicycle. Five hundred years ago if you said you had a machine that you could sit on that could go faster than somebody running and do it indefinitely what would the response be? In some parts of the world you may have found yourself burning on a stake by dinner time accused of witchcraft. But a bicycle is the quintessential "more output less effort" process.

The reason it doesn't feel magical for most of us is that riding a bicycle has its own set of internal limitations. The faster we want to ride the lower the potential time we can do this. However, these limitations are a step up from the similar limitations for running. We could extend the analogy further and eventually trade up to a motorcycle which gives you even more output with less effort while having its own similar internal limitations of speed versus fuel consumption etc. From the motorcycle we could move to the metaphorical helicopter, followed by the metaphorical airplane, and even eventually the Starship Enterprise. We are going to aim to upgrade our own psychological maps similarly.

Returning to more output less effort for a moment. This is not a radical idea. In fact you are unconsciously running this script in most areas of your life already. Do you grow all your own food, or make all your own clothes, do you swim between continents if you travel or walk days through deserts for a holiday. It is unlikely that you do. You most likely buy your food at a grocery store, buy your clothes from a shop, use motorized public or private transport. This is more output less effort in action. It is the heart of most technology too. In fact, the process of evolution is built on the structure of this paradigm. Perhaps it was your under 7 soccer coach who gave you the "no pain, no gain" programming that you only selectively use to your detriment as we will show shortly.

But moving away from abstract examples, how would all this look in the real world in our day to day psychology? How do we implement and optimize these ideas? Let's use an example that is closer to home.

Teacher A and Teacher B

Teacher A

Many of us have seen movies from a few decades ago where children were schooled under strict regimes and punishment was often physical and brutal to modern eyes. Let's take a temporary trip back to those times.

We have a young student. Let's call him Johnny. One day Johnny is in class and he says a colourful look bird sitting in a tree outside the window of the classroom. He stares at this bird noticing all the interesting colours. As he is staring at the bird **teacher A** notices and marches down the aisle with a big wooden ruler and whacks Johnny very hard with this ruler. Naturally, Johnny gets quite a shock. The teacher then tells Johnny that he will never get anywhere in life daydreaming and that if he catches Johnny doing it again he will be in even bigger trouble.

Johnny rubs the red mark on his face where the wooden ruler made contact. He doesn't look out the window for the rest of the day for fear of the consequences.

Later it is maths homework revision time. **Teacher A** asks Johnny, in front of the class, what answer he had for question 1 from last night's homework. Johnny answers that he couldn't do it. **Teacher A** marches up to him with his trusty wooden ruler and you can guess what happens next. **Teacher A** gives Johnny 5 more questions and says, "this is punishment for being lazy. You better have these 5 questions done by tomorrow morning or you

will not be going on the ice-cream factory excursion on Friday with everyone else!"

Johnny is suitably humiliated and fearful. Johnny didn't understand the homework question because earlier in the year when the class was working on that topic Johnny was off school sick with glandular fever for a number of weeks. He didn't bother reminding **Teacher A** of this as he feared he would get into even more trouble for his "excuses".

Let's assume **Teacher A** is not some sort of psychopath, but is consciously dishing out "tough love" thinking that Johnny will hate **Teacher A** now but in 40 years time when he is a success and **Teacher A** is long gone, **Teacher A** hopes Johnny looks back at these times as instrumental in guiding his path successfully forward. **Teacher A** feels they are some form of martyr for the future benefits of the children.

Johnny goes home terrified of any impending humiliation the next day as well as missing the excursion later in the week. He looks at the 5 questions and doesn't really understand what to do with them. He looks up the answers in the back of the textbook and fudges his way writing out some working that he hopes **Teacher A** will not look at closely tomorrow. It takes a while and he ends up having to go to bed at 2am.

The next morning Johnny sheepishly shows **Teacher A** the answers and **Teacher A** quickly glances at them and says, "that will teach you for being lazy, don't do it again!" Johnny feels a sigh of relief that he avoided missing out on the excursion. He still has no idea how to do those types of maths questions and if there was an exam on them today he would fail dismally. But he has largely avoided punishment and humiliation which was the main goal for him.

Teacher B

Now let's turn our attention to an alternative universe. In that universe Johnny is sitting in class with the same children, but the difference is that he has a teacher called **Teacher B** now. We will skip the part about Johnny looking out the window at the colourful bird and move straight to maths homework revision time. Just as **Teacher A** did, **Teacher B** asks Johnny what answer he got for Question 1 from last night's homework. In this universe Johnny still didn't know the answer and the reason is the same, glandular fever back when the class discussed the topic. Johnny replies that he wasn't able to fully complete the question and **Teacher B** says "let me have a look at what you were able to do."

Teacher B then says "ahh ok so you got the first step correct but then got stuck at the next one. Remember when we discussed that a couple of months ago?" Johnny felt comfortable reminding **Teacher B** that wasn't there for that work and he doesn't fully understand how to do that topic yet. **Teacher B's** reply is "of course, I remember now, you weren't here then." **Teacher B** then briefly goes over the theory finishing with "and then you divide by 2 and multiply by 180 degrees, does that make sense?" Johnny thinks he understands the divide by 2 operation but is still a bit fuzzy on the multiply by 180 degrees one. **Teacher B** then explains it another way and Johnny thinks that he understands it now. **Teacher B** gives Johnny a couple of practice questions then and there and helps guide Johnny through them.

Teacher B then says "try these 5 at home and we can look at them tomorrow. But before you try them look at this short YouTube video where they show how this maths was used to help the space shuttle engines work."

Johnny goes home and is playing computer games after dinner when his mother tells him its time to work on his homework. Johnny goes to his room and gets out all his books. He sees the YouTube video link written on a piece of paper and decides to start there as it seems like the easiest option to start his homework. As he watches the video he starts becoming interested and thinking "ahh this maths is space stuff, that's pretty cool." We are not going to overplay this story and say Johnny joined Space X or NASA and lived happily ever after obsessed by space. No, all we are saying is that Johnny disliked maths a little less at this moment than he might otherwise have done and felt a spark of curiosity about its usefulness in the real world. After watching that video he watched another couple of recommended ones that were similar and then got down to work. He found that the first 3 of the 5 questions seemed quite straightforward although the working took time to write out. However, question 4 and 5 seemed hard nuts to crack. He just couldn't seem to get them to balance. But with no threat looming over him, he felt no fear. He was curious to find out from **Teacher B** what the missing element was for both of the questions. At 2am his mother told him he had to go to sleep. He slept comfortably without fear of the new day at school.

In the morning Johnny approached **Teacher B** before class to check through the 5 questions of homework. She mentioned that the first 3 went smoothly enough. With the 4th she showed Johnny that he just forgot to "multiply by 180 degrees". For the 5th question **Teacher B** let Johnny know that she set it as a trick question. She showed him how a slight change in how the question is set up can confuse people who haven't seen the deeper nature of the problem. She also mentioned that one of the last 2 questions on the exam paper often have this type of change in

the question to throw people off, but that now he has seen it and understands it he will be able to check and transform that question appropriately. A few months later, sure enough, one of the last questions in the paper was a similar one and Johnny was alert to it. After the exam he heard his friends complaining about that question and how it wasn't set up how it was supposed to be. He felt a nice warm feeling inside that he had mastered that.

It should be noted that **Teacher B** is not a "soft option" where everything is always fine, all answers are equally as good. Where $2 + 2$ can be 4, 5, or 6, or whatever the student thinks to spare their feelings. **Teacher B** has a certain outcome they are aiming for and recognize that a student can be drifting off course at any particular time. Sometimes "correction" is required. And **Teacher B** is not the type of teacher who necessarily lets the class get on top of them, throwing things at them behind their back or locking them in the storage closet when they go in to retrieve materials. Compassionate, supportive and grounding is how we will define our best manifestation of **Teacher B**.

We should note that **Teacher A** and **Teacher B** do overlap in some of their beliefs. They both feel that for success students will need to master the material and that this process will take substantial effort and time regardless of increasing efficiencies in study and organising achieved by a student. However, **Teacher A** thinks that without tough discipline and a touch of brutality it will be like herding cats, the students would drift and possibly run amock. **Teacher B**, however, thinks that by providing a spark of curiosity and an explorer mentality, that might feed the fire of passion that leads to deep engagement and mastery as a byproduct.

Now, let's stop this example here and ask a question.

Which teacher, **Teacher A** or **Teacher B** would you want teaching your child (or future one)? I'd say it would be a relatively safe bet that you would say **Teacher B** without much hesitation.

Now we raise an interesting point.

While nearly everyone would want **Teacher B** teaching their child for a whole host of reasons, nearly everyone has a version of **Teacher A** as their internal working overseer. This might be **Teacher A** on their best day (more closely linked to the Passive Self-Criticism paradigm discussed earlier) or **Teacher A** on an average or relatively bad day (more closely linked to the Active Self-Criticism paradigm also discussed earlier). Why the difference between what you would want for someone you loved and what you might accept for yourself? This is where our previous

discussion of the sources of Self-Criticism can shed some light. The moral and pragmatic sources can push us into long term Self-Critical feedback loops.

Why you haven't done this already

This discussion can seem all too obvious to the point that it can feel there must be more going on. It can't be that simple. You might have spent a lot of years thinking about your psychology and you might have had people say you are a bit hard on yourself at times. If it was just that simple to shift this wouldn't you have done it already?

We have already looked at the drag coefficients of the Moral and Pragmatic reasons that maintain Self-Criticism but there are other process factors too. We will look at two prominent ones.

Vitamin fallacy

We will talk about an interesting story then link it back to our discussion of Self-Criticism at the end. As a psychologist I have always been interested in cults, how they start and what maintains them, as well as how they end. Some forms of network marketing can appear to share a number of similar features and thus my interest also spread there.

I once spoke to someone who had a senior position in one of these network marketing businesses which became an offshoot of a very famous parent business. He offered to let me see the procedures manual that was written by the founder of this business for the senior people to follow. I found it interesting how it differed from similar documents I had read in the past.

The strategy of the parent company was to recruit people to sell items to their friends and family first of all then expand from there. The recommendation of this business was for people to start selling staple items such as laundry liquid dishwashing liquid with the rationale that everyone needs such products so demand is almost universal. That system had all the usual sales tactics that such business employs. If someone asked why the laundry liquid was twice as expensive as the usual one at the grocery store they were told it was four times more concentrated so it was actually half the price effectively. In this way it is often quite easy to make the first sale to someone if you handle the objections regarding high price and the like. However, the problem is in the repeat sales. It's hard to know when someone will be running out of these products and need a refill. Some people might take 2 weeks to run out some might take 2 months. The sales agent will have a narrow window for a follow up sale. The prospect would need to be almost finished using their first order or have just run out of the product. The

next time the prospect is at the grocery store they are likely to just buy more of the laundry liquid while they are there rather than wait for their acquaintance in the network marketing company to contact them for a new sale. Attrition such as this are one of the reasons for the large dropout rates for people who sign up to work with network marketing companies.

Now let's turn to how the offshoot business, which was becoming hyper successful at that point, did things. Instead of getting people to sell household staples such as laundry liquid and the like, they trained their people to sell vitamins as the first pitch. The sales process I read in the manual was stellar. I felt that if someone came to me with this pitch it would be possible I would buy their vitamins, it was so compelling. However, the most interesting aspect was not the focus on vitamins, or the initial sales pitch, but how they went about cultivating followup sales. With a 30 day supply of vitamins a sales agent has some idea as to when the prospect will be becoming low in their supply. They also check in at regular intervals to remind the prospect to keep taking their vitamins which came across as "good customer service" the way the process was handled in the manual.

Let's turn to the big success secret that was employed. At the end of the period in question (eg 30 days) the sales agent contacts the prospect and asks "how have you been feeling the last month since you have started on the vitamins?"

The manual detailed a branching structure sales process we will outlay here. Any possible answer was divided into two broad categories. The first category included replies in the range of: "great" to "ok I suppose".

Great _____ **Ok I suppose**

If a client made a reply in this range the sales agent would say something along the lines of: "that's good to hear, we can't be sure exactly what proportion of that is being created by the vitamins, but it sounds like we want to do everything possible to keep that going and improve on it, yes?"

If the client takes this bait and momentum is created the sales agent then begins an upsell process: "we are finding this to be a common experience, so much so that we are starting to run low on supply. I'd recommend that you purchase 3 months supply so you aren't disappointed at the end of next month if I have run out of stock completely."

Now let's look at the other possible answers a client may give to the question "how have you been feeling the last month since you have started on the vitamins?"

The manual also detailed the second part of the branching structure. The second category included replies in the range of "not so good actually" to "it was the worst month of my life I was in hospital and it was touch and go for a while whether I would pull through."

Not so good ————— Worst month of my life

I still remember clearly the advice for the sales agent in the latter catastrophic circumstances: "Well, sounds like a terrible time there, so sorry to hear. Look, we certainly can't be sure about this but the vitamins may have given you that extra 1 to 2% (or more) that helped you just tip over on the positive side here and contributed to boosting your immune system etc. and saving your life along with the doctors and everything else of course. We certainly don't want to take any chances in your recovery and we certainly don't want to take any risks, especially if the vitamins provided some benefit to you during this catastrophe. I really think you should invest in a 12 months supply while you get yourself through this just to be on the safe side. We can't even risk any old vitamins because for all we know it could be this unique formulation and taking anything might not add the benefits you may have got with these."

We can of course make all sorts of moral judgments about these types of sales processes but from a psychological and sociological perspective it was very interesting architecture compared to standard fare I had researched. I also had to admit to myself that it wasn't too long ago that I would be at risk of getting caught up in a process like this if it was thrust upon me.

So, whatever the client's answer to the question "how have you been feeling the last month since you have started on the vitamins?" it would appear to them that they were the exact type of client who should be repurchasing a supply. They wouldn't realise that whatever their answer was it would appear they were the exact type of client who should be repurchasing a supply.

This is why you might notice that yours or some of your friend's medicine cabinets start expanding with all sorts of supplements. This is because of the trap of the proverbial end of the supply question. Once you reach the end of a supply of something you heard about on a podcast, read about in a magazine, or were told about by your uber driver, there is a decision point. That decision point relates to whether you should keep taking that supplement and replenish your supply. We will assume

you have been diligent with taking it. Of course you might have taken the supplement for 3 days after the initial inspiration and just forgot all about it but we will leave that case aside for now. We saw how the network marketing business built in follow up calls to keep clients on the path to regular consumption of the vitamins.

At the decision point you may ask yourself how you feel after the month. As we have seen if you feel pretty good you now may partially attribute this to the vitamins and replenish on the basis of that perspective. Alternatively, you have have felt terrible, and had a bad dose of the flu for a week. However, you remember how your next door neighbour had the flu (you might have even caught it from him) for 3 1/2 weeks and is still not quite over it. It looks like the supplement reduced the impact of the flu and on that basis its certainly time to replenish as a prophylactic. You see, whatever the state of your health, there appears to be a perspective to keep taking the supplement. It is like a closed loop that ends where it started regardless of where it goes.

How does all this relate to Self-Criticism you ask. Self-Criticism can be seen the same way. As a self-sustaining closed loop system. We will talk about closed-loops in more detail when we come to discuss belief systems. Say you are habitually Self-Critical (let's assume in the Active Self-Critical sense for this discussion). If you have any successes in life, it will appear almost obvious that Self-Criticism is at least partially responsible for this success as it "kept you on the straight and narrow", "stopped you drifting" or "repeating mistakes" or whatever other unique pragmatic beliefs you may have about the benefits of Self-Criticism. In the case where things are not going well, or even disastrously currently, it will also appear almost obvious that Self-Criticism stopped things from "being even worse". You might currently be in the "8th circle of hell" but you could always be in the "10th circle of hell" if your Self-Criticism hadn't stopped things from completely going off a cliff.

Here we see it doesn't matter what happens in our lives, anything positive, negative or neutral reinforces our Self-Critical paradigm. In fact we can be trapped in a reinforcing closed-loop of confirmation bias that can last a lifetime. Any belief structure follows the above process. That's why it is a belief rather than a passing thought or daydream.

This type of thinking kept dysfunctional processes embedded deeply into our societies for hundreds of years. Let's look at the field of medicine. Leeches have until relatively recently been a fundamental part of the medical toolkit going back at

least 2500 years. As recently as the 19th century you would have found reputable and respectable doctors using leeches to treat anything from tonsillitis to hemorrhoids. How is this longevity of use possible when leeches have zero, or next to zero functionality in the treatment of almost every disorder they were applied to? In fact, leeches were the frontline treatment of the Black Death in the 1300s where 30% to 60% of the population of Europe died from the plague. Shouldn't this fact have been fatal to the idea of leeches being in the medical arsenal?

Let's go on a little journey to medieval times. We have Bob who isn't feeling very well. He goes to the local village doctor who says he can confidently cure Bob of what afflicts him if he promises to diligently go through the doctor's leech treatment on a daily basis for 3 weeks. It will cost Bob a pouch of gold coins which his blacksmith business can certainly afford as he has been expanding recently with the addition of a swathe of 6 year old apprentices.

Bob dutifully goes through the leech bloodletting for 3 weeks and at the end of this process is feeling almost good as new. Miraculous. This doctor is the real deal. Bob is very grateful and sings the praises of the doctor to everyone who listens. The reality is that Bob had a head cold and he just got over it in a couple of weeks. The leeches provided nothing of value to that process but Bob gave these creatures half the credit along with the doctor.

Now it so happens that Bob's cousin John has just returned by ship from his annual holiday to Messina. It was a 10 day trip back and he wasn't feeling too well even before he left. He was telling Bob about his travel stories such as how he saw 12 ships being forced out of port for some reason. Apparently, some of the sailors were quite sick apparently, and authorities told the ships to leave.

Anyway, after telling tales of lessons in Pitching Quoits and Jousting as well as learning about new technologies for ice skates using cow shinbones, Bob starts to get a little worried about cousin John. He suggests that John see the fabulous village doctor. John said he has quite a bit of work to catch up on but will keep it in mind. A few days later Bob sees John in the village square looking quite haggard with some pronounced black boils on his body. Bob insists John see the esteemed doctor immediately and makes the introduction. The doctor gives his now familiar refrain of assuring John that he can sort out all his difficulties if he engages with the doctors leech therapy for the next three weeks. He will need to pay a pouch and a half of gold coins (inflation is running pretty high). Bob offers to pay this as his new barrel making business is flying high.

John readily agrees and starts on the daily leech treatment regime. However, on day 3 disaster strikes as John dies suddenly and painfully. The rest of the village are up in arms and turn on the doctor accusing him of incompetence. They march on the doctor's premises with pitchforks in hand ready to enact frontier justice.

As they gather outside Dr Leech's house they are ready to strike. Dr Leech steps out on the porch with a conciliatory tone telling the crowd he understands their pain and he shares it with them. He then asks the question when John first got sick. Bob who is in the crowd mentions that John said he was already sick when he started the journey back from Messina, which was then a further 10 days. The doctor then asks whether John sought him out the moment he disembarked. Bob replied no, it was another few days until John decided to go to the doctor and it was at Bob's insistence. The doctor quietly and empathetically asked how could he possibly make any real impact on John's condition when he left it so long to seek treatment? Perhaps if John had come the moment he disembarked the doctor may have been able to arrest the precipitous decline in John's condition but even then he had had a fortnight of the symptoms steadily worsening.

The mood of the crowd slowly started to soften. They had trouble arguing with Dr Leech's logic and they did know John had a tendency to procrastinate. This time his procrastination had caused his demise. Some in the crowd even started to apologize to Dr Leech. He said he completely understood and that he wished he could have used his powerful leech therapy when John just started showing symptoms then all would have been well.

John, of course, had bubonic plague and leech therapy would not have made any difference even on day 1. As Bob walked home he noticed that he was aching and saw a black boil had appeared on his leg. Later that day as Dr Leech was sipping his tea he too felt a black boil on the left side of his neck..... The rest is history.

As you can see a closed loop can develop in such medical situations. A completely ineffective therapy can appear to work when it was actually the body's natural immune response combined with time. A fatal outcome can always be blamed on someone waiting too long to get treatment. Think further on this, if you had all the symptoms of a cold that progressively worsened over a week to the point where you went to the hospital, you would be asked when the symptoms first appeared. If the diagnosed illness turns out to be serious the ER doctor may admonish you for waiting so long to get treatment for such a serious life threatening illness.

If, however, you raced to the hospital every time you had a runny nose you would likely be admonished by the same ER doctor about your health anxiety and be referred to a psychologist when he lets you know you have a common cold which is what those symptoms would be 99% of the time.

Ironically, we are all vulnerable if we have serious illnesses that share the components of common less serious illness and we present at a hospital. It is natural for medical staff to assume it is a minor issue until it is proven otherwise. Hospitals don't have the resources to do comprehensive testing of everyone who walks in the door with symptoms that are consistent with everyday illnesses.

Ebola and Influenza share most of their symptoms, but of course the former is exceedingly rare in most places in the world and historically infinitely more deadly to most demographics. Ebola and other serious conditions could easily (and often are) mistaken for the flu in the early stages.

Alternative therapies which have empirical evidence for their effectiveness

There is another perspective that allows you to keep some positive ideas about the value of your past Self-Criticism while also trading it in permanently. This allows you to bypass the grief of wondering if you had changed your Self-Critical paradigm earlier, how much pain you could have saved over the years.

Developing a base of evidence has become an important aspect of the field of psychology. The notion behind this is that there are many ideas that have face validity or in other words sound "good" but don't actually lead to improvements in people's lives and so enabling people to go through processes to ascertain "what works" is a noble goal, albeit fraught with difficulty and philosophical complexity.

What do we mean by terms such as "this is an evidence based technique". This might give the impression that if the technique is competently applied in the domain it was designed and researched in, it will make a big positive difference in outcome. This may be true but not necessarily so. There are many psychological techniques that have reached the designation of "evidence based" that don't quite fit with these possible expectations.

A technique or therapy type may have been researched and found in certain studies to "work." However, these evidence based tools will not necessarily "work" for everyone. A technique that "works" for 65% of people might be described as "evidence based".

Also, what do we define as "working"? A reduction in severity of symptoms, say, of depression by a certain percentage point rather than the complete elimination of the set of symptoms is what is usually talked about there. Of course we have shown that we redefine what "symptoms" might mean in various realms of popularly labeled mental health conditions, and that pathologizing them is the least useful way of looking at it in most cases. A person might have their symptoms reduced to a point where they don't meet a diagnostic cut-off for depression or an anxiety disorder per se, but may still have a certain level of suffering remaining. With our model we now have a multidimensional paradigm to make sense of these ideas that differs from the mainstream interpretations.

You might think that a tool or therapy that has been shown to be evidence based would be the automatic one of choice. However, that might not be the most useful way to look at it. Let's use the example of an unnamed alternative therapy that has recently gained substantial empirical evidence for its effectiveness. Since we have already disparaged network marketing and the vitamin industry in our discussion, let's pull our punches and not write a hit piece on any specific alternative therapy here. We don't need to, to make the point we want to make.

Let's say this therapy which we will call Therapy X has been around for a long time on the fringes of psychology. The average person might assume it be a standard "legitimate" therapy. Some well designed research is published which shows that yes this type of therapy makes a real difference in the treatment of certain psychological conditions. This once fringe therapy now has some real scientific backing for its principles and of course practitioners of Therapy X hold up this research as it provides credibility. Potential clients look at this research and feel confident that it provides benefits. It seems clear that engaging in this type of therapy is clearly the way forward.

But is it?

If I came to you just before you embarked on finding a practitioner for Therapy X and told you that Cognitive Behaviour Therapy has been shown to have a 3 times greater effect size in about half the time than Therapy X, which therapy do you think you would like to engage in if treatment result was your prime variable of concern? We can both say Therapy X has real demonstrative ability to help a condition but at the same time it would never be chosen above Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for this condition. Thus, something can have demonstrable benefits but never be used because something else has even more power with less effort needed to be expended to succeed.

We can take that approach to Self-Criticism if we wish. If it is a bridge too far to see Self-Criticism as an entirely sub-optimal approach in all circumstances then we can view it similar to Therapy X above. This can prevent you from thinking you were "doing it wrong" before. You can view adding a Self-Compassionate approach which we will talk about more practically next chapter as a form of software upgrade. The first version of the software was better than nothing but you would never go back now you have Version 2.0. Of course, we have simplified these analogies to a low to medium resolution level and they are not above criticism, but we are using the resolution required to highlight this non-conventional but perhaps more functional perspective.

Our goal for this chapter was to remove as much as possible any conditioned road blocks to the beginning of a development of a more self-compassionate relationship. We have shown that no-pain no-gain axioms often lie at the bottom of the assumption that to be more self-compassionate we have to actually drop our standards. In, fact the irony is that a deeply self-compassionate system allows for the possibility of the expansion of standards and the lifting of goal horizons.

How would that work?

For someone who is aiming for lofty goals and is habitually self-critical, there is a limit to the scope of the goal they are aiming for. The higher the goal the more failure in the attempt to achieve it. At a certain theoretical point self-criticism could be almost constant and paralyzing and the psychological heat generated becomes too much to bear at that level. Therefore the person in question will need to reduce the loftiness of their aspirations, or give up on their goal, so they don't get crushed under the weight of constant self-criticism. However, a deeply self-compassionate system allows you to let your goals off the leash. If "failure" is not met with self-criticism but a **Teacher B** orientation then you can shoot for the moon if you wish with no psychological or self-esteem risk.

This is because the concept of "failure" is redefined in such a system. This is such an important idea we need to dial up our resolution of this map further. Take the perhaps apocryphal story of Thomas Edison and the invention of the light bulb. Popular lore holds that it took Edison and his team 1000 iterations of the light bulb over a period of time to achieve a working light bulb. That appears on one level as a lot of failure and we might attribute an amazing level of resilience and other apparent qualities to this, in the end, successful process. How did Edison describe the process he went through? When asked how did he handle all the failure he is purported to have said "I

just worked out 999 ways a light bulb didn't work." This framework points to curiosity, passion, exploration as driving forces of a successful process. There is little oxygen for self-criticism and shame. The average person may look at Edison and feel he has some superhuman qualities. They might think that after 6 or 7 failures they would feel too destabilised to continue as their sense of self as an inventor would be severely shaken in their minds. The heat would get too much. So someone who can persist through the suffering of another 993 times through this failure cycle is certainly someone to look up to. **But the real secret here is that there was no suffering.**

Baby learning to walk

Let's use an example closer to home. I find it fascinating how many people attribute their success in life to a self-critical attitude. High-flying businesspeople will say things like "I got where I am today by never being satisfied and always pushing myself harder and not accepting failure in any way" and leading musicians, athletes and actors often cite ruthlessly demanding teachers or coaches as being the key to their success by teaching them to never be happy with themselves and always aiming higher. Achievement and self-criticism seem inexorably linked in most people's minds. **And yet there remains the question as to whether such people succeeded despite their self-critical orientation, not because of it.**

Where does this idea that to succeed you have to endlessly criticism and belittle yourself come from? And is there a better way to find success without dropping standards - one that doesn't leave a person with a depreciated self-esteem and an inability to see themselves positively other than briefly after a short term successful outcome.

A few months ago I was at a birthday party for a good friend's five year old son. I've seen this boy grow from birth to become a real bundle of energy. He was racing around the house, darting and dipping between furniture with incredible skill and dexterity, chasing and being chased, pivoting and instantly shifting position and sidestepping, a marvel of coordination and agility.

This made me think back to his younger days. When I used to visit, when he was still crawling around the floor in the lounge room. One day I was there with a whole group of other people and we were watching, with rapt attention, as he tried to get up on his feet and fell back down instantly to the crawling position. His valiant effort at standing was met with howls of appreciation from all the adults observing him, there were claps and encouraging words and wonderful energy filled the room.

And this little baby boy would look up and around the room, beaming and smiling as his audience cheered his every attempt to get up. Of course, he met with little success. His attempts to stand were an exercise in abject failure that went on week after week after week, month after month after month; nonstop failure. But every time I was round at the house while he was trying, we would all naturally, almost genetically it seemed, create this safe environment for him to try and fail to stand. Every adult present knew instinctively to create an encouraging and supportive place where he could go through his extremely complex process of trial and error, to get to the point where he could hold his body in an upright position and walk.

At no stage did we think he wouldn't eventually succeed, and at no stage did any of us, especially his parents, express any impatience or annoyance that it didn't happen sooner. But on paper, we were witnessing constant, utter failure, time and again until the day that he was able to get upright for the first time and take those first couple of unsteady steps, slightly too fast, before gently crashing to the floor amid rapturous applause and resuming his normal seated position on the carpet, more interested in the wrapping paper of his present rather than the present itself.

It's quite an amazing feat for a young, immature brain and body to go through a process of such complexity - to arrive at a sophisticated action such as walking, at such an early age of development, with so many more years of growth and maturity in the brain and body to come. It's truly remarkable, if you think about it. Especially when to that young mind there is no guarantee of success.

And our reaction to it was remarkable too - that constant, unconscious approach of encouragement and safe, positive guidance. This is just the way we're programmed to respond to a child learning to walk. This process is playing out right in this moment in hundreds of thousands of households around the world. We extend to the child a deep emotional safety and give them a safe space to learn, explore and fail repeatedly, until the objective is achieved. And yet with ourselves, we may tend to be harsh, critical, relentlessly demanding or conversely avoidant of challenge due to the un-acceptance of "failure". So when in life do we decide that the kind, safe approach needs to change to a harsh, critical, perhaps brutal at times, internal voice that many of us think is the optimal way to learn and grow? When does this happen?

Well, as I witnessed this boy being scolded many times for running in the house, I started to realize that it was probably about now. At school, at home, everywhere he went, the way society taught the boy was changing into something much colder,

less flexible. In place of encouragement, he had restrictions. In place of unconditional support he would be made painfully aware of his shortcomings every time he failed to live up to expectations. In place of emotional safety he may soon come to feel he was walking on eggshells. Instead of looking around at beaming faces and knowing that he would be valued even if he screwed up, society would come to teach him that he was only as good as his grades, his achievements, his job title. And he would come to internalise that voice of criticism (Active and or Passive versions) see it as his harsh but perhaps caring friend, and listen to it as it told him that to succeed he needed to be hard on himself and continually push himself further and further.

Why do we take a fool-proof method for teaching success, with infinite evidence of its utility all around the world, that is deeply compassionate and emotionally safe, and trade it in for either harsh criticism or cold pragmatism in how we view our growth, achievement, success, goal setting, and general behaviour? I often wonder if we took the same approach to a baby learning to walk, how would that baby interact with the process of learning? What would happen if after a couple of attempts it was abused, scorned and told to give up, as there's no point and "you're just not cut out for walking"? Would we have primary schools full of children who didn't progress above the crawling stage and had to walk around the playground with kneepads on?

Teenagers

Let's do a thought experiment and see where it leads. Let's say that some mystery illness has afflicted all teenagers on the planet simultaneously. The upshot of this illness is that all teenagers lose the ability to walk. They are back to the skill level of a baby in this regard. Let's also assume that the teenager can regain these skills if they undergo the exact process they did as a baby when they first developed their ability to walk. Months of tens of thousands of repeated failures to get to the point to walk again. Let's also assume that the teenagers do not know this is the process required.

Knowing the average teenager with their potential self-critical aura, how many of them do you think would keep going through this process of massed failure and social media groupthink? How many would decide after a week or two of trying intermittently that they have lost the skill forever and do not wish to manage the frustration and shame of continuing to try as it seems obviously futile. Even if a handful of teenagers do go through this process to succeed, other teenagers are likely to see them as "special" or "superhuman" rather than a road map for their own possible successful outcome. In fact, it is possible that it would be so rare for a self-critical teenager

to navigate this terrain, that there would be movies made and books written about the ones that do. A movie and book about something every baby goes through smoothly without any psychological damage or suffering caught up in the joyous wave of exploration and validation.

For a baby learning to walk, teaching them with a compassionate, supportive mindset seems obvious. Why can't that be the case for the rest of our lives? I feel absolutely certain that this style of learning would produce at least the same levels of success as the critical approach. If people spoke to themselves with a bit more compassion and encouragement they might be capable of engaging with and staying with processes that might reveal they are capable of a lot more than they imagine.

But the effects would be so much greater than that. We'd have people who are encouraged by success rather than afraid of failure. And even the concepts of success and failure would be redefined much as in our Edison light bulb example. We'd have schools full of kids and offices full of employees who know that their worth as a human being is not dependant on their latest progress report. If everyone felt secure and safe enough in themselves to experiment and "fail" (or find out the different ways a light bulb doesn't work) without it contracting their sense of worth I imagine an awful lot of people would be an awful lot happier and content.

And yet people can tend to cling to their self-criticism like it's the only think keeping them afloat in a vicious competitive world. They see ruthless criticism and even perfectionism as the only means of getting ahead in life, and see self-compassion as weak. But kindness and compassion towards yourself are not soft options. They are the most effective known strategy to safely grow and master new abilities. The baby learning to walk experienced the most massed failure it will ever experience in its life. It will be attempting a near impossible feat with a brain so overmatched by the goal that it is remarkable beyond words. Even more remarkably, nearly every one of us gets there. Because it is so normal and common for this to be so does not make it any less remarkable.

If compassion is good enough for babies- humans at their most vulnerable and precious - surely its good enough for the young child that remains inside all of us. Maybe pause for second the next time you see a baby crawling and realize, in some sense, this was, and still is you, just in a smaller package.

Self-Compassion and Perfectionism

We could view self-compassion and perfectionism as the two extremes on the continuum of how you related to yourself.

Self-compassion ————— **Perfectionism**

Self compassion is an "unconditional" relationship with yourself. If you remember it is the "I'll never abandon you no matter what happens" type of filter. Perfectionism is more of the "I'll be ok with you as long as you do everything perfectly" while making it almost impossible to do things perfectly as there is always something that could have been "better" in almost every situation. Perfectionistic people often succeed materially in life but it can come as with great cost.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "perfectionism" as "the refusal to accept any standard short of perfection."

It isn't just about high standards.

If you are not a perfectionist it is likely that you know one. Perhaps someone very close to you. Perfectionists don't always see themselves as perfectionists. They often think their standards are normal and reasonable and it is just that everyone else is "dropping the ball" or "lazy" or "not really trying their best".

A lot of people don't see perfectionism as a real problem. They rationalize the negative consequences as the natural price of achievement and success through the no pain, no gain filter we have already discussed. People can feel their world will "fall apart" if they chose to behave any differently.

Conventionally, when perfectionism is discussed in a therapy or coaching environment, the goal is often just to get the person to reduce "unsustainable standards". As effort is made to "get a work life balance" or something similar. These attempts usually end up going nowhere.

I've always felt uncomfortable about the idea of trying to talk somebody out of having high standards. That approach is too much like pathologizing anyone who wants to shoot for interesting new realms.

Where would we be if that approach had been applied to Einstein or Newton?

Would the Edison of our previous light bulb story pushed through the 1000 attempts required to make a working light bulb.

It's important to know whether the healthy pursuit of excellence has actually moved into the realm of toxic perfectionism. We need to determine if this shift is the natural consequence of the pursuit of excellence.

Is the pursuit of excellence creating enormous levels of stress, anxiety and interpersonal dysfunction? And if so, what is creating those negative consequences. It might be more complex than just the high level of effort often observed.

Perfectionism can be broken down into two key components. The first component is the traditional one just discussed concerning the extremely high standards one sets for oneself. The second component concerns our own reaction to ourselves for falling short of those standards. Research shows us that how the two components interact is extremely important. In fact, it can make all the difference.

People with a combination of high standards and high self-criticism score worse on all manner of psychological variables. They often also get lower scores for feelings of hope, joy and a whole host of positive emotions.

However, for people with a combination of high standards and low levels of self-criticism when they fall short, their scores on all psychological variables tend to be more positive. They also tend to score higher for levels of optimism and other positive emotions.

It's important to note that toxic perfectionism is not really about the "high standards" we have been led to believe for so many years in psychology. Toxic perfectionism is like a self-critical orientation when we fall short. This is where we need to focus our attention most acutely. The high standards side of things is not the central driver of distress.

The idea of theoretically reducing self-criticism and replacing that orientation with self-compassion has been the thesis of this chapter and we have brought in material to hopefully remove any latent, conditioned, unconscious and conscious barriers to that exploration. Not as a soft option but as the most functional performance enhancing process that can be imagined. In fact, self-compassion can be your superpower not your security blanket.

The source of high standards

We've focused a lot on the sources of self-criticism in its multiple guises, but what about the source of high standards, where do they come from?

We could divide the main sources of high standards into two categories, protection and exploration. Most people with high standards have some combination of the two categories, although it is common for one type to dominate.

Many people create high standards for themselves to protect against criticism from others or to push back against a depreciated self-esteem. This is a reactive space and it is a rarely comfortable space to inhabit regardless of the success that can come as a by product.

Other people develop high standards as a byproduct of their curiosity, passion, and explorer mentality. They just passionately want to see the "view from the top of that hill" and mastery and success come as a by product of this passion. Needless to say, the latter potential source of high standards appears to win out when looking through the "more output, less effort" lens. It trumps the other form on every functional metric you can name.

This does not mean that high standards are "better". Some people whose high standards were driven almost exclusively by protection and who are able to melt that iceberg often move to lowering standards but expanding their scope of interests. Its like substituting narrow and deep for broad and shallower. The proverbial Renaissance Man and Woman. There are no rules other the ones you want to make, we just want to remove the trees from your road so you can travel along it smoothly. Wherever you want your road to lead.

Hopefully, we are now at the point where self-compassion feels like a positive growth and contentment mechanism and any residual resistance is loosening and dissolving. Our next chapter will look and how to practically take charge and create your own self-compassionate programming. We've looked at the ingredients, now let's do some cooking :)c