

-----

# Claire Hatch Counseling Newsletter

Tips and Tools for Happier Relationships

June 2004

-----

## In this issue

- Life Balance--What's Your Inner Critic Got to Do with It?
- More Time Savers
- Is Love the Last Thing on Your List?

## Life Balance--What's Your Inner Critic Got to Do with It?

-----

Do you dream of relaxing weekends? With plenty of time to enjoy your family? And free time that's really free?

Sure, you say, but it's not going to happen anytime soon, unless I win the lottery, move to France, or my boss undergoes a complete personality change.

What if I told you there is a way to lighten your load? A way that's completely under your control and doesn't require any drastic changes to your lifestyle?

### **There is a way-get your inner critic off your back.**

I write a monthly column on relationships for the wedding website, [www.byrecommendationly.com](http://www.byrecommendationly.com). On a good day, I turn out an article in ninety minutes. On a bad day, it can take up to ten hours. What makes the difference? Am I just smarter on the ninety minute days? In a sense, yes. On the ninety minute days, I'm completely focused on what the stressed-out brides who are my readers need to have a happier engagement. It's just me and the work.

On the ten hour days, I have an uninvited guest-my inner critic. The critic adds a voice-over to every task: That was a silly idea. You think that's going to help anyone? And besides, the article is way too long. Or too short. Too complicated. Too simple. In some way or other, just not good enough.

Now what happens? **You probably know from your own experience that if you listen to criticism long enough, you start to believe it.**

Remember the movie, *Billy Madison*, with Adam Sandler? Billy gives a completely incoherent speech, and afterward, his teacher says, "Your speech was so poor that we are all stupider for having listened to it." After a session with the critic, all those ideas you were so excited about have mysteriously vanished. You have to go searching for them all over again and get back on task-until the next monologue starts up.

Imagine going back and forth like this all day. Then you go home and your partner asks, "How was your day?" You say, "Terrible! I'm exhausted! Just whipped to a frazzle! This project is a real bear and my boss is breathing down my neck all day. I don't know how I'll get it all done." But it's not the project or the boss. **It's the criticism, working like an invisible tax on your time and energy.**

The solution? First, you have to perceive when you're on task and when you're distracted by the critic. One important clue is your awareness of time. **When you're really working and "in flow," you lose track of time.** When you're aware of time, either

because it's going too fast (I'll never make this deadline!) or too slow (Three whole hours to go?) chances are the critic is afoot.

**Get in the habit of noticing those moments when you're acutely aware of time. Stop and write down what your inner critic is saying.**

This is what my client Kathy, a designer, wrote when she was struggling with a website: "I can't get these colors right. They're either too bright or too dingy. I've never been that good at color. How can I be a designer if I don't have a natural feel for color? Maybe I'm just not ready to run my own design business."

Choose the idea that bothers you most and ask: **What's the evidence?**

Here's the evidence Kathy came up with for "I'm not ready to run my own business."

"Color isn't my main strength." When forced to write it down, she couldn't honestly say, "I'm bad at color." It just didn't ring true.

**Then brainstorm all the other possible ways to look at the situation.** Here's what Kathy came up with.

"It always takes time to come up with a palette. It's like writing a story or composing a piece of music. You usually start with something you don't like very well and then improve it little by little. My biggest talent is coming up with concepts. No one is equally good in all areas. There are plenty of designers running businesses who aren't nearly as good as I am. Just because one website is taking more time than I expected doesn't mean I can't run my business."

Seeing her thoughts in black and white, it was clear to Kathy that she was making a big leap from being challenged by one project to thinking she shouldn't be in business at all.

"My inner critic is a master at exaggeration!" she laughed. "But I'm getting quicker at catching her in the act."

The result? She spends less time worrying about her work and more time actually working. And she gets home earlier and has more energy to enjoy her evening.

**Want to get your life back in balance? First, get your critic off your back.**

### **More Time Savers**

~~~~~

**Keep a laser-like focus on your priorities.** There will always be far more worthwhile projects and events in the world than you have time for. If you keep saying "Yes" you won't have time left for what really matters to you. If you have an uneasy feeling when you're asked to join a project, give yourself a day to think about whether it fits with your goals. Often the key to accomplishing more is committing to less.

**Don't be a perfectionist about making the exact right decision.** In most situations, a pretty good decision is better than none. It's a lot easier to change course once you're moving. And taking action in itself often leads to new information and new ideas. Can't decide where to go for vacation? Put down a deposit anyway. Just make sure you cancel before the deadline if you change your mind.

**Beware the preparation trap.** Yes, if you're a perfectionist, this means you. You want to make sure you've gathered all the relevant information before you write that report or

create that project timeline. Research can be a comfort zone and a huge time sink. The solution? Vow to plunge into the finished product before you really feel ready. Suddenly, it will be crystal clear to you where you need more information and where you already have enough.

### **Is Love the Last Thing on Your List?**

~~~~~  
I was talking to a colleague who has been in the counseling field for over 25 years. She commented, "The biggest change I've seen in families is the phenomenon of couples who hardly see each other. Twenty years ago that didn't happen."

It's amazing, isn't it? Living in America, we have more wealth, education, and freedom than anyone else on the planet. And along with that, more ability to choose our lifestyle than anyone else. And we choose to put our relationships the last thing on our list.

Not when we're single, of course. Then relationships are at the top of the list. We're out there every weekend, trying to find that perfect person. But once we do, other priorities take over-kids, work, school, hobbies, remodeling, social events.

The next time you reach for your calendar to commit another hour of your precious, irretrievable time, consider this:

According to Gallup, the #1 goal for most Americans is a happy marriage. That means that if you are married, there are millions of single people who dream of living your life.

If you are a turbo-charged super-couple, your partner's colleagues may know more about your partner's current joys, pains, and dreams than you do.

Relaxation is sexy. Maniacal multi-tasking is not. You can't race at 70 miles per hour and then turn on a dime and feel amorous. The Pointer Sisters didn't name their song "Slow Hand" for nothing.

### **Contact Information**

~~~~~  
email: [claire@clairehatch.com](mailto:claire@clairehatch.com)  
voice: 425 823-2273  
web: <http://www.clairehatch.com>  
~~~~~

Claire Hatch, LICSW, is a counselor and mediator who works with clients in her Seattle area office and by phone around the world. She gives presentations on relationships and conflict solutions. For more information on making your relationships the best they can be, visit [www.clairehatch.com](http://www.clairehatch.com). Claire can be reached at 425 823-2273 or [claire@clairehatch.com](mailto:claire@clairehatch.com).

Claire Hatch Counseling • 615 Market Street, Suite C • Kirkland • WA • 98033

**You are welcome to reproduce this article anywhere as long as you include the information above.**