

## Chapter 6: Regain Control

**Y**es! Here we go. If you made it this far, then I know that you are motivated and determined to make a big shift inside of your mind and heart. You are fed up with treating yourself poorly and ready to experience a life of more self-compassion, enjoyment, and O.M.O.S. I want to give you a map of the terrain ahead, including the stages you will go through on your journey to being more and more on your own side.

### THE FOUR LEVELS OF O.M.O.S.

While a powerful decision is the first step to being on your own side, it does not mean that your work is done. That decision is the springboard to changing your long-standing negative habits of relating to yourself poorly. Here is what the path of changing that habit looks like:

## Level Zero: Swimming in Self-Attack

Even before level one of O.M.O.S., there is, unfortunately, a level zero. This is where I spent many years, where you may have been before reading this book, and sadly, where a large number of people live their lives.

They are generally unaware of their inner critic, responding to its claims as if they are accurate reflections of their worth and ability. When the critic says they are an idiot for making a mistake, they think they're an idiot and feel ashamed and embarrassed. When their critic says not to try because they could never achieve something, they refuse to take the risk.

They feel like their self-hatred is justified—*Of course, I should be disgusted by myself; look at those thighs. Of course, I should feel inferior; look at my apartment and how small and unglamorous it is.*

In response to all this inner self-hatred, they may be living in a constant quest for glory, trying to become their fantasy self. They may be working themselves ragged, driven forward relentlessly by perfectionism and the promise of one day being worthy, or rich enough, or successful enough to finally be respected and admired by others.

As you may guess, living in level 0 is deeply unsatisfying. It doesn't end well.

## Level One: Catch and Interrupt Direct Self-Attack

In level one of being on your own side, you are able to catch yourself when you fall into a spiral of direct self-attack. You notice it when you are saying mean, harsh, or critical things to yourself.

For example, after you get rejected by someone, and you think—*I am such a loser. How embarrassing for me to have even*

*asked*—you don’t automatically agree with that criticism. Instead, an alarm bell goes off inside of you, alerting you that you are now in self-attack mode, which is not helpful.

You then employ the tools you’ll learn in this chapter to interrupt that criticism and stop it in its tracks before it grows into a 40-story monster that’s destroying the city.

And, if that is already happening, and you’ve fallen into a pit of self-hatred and perceived unworthiness, you are equipped with a tool belt that helps you get out faster than ever before.

## **Level Two: Catch-All Forms of Self-Undermining and Return to O.M.O.S.**

In this level, your alert radar goes off whenever you turn on yourself, in any way, no matter how subtle. Direct self-attack is a more rare occurrence and is surprising and jarring when it occurs. You ask yourself, *How did I tolerate that kind of treatment?*

As you catch and eliminate this direct self-attack, your critic turns to more sneaky methods of undermining your sense of confidence and worth. In this level of O.M.O.S., you get better and better at seeing those sneaky methods in action and finding your way back to being more compassionate and loving with yourself.

You regularly ask yourself, *Am I being on my own side right now?* When you’re struggling, you get curious about how you’re turning on yourself and what you can do to take care of yourself. You are actively curious about your own well-being and committed to quickly offering yourself the love and support you need.

The more you practice this, the better you get at it, and the better you feel. Turning on yourself in any way starts to feel unacceptable. It’s almost like you have an O.M.O.S. immune system that mobilizes a quick response to combat any form of self-attack and return you to optimal health.

### **Level Three: Mostly O.M.O.S.**

You reside mostly on your own side. This is your center of gravity and what you keep coming back to naturally. This results in a radical reduction of social anxiety, self-judgment, and all other forms of self-doubt. You like who you are, and you are less obsessively focused on how you come across and whether people will like you or not. You are okay with you.

You rarely engage in direct self-attack anymore. If it does start to happen, you are surprised and maybe even slightly amused. You think to yourself, *Wow, something must've gotten my critic really fired up!*

You approach your critic and all the parts of you with curiosity and acceptance. When you are suffering emotionally, you are truly empathic and looking to see what you need and what will help you.

You take more healthy risks because you are not afraid of the horrible berating that used to follow failure or rejection. You are more open to and engaged with life.

You sometimes catch ways you turn subtly on yourself. You are curious about the roots of these patterns and plant your focus on healing them at their core. You are uncovering and letting go of long-standing beliefs about who you should be and how you should operate to be lovable and worthy. You are becoming more and more you.

### **Level Four: Permanent O.M.O.S.**

You are truly accepting of who you are in the world, including all of your past mistakes and painful moments. You see the magic and beauty in who you are and how your life is unfolding.

It goes way beyond begrudgingly accepting yourself in spite of your shortcomings. Rather, it's deeply falling in love with your-

self, loving all of who you are, including the way your left eye gets smaller than your right when you smile, and the way you get secretly irritated when someone starts playing a Michael Jackson song because you never really liked his music, but everyone else seems to think it's amazing and you never saw what all the fuss was about (that's just hypothetical of course).

You are doing you. Life is moving through you, and you're letting it. You relish who you are. You love being in your body and are so grateful to have this incredible vehicle to move through the world.

At this level, you only want the best for yourself. You don't tolerate poor treatment. Instead, you cultivate a relationship that's affirming, inspiring, and loving. You are doing work that feels meaningful and fulfilling for you. In short, your life is awesome.

When there is pain, loss, heartache, or other inevitable challenges that arise in your life, you are on your side throughout. You hold yourself with tenderness and patience as you feel the inevitable pains that this human life brings.

Does that sound good to you? Do you want less of level zero and more of level four? Me too. And we start by mastering level one. Like any good video game, we gotta level our way up! Let's get started.

## **I AM THE CAPTAIN**

You are clear, determined, and motivated. And your critic is not happy about any of this. The first key skill you must develop to truly stay on your own side is to become the head of your household, the captain of your ship, the master of your domain—your inner domain.

Up until now, your critic has been running amok in your inner household. It has often been in charge, giving orders, yelling and

screaming at other family members, and causing dysfunction. This must change, and you are the one to change it.

You are a collection of parts. There is the critical part of you, and there is the part of you that wants to love yourself more. You have a scared part that acts up at different times in your life, and you have a courageous part that takes bold action in the world. You have a generous part that gives freely and a selfish part that wants to hoard everything for you and yours. This is natural and universally the case for all humans.

But we don't talk about this much. We say, "I decided to do this," or, "I told him that," as if there was just one "I" in there. But, what you decided to do was based on the input of various parts of you and on which parts are loudest and most dominant. For example, did you decide to eat a healthy dinner yesterday? Or did you just grab some fast food or eat some processed food from your cupboard? If you ate the healthy meal, then the health-oriented part of you was dominant last night. If you ate fast food or junk food, then the lazy or comfort-seeking part of you was in charge at that moment.

That's a simple example with just two basic parts. But what about something like this. Imagine you are at work, and you have an unpleasant encounter with a colleague in which he disparages your work in front of several other team members. He is condescending and dismissive, and you feel embarrassed and don't say much in your defense. After the meeting, there is a storm going on inside of you. You feel embarrassed, humiliated, angry, hurt, upset, and inferior. Your mind is abuzz with thoughts:

*Oh my God, that was terrible! He called my work uninspired and unclear. He even said it was sloppy. So bad. So awful. And Jared and Carol were watching the whole thing, and I didn't even do anything. I just sat there taking it like the pathetic doormat that I always am. What the hell is wrong with me? Anyone else would have said something, at*

*least. So weak. How dare he say that? What a jerk. As if his work is so great; he is so full of himself.*

Can you relate? Whether it's a tough work meeting, an awkward first date, or a difficult conversation with a loved one, we can leave experiencing a flurry of emotions and thoughts. We often think of this as "me" having "my" thoughts. But, what if it's a collection of different parts in there? Can you pick up a few different parts in this hypothetical work scenario? What are they?

There's the part of you that is hurt and embarrassed by your colleague's treatment. His criticisms stung, and the fact they were delivered publicly was even more painful. This part might feel like a small child who was criticized by the teacher and feels ashamed, inferior, and worthless. Then, there's another part of you that is enraged at your colleague, that wants to tear him down, get revenge, or give him a piece of your mind.

And finally, there's also your critic in there. Of course it's there because, remember, your critic is there to protect you from painful emotional experiences like this one. So whenever you are hurting inside, guess who's going to be in the mix, throwing out a handful of spiked barbs at you? That's right, your critic! In this case, it's picking on you about your history with a lack of assertiveness and what this says about your character.

Instead of a singular entity, this is more like a bunch of family members all talking at once around the kitchen table. Each part is inserting its perspective, speaking loudly, and cutting off other parts. This creates a cacophony of noise and adds to the sense of tension and upset you are feeling after a difficult encounter. It's hard to know what's going on. In fact, after a difficult experience, you may feel overwhelmed and confused and have a sense of "I don't even know what I think about it."

Discovering that you are a collection of parts might be a big revelation or something you already knew. My question for you

is, how do these parts inside of you relate to each other? If you imagine all these parts are like a family inside of you, how does the family operate? Is it harmonious and respectful? Or is it chaotic, disruptive, harsh, or even violent? Who's in charge? Who's the loudest and most dominant one? How does it ensure its voice is the loudest, and how does it silence other parts?

## **A Dysfunctional Household**

What is the nature of your “inner household”? We will do an exercise in just a little bit that will help illuminate this even more, but for now, what's your initial sense? How do the different parts inside of you relate?

Certain parts, such as your inner critic, a judgmental part, or a fearful part that is terrified of failing, looking bad, or being hurt, may be a dominant voice inside of you. You may be living from this part for large periods of the day, thinking thoughts from this place of fear or judgment, and feeling the associated feelings.

How do these dominant parts relate to other parts of you? Are they dismissive, intimidating, or condescending? Are other parts of you being pushed out and now resigned to a subordinate role in which they are submissive and meek?

And then, there are the parts that have been so habitually ignored and denied that they are pushed out of conscious awareness and seemingly gone. However, you can't get rid of parts in this internal household, so instead, they are down in the basement, out of sight, out of mind. However, these can manifest as anxiety symptoms, immune system problems, stomach issues, and chronic muscle, tendon, or joint pains.

Of course, most of this occurs outside of people's conscious awareness. They're focused on the external world—work duties, family responsibilities, desires, cravings, and making life go how



they want it to go. If they pay attention to their inner world, they are aware of feelings, which are often jumbled, conflicted, and confusing or uncomfortable. If they slow down even further to notice thoughts, they often witness a fast, random thought stream that bounces from one thing to the next.

However, when you start to pay attention to your inner world as an internal family, as a collection of parts, everything makes more sense. You have conflicting feelings because you have two or more parts that feel very differently about an issue, and they're arguing inside of you. Your mind is bouncing all over the place because you have three parts that are all highly active in the moment, each loudly expressing their viewpoints without pausing to listen to the others. You feel depressed because there is a part inside of you that deeply wants to pursue something meaningful, but a dominant rational part has smashed it out of awareness, which takes tremendous energy each day.

One of the biggest problems that leads to social anxiety, low self-esteem, and insufficient confidence is having an overactive critical part that is running your inner household. Take a moment right now to see if this is the case for you. At certain times, does your critic kick in the door and start running the show? Is it acting like an angry, abusive, or alcoholic parent who is terrorizing the household? How do you relate to this critical part when it barges in and starts disparaging other members of the household? Do you stand by and watch in fear? Do you cower in terror? Do you submit and glumly nod, agreeing to its attacks? What do you typically do when your critic gets active?

This reflection will tell you a great deal about the current state of affairs in your household. When I was under the thumb of my critic, it would totally run the show. When it arrived to dispense a verbal beatdown, I would cower and submit to the onslaught. In some ways, I would agree with whatever it was saying as if it was laying down an awful and brutal truth about me.

I would spend a great evening with close friends enjoying myself and their company. And then, on the drive home, instead of enjoying the residual afterglow of love and connection, my critic would begin to pick at me. He would tell me I talked too much, that others were secretly annoyed with me, that they were just humoring me when I shared stories about myself. The moment my critic said these things, I would contract inside, feeling embarrassed or ashamed for how I acted, and for who I was.

It's like my inner family was having this sweet party with a cake and shiny plastic party hats, and everyone was smiling and laughing and loving each other. And then the scary patriarch bursts in the door, drunk and looking for trouble. He tears everyone down, shouting, disparaging, and telling them how nobody could actually love them.

And in that moment, I would take it in entirely like the child who takes in the poisonous venom of a verbally abusive parent. *I guess I did talk too much. Why did I do that? Oh, and then I told that story, which was so stupid. I was too excited, just going on and on.*

In a way, I would actually get on board with the critic. I didn't even stop to ask, "Is this true? Did I talk too much? How do I know that? Didn't they seem to be engaged and enjoying my company as much as I was theirs?"

But that would have involved questioning and challenging the critic. And it's hard to question someone who's screaming at you and slapping you in the face. It's much more familiar to cower and take it. Especially if that's the boss, the head of the house, the alpha, which your critic might have been...until now.

Forget that noise. Forget that loud, obnoxious, mean, abusive S.O.B. You don't have to take this anymore. You shouldn't take this anymore. You don't deserve it. You never deserve to be treated that way by anyone—inside or outside of you. And it's time to stand up to it. Now.

## Reclaiming Your Seat

You might imagine that now we're going to have you go "head-to-head" with the critic and take it down. When he bursts in the door, you stand upright, cock your arm back, and give it a solid punch right in the kisser. It tumbles down in a disoriented jumble of limbs, completely shocked that anyone would dare stand up to it as you have bravely done. And then it slinks back out the door, and your inner family lives in harmony and peace for the rest of your days.

It's tempting. And I wish it were so simple, but it's not. The thing about abusive relationships is that we want to stay in them on some level. Have you ever seen this in yourself or someone you know who's been in a toxic romantic relationship? You know it's not working, and you know it never will, and you know you should end it. But you don't. You find a way to explain or justify their behavior or why it would be too hurtful or dangerous to leave them.

Or, in some cases, you eventually do leave them. But then, one day, or one week later, you feel so awful. You just want that person back. You feel guilty, unsettled, empty, or otherwise lost without them. You feel like you *need* them to be okay. And so you go back, apologize, make up, and get back on for another ride on the merry-go-round.

It's the same with your inner critic. That sucker has been in there guiding you for decades. Your critic's views about you, your worth, your lovability, and your potential are extremely familiar to you. Its view of reality is the dominant view of reality, and you take it as true.

Is this not so?

I've tried this little experiment with dozens of clients. Let's try it together now. Think of one negative, toxic, unhelpful thing that your critic says about you regularly. Perhaps it's that you're

not good enough to be in a loving relationship, that you'll never achieve a meaningful goal in your work or other areas of your life, or that you'll never be happy. You got one? Okay, great.

Now, let me ask you this. Are you willing to let that go now? Be totally open to the possibility that later today will not be like right now. And tomorrow doesn't have to be like today. So no matter what happened in your past, it's possible for you to have what you want, experience the love you want, achieve a goal, etc.

What happens inside of you?

For almost everyone, the initial response is: Nope. Sure, that sounds great, but I can't let that old story go. I can't just disbelieve my critic right now, instantly for no reason other than that I choose to!

"Why not?" I would ask my clients.

"Because what my critic is saying is *true*."

And then our real work would begin the work of unhooking their identity from their critic, the work of decoupling ourselves from this poisonous propaganda that we've taken in for years. Because instantly rejecting that old identity that our critic has created for us and setting a new course sounds fantastic in theory, but often leads to a break up followed by a reconciliation. Before you know it, the critic is back on the scene, louder than ever. What's worse is that now it's ready for you to try to stand up to it, and it's going to do even more to make sure you never try anything like that again.

Instead, we are going to use a much more powerful and effective approach to undermining your critic's dominance, the power of awareness. For when you start to systematically observe your critic and witness what it's doing day after day inside of you, something will naturally start to shift. You will see, *really* see, just how intense and hateful it's comments are. You will feel how much they hurt other parts of you and how much damage they cause. And you will begin to feel repulsed. You may even start to feel out-

raged at this kind of mistreatment with a growing sense of compassion to put an end to this inner tyranny.

Maybe that's already starting to happen right now. Can you remember the last time you were being hard on yourself? Maybe it was earlier this week, or even earlier today. What was the moment you last turned on yourself? What was that like? What were you saying to yourself? Or, to be more specific, what was your critic saying to you?

Take a moment to imagine it as if it were a family inside of you. How does this critical part relate to the others? How do you feel about that as you witness it? Is it okay? Does it feel right or wrong? What is your natural impulse as you watch?

Whatever you feel is okay—do not fight it, resist it, or judge it. Sometimes when people start to see how they've been treating themselves for years, instead of feeling happy or liberated, they feel pain. They feel the sadness and grief of being so hard on themselves for so long. They feel remorse and heartache for how cruel they've been. Others feel despair or regret about how many opportunities they've missed or how much joy they've sucked from their lives by being so hard on themselves.

Or you may not be feeling much at all, and that's okay too. Sometimes we need more time to witness this treatment of ourselves before it really sinks in. When it does, something will crack open inside of you, and you will open your heart toward yourself, perhaps for the first time in your life.

## **Naming Your Critic**

One simple, highly effective technique to start using immediately is to give your critic a name. Naming your critic instantly enhances the separation, so you are not fused with your critic. When you hear your mind listing that litany of shortcomings, you