

Ep #229: How to Think About Feeling Triggered and Unsafe

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With Your Host

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Welcome to *Joyful Marketing*! I'm Simone Seol, and I teach you how to get your life coaching practice fully booked without having to pay for ads, buy Instagram followers, or complicated sales funnels. It's not rocket science, and you can do it, too. Listen on to find out how.

Hey, I apologize in advance for the episode you're about to hear. It was recorded during the Lunar New Year holidays in Korea. And there was like a billion family members storming the house, and there was no quiet place to record. And so, you're probably going to hear random background family noises the entire time. I'm sorry about that. But also not that sorry, because such is life; I hope you enjoy, and Happy Lunar New Year.

Hey, friends, I want to talk about some words and ideas today that get thrown around a lot. Words like "triggered," words like "unsafe." I want to define them and suggest more useful ways to think about them than is normal and common out there. And how to act and make decisions around these ideas.

Because I see it come up over and over again, in marketing, coaching, and in leadership; so-and-so was triggered, I was triggered, I felt unsafe, so-and-so felt unsafe, this is unsafe; all that stuff. And unless you know exactly how to think about and how to handle these conversations, you are going to be running around in frustrated and anxious loops for a very long time. And I want to save you from that experience.

So, let's get right down to it. I want to start with the concept of being "triggered". Imagine I'm putting the word triggered in quotes, not because it's not real, but because we're about to define it. Let's talk about what it actually means. All "triggered" means is one thing, which is that you are experiencing an activation of your nervous system. Activation of your nervous system is not good or bad.

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It is certainly not a malicious thing that your body is doing. It may not be pleasant. It may even be quite uncomfortable; it might be painful. But it is not a bad, evil thing. It's your body's way of letting you know that it senses danger or threat and wants to take you to safety.

“I'm triggered. I'm activated,” that means my nervous system is activated. My heart's beating fast. My palms are sweaty. I'm having tunnel vision. I have this knotted feeling in my chest. I'm breathing shallowly. All of these are your body's way of letting you know, “I think we're facing a threat.”

Experiencing an activation of your nervous system means that you have a healthy nervous system that's doing its job. And its job is looking out for you, to make sure you don't die. Experiencing activation of a nervous system is a normal, natural, and a healthy part of life. And it is especially a normal, natural, and healthy part of life in which you choose to be challenged.

You choose to grow. You choose to achieve bigger goals. You choose to evolve and expand. Because in order to do that, your nervous system has to have the capacity to tolerate a greater range of sensations. When your nervous system can tolerate a greater range of sensations, I call that an “expanded nervous system capacity.”

And how we create an expanded nervous system capacity is by encountering a lot of triggers. And then, a lot of nervous system reactions at the same time, and then practicing reacting the way we want to.

For example, I used to live in absolute fear of other people saying anything negative about me. It used to feel absolutely excruciating; I couldn't bear it. If there was any possibility of it, I hid from anything that would expose me to that. I felt incapable of handling it. Now, I see people saying negative shit about me all the time, sometimes to my face. It's inevitable when you have tens of thousands of followers.

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And guess what? It's not a fun experience, but I'm okay about it. I see someone say something nasty to me. That doesn't happen that frequently but something unpleasant, something critical, whatever. Sometimes it even comes from people I care about. Again, it's not often, but you know, it happens.

I can tolerate that experience much better than I used to be able to. That means, around this trigger of someone saying something negative to me, I have an expanded capacity for responding. Before, I used to only be able to respond one way; now, I can respond in different ways.

And you know, I also used to have an extremely narrow range of reactions to someone telling me something challenging, even if it's not a criticism. Let's say it's a piece of feedback that feels harsh, right? For decades, the only way I used to react to that was by shutting down. I would completely withdraw. I would look like a turtle snapping into its shell. I would withdraw from interacting with the other person. I would feel ashamed. I would feel very victimized; that was the only way I was able to react.

But now I'm able to be much more chill and objective about it, right? When someone gives me feedback that feels harsh or challenging, now I'm able to take a moment and sit with myself and say, "Hmm, you know what? Is there any part of this that's useful to me? If I step back and think about it, do I agree with any part of it? Could it be for me, in any way?"

You know, maybe some parts of it, maybe all of it, maybe none of it at all. And even if I don't agree with any of it, I can still choose not to take it personally. I'm like, "Okay, well, that's that person's thought; that's fine. It's got nothing to do with me. They're entitled to their thoughts. I've got my thoughts. It's natural for people to see things differently. It's totally fine."

So do you see? Again, expanded range of reactions that I can choose from because I have an expanded nervous system capacity. I'm not locked into

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one response, right? All of this doesn't mean I'm more evolved than before. It doesn't mean I'm a better person than before. It doesn't mean I'm smarter than before. It just means that I have intentionally exercised my nervous system skills so that now I have the option to react in more resourceful and flexible ways to what could have been stressful triggers.

Now, if you want to create new things, achieve bigger goals, and become who you want to be and not who you have been, you have no choice but to expand your nervous system capacity. There is no way you can keep the exact same patterns of nervous system reactions and create new results in your life; it is just impossible. There's no way, right?

If you want a bigger life and bigger business, you need a bigger nervous system capacity. I feel like it's really repetitive, but it's important. And triggers are what give you the opportunity to practice expanding them. But I want to be very clear.

It doesn't mean that you have to go sign up for every painful experience just to work on your nervous system capacity. It doesn't mean you allow yourself to be pushed around by fucking assholes, just so you can learn how to not take it personally. That's not what I mean.

Part of this work is also developing the discernment and the trust in yourself, and the respect and love for yourself to know, "Hey, you know what? I'm choosing to allow this. I'm choosing to learn from this. I'm choosing to interact with this for my own growth." Versus, "You know what? I have no desire to experience this, and I'm out." That's an entirely valid option, as well.

"And when I decide I am out, there's no resentment or bitterness. Or, that person should have done this, this person should have done that. It's not about controlling other people's actions. It's about my choices. I choose what is for me and what isn't for me. And I decided this isn't for me."

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So, for example, some people give me... Random people give me negative feedback. And they're like, "You should be able to take constructive criticism. What are you, so fragile that you can't take constructive criticism?"

And I'm always like, "Dude, you're not my mom. You're not my coach. You're not my teacher. You're not my best friend. You're not even my paying client. You're just a random person on the internet. There is no way I'm agreeing to expose my nervous system to this conversation so I can have a growth opportunity. No, fucking thank you." Right?

If I'm going to manage my emotions... I have a limited capacity for managing my emotions because I'm fucking human. And I reserve it for people that I have intentionally trusted, and maybe sometimes paid, to give me counsel. There are people that I trust to give me a piece of their mind, to set me straight. I have coaches for that. Teachers and mentors. I have trusted friends, right?

I also reserve managing my emotions for people that I love and care about because God knows, sometimes you need to do that with family, right? You're with family, and you're like, "Oh, dear God, this is an opportunity for me to expand my nervous system fucking reactions. Otherwise, I'm going to kill everybody." That happens.

Same thing with clients. I'm always going to be open to hearing whatever my clients have to say because they've trusted me, and I have a relationship with them. I'm invested. Whatever they're bringing me, I'm going to engage.

But if you're a Rando, you're not entitled to having my attention and dictating to me how I should or shouldn't handle my nervous system capacity. How I should or shouldn't manage my emotions so that I can take your whatever random fucking comment as a growth opportunity. No.

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Do you see what I mean? Nobody gets to dictate the guidelines for this except you, for yourself. Like I just told you, I do this for my family. But sometimes people are like, "You know what? I've had enough of my family, and I don't want to be exposed to my family anymore. I'm going no contact." And that's fair, right?

Everybody has different relationships and different choices. You get to decide what you're available for and what you're not available for. You get to discern. You choose, and you own your choices.

That is all to say, triggers are not a problem. When you identify a trigger, I'm going to summarize it for you, do the following three things. You're like, "Oop, I'm triggered." Here's what you do:

Number one, remember, know what's actually happening in your body. When you're triggered, all that's happening is your nervous system is alerting you to potential danger to make sure you stay safe. It doesn't necessarily mean there's an actual danger. Our nervous system likes to be over-alert, so it can err on the side of keeping you alive. Right?

We can sometimes have a similar nervous system reaction to seeing a live bear versus seeing a Twitter reply. The two are not the same in terms of the actual level of threat to your bodily integrity. But your nervous system might think so. Not because your nervous system is stupid or because it's an asshole, but because your nervous system's job it's to protect you, and it works 24/7 very hard. So if you're triggered, that's what's happening.

And second, decide how you want to respond. Because you have the power, you have the agency. We don't get to choose what other people say or do to us. But we always have the agency to choose how we want to respond. So, be intentional about it.

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Do you want to use this trigger as an opportunity to get more flexible in how you respond? Do you want to use this trigger as an opportunity to practice expanding your nervous system capacity? If so, let's say someone said, "Oh, your prices are too high." That's something that a lot of people find triggering. Someone said, "Your prices are too high," and that's triggering.

Okay, you're experiencing an activation; how do you want to feel in response to comments like this? Who do you want to be? And when you are who you want to be, how would that person react to a comment like that? Maybe you want to be calm and collected. Maybe you want to be curious. The point is you get to choose, and you get to rehearse that way of being, on purpose.

Maybe you want to practice having your own back so much that no matter what anyone says, you're on your own side, you got your own back, you believe in yourself, and you center your own experiences, right?

Maybe when somebody says, "Oh, your prices are too high," maybe that's an opportunity for you to practice believing, "Actually, there's that discomfort. My body's trying to protect me because it senses a threat. Uh-huh. Now, this is a chance for me to reinforce; I believe in my value. And if someone else doesn't, that's not a problem. I'm proud of what I create and what I deliver."

When someone says something like that to me, I want to be the kind of person where it rolls off my back, and it's not a problem. I say, "Hey, that's okay. Totally cool if it's not for you," that's who I want to be. And this is an opportunity for me to practice that.

So, think of every trigger as like the universe handing you an opportunity to practice being who you want to be on a silver platter. It's the roadmap to you becoming who you want to be. Every activation is part of the curriculum that takes you to your success and takes you to who you want to be.

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Or, like I said, you decide. “You know what? I don't want to deal with this. I want to grow, but this is not an area where I want to grow right now.” And it's fine. Not everything is a fucking opportunity for growth. When this person is calling, I'm just not going to pick up. When this person leaves a comment that's nasty, I'm just going to block them next time. Right?

You are responsible for having the kind of experiences you want to have. See what we're doing here? We're making decisions and owning the consequences of those decisions. If I want you to take away one thing, remember one thing from this podcast episode, it's this: All triggers are neutral until you decide what they mean and how you're going to react to them, and why.

There is no such thing as bad or malevolent triggers, in and of themselves. They are invitations for you to make decisions, and they can be invitations for you to expand your nervous system capacity.

Now, last thing. I want to tell you something about safety, which is connected to the whole conversation around triggers, and what it means to be unsafe. A lot of times, people throw around words like unsafe, I don't feel safe. And the word is used in a very imprecise way, right?

There's a big difference between feeling unsafe and feeling awkward or uncomfortable, or vulnerable. A lot of times, when I see people say, “I feel unsafe,” what they mean is, “That was uncomfortable. That was awkward. I felt vulnerable. I didn't know what to do. The situation called for me to do something that felt awkward to me, that wasn't comfortable for me.”

Being unsafe is not the same thing as being unwilling to risk discomfort, risk inconvenience, that may arise when you take up space and use your voice. When we have the option of exercising our courage to do something uncomfortable but choose not to, because we don't want the discomfort, that is not a lack of safety.

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That is a lack of willingness and/or a lack of emotional skill, relational skill, or communication skill that's related to doing hard things. Experiencing that kind of discomfort on purpose, over and over, to strengthen your muscles of courage, that's vital for you to live a life of authenticity. Again, it's a challenging experience, maybe sometimes even a painful experience. Not the same thing as an unsafe situation or an experience.

Ukrainians who are caught in a war right now, they're unsafe. Not being able to count on police to protect you because of the color of your skin, that's an unsafe situation. Undocumented immigrants doing dangerous labor with zero legal protection are unsafe. These are the people who are in genuine unsafety.

We have to stop using the word “unsafe” to describe situations where what's being asked of us is to get off of the path of least resistance. So we can say something and do something that is aligned with our integrity. Call it an overwhelming experience, an uncomfortable situation, or a challenging situation, but not an unsafe situation. Because that's not what it is.

I'm going to wrap this up, my friends. If we are going to live big, meaningful, authentic lives, we're going to be triggered; we're going to be uncomfortable. And we're going, to tell the truth about when we're actually safe.

We are capable of creating the experience of safety in our bodies. Because guess what? That's the only place that can be created, right? The only place where we can feel safe is in our bodies. It doesn't come from other people's actions. It doesn't come from other people's words.

Everything we want out of life is on the other side of living into this knowledge, again and again. That's going to take us off of the path of least resistance, and that means that we are living lives on purpose, not by default.

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Alright, my friends, have a great week, and I'll talk to you next week.

Hey, if you want a shot of fresh inspiration and actionable tips to improve your marketing every single week in your inbox, you better get on my email list. Sign up to receive my free e-book called *20 Unsolicited Copy Tips*. It's been known to get people to come out of the woodwork and ask to work with you. So, get on that link in the show notes, and I'll see you in your inbox next time.