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CTRL+CLICK CAST #93 - Banish Your Inner Critic with Denise Jacobs

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Preview: One of the things I like to say is you could do something exactly like or try to do something exactly like somebody else, but because you're a completely different person with a completely different set of experiences and basically you as a filter makes it different.

[Music]

Lea Alcantara: From [Bright Umbrella](#), this is CTRL+CLICK CAST! We inspect the web for you! Today we're talking about banishing your inner critic with special guest, Denise Jacobs. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm usually joined by my fab co-host, Emily Lewis, but she's a little sick today. Get well soon, Em!

This episode is brought to you by our friends at [Craft CMS](#). We would like to tell you about Craft 3 Beta. Craft 3 has been rewritten from the ground up to be faster and easier to build sites with. It has exciting features like Multi-Site support and a beautiful image editor that you can use to crop, rotate and set focal points on your images right within Craft's Control Panel. To find out more and download the beta, go to craftcms.com/3. Again, that's craftcms.com/3.

I also want to remind our listeners that we have a donate link to our site, so if you love CTRL+CLICK and have a little spending money, consider donating to help us keep the show going. A dollar, five



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dollars, whatever you can spare will help us continue to deliver great content, high-quality audio and transcripts for each and every episode. Now, onto the show!

We are excited to have Denise Jacobs to return as our guest to discuss how to banish your inner critic. Denise is a speaker, author and creativity evangelist who speaks at conferences and consults with companies worldwide. As the founder and CEO of The Creative Dose, she promotes techniques to unlock creativity and spark innovation in people, teams and workplaces, particularly those in the tech world. She's also the founder of Rock The Web and the head instigator of The Creativity Revolution.

Welcome to the show, Denise!

Denise Jacobs: Thank you so much for having me!

Lea Alcantara: Absolutely, I'm glad you're back. Can you tell our listeners a bit more about yourself?

Denise Jacobs: Oh, my goodness, do I even know where to start, so you already said that I'm a speaker and, as I like to call myself, a creativity evangelist.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: I just finished – well, I won't say I just finished writing, but my book, *Banish Your Inner Critic*, do you know I was about to say the *CSS Detective Guide* like it's 2010? My latest book, *Banish Your Inner Critic* is coming out next Tuesday on June 6th. Can you believe that?

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]



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Denise Jacobs: I mean, it's probably going to be out maybe next Tuesday when people listen to this.

Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Denise Jacobs: But for me right now currently, it's next Tuesday so I'm super excited about that. Some things that people may or may not know about me, unless they follow me on Instagram or friends of me on Facebook, is that I started really getting into making earrings.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, very cool.

Denise Jacobs: And so I also, in addition to speaking and doing workshops and trainings and writing books, obviously and talking about creativity and inner critic and stuff like that, I make really lovely earrings. It's because I love earrings, and so that part of my business I appropriately called Earring Love. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Oh wow! I mean it, what? It works. It's accurate. I love that. I love that.

Denise Jacobs: Me too. And then the last thing that people probably don't know about me, unless they actually come to my house, is that my backyard is a big old organic garden. I live in Miami, Florida. It's a subtropical here, so right now we have pineapples that have just ripened. We have passion fruit that is literally falling off of the vine onto the ground when we go out. I like to call it Easter egg hunt when we go and gather up all the passion fruit every morning.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, wow!

Denise Jacobs: And...



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Lea Alcantara: Oh, my gosh.

Denise Jacobs: We have bananas that are coming in and we have dragon fruit that's starting to ripen and eggplant and kale and...

Lea Alcantara: That sounds amazing.

Denise Jacobs: It's pretty vast.

Lea Alcantara: Awesome, awesome. So you've kind of mentioned your *CSS Detective* book.
[Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: Oh, sorry, it's so long ago so much, a former lifetime.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, exactly. So why don't you tell our listeners a bit more about like how you first got into the web.

Denise Jacobs: Oh, my gosh, how I first got into the web, God, this was like ancient history, everybody, like super ancient history.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: So I like to joke around, I started doing web stuff when I was about 5 because it was in 1997. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



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Denise Jacobs: I was older than 5, by the way, but I was working at the University of Washington at a research center. It was the Northwestern Center for Research on Women, and I had this job where I had like three jobs rolled into one.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: But my job was only like three-quarters time and it was not permanent. It was only for 18 months. It was the weirdest thing.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: So I was an events coordinator, I was the editor for the newsletter that came out quarterly, and then I also was like assistant to the director.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: So I had to do fun things like write an annual report, and then also put together events that the Center had and then, of course, write and do the newsletter. But we had a website, again, this was in like 1996, there was a website, and at the time, I thought like the web was like magic. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Right, right.

Denise Jacobs: So when the website needed to be updated, I was like, "Well, it's a computer and stuff like that. It should be pulling from somewhere and it should just like automatically update it." But it's not how it works.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



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Denise Jacobs: Still nonetheless, and unfortunately, there still has to be a human element, and so I was getting really frustrated for months and months. Not that many people actually knew about the web, but I did, and I kept going to the website and I kept thinking like, “Why isn’t the website updated?” And finally, I checked around because there were so many people who work at the Center like ten. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: Like eight or ten, but more like eight or nine or like seven. It was really small, and I was like, “Who is in charge of the website? Who is in charge to look at it?” They were like, “Oh Shannon is in charge of the website.” So I finally talked to Shannon, I was like, “Shannon, what’s up with the website?” She was just like, “Check this out.” In 1996 she was already burnt out on the web.

Lea Alcantara: Wow.

Denise Jacobs: But she had been doing web stuff for so long, like she had been like doing web stuff like when HTML first got created.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Then she had worked for a company that was trying to do web design before there were tables.

Lea Alcantara: Wow! Wow.

Denise Jacobs: So they were doing like or like they were using like preformatted text to try to put elements in place and have them not move. I mean, like craziness, like the Wild, Wild West of web design.



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Lea Alcantara: Wow!

Denise Jacobs: So anyway, tables had existed by now. It was like HTML 2.0 and she was like, “I’m still burnt out on this. If you want to take over the website, you can go ahead.” And I was like, “Okay.” And she’s like, “You’re going to have to learn this language, this HTML stuff.” And I was like, “Well, you know, I’m pretty comfortable with computers, so that shouldn’t be too hard.” And she was like, “Okay.”

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: So she put me on to some websites. There was a website called Route 66 that taught people how to do HTML and they weren’t actually, strangely, there weren’t that many websites that did that, that actually just had HTML code on it like, “This is how you make a page.”

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: So I started studying, and I started studying the tags and the attributes and everything and I would like go to talks and I would sit in like, well, in between listening to whoever was talking about whatever they were talking about, I would like have my printout of my code and I’d be looking at it trying to figure out what was wrong and what was right and all this stuff. I started even dreaming in HTML code where it was like a loop, like in basic, like a loop in basic.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And I would keep like coming to a tag and then I would go down to another line and then I’d have to come back to that same tag and I’d just be in this like this loop in my head, it’s fun.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]



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Denise Jacobs: And so I started and learned HTML. I taught myself HTML, and then I started updating the site and then I was also doing temp work because having a three-quarters time job means that you still need more money. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Right, right.

Denise Jacobs: So I was doing temp work on campus, and when the places that I was doing temp work found out that I could do HTML, they were like, "Oh, my God, can you update our website?" And I was like, "Sure." It was like Telnet-ing in. It's like old school like...

Lea Alcantara: Telnet, oh my goodness..

Denise Jacobs: I was Telnet-ing in to the server and like fixing the HTML live. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Wow! I love it. I love it.

Denise Jacobs: Oh, my God. So that's how I started getting into web stuff, and then when that job ended, I ended up getting a contract at Microsoft because I had had a background in international studies and I had done this events coordination and so they were like, "That equals localization project management naturally."

Lea Alcantara: Oh...

Denise Jacobs: Interesting, of course. And so I started doing that and yeah, it just kind of like one thing led to another where I was doing that and I was still doing web stuff, and then I started a soap-making business and I started teaching soap-making classes, and then I worked at another company doing web project management and then that ended up kind of parlaying into me teaching web design and web development and so...



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Lea Alcantara: Very cool.

Denise Jacobs: Yeah. I started doing that in 2000 and I taught web design and web development until 2005.

Lea Alcantara: Well, what I found interesting about your story is that you've really gone through a gamut of experiences through the web while also dabbling with, as you mentioned, your soap making and you also mentioned your earring business and all that fun stuff, and when you're juggling all these types of things, I'm sure that there's a lot on your plate and you're wondering what's next for you, and I feel like you've transitioned your career right now, you're writing these books, for example, *Banish Your Inner Critic*. What gave you the confidence to move forward and kind of pivot your career?

Denise Jacobs: Well, you know, it was really interesting. I think some of the best experiences in my life have been when it wasn't a question of whether I could do it or not. It was just like this is just something I have to do and there was no question in my mind, there was no doubt, but it was just like, "This is just what I'm doing."

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And I think in a lot of ways the pivot that I did from being like a web designer, web developer, front-end developer, whatever you want to call it, type of person and talking about CSS 3 and conducting trainings and stuff on it and having that book and whatnot to being like a creativity evangelist voice that I had this major insight. When I finished writing the *CSS Detective Guide*, I had this like epiphany basically about how important creativity is in our lives.



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Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: At least in my own life, I always kind of have this tortured relationship with creativity and doubting myself and wondering if I'm creative and then like going to everybody seeking validation saying, "Am I a creative person? Is this any good?" And when I finally got to a place where I stopped doing that and when I just finally had like a moment where I was like, "I am creative. It is good, let's move on." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Right, right.

Denise Jacobs: It was so freeing and it was so powerful and I literally for a while felt like invincible, like anything I put my mind to, I could do.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And when it came, basically from that point on, I was like, "This is what I want to do and it was so clear for me.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: It was so clear that it was almost like there really wasn't any other option, like wouldn't I do this, pursue this route that fed me so much, that was so beneficial, that was so positive and fulfilling and satisfying feeling and that gave me such energy and such power that I was just I can't not do this, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right, right.



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Denise Jacobs: And so that's really what ended up happening. It wasn't even a question of can I do this, it's more of like I can't not do this, this is what I must do.

Lea Alcantara: So what I want to ask you in regards to that, you said you kind of had a tortured relationship with creativity.

Denise Jacobs: Totally, yeah.

Lea Alcantara: And I think part of the reason why is that maybe there are misconceptions of what creativity even is, especially in the tech industry, right?

Denise Jacobs: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So let's talk a bit about that, how would you define creativity?

Denise Jacobs: So one of those things that I like to call back on is when I talk about creativity, what I'm really talking about is bringing something new into being that didn't exist before, and one of the quotes that I use in my talks a lot is from a guy named Bruce Nussbaum and he wrote a book called *Creativity Intelligence*, and one of the things that he says is that creativity is about seeing patterns, and like being able to like see these patterns and see connections between things, and I'm like, "Yeah, that's creativity too," and all that stuff. But for me, I have to say like it doesn't have to be earth-shatteringly different, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Even a slight variation upon something can have very different results, you know?

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: Like if you cook, for example, and you substitute one ingredient for another one, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: If you are making pesto and instead of using basil, you use sage, but you're still making a kind of pesto or actually my favorite combination is like cilantro, basil and fresh sage altogether. Try it.

Lea Alcantara: Yum! You're speaking my language. [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: Try it, it's delicious. But all of a sudden, now you've created something different. It's still pesto, but it is a totally different kind of pesto, a totally different vibe than just straight basil pesto, and so I don't necessarily think that bringing something into being means it needs to be like so dramatically different. It can be a slight tweak, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: It can be that it's coming through this filter, like one of the things I like to say is you could do something exactly like or try to do something exactly like somebody else, but because you're a completely different person with a completely different set of experiences and basically you as a filter makes it different, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right, right.

Denise Jacobs: Just like when people do covers of songs.

Lea Alcantara: Of songs, yeah.



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Denise Jacobs: And it's amazing, it's amazing what comes through people. The exact same song, the exact same melody, and it's like their voice is different or their phrasing is different, and it's different. It's a completely different song.

Lea Alcantara: Right. So I'm curious though is that it took you a while to get to this point because you mentioned that you were a little tortured about it and I'm sure like a lot of people still struggle with this idea, and basically I think it's because of the topic of this episode, which is the inner critic. Why don't...

Denise Jacobs: Amen, sister.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. So why don't you tell our listeners what an inner critic is and then how it relates to creative work?

Denise Jacobs: So the inner critic is basically kind of that inner voice that basically tells you that you can't, that you're not good enough, that you need to try to keep yourself safe and protect yourself somehow. As a matter of fact, the inner critic comes from this kind of construct that is there to protect your sense of self.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: And so if your sense of self is threatened somehow in any way, your inner critic will pop up and be like, "I am here to save the day. Let's just shut it down. We'll shut everything down."
[Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: And so yeah, a lot of times when you are afraid of being judged or afraid of being laughed at or afraid that your ideas aren't good enough or you are super highly critical of your ideas, you're like, "I'm not even going to share that with anybody because I'm just too stupid for words."

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Or if you think it needs to be super, ultra amazingly unique and it's something that nobody has ever seen before, and if it's not, then it's no good. It's that sort of thing, that is the inner critic. It's classic, textbook inner critic, absolutely.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. So in regards to all of that, can these issues with the inner critic also bleed over into our personal lives?

Denise Jacobs: Oh my God, are you kidding? Yes.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. So I understand that we're talking about this in regards to creative issues, but it's not just about productive creative issues, but can you talk a little bit more about that?

Denise Jacobs: So here's an example from my own life, a very personal example, by the way, so listeners just not like embarrassingly first know, but it's just personal.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: So I personally am 6'1, and I love tall men, like if I see tall men and I'm just like, "Did you use to be a professional basketball player? Can I have your children? Like I don't even know you, I don't even know if you're smart, but we will have beautiful children together"

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



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Denise Jacobs: And for the longest time, and I actually just realized this recently that one of the ways that I have protected myself over the years is I would see people, you know, like people would look at me and they're like, "Oh my God, you're totally like a strong black woman, and you just don't take any crap." You know?

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: And I'm just like, "Listen, if you were in my head, you would never ever think that."

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Because there have been plenty of times where I've seen people who I've been super interested in somebody. I mean, like, he's amazing.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And I won't talk to them. Instead of going and talking to them, I'm finding out, "Maybe this person, first of all, maybe he's not smart." Do you know what I mean? [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Who knows? Exactly.

Denise Jacobs: Or maybe he's awesome. Maybe he's actually attracted to me and he's being shy whatever.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: My brain will do this thing and it's been doing it for years where I think, "He probably likes really skinny women and I'm not skinny enough." Even when I was the absolute thinnest that



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I've ever been in my life, I would still see people and think I'm not skinny enough, and then I would just rule myself out. I wouldn't talk to them.

Lea Alcantara: Right, right.

Denise Jacobs: And that's the kind of thing that the inner critic will do on a personal level, right, like that it will be like.

Lea Alcantara: Right, yeah.

Denise Jacobs: Just last night, I was falling asleep and one of a very famous quote popped into my head and I was like, "Oh, my God, I need to like put that up as a big banner in my office and just remind myself every day that Wayne Gretzky, a famous quote from Wayne Gretzky, which is you miss 100% of the shots that you don't take."

Lea Alcantara: I love it.

Denise Jacobs: Right.

Lea Alcantara: First of all, I'm from Edmonton.

Denise Jacobs: Right.

Lea Alcantara: And the fact that you even know Wayne Gretzky... [Laughs]

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Denise Jacobs: Of course, it's back in the day.



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Lea Alcantara: I love it. Yeah, perfect.

Denise Jacobs: So that's the inner critic. The inner critic is that force that pushes you to not take the shot, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: The shot that you're probably completely open for, and maybe you're not, but then you learn from taking the shot like what you need to do to take the proper shot, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Because really, there's no way you don't win from that.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, absolutely.

Denise Jacobs: And there, I think, are so many of us, myself included, who have lived our lives going, "No, no, I'm not going... No, it's too much of a risk. That's too much of a chance if I put myself out there, blah, blah, blah." And we miss the shots because we don't take them.

Lea Alcantara: That actually reminds me of something that's been going around in the web industry a lot these days, especially because we're working on such technical fields and advanced code and all that fun stuff. We hear a lot about the impostor syndrome.

Denise Jacobs: Absolutely.

Lea Alcantara: Is that related to all the stuff that you're talking about now with the inner critic?



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Denise Jacobs: It is. It is. As a matter of fact, in my book, even though I don't talk about the impostor syndrome per se exactly because, honestly, I was going to write it in this book and I kind of ran out of time and space... [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: And so I'm going to do a really big treatment on impostor syndrome in my next book, but yes, impostor syndrome is huge, and some of the things I think that actually contribute to it that I wrote about in this book is this feeling of not being enough, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Not being enough, not knowing enough, not having enough expertise. It's this kind of "enough-ness" and sometimes, in some ways, "deserving-ness", but I definitely think it's really based in this idea of enough-ness or not enough-ness.

Lea Alcantara: Do you think that's also because people have an incorrect assumption of what even expertise means?

Denise Jacobs: Yes.

Lea Alcantara: Like an expert needs to be the best of the best of the best in the world or something like that.

Denise Jacobs: Right.

Lea Alcantara: And if you're not even close to that, then you're not an expert?



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Denise Jacobs: Absolutely, absolutely, and I think also too that people don't realize that as soon as you know something more than the next person, you are an expert in that thing in their eyes. That expertise is actually relative to whoever the audience is, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: There's another saying that in the land of the blind, a one-eyed man is king or something like that, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right, oh, that's perfect.

Denise Jacobs: So quotes and me this year, I have just been having like a thing.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: Like where I've just been like, "And this quote..." And that quote I don't know where that came from, but whatever, I'm working with it. But yeah, so in that respect, if you know one or two or however many things more than the next person, then you can teach them. You can share your expertise and you can help them get to a place where they know more than they did before.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Denise Jacobs: And so I do think expertise very, very much is a very relative position.

Lea Alcantara: I definitely think that this needs to be really emphasized on the web in the web industry even more. Emily and I have been doing this [series on the podcast called Demystifying the Web for our clients](#).



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Denise Jacobs: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: Because I feel like, especially when you're really passionate about this work, you are reading all these articles and going through these tutorials or going through these conferences, you feel like everybody knows what you know, and then if you apply that when discussing things to a client who isn't as technically sound, that actually creates a professional barrier to the success of the project because they don't feel comfortable in speaking to you about their needs or you throw them acronym soup and then they don't actually even know what they're getting, so there's a lot of issues in terms of communication in regards to that because you incorrectly think that everybody knows what you know.

Denise Jacobs: Right. And the other thing too is that, again, it's relative. When you're in a cohort of people who are not just experts, but that they are like leading or bleeding edge, your idea of what everybody else knows is going to be completely skewed because your everybody else are people who eat, breathe, live, sleep this stuff, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: I mean, that totally threw me off when I was like deep in the midst of stuff, and then I would go back and I'd try to kind of parley that back to my clients, and my clients were just like, "I just want a website. I just want it to work."

Lea Alcantara: Yes. [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: And I'd be like, "Well, it needs to be responsive and have them backwards, degradable, compatible..." And they were like, "I want a website but not about that."

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



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Denise Jacobs: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: So why don't you talk a little bit about that in regards to the common ways people are critical of themselves and that actually harms their professional lives. What would you say are the most common ways people essentially shoot themselves in the foot?

Denise Jacobs: Well, kind of like what we were just talking about before, this kind of idea of having to be like be expert, having to know everything. I mean, I think it's so pervasive I think of this like I need to know everything, and if I don't know everything, then people aren't going to take me seriously.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: Now, let's of kind of backtrack for a moment and have real talk because both you and I, as women of color, in an industry that's predominantly white male, we actually do have to do that because people are always discounting us, at least that's what I experienced.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yes.

Denise Jacobs: Even if they don't say so.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Even if they don't say it, a lot of people haven't dealt with their biases, a lot of people haven't dealt with their internalized racism and stuff, and so they exist.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.



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Denise Jacobs: And I'm not going to even try to act like it doesn't, because it does.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Denise Jacobs: So a lot of times when you see women who kind of have this kind of attitude and stuff like that, part of it is not made up, right?

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: This is not like, "Oh, that's so sweet. You don't have to be like that. You know, it's okay." No, actually, actually, if I don't do this, then I'm not going to get ahead.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Like if not like 75 times smarter than everybody else in this room and more knowledgeable, then everybody is going to ignore me and discount what I said, period.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: So that exists, but those kind of issues, let's just kind of just put them aside hypothetically for a moment, but they still are because there are plenty of men and plenty of not people of color men or other people of color or however you want to call it [laughs] that's still experience impostor syndrome and things like that and not really feeling comfortable with their expertise and whatnot.

Lea Alcantara: Right, right.



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Denise Jacobs: So it's kind of getting in touch with how much you actually need to know to be able to do something well I think is important.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: And then also, getting comfortable with there's no way I'm going to be able to know everything, so who is it that I need to kind of ally myself with and connect myself with who knows what I don't know, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Like trying to find these kind of complementary pairings or kind of collaborative situations where you're just like kind of like you and Emily, for example, where you're like, you know?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Emily had all these strengths for her business. You have all of these strengths for your business and for your brand, and then you brought them together and they complement each other and then you guys have been able to work well together now for – what – three years, four years?

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, almost four years now.

Denise Jacobs: Almost four years, right?

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.



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Denise Jacobs: And you guys were both doing just fine on your own, but you found that working together was stronger, and then there are things that where you're just like, "Yeah, I'm actually not good at that, but Emily is awesome at it," and that means that you don't have to carry the intellectual or the knowledge burden by yourself, right?

Lea Alcantara: Or even the emotional burden, I would say.

Denise Jacobs: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: Because I think in regards to inner critics and things like that, having someone that you respect regularly boost their perception of you, and it just happens naturally with Emily and I because we admire each other's work, I think it helps banish that inner critic, wouldn't you say?

Denise Jacobs: I think so, yeah, and I think, first of all, actually just kind of one of the things ... so in the book, I was really concerned that people were going to treat it as a fluff and just be like, "Oh, my God, so like you just have to think positive thoughts and do affirmations and like burn some incense and your inner critical facility is gone, you know, and then you can like live your best life and #blessed, and you know?"

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: And I was just like, "No, that is not the process."

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Sure, you can add those things to the process. I'm from a hippie town, I'm all for it, right?



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Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: I've got lots of incense in my house. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Sure, sure.

Denise Jacobs: But I also really wanted this to be grounded in research.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: So what I found in my research is that there's this kind of combination of three things that really actually make this process that I outlined in the book effective and make it work, and that is that our brains have a natural capacity for change, otherwise known as neuroplasticity.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

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Denise Jacobs: And that when we set our intention and we actually start doing different things, a.k.a., thinking different thoughts, we actually change the way our brains are wired, that's number one.

Lea Alcantara: Very cool.

Denise Jacobs: Number two, one of the ways that we do that is through mindfulness and practicing mindfulness and being aware of something that's called metacognitive learning where we're actually aware of the thoughts that we're thinking again in choosing to deliberately making a choice to think different thoughts, and then when you find yourself kind of going down the path of inner critical



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thoughts, self-criticism, fear of being judged, et cetera, that you can kind of stop and you can say, “Okay,” and then you can like actually make a choice like, “That’s kind of subconscious or unconscious or habitual thinking and I’m going to choose to like start establishing a different habitual thinking pattern.”

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: And then the third thing is self-compassion and self-kindness, and so realizing that this is actually really hard stuff, like thinking these thoughts does not feel good, you’re actually not doing anything to make yourself feel better.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And that this process of going through thinking these thoughts and beating yourself up is actually painful and like acknowledging that and then saying, “Okay, you know what, I’m really sorry that this is really hard for you.” You can talk to people who talk to themselves and saying, “Okay, let’s do something else.” Right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: In that self-compassion, there’s a fantastic book by Dr. Kristin Neff called *Self-Compassion*, oddly enough, and she has a lot of research. She’s a professor at the University of Texas in Austin. She has a large body of research on how self-compassion actually changes people’s behavior and changes what they are capable of doing right in terms of success and leadership and all of this stuff.

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: And so like these three things, these kind of three pillars or kind of three legs, everything in the book basically is based upon that, and that that is basically how and essentially, through different tools and different exercises, that's how you can banish the inner critic. It's really about knowing that you can change the way you think and then actively doing so.

Lea Alcantara: That's very cool. I love the point that you're making that all of this is deliberate and intentional.

Denise Jacobs: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: I think what paralyzes some people when we're thinking about inner critic is that like they have no choice, you know?

Denise Jacobs: Right.

Lea Alcantara: As in like, "This is just how I feel, and it is what it is."

Denise Jacobs: Right.

Lea Alcantara: But what you're stating here is that there are actual tools and exercises in order to move on and move forward. But before I ask you about those specific things, in your book I was reading about the terms, self-compassion, and you mentioned something about self-esteem versus self-indulgence versus self-compassion.

Denise Jacobs: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And I feel like a lot of people confuse all three.



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Denise Jacobs: Yes.

Lea Alcantara: And they're not necessarily the same. Can you explain to our listeners the difference in what each of those terms mean to you?

Denise Jacobs: Absolutely. So self-esteem usually is about feeling good about yourself, but it's kind of at the expense of others.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Denise Jacobs: So it's like it's kind of more of a comparison-type of situation like, "I feel good about myself because I know that there are other people who are suffering." [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Denise Jacobs: I feel good, like I know that I'm smart because I got a 100 on my test and other people got like 80 or 60 on the test.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And so compared to them, I'm doing really well, right?

Lea Alcantara: Okay.

Denise Jacobs: Self-esteem really has to do about feeling good about yourself in relationship to others.

Lea Alcantara: Okay.



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Denise Jacobs: Self-indulgence is more about catering to your whims, but not really kind of thinking long term about how this will affect you kind of over time.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Like if somebody is like, “I totally want to get in shape, become like a hard body and have like six-pack abs, but I’m going to eat this ice cream and I’m going to sit around and watch however many episodes of like...”

Lea Alcantara: Netflix.

Denise Jacobs: Right. On Netflix and when I do at Parks & Recreation like binge watch.”

Lea Alcantara: Binge watch.

Denise Jacobs: And it’s like, okay, well, in the moment, that was satisfying, but to your end goal of really taking care of your body and really being in shape and like, “You shouldn’t be eating ice cream because you’re actually lactose intolerant, like you know?”

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: And I know a lot of people. Oh, my God, so many people who are just like, “Yeah, I totally agree, but I just take like a pill,” and I’m like, “No, you see, what’s happening is your body is telling you that that doesn’t work for your body.”

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: Like it's telling you like, "I don't know why I'm so inflamed." Well, maybe you're eating a food that inflames your body.

Lea Alcantara: Right, right, right.

Denise Jacobs: I'm just guessing. I'm just out here just guessing. So self-indulgence really is kind of about distracting yourself away from discomfort and numbing yourself and not acknowledging it and not thinking about kind of solutions in the long term.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And then self-compassion is really about really caring for yourself, really showing yourself the same kind of compassion that you would another person if you knew that they were experiencing a hardship or difficulty.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: When you see a friend and you see that they're upset about something, your first inclination mostly likely, unless you're a sociopath, is to like go to them and try to comfort them, "What's wrong? Is there anything I can do?"

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And so like really treat them with kindness. The sad thing is that we don't typically do that to ourselves, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: We find that we are in discomfort in stuff and we're like try to numb ourselves with some kind of distraction and that sometimes that distraction can be work, like working hard.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Like I have a tendency to make myself work harder when I feel like when I'm tired and I overworked myself, but who knows why?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And kind of giving yourself that same kind of like nurturing and kindness and empathy that you would show another person, turning it back on yourself, and then basically in the book, *Self-Compassion*, one of the things that Kristin says is that there's this common humanity about self-compassion, that knowing that everybody on the planet suffers somehow and that you are a part of this kind of grand group of people who are suffering. You're not having this singular unique experience, but you're a part of a greater whole.

Lea Alcantara: So in regards to that, when I'm thinking about creativity and inner critic and all those different definitions, do you think that part of the issue is that people have paired creativity with suffering way too much in our society as in, in order to be creative, you need to have a destructive inner critic?

Denise Jacobs: I think that some people think that the inner critic is what helps them be more creative. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



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Denise Jacobs: And the reason I laugh at that is that from a neuroscience standpoint, nothing could be further from the truth.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: But actually, the part of the brain that is in charge of self-evaluation, self-criticism, behavior modification, all of this stuff, that is actually a part of the brain that the inner critic — basically combat *is* the inner critic

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And it's the only one that part of the brain is quiet is when creativity really flows and that people go into flow states and all of this stuff, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And so I don't think that we need to be tortured. That's the word... [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Right. [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: The tortured part is the part where you know that something isn't happening correctly, like the inner critic is there and creativity is not there.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Now, sometimes I think that when you run against a wall, it is helpful because it can force you to look at other alternatives to realize that you may be going in the wrong direction or maybe you're going in a direction that's not going to be fruitful for you into like shift directions.



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Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: But I don't think that suffering is inherent in creating. As a matter of fact, kind of part of my definitions is implied, and I don't think it's explicit, but maybe I should make it explicit, is creating is like bliss, like creating is euphoric and energizing and nourishing and satisfying. It's not a torture. A torture is when you're not hitting that, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: When you're not in the bliss state, that's the torture part. So I think it is really important to start to kind of extricate this idea that in order to create, you need to be tortured somehow.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, right, right.

Denise Jacobs: I'm just not with that.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. So let's talk about that. What are a few ways you can banish this inner critic so we would stop torturing ourselves?

Denise Jacobs: Well, so in the book, one of the things that I did, it's really easy to just kind of talk about the inner critic in very broad, very broad brushstrokes.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: But one of the things I did was I really broke it down into different ways that the inner critic shows up because it's very, very easy to think that the inner critic is just one way and in



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one form, and it's not. It shows up in a lot of different ways. It's very sneaky. It's got its job to do which is to protect your sense of self, and it will do it however it needs to do it, right?

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Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: So for example, if you are feeling afraid about being judged, one way that I have a lot of different ways to deal with that, but for example, another great quote by James Clear, which is you can basically be afraid of being judged or you can let and you can keep all of the great things inside of yourself and never let them out. I'm paraphrasing.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: So one of the things that I say is that when you're afraid of being judged, instead of being so focused on what people are going to say about what you're doing, just focus on the work itself. Focus on who you're trying to help, what you're trying to do with it, what you're trying to accomplish with it and why you started doing it in the first place, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: So when you shift the focus from, "Oh my God, what are people going to say," to how can I help the people that I want to help as best I can and as much as I can with this, it totally changes where you're putting your energy and where you're putting your focus.

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: So that's like one example. If you are feeling like you're really, really highly self-critical and you're always thinking really highly self-critical thoughts, that there's been a research done by a woman whose name is Susan Goldin-Meadow. She's at the University of Chicago and she has done a lot of research between the connection between gesture and thought, it's fascinating stuff that children are actually able to better solve equations when they're taught gestures along with the equation instead of just equation by itself. It's like amazing.

Lea Alcantara: Right, right.

Denise Jacobs: Amazing, amazing stuff.

Lea Alcantara: Isn't that like related to like that kinetic learning?

Denise Jacobs: Yes, yes, yes.

Lea Alcantara: It's what I like to write notes on a notebook as opposed to typing it down.

Denise Jacobs: Because it actually stimulates more parts of your brain and it makes better connections between what you're trying to retain and what you've done and you've gotten more points.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Anyway, so one of the things that taking that into consideration that we have this ingrained habit already with devices of swiping left when we want to delete something.

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: So to take that and to combine the two and kind of combine all of it together, and when you're thinking of really super self-critical thought, to swipe it like to actually like, "Okay, swipe left and say delete." Right.

Lea Alcantara: I love it.

Denise Jacobs: And then you're just like, "Oh, my God, it's going to suck. Delete. Delete." And just do that, swipe to left and then also say something again because you're connecting more points in your brain with that. Another gesture you can use is to push away from yourself, like go away.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, I love that.

Denise Jacobs: It's deep, right?

Lea Alcantara: Well, I mean, I love it because I feel like I've naturally done that, but I'm an extrovert so I feel like when I'm showing emotions and even when I'm speaking on stage, I'm always moving my hand because I need to like expel this energy somehow.

Denise Jacobs: But it also helps people understand what you're saying.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly, yeah.

Denise Jacobs: You use your hands to illustrate the concept or illustrate and give people an additional point of reference other than you just talking, because most people don't mind just by hearing words, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right. And you're saying just do that to yourself.



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Denise Jacobs: Yeah, do that to yourself, like you're thinking those thoughts when it arises in your consciousness and you're just like, "Oh, okay." And you think it again and you just delete and you just swipe left on it.

Lea Alcantara: Oh, I love it. [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: Or like I said, you can push it away from yourself like, "Nope, go away. I don't need you anymore. Go on."

Lea Alcantara: Right. I feel like that's also anyone who probably practices yoga and all those types of things.

Denise Jacobs: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: There are so many movements and things like that where like the entire point is to release that energy, that juju, whatever you want to deal with, and get yourself in a good mindset, and the physical movement does get you to that point.

Denise Jacobs: Absolutely, absolutely, yes, yes. So that really I love that. I love that particular tip because I feel like it's something that's so easy, so relatable.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And it's just something that you can start immediately.

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: It's not like you have to sit down with a journal and like think about life or anything, you can just start doing it, delete, delete, delete, and it's really easy to use.

Lea Alcantara: Right. [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: And then another thing that I like too, one of the things that I have in the book about comparing yourself to other people...

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: So a couple of things, one of them is to first to like actually turn your envy of them into admiration and to really like make an effort to like just start to support other people in their endeavors because, first of all, a lot of times, people are envious of other people because they haven't been supporting themselves, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: So it's like you're so busy like going, "Oh, why does this person got this thing and that thing," and you haven't even been acknowledging your own successes.

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: I'm like super guilty of this sort of thing. It's like I have an accomplishment and then I just move on like nothing happened, and then people are like, "Oh, I'm sorry. Hey, stop the buzz. You realize that you just wrote a book, right?" I'm like, "Yeah, but... blah, blah, blah."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, yeah.

Denise Jacobs: And they're like, "Oh, okay, like let's just back up here."

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, right.

Denise Jacobs: And so to take that envy and to start translating it into admiration in different ways, and then also see how you're actually very different from that person who you're envious of.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Because a lot of times they have a totally different set of circumstances than you do and it's really important to recognize that.

Lea Alcantara: Right. And I think like at the very beginning of this show, you were talking about how creativity doesn't have to be this big giant change or like innovation, it could be simply because you have your own life experiences and your own thought process that already whatever you bring to the table is unique.

Denise Jacobs: Exactly. Every time I think about this, I get this kind of like almost like teary reverent feeling, but when I think about like if you just stop for a moment and you just think, and I'm trying like to keep tears back here, you just think, "There is nobody else on the planet that is you, like nobody."

Lea Alcantara: Yes.



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Denise Jacobs: And if we want to take it a step further, there has never ever been anybody that is you ever in the history of ever.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And when you're not here anymore, there's never ever, ever going to be another person that's like you, ever in the history of ever.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah.

Denise Jacobs: It just doesn't happen. There's no two like snowflakes, like yes, actually somebody like was kind of nihilist on Facebook and were like, "You're not a unique snowflake," and then I was like, "Well, actually, technically, yeah, because this can't be replicated."

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: The experiences that you're having, the way that you think, the way that you do things, your voice, your fingerprints, your DNA, never ever replicated ever again.

Lea Alcantara: And I'm just going to put like two cents, like I know a lot of twins, I'm sisters with twins and they're very different. [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: Yes, they're very different.

Lea Alcantara: So like even if they came from the exact same genetic material, still they view the world and experience the world in different ways, so yeah.

Denise Jacobs: Right. And they've had experiences.



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Lea Alcantara: Exactly.

Denise Jacobs: Even if they spent most of their time together, they haven't spent every single moment together and they have, again, the filter of them, right?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Each person has the filter of themselves and there's nobody else who has that filter, nobody, and then the last thing for the comparisons is a lot of times we get caught up in comparing ourselves with other people and it keeps us stuck and stagnant.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And so I have a friend who actually started a group called Akzen — A K Z E N — and he basically started this action club and it basically is like a way for people to gather together and just do the damn thing, like whatever that is.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Like you want to go skydiving, put it on your list and make it happen.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: You want to like be an extra in *Game in Thrones*, put it on your list and make it happen.

Lea Alcantara: Right.



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Denise Jacobs: And it's not like put it on your list and then talk about it, but it's like, "Here are the action steps that I've taken this week to accomplish this goal."

Lea Alcantara: Very cool.

Denise Jacobs: He's had people who have like gotten back to school and gotten their Master's degrees and started like programs for the homeless and people who have become actors even.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: It's like amazing stuff by having this and being in a situation, being in an environment where you're actually taking action and you're around other people who are taking action and you're being supported, you have a community. So that would get you out of comparisons.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, I think that's so important having a community, because aren't we the sum of the five closest people, right?

Denise Jacobs: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: I read that, but I don't know what the exact research is.

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Denise Jacobs: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: But if you surround yourself with people who prop you up and help keep you accountable to your goals, then you'll reach them.



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Denise Jacobs: Yeah.

Lea Alcantara: All right. Well, I mean, do you have any final advice for those that want to be more creative and kinder to themselves?

Denise Jacobs: Buy my book. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: Yeah. Just basically like that I think is really important, something that I've been discovering myself, and I know it sounds trite and everything, but actually it has a lot of depth to it, but really knowing who you are and accepting who you are fully is huge. It's just a game changer, right?

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Denise Jacobs: Like when you finally get to a point where you're like you're not judging anything that you do and not thinking it needs to be different or changed or modified somehow, and I say this from a standpoint of like I said, I make earrings. I still actually do make handmade herbal soaps and for the longest time, I used to like kind of be judgmental about the fact that I did this and like, "Why am I doing these silly things when I should be really working on my business, or I should really be investing, like doing boring like adult things?" Right?

Lea Alcantara: Right. Like adult things. [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: Adult things, like why do this fun play thing that fills me up and makes me feel like more grounded and more settled in myself and everything, I should be doing this other stuff that I don't really care for that much or that might be easier if I actually felt better about myself.



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Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: And when I finally got to a place where I was like, “Wait a minute, this is just who I am.” And instead of fighting it, what would happen if I really just went all the way with it?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Like if I like gave myself permission to make earrings whenever I wanted to and then sell them to people because would like those beautiful earrings, like what would that felt like?

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, why not?

Denise Jacobs: Why not? And why isn’t that as valid a pursuit or business as conducting a training at a corporation?

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Denise Jacobs: Why is one better than the other? And so I’m sure there are a lot of people who are totally self-you know, who are pretty self-actualized and who are just like, “Yeah, I just make bird houses or whatever.”

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: But if there is a thing that you do that you’ve been thinking needs to be different or needs to somehow be more acceptable or needs to be more digestible or needs to just somehow be different than what it is that you need to be different somehow than what you are and who you are, just see what it feels like to just say, “No, this is just who I am and I’m really okay with this.”



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Lea Alcantara: Amen. Easier said than done, I think.

Denise Jacobs: Dude, listen, I wrote a book about it.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Denise Jacobs: Like come on.

Lea Alcantara: Exactly.

Denise Jacobs: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Exactly. Well, anyway, I really feel like we can talk hours and hours on this, but that is all the time we have for today, but before we finish up, we've got our Rapid Fire Ten Questions so our listeners can get to know you a bit better.

Denise Jacobs: Yehey!

Lea Alcantara: Are you ready?

Denise Jacobs: I'm as ready as I'll ever be.

Lea Alcantara: Okay. So first question, introvert or extrovert?

Denise Jacobs: Introvert for the most part.

Lea Alcantara: Second question, the power is going to be out for the next week, what food from the fridge do you eat first?



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Denise Jacobs: The frozen stuff.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] So what's your favorite website for fun?

Denise Jacobs: Oh, I don't know if I have one.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs] Fair, fair. What's the last thing you read?

Denise Jacobs: The last thing I read was – I'm actually currently reading it now is a book by M. Evelina Galang and it's called *Her Wild American Self*, and it's awesome.

Lea Alcantara: Very cool. What's the best piece of professional advice you've received?

Denise Jacobs: Well, I just got an amazing piece of advice last night, which is to conserve your energy for the things that are important.

Lea Alcantara: Excellent. So what's the worst piece of professional advice you've received?

Denise Jacobs: Try to do what other people do to be successful.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees] What's your favorite color?

Denise Jacobs: Magenta.

Lea Alcantara: If you could take us to one restaurant in your town, where would we go?

Denise Jacobs: Fratellino's on the Miracle Mile. It's an Italian restaurant and it's delicious.



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Lea Alcantara: Oh. What's your favorite board game?

Denise Jacobs: I don't know if I have one.

Lea Alcantara: Fair, fair. Okay, last question, Hulu or Netflix?

Denise Jacobs: Netflix.

Lea Alcantara: Very cool. Well, thank you, Denise.

Denise Jacobs: [Laughs] You're very welcome.

Lea Alcantara: So in case our listeners want to follow up with you, where can they find you online?

Denise Jacobs: You can just find me online, my website is denisejacobs.com. You can follow me on Twitter, @denisejacobs. My Facebook fan page or whatever, professional page is denisejacobsdotcom, and Instagram is Denise Jacobs, and my book's website is innercriticbook.com.

[Music starts]

Lea Alcantara: Very cool. Well, this was such an interesting discussion. Thanks again, Denise.

Denise Jacobs: Thank you so much for having me. I had such a good time.

Lea Alcantara: CTRL+CLICK is produced by Bright Umbrella, a web services agency obsessed with happy clients. Today's podcast would not be possible without the support of this episode's sponsor! Many thanks to Craft CMS! And we'd also like to thank our hosting partner: Arcustech, and thanks to our listeners for tuning in!



<https://ctrlclickcast.com/episodes/banish-your-inner-critic>

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And don't forget to tune in to our next episode when we have Ben Furfie on the show to ask, do you really need a CMS? Be sure to check out ctrlclickcast.com/schedule for more upcoming topics.

This is Lea Alcantara signing off for CTRL+CLICK CAST. See you next time!

[Music stops]

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