

# Ep 3: The Myth of Positive Thinking and the Secret of Radical Self-Awareness



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**SaraEllen Hutchison**

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# Ep 3: The Myth of Positive Thinking and the Secret of Radical Self-Awareness

I'm SaraEllen Hutchison and this is the *Feminine Energy Feminist* podcast, episode number three: The Myth of Positive Thinking, and the Secret of Radical Self-Awareness.

Welcome to *Feminine Energy Feminist*, a podcast for professional women who are ready to tap into their feminine energy, so they can be happier at work and in their personal lives. It's time to redefine what a professional woman is in those historically male-dominated fields that don't always embrace the needs and talents of women.

I'm your host, SaraEllen Hutchison. I'm a life coach and a practicing lawyer. I'll help you learn how to embrace who you are as a woman; body, mind, and spirit, so you can be more powerful in your career and fulfilled in your life. So, if you're ready not just to be a high achiever, but get what your soul wants too, let's proceed.

## Episode 3: The Myth of Positive Thinking

Welcome back to the *Feminine Energy Feminist*, Episode 3. Today is all about the second radical idea covered in the first episode. That is Radical Self Awareness.

In Episode 1, as you recall, you learned two radical ideas:

- (1) embrace your feminine energy,
- (2) develop radical self-awareness.

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In Episode 2, I gave you the four steps to embrace your feminine energy. If you haven't listened to it, I encourage you to do that either before you listen to this episode, or soon thereafter. Like I have shared, the first number of weeks of this new re-tooled podcast is designed to be a course, a free course that you take in sequential order.

Today I will go in depth on the second radical idea: radical self-awareness. And why positive thinking is pretty much a MYTH. And that's not the only controversial thing I'm going to say. We're going to dismantle that myth, and if you can get past my attempts to be mildly shocking and contrarian, it's going to be a tremendous relief for you, especially if you have tried positive thinking and failed, or tried the law of attraction and failed. Or at least you are using the word failure to describe it. So, keep listening.

So how did I get here? Why am I telling you that positive thinking is a myth? Especially given that when I am not lawyering, I'm a life coach and spiritual mentor, helping women like you get more of what you want and have less of what you don't.

Well, I come from a long line of champion complainers. I mean, world-class bitches and moaners. Moody English majors. Jaded journalism majors. Disenchanted do-gooders. I even have an angry Republican or two in my family (please don't judge). And I'm an attorney, so I'm always looking for faults, things to improve, stuff that isn't how I want it to be, and devising ways all the morons and the asinine institutions would all be better if they could only conform to my impossible ideals.

To top it off, I practice consumer protection law, the ultimate "there oughta be a law!" righteous indignation niche. To say I know how to think

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negatively, and enjoy every damn minute of it, in the most luxurious way, is an understatement.

...Even after 25+ years of personal growth and spiritual study, I am capable of thoughts that aren't all namaste and love and light, y'all.

Can you relate? Are you like, "yeah, I live in the real world and some stuff sucks?" Well, what if you're like me, living and working in the *real* world, you might find it challenging to have a positive attitude all the time.

The issue is when we decide we are going to try to have a better attitude, and maybe raise our energetic vibration, and it doesn't seem to jive with having to deal with real problems at work and in life. Reality doesn't seem to harmonize with spiritual teachings that seem to suggest that your life will be crap if you don't think positive thoughts all the time.

Well, that's a myth, and today I will dispel it.

(You're welcome.)

So where did the concept of positive thinking come from? This episode isn't going to be an entire dissertation on the history of the Western world, but let me give you the nutshell. You see, there was this fellow named John Calvin. He was a philosopher. He had this concept called the Doctrine of the Elect. Basically, he postulated that God was kind of like Santa Claus, in that he had a list of who was naughty and nice. But you see, he decided that *for you* before you ever had the glimmer of desire for that second piece of birthday cake or fantasies about your hot neighbor. God, all powerful, decided ahead of time who gets the rose and who goes home.

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And maybe you, poor little human, well you didn't ask to be born, you literally just showed up in your little life, and didn't know where you stand. So, what are you going to do about it? Well, humans are inherently tribal. We are pack animals. So you're thinking your family is tolerable, but the Joneses down there yonder, well, we don't know about *those people*, they seem a little stuck up. We don't want anyone thinking that the Joneses are chosen but we aren't. We don't want anybody thinking that we're on God's naughty list. So naturally, with all of this at stake, you're going to work really, really, really hard to look like you have it made. And that, my friends, is the psychological underpinning of what we now know as the Protestant work ethic or Puritan work ethic.

Regardless of your culture or religion, there is most likely some version of this trickling through your psyche if you are from, or living in, the western world.

The Protestant work ethic has a lot of benefits. One of the obvious is taking action to get successful results, and of course, valuing hard work. Great things have come out of the hard-working people influenced by this ethic, myself and a lot of my ancestors included. When I see a complete lack of ambition in a person it baffles me. But in much of Western culture, it gets twisted into something very neurotic. And that is the obsession with being happy as one of the offshoots of being in God's good graces, and the constant comparison to others that quickly sabotages our happiness.

First let's look at how we deal with mental health in the United States. Suppose we have a hypothetical first year-associate at a law firm, a young woman in her late 20s or early 30s. She has a lot of talent. Smart. Good

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grades all the way through school. She is accustomed to having a lot of validation for what she is good at and what her potential is. When she puts in effort, the response from the world seems to be congruent with what she has put in.

But then she has the seeming bad luck of being assigned to a particularly demanding or unsupportive supervisor or partner, and the wheels completely come off. She free falls. She struggles to keep up. Despite being smart enough to do the work, it's hard to crank enough of the work out while she is walking on eggshells trying to please someone who themselves probably has no training on how to nurture, supervise or train newbies. The expectation is that everybody is supposed to be "resilient." Or "lean in." Or just act like they're happy even if they are not.

Just like the people in the ads for home improvement stores. Let me tell you that when you are remodeling an old house, you are not smiling as much as those actors in the ads. Go try it for yourself if you don't believe me. Start with flooring if you really feel masochistic.

There's a lot of time in the law and other professions when it's natural to experience the 50 percent of life that is not what most people would call "positive."

And so what this new associate may be going through is culture shock, an identity crisis, a shamanic death and rebirth, a great personal transformation or just a rough spell, but there is nothing and no one there to remind her that she is completely normal, and her acute lack of happiness is also normal.

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So, sadly, what sometimes happens is that she is diagnosed with major depression, anxiety, or a personality disorder, simply because she's not happy and plucky anymore the way everybody would rather have her be. Including herself. And then what might feel initially like a relief – “ah! It's not me! It's my fill-in-the-blank problem!” – can become a greater limitation than the original garden-variety, part-of-life unhappiness that she experienced.

And even worse, sometimes the only way out of a terrible situation is a medical leave.

This isn't everyone, of course. A good number of women early in their professional careers really do develop clinically significant mental health issues. And some women do encounter employment circumstances that warrant legal action or just a change of scenery. If you suspect any of that applies to you, talk to a doctor or an employment lawyer or both.

When you look at society at large, you see a lot of either/or thinking when it comes to what is supposedly “normal” and what is “not normal.” We have too sharp a line between who is “able” and who is “dis-abled,” which limits what all of us are capable of. Too quickly in our society, you will be given a pill so you can keep going – or told that you are too different from the rest of us such that you should stop contributing altogether. The emphasis on putting on a happy face and whistling while you work is so great that on 9/11, tragically, some people were told that they should go back to their desks.

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In summary, the emphasis on happiness as an indication that things are going well is just another offshoot of some old, outmoded patriarchal ideas that need to go the way of the dodo because they are not serving us.

So now, let's fast forward in history away from John Calvin and land ourselves in the last 250 or so years and discuss another philosophical thread running through a lot of Western culture, and that is the law of attraction. Again, this is not going to be an entire Humanities course, but I'm going to show you the dots and you can connect them. Alongside the Puritans, there were a good number of freethinking deists – folks who were more spiritual than religious – who were extremely influential in the creation of the United States. And fast forward a few decades from there, the American Transcendental literary movement, inspired by some Eastern and ancient traditions, showed us that the divine is in all of creation. The latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw some very interesting religious and spiritual movements in the United States, many of which continued the Transcendentalist narrative. And the one that can be credited with popularizing the law of attraction – that like attracts like, that you create your reality, that what you appreciate, appreciates – is the New Thought movement.

There are a lot of wonderful New Thought authors from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and reading the source material by authors like Wallace Wattles, Florence Scovel Shinn and Ernest Holmes is highly beneficial if you vibe with law of attraction and prosperity teachings, or you like Abraham Hicks but want to go deeper.

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I credit all of these as influences on my beliefs, my personal and professional success, and my coaching. I credit these teachings with raising my overall “default” level of happiness to something much greater than it was 20 or 25 years ago, even 10 years ago. And I know firsthand that being positive all the time is NOT the point of the law of attraction, and is not required to create – or manifest – a good life. Positive thinking works, of course. But the way it is often dumbed down into this message that you need to be more positive, in a pressure-y way, is MYTH.

OK, time for a reality check. You are probably thinking at this point, “hey, isn’t this podcast all about trying to be happier overall at work and in my personal life?”

Of course it is. You’re ready for the big secret. Here it is: when you embrace that you are not going to be happy all the time, that it is impossible to do so, and that your negative thoughts and feelings are actually not an indication that anything has gone wrong, you’re going to freak out less, and beat yourself up less, and roll with the punches of your own internal weather a whole lot better.

If you’ve ever listened to Abraham, what’s one of the first things you often hear? It’s some version of, “are you enjoying the contrast?” Contrast is when you experience something that you do not want, when you are not 100% happy, when you realize immediately that you’d prefer something different. Can you really learn to enjoy the contrast? You can, once you see how much it is actually really helping you.

We get ourselves in trouble when we see the contrast and decide, ok, I read this self–help book and I’ve been listening to Abraham on repeat. I

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want to improve my life, so I'm going to be aware of my negative thinking. And the first thing that people often do, or even years after learning about positive thinking, is they get really mad at themselves when they have negative thoughts, and blame themselves for the conditions in their lives. "If only I could control my thoughts, I'd have a better life," they conclude.

The thing is, it isn't about controlling your thoughts. We have about 60,000 thoughts a day. And it isn't even about immediately changing the negative thoughts we are hell bent on believing. The only way we are going to convince ourselves of something new is to first accept our starting point, and accept our internal and external resources in their present state.

Denying that we think or feel a certain way out of embarrassment, judgment, or anger against ourselves is what will keep us stuck and unable to quantum leap to a new plane of existence.

The secret of self-awareness is a "secret" because it's the part that a lot of people want to skip over. They want to rush to feel better. And while feeling better is great, there need not be any rush. You have time.

So here's your homework. Next time you have a negative thought and feel internal pressure to rush to change it to a positive thought, remember that the pressure you feel to rush to improve that thought comes from some twisted and/or watered-down spiritual teachings, and the real deal is in no hurry. The real work is becoming lovingly familiar with right where you are and starting with acceptance.

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There's a lot more to say about the process of acceptance and the wise use of the full spectrum of your emotions, but you're just going to have to wait for future episodes.

In summary, people who feel stuck are often trying really hard to practice positive thinking, believing that something has gone wrong if they are unhappy with their circumstances and seemingly unable to control their thoughts. It's a myth that we have to be happy all the time to have an overall happy life or manifest our desires. The real secret is to become fully and radically self-aware, honoring all the thoughts and feelings, especially the uncomfortable ones, because that's where you will find gold.

I'm really excited to share how you can mine for that gold, but we've got to wrap up for today.

I've got two announcements.

One, is the raffle. To celebrate the launch of the new, improved podcast, I'm going to giving away a reMarkable Tablet! Wow! And, Remarkable is now integrated with Dropbox and Google Drive. How cool is that?

Ever since I bought mine, all the trees in the forest are sighing relief because they're not going be felled for my journaling practice!

And possibly yours, too. I'm going to raffle off just one of these to one lucky listener who follows, rates, and reviews the show. I need a bunch of reviews and ratings and entries before the end of 2021.

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It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I hope that you love the show. I do want your honest feedback, so I can create an awesome show that provides a ton of value.

Visit [lawyergoddess.com/raffle](http://lawyergoddess.com/raffle) to learn more about the raffle and how to enter. I'll be announcing the winner on the show in an upcoming episode.

Two, if you are a professional woman wanting to raise your default happiness in your work and life, talk to me and we'll show you how coaching can help you. Go to [lawyergoddess.com/contact](http://lawyergoddess.com/contact) to message me.

Thanks for listening to *Feminine Energy Feminist*. If you want more information or the resources from the podcast, visit [lawyergoddess.com/podcast](http://lawyergoddess.com/podcast). See you next week.

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