

## untethered. put down the rope.

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self leadership masterclass #2: how to tap into the power of your self to allow and alleviate your struggle

### *class outline:*

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- activity: your struggle metaphor

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- bonus content: your inner parts

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## about karen & this class

before we begin...

this masterclass assumes you have done part I of this series (how to self) and that you have met me through that introduction. if you have not yet done that class, you may wish to pause here and do that first... self is the prerequisite to self-leadership!

i am karen gunton – teacher, author, life coach. my aim is to help you get unstuck from whatever is holding you back and move toward whatever it is you want for yourself.

i know stuck. i know struggle. i am an unstucktor who has been very stuck, a light ignitor whose light was very dim, and a teacher/leader/coach who had to learn to teach, lead, and coach my self first.

in this self-leadership masterclass series i am sharing the concepts and strategies that helped me to help myself get out of my struggle and back into my life.

some of the concepts shared in this class come from therapies such as ACT (acceptant and commitment therapy), IFS (internal family systems) and mindful self-compassion – but please note that is not therapy and i am not a therapist. i am simply picking and choosing and amalgamating some helpful ideas that made a big difference to me and sharing them with you... things that may help us to help our selves.

thank you for joining me again!

## introduction

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this is the "struggle masterclass." we're here to learn how to tap into the power of our self (which we worked on in the previous class) to allow and alleviate our struggle. recognising you are struggling is the first step towards helping yourself get unstuck.

first, how do you know when you are struggling? what are the signs or clues, for you? examples: negative self-talk/voice; avoiding, numbing, procrastinating; lack of mojo/interest; not able to do the things you long to do; reactive/snappy/impatient, retreating, doubting...

also, consider what type of struggle you are experiencing, what is your hard thing right now? 2 types of hard things:

- **the present thing:** you have experienced a shitty thing or you are dealing with a hard thing (eg a failure, a setback, a loss, a tricky situation, a conflict...) and it's hard to bounce back.
- **the absent thing:** you are wishing for a good thing, a better thing (eg you're languishing, you're longing for something different, you desire change) and it's hard to move forward.

maybe it's even a combination of both things! in both cases it might feel like there is something in your way – a wall of resistance blocking your path, a heavy load that weighs you down.

no matter your particular kind of stuck, this is what i want you to remember:

### a. your problem is not the problem. the struggle is the problem.

- whether it is the presence of a thing or an absence of a thing, that thing is not the problem. the inner struggle is the problem – the wall, the load.
  - let's say you have had a failure and now maybe you've lost your way, lost your mojo, lost your confidence.
  - let's say you really want to make a positive change but maybe you have resistance, overwhelm, uncertainty, or fear.
- failures and changes are a constant of life. it's all that inner struggle stuff that is the problem. the struggle includes your feelings, thoughts, beliefs, mindset, behaviours, stories you may be telling yourself... this is what we will explore in this class!
- we're not here to solve the problem or fix the hard thing we are here to allow that the struggle is real and to explore: what part of me is struggling?

**b. you are not a problem. you are not your struggle.**

remember this, about who you are...

- your struggle, your hard thing is not your identity. you are so much more than that thing – you did the work to strengthen your self in the first class, this is why. you are so much more than whatever problem you are struggling with. for example, for a long time i kept saying: *i am depressed, i am lost, i am languishing*. **putting me first** (instead of my problem, my hard thing) reminds me: *i am a warrior and i struggle sometimes with depression. i am creative, i am a learner, i am wise... and i am ready to find my purpose again.*
- you are exactly right, exactly enough, exactly as you are right now. you aren't broken, you don't need fixing... you are just right. i want you to feel that, to feel and be strong in who you are
- you are deserving of whatever it is you long for – exactly as you are right now. good health, well-being, peace, calm, fulfilment, joy, success, connection, purpose... you deserve that. you deserve to feel better. you deserve your dreams coming true.

you are not having a hard time because you are doing anything wrong, you are having a hard time because this is a hard thing. you are not the problem, you are not your hard thing.

**c. life happens. hard shit happens.**

- the feelings and experiences you are having... this hard thing you are in right now... it's real. it's valid. it's happening. there is no sense in trying to switch it off, avoid it... it is possible you can't even fix it. you definitely shouldn't beat yourself up over it or judge yourself for not being able to move past it... you are allowed to be exactly where you are, right now.
- this is about accepting that sometimes life is just hard, in fact sometimes life is really fucking shitty, and allowing yourself to feel exactly how you feel...
- while also remembering that you are not your struggle!

instead, imagine you are tethered to your hard thing – your problem – with a thick heavy rope... like a tug of war. the longer you carry it, the more you are tugging, the more you feel the struggle.

we aren't here to win the war, to win the "tug of war" battle. what if instead you could just walk away from the war? that's what we are here to do... to put down the rope so that we can step away from the war and step toward where you want to be... to get out of the struggle and get into the life you long for. (*note: this is a concept from ACT*)

the aim of this whole class is to ALLOW the struggle. allowing cannot be lip service. we must truly allow for the suffering. without allowing, we are still carrying the rope we just aren't looking at it, thinking about it, we have no idea what the rope is made of, and it continues to hold us back from moving forward.

**activity: your struggle metaphor**

describe your struggle using a metaphor. i've just used the metaphor the rope, the tether, the tug of war. what other metaphor feels to you like your struggle? when you close your eyes and think of the hard things you are experiencing, what does it feel like to you.

for example: waves crashing, stormy sea, treading water, black clouds, dark cave, heavy baggage, roller coaster, fog, lost in a dark forest, treadmill, dark room, messy house full of junk and clutter.

## acknowledge + accept the struggle

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hard things are one of life's constants. a tricky thing happens: when we find our self in struggle we can lose our sense of self. we think: *what's wrong with me! i want to xx but i can't get past yy no matter how hard i try!* our mindset, behaviour, beliefs, voice in our head doesn't match who we think we are... the struggle makes us question our self... and then we struggle even more.

instead: when you are struggling with a hard thing i can be helpful to believe that it's **not your whole self struggling, rather it is simply one part of you.**

**bonus content: your inner parts** (+ introduced in class 1)

this approach: turn towards your suffering part as though it is a friend, a sweet struggling part of your inner team or inner circle. resistance creates suffering, acceptance alleviates it! we are going to accept our suffering part.

remember to engage your true self before you explore your parts - you can do this by engaging the Cs of self: calm, compassion, connection, curiosity, clarity, care, confidence, creativity, courage.

### 1. compassion

#### a. kindness

- compassion for the part who is suffering = kindness towards the suffering self
- self-compassion is acceptance... acceptance of the part having the experience.
- give up struggle to fix things, to "feel better"... find compassion for part instead. what are you trying to fix or shift that you could accept instead? self-compassion is letting your self off the hook and that's putting down the rope.

#### b. connection

- attachment to your part – you are real, you are safe, you matter
- my love for you is VAST: validation, affection, security, trust – needs will be met, part won't be abandoned
- creating a new bond: self to parts; the rope (old bond) released = unburdening

#### c. strength + struggle

- brene brown says about compassion: compassion is fuelled by understanding and accepting that we are ALL made of strength and struggle. no one is immune to pain and suffering.
- chris germer says: compassion is when love meets struggle.
- strength and struggle – you've remembered your strength, let's allow for the struggle.

## 2. acceptance

### a. direction of awareness – attention to, lean in, turn towards

- lean in with mindfulness, conscious of every feeling, look right at it, meet it, lean in and put your arms around the part of you that is suffering
- turn towards suffering or pain or resistance, bring in blanket and sit with it. welcome. peace. comfort. befriending your self, your parts.
- stay open. opening emotionally to present experience. a choice to experience thoughts and feelings as they happen.

### b. willingness

- willingness – to take what is offered, take your part as it is.
- to welcome even if you don't want part there (like a grouchy aunt), there is no try, either you welcome her in or you don't
- to allow truth of experience, to be honest, to acknowledge reality of experience – this is what it's like and it's ok

### c. expansion

- creating space for, making room for feeling, enough space that those feelings don't strain us, i can make space around the feeling that is big enough to hold it... to your part: there is all the space for you here
- open up instead of squeezing down
- observe feelings, breathe into them, let them come and go

### 3. allowing vs resisting

#### a. the problem...

- i heard this said about resistance: *when you resist something in you it goes to the basement to lift weights*. that's what our parts do when they aren't seen, honoured, validated... they just get more activated, they take up more space in the circle, around the table.
- a part that doesn't trust the SELF to lead is going to try to take over driving the bus of life.
- resistance creates suffering. acceptance alleviates it.

#### b. resisting

- avoid, numb, turn away, disconnect, forget
- diminish, suppress, bury, minimise, reject
- control, manage, handle, cope, guard
- fix, rid, solve, overcome, get over – make it go away
- judge, evaluate – this is horrible, i'm so weak, what's wrong with me, something bad is happening, this feeling is wrong, this thought is bad
- buy in – thoughts are facts, beliefs are truths
- discharge – rant, release, explode, erupt – expressing anger doesn't reduce anger

#### c. allowing

- looking *at* a thought vs *from* a thought
- having a thought vs buying a thought
- being hurt, being angry (part is taking over) vs being aware of hurt, being aware of anger (self is present)
- descriptions vs evaluations
- label, name, identify, notice, validate
- watching thoughts and feelings come and go
- moment to moment bodily experience, body sensations

remember: this step about allowing for the part of you that is suffering and turning towards that suffering part with compassion, acceptance, and allowance.



**activity: your parts practice... turn towards your parts**

remember your self practice from the 'how to self' class?

now it is time to remember how you engage the self as the leader, the guide, or the friend... and turn towards your parts with compassion, acceptance, and allowance.

try it now: think of one hard thing, one struggle – see if you can tune in/activate your self (remember your Cs) and then turn inwards to find the part of you that is agitated, resisting, or suffering.

practice what you have learned about accepting, allowing, and compassion. practice turning towards your parts. jot down any things that help, that work well, that you want to remember so that you can keep practicing!

## ask + explore the struggle

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martha beck: **address the one that is distressed.** what part of me is struggling here? find that part inside of you, name it, know it, turn towards it.

address the one that is distressed as you (instead of i/me) – creates the perspective of self as compassionate witness vs whole self is the problem.

address the one that is distressed with curiosity. activate wonder: hmmmmmm, i wonder... ask questions. explore with out judgement or expectation.

### 1. awareness. noticing. labelling

#### a. feelings

- you are having a feeling that
- feelings are simply messages! they are neither good nor bad, they are just information.
- what is this feeling like in your body?

#### b. thoughts

- you are having a thought that
- thoughts are not facts. thoughts are not things. it's just a word machine!
- worries, fears, doubts, resistance

#### c. beliefs

- you are having a belief that
- beliefs are not truths. all beliefs are made up!
- where did that belief come from?

## 2. deeper understanding.

digging deeper, peeling layers, what else is going on here? try giving your part a funny voice – reminds you it's not your true self talking, but simply just one agitated part who is really tugging on the rope.

### **a. catalyst**

- what happened to agitate this part?
- something that provoked, caused, prompted... the inciting incident, the catalyst, the button pushed
- (careful: trigger)

### **b. stories**

- stories you are telling yourself, you think these are the rules or expectations
- clues: should, must, ought, probably, guess, assume, if this then,
- what you are supposed to do, how you are supposed to feel/deal with, what happens next

### **c. layers**

- feelings about feelings, thoughts about thoughts, beliefs about beliefs
- ask: but why and keep asking but why
- ex: i feel silly. but why? i should be over this by now. but why? i'm the guy who just gets on with things! but why? that's who i have had to be. but why?

### 3. clarity

connecting dots. oh i see now, i get it!

#### a. behaviours

- responses. urges. go to reactions.
- examples: get defensive, catastrophise, lash out, run/hide, blame, shut down.
- "i get it! xx happened. so you are feeling yy. now your response is to zz"

#### b. helps

- what is your part trying to do? example: protect, manage, play, relax
- how is it trying to help? ex: keep you safe, get shit done, have fun, not be too busy
- what strength/gift does this part possess? guarding, organising, creativity, rest

#### c. needs

- what does your part need? better plans, more processes, protect your time, time for play/relaxing
- what is soothing, interesting, or igniting to your part? (not just triggers, but glimmers too)
- what does your part like best? desire? long for?

remember: this step is about clarity and understanding. just as if you were the leader of a team or you were guiding a circle, if you have one person in your group really struggling, you engage your leader self, you engage compassion and curiosity, to understand what is happening so that you can help them with their struggle.

#### activity: your part snapshot

#### bonus content: PDF worksheet and prompts

once again think of your hard thing from the previous work on allowing & accepting. print out and fill in the "picture of my part" worksheet. address the part of you that has been distressed, agitated, or struggling and go through the ask & explore steps. use the worksheet to create a snapshot of the part you have been turning towards. you can download the "explore prompts" PDF to help you label thoughts, feelings, beliefs, behaviors, body sensations, etc. remember: engage your compassion & curiosity – this isn't about judging or evaluating or fixing.

## ally + alleviate the struggle

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you are allowed to put down the rope, to let go of the inner battle and step away from the war.

how? we need to engage the self and ally with our struggling parts – to ally is to unite, to form a connection, to show strong support for, to work together to help each other. self forms a connection, a new tether, with part: you are real, you are safe, you matter – self + part can put down the rope, walk away from the war, hand in hand.

### 1. leader's job

build trust, build confidence, have courage, be creative – i got this! and show that you do, follow through on your promises! to your parts you say: *trust that i will take care of \_\_\_\_\_*.

#### a. what does your part need from you?

- forgiveness, boundaries, unburdening, space, time, a specific kind of activity
- martha beck: barter, better, bag
- wise Qs: is this true? how do you know it's true? what if the opposite is true?

#### b. what can you do for your part that you do for others?

- think of your superpowers. your mission/purpose.
- example: help people hero. help people share their message. help people learn or grow. help people organise or manage.
- turn towards your part and help them have more of that thing you love to help people with!

#### c. what are your leadership strengths, values, and desires?

- if you are a learner, what can you research and learn that can help to ease the work for this part?
- if you value kindness how can you practice hardcore kindness for part: the voice pops up "i am so useless" catch it, replace it. what if the opposite was true! "you are so incredible!"
- if the kind of person you wish to be is a warrior and fight for what matters most to you, what matters most to this part that you can also fight for?

## 2. part's job

can you help your part put down the rope of the job it has been doing (guarding, protecting, managing etc) and do a new job? move from rigid extreme function to more useful/balanced function. to your part you say: *you are amazing, can you help us with \_\_\_\_\_.*

### a. find the gift

- the other side of the coin – not the struggle but the gift.
- ex: struggle of rumination, trying to solve unsolvable problems. gift is connecting dots, puzzle pieces together, wise perspective. my anxious brain is also amazing brain!
- use gifts/strengths to manage certain situations (eg inner celebrity to get videos made) – take the mic, drive the bus, take the lead

### b. assist with reframe

- a reframe or reset = a new way of thinking/believing that serves better
- ex: guarding self so nothing bad happens, stay closed off, protected, walls up vs guarding open heart, receiving, noticing how we can be open and safe
- collect evidence ex: of safety instead of danger; or watch for clues ex: uh oh, that situation makes me want to put a big wall up, danger!

### c. redirect focus

- Emily and Amelia Nagoski (author *burnout: the secret to solving the stress cycle*) - "remember who the real enemy is" - example: teacher burnout is not a reflection of you, your worth, how good of a teacher you are... it's a result of a broken education system asking too much of, and valuing too little, our teachers
- dial it back to 10. your strengths mean you over value certain things, don't let that limit you. ex: strength is learning but then i believe i don't know enough
- play bingo – your part can make a list of predictions, then tell you every time they were right. make it a game! bingo!

### 3. put down the rope

what would it take to be able to put down the rope?

this doesn't mean you have to "get over" whatever hard thing you've been experiencing. you can feel and accept and allow without trying to forget or fix. it's ok for hard things to be hard. and it's ok to alleviate your inner struggle, to walk away from the inner battle.

#### **a. not fighting a war**

- not at war, not a battle, not a fight.
- inner peace is not the goal because i am not at war and it's not about creating a life where nothing bad happens or nothing is hard
- aim is inner partnership, inner leadership – walk away from the war, hand in hand, do things differently now

#### **b. not fixing a problem**

- not about fixing, solving, overcoming, eradicating.
- it's about allowing. turning towards: i see you. you're allowed to be who you are and feel how you feel.
- aim is inner awareness, inner compassion. creating a life where we allow for and navigate the hard things, as allies

#### **c. not a lone warrior**

- no one is left to hold the rope alone – deal with the hard thing alone - self-leadership is about holding more of our selves at once
- self-led inner world & outer world – somethings will be inner jobs (honouring feelings, questioning beliefs), some will be outer jobs (making changes, taking action)
- aim: the whole team, your entire inner circle comes to the table with strengths and struggles – here's my work, here's yours

### activity: your alleviate plan

you've explored some ideas that might help your part put down the rope of the inner struggle they have been engaged in. what will you do to lead? what new job can your part do? write down your plan on the back of your snapshot so that you can remember and help your part remember too. your part will probably struggle again: the rebel is going to rebel, the controller is going to control, the manager is going to want to manage. coming back to your plans again and again helps, so does following through on your promises!

## conclusion

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we alleviate the struggle when we strengthen the self.

suffering depletes us, so we must strengthen the self.

we strengthen the self so we can turn towards our parts with compassion.

when we lead with self and lead our self we allow that parts may struggle but that our self is not a problem. we recognise that the problem is not the problem.

problems – hard things – will happen! our job is to alleviate the inner struggle.

i used to think: this will be my year. i just want one year where nothing bad happens and i can focus on me, i can show up and shine. but of course life happens. life is full of hard things. we can let hard things keep us stuck, small, same, and safe. we can become crippled by our self-doubt, uncertainty, fear, anxiety, depression, burn out, overwhelm... the rope that holds us back or holds us down is so damn heavy. but we *can* put it down so that we can keep rising, keep shining, keep moving forward even as the hard things are happening.

so that's the work – to put down the rope so that you can keep moving forward from where you are to where you want to be... to get out of the struggle and into the life you long for.

lyric from brandi carlile's song broken horses: "*tethered in wide open spaces*"

in other words we are the only things holding us back... the tether, the rope, is an inside job.

**untethered** means...

- released, let go, not tied or limited or confined or restricted
- to be free, to free yourself, to create your own liberation
- (and to me...) free yourself from struggle so that you are free to move toward more of what you want

how do we become untethered from our inner struggle so that we can move forward? the answer is self-leadership. we learn to lead our self – to lead our struggling parts and to lead *with* our empowered self.

i will note: this work on allowing can be tricky depending on your hard thing, culture and society, even habits and behaviours through life. you may need support from a therapist to allow and alleviate those tough emotions and experiences. for this, for now, the key is permission to allow the part of you that is struggling... to practice giving yourself space and time with this.



**activity:**

remember the metaphor you came up with at the start of this class, the one that represents your struggle. your work now is to reframe that metaphor to remember that you are much much bigger and so much more powerful than this struggle!

for example: i am not the waves, i am the ocean; i harbour sadness, but i am the whole ocean. i am not the dark cloud/the black hole, i am the whole fucking sky; i am not this roller coaster, i am all of Disney world; i am not this house/room, i am the light and the warmth inside, i am not on a treadmill... my steps are leading me to the light at the top of my lighthouse.

andrea gibson shared this about the roller coaster:

the up and down is a healing place to be. up and down, up and down, it's like stitching a wound.

what metaphor can you create now that reminds you of the strength and power of your whole self, that the struggle is just one part you can have compassion for and can allow, and frames things in a way that is healing or empowering.

thank you for joining me for this masterclass on how to "struggle." if you have any questions please DM or email. other resources you might be interested in, including 1:1 coaching can be found at [karengunton.com](http://karengunton.com). the third and final class in this series is how to "step forward into more of what you say you want for your self now that you are untethered" – this is the class about mojo, meaning, and self-direction... crafting a life that lights you up! i hope you will join me again for that! until next time, keep shining.