



Conscious Life presents
**HEALING TOXIC
RELATIONSHIPS**

From Judgment to Genius

Guest: From Judgment to Genius

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[00:00:10] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host. I loved this interview with Gay and Katie Hendricks. They're pioneers in the field of body intelligence and relationship transformation. They've been doing it for 40 years, and they've mastered ways to translate powerful concepts and life skills into experiential processes where people can discover their own body intelligence and easily integrate life-changing skills.

When it comes to transforming toxic relationship patterns, Gay and Katie have lived the frameworks they teach people. Together and singly, they've authored more than 40 books, including such bestsellers as *Conscious Loving*, *The Big Leap*, *Conscious Loving Ever After* and *The Genius Zone*. I hope you glean as much wisdom from this interview as I did. Enjoy.

Gay and Katie Hendricks, thank you so much for being with us today.

Katie Hendricks

Thank you.

Gay Hendricks

Thank you, Meagen. Great to be with you.

Meagen Gibson

So much of your work revolves around getting rid of judgment and abandoning negative thinking. Before we dig into some of the specifics in your work around Upper Limit Problems and blame free zones, I'd love it if you could address the skeptics in the room who feel like their judgment is integral to their safety.

Gay Hendricks

That's a good way to put it. Well, judgment is really useful in certain situations, if you want to decide whether a movie is good or bad or something like that, it's a good thing to have. But where it gets us into trouble is when you go around judging things that have absolutely no reason to be judged, and that happens to be almost all of life.

[00:01:57]

While judgment is a really important thing to have in our minds, it's way down the list of things that we really need to have a daily life that's got good feeling in it and connection with another person. Because when I look at my beloved, I don't want to be judging her. I don't want to be thinking, gosh, is this the best possible beloved I can be?

Katie Hendricks

Should I be shopping for another one?

Gay Hendricks

Just over her shoulder, is there one? It's a different way of looking at the world. Judgment is great in certain situations, but most of the time what we really need is heartfelt connection and also alignment with who we really are and who this person really is. Those are the key things.

Katie Hendricks

One of the things that we have seen in working with thousands of people is that one of the mythologies in relationship is that you need my judgment. My partner needs my judgment, and that we consider partnership is not an appreciation project, but a fixer upper project. He's a little rough around the edges, but my love is going to get him all polished up. That mythology has caused so much misery because rather than judging, appreciating is what we have found is probably the most underutilized, but most valuable skill you can use in relationships is seeing your partner as an appreciation project, rather than an improvement project.

Meagen Gibson

I completely hear that. Thank you for putting that into context. Now that we've got the skeptics on board, let's talk about the concept of the Upper Limit Problem. Why do you consider it so important to everything and especially in this context of relationships?

Gay Hendricks

Well, in a way it's the only problem you really need to solve because the Upper Limit Problem is our tendency to have a governor put on how much love or positive energy or money or flow of connection. And then when we exceed that, the Upper Limit Problem clamps down and we bring ourselves back down. So that's the problem that applies to just about any area of life that you need to show up in. We've been together, by the way we're just about to celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary.

Meagen Gibson

Congratulations.

[00:04:29] Gay Hendricks

We've been here a long time. We find that that was one of the hugest things that we had to get through in our first couple of years together.

Katie Hendricks

It was to really allow ourselves to expand our capacity to enjoy giving and receiving more love. We really think that is basically the only problem and that when we top out, we've all learned don't couch your chickens before they hatch. Who do you think you are? I think those are all attempts to actually keep us safe, that if I'm just not shining too much, I'm not going to get into trouble.

But on the whole other hand, that relationship can be a place where you can expand into revealing more and more of who you are. We call it revealing essence. I think that's the big discovery playground of relationship and that when you catch yourself doing something like getting critical or breaking an agreement, you simply recommit. Rather than beating yourself up, you recommit. Love yourself first, slipping off the path and then take action in the direction of appreciating or asking your partner what they want, moving your partnership more toward what you want rather than what you're trying to get over.

Meagen Gibson

It's interesting that you say that because so much of what you talked about in *The Genius Zone* related to addiction and had some addiction elements to it. I related to that so deeply because in the last couple of years I've been dealing with extended family members who were suffering from addiction.

One of the first things that I was helped with was just looking at myself instead of looking at them as having a problem with addiction, trying to inquire within as to where my addictive behaviors were. And then the way that you put into context, the way that criticizing or judging or trying to fix another and putting it outside of yourself, that that pattern of thinking can be a very addictive behavior. Trying to exert, control, et cetera. I just loved that context. Within that then, what do you guys call the blame-free zone?

Gay Hendricks

Yes. Well, one of the things that Katie and I did in the early days of our relationship, which produced some real magic, is we realized one day that we were doing a lot of bickering back and forth and criticizing each other. And so we made a pact, actually made an agreement with each other, to create a relationship that ran entirely on positive energy, that didn't need to go down into the depths. A lot of people, in order to have great sex, for example, have to create an argument beforehand. We call that the wargasm pattern. Now, we don't want to do it that way.

Meagen Gibson

I've never heard the term wargasm, I like it.

[00:07:30] Gay Hendricks

We didn't want to run our relationship off adrenaline. We wanted to run it off positive energy, and so we made this deal with each other. We shook on it and everything that we wanted to create a blame-free zone where it ran on positive energy, that it wasn't about blame and criticism or shame or anything like that. We were surprised to find out how addictive those old patterns were, the whole blame and criticism thing. Because here's why, when you do blame and criticize or shame somebody else, you get a burst of adrenaline, and that's one of the most addictive drugs there is.

You get hooked on that adrenaline of the wargasm pattern and have to keep yourselves constantly stimulated by bigger and bigger arguments to have a connection. We eliminated that problem. We decided, okay, we're going to have our good times doing things like writing books together and creating new projects and things like that. We're not going to spend our time blaming and criticizing all the time. It took us a few years to do it, but for the last 30 years or so, nobody's criticized anybody else. It's fantastic, I'll tell you. If you don't ever have any criticism and blame in your life, you'd be surprised at how many other things you can get done.

Katie Hendricks

One of the things that was really surprising to me and impacted me so profoundly was realizing that I could simply open and share with Gay whatever was going on, that the criticism and especially the anticipation of criticism, that I had sort of gotten pickled in my family. So many of us had an anticipating the criticism. But to be able to open to what's wanting to happen here, and the pure magic of connection and the creativity that came out of that, that was really such a new discovery.

The possibility of being completely yourself in the presence of someone else, that continues to be a daily gift that I can just open to more and more of who I am and who we are together. It also has a ripple effect because people feel it. They notice that there's ah, I can breathe easily. They look like they're having a lot of fun. In fact, people have always known where we are because that's where all the laughter is coming from. So laughter and creativity and enjoyment and savoring replace criticism and control.

Gay Hendricks

It's also a direct access point to your creativity too, because a lot of us tie up our creative minds in the whole business of negative thinking in one way or the other. Negative thinking being the stuff that goes on in our own minds and then out in relationship, looking for things to find fault with and picking on the other person and that kind of thing. There's a lot of energy that goes into that, but if you can break that addiction, wow, there's an amazing amount of creativity there that can fill that same space.

Ultimately too, creativity is such a key to everything because especially in relationships - you mentioned our book *Conscious Loving Ever After* which is about relationships from 40 and up. One of the key things that we discovered in studying and working with couples at midlife and beyond is the incredible importance of keeping your creative pipelines open in yourself and in the relationship. We have the saying that every breath you take in second half of life is a breath of creativity or a breath of stagnation. Which one are you going to be breathing toward every moment?

[00:11:23]

Because as anybody from 50 up, 60 up will tell you, there's a tremendous pull towards stagnation, doing the same old thing over and over again and that kind of thing. Whereas the real possibilities of life become available only when you fully open and commit to having more of your genius and more of your ability to receive and give love available on a daily basis.

One of the first things I ask people to do is make a commitment to bringing forth more of their genius every day. Because I find if they can do that, they've now taken a different life position. Now their life is about something else. It's not about going through the motions anymore, it's about opening up a bigger dialog with your genius every day.

Katie Hendricks

Appreciation is directly connected to uncovering genius because most of us are better able to see genius in others than we are to see it in ourselves. Because one of the aspects of genius is that it's easy. That something that I do, that's just something I love to do and it's very easy for me, I just assume everybody can do that. But genius is unique to each of us. The thing that we love to do that also makes a contribution in the world.

I've noticed that as I've gotten better at appreciating people and appreciating the things that I notice about them, they begin going, oh right, oh, that's something I really love to do, it's easy for me to do. They begin expanding their genius, so more and more time gets lived in genius rather than trying to fix things, make things better, improve things, which is an endless task.

Meagen Gibson

I know that neither of you would say that doesn't mean that you don't try something new that's unfamiliar. Because I know you've got offices full of musical instruments and all kinds of things that you've continued to learn and ways of expressing your creativity and genius throughout your lives. So it's not about only doing the one thing that you know how to do?

Katie Hendricks

Oh no, not at all. In fact, genius is not one thing. It can be a whole range of activities or a way of being in the world or a range of things that you love to do. But the point I was making is I think appreciation is the key to uncovering those.

Gay Hendricks

Yes. I have a whole room full of musical instruments behind me and if you slip in a few extra bucks, I'll play the trombone for you.

Meagen Gibson

Well, yeah, I've got a rising 6th grader going into middle school this year, so he's going to be in the band and we were just discussing how to pick an instrument. Maybe you can do that demo for him later.

[00:14:12] Gay Hendricks

Keep him away from the timpani and the symbols and things like that.

Meagen Gibson

Unfortunately, his father is a percussionist. That's the way things are leaning.

Katie Hendricks

Well, he may be good in that area.

Meagen Gibson

Exactly. We've got lots of support in that area. That's the wonderful thing about appreciating where we are. Just speaking of family, I know that we've been talking about couples, but relationships encompass a lot of things with the relationship between parents and children, the relationships you have at work. I can see how this would expand to all of those. How many times do we spend correcting or trying to control, and when I say we, I mean me, our children?

Whether it be how they eat at a table or how they shake someone's hand when they meet them or just the way they treat their siblings. Leaning into that appreciation aspect and how that can help somebody else's creativity thrive and help them feel into what their genius zone is, I'm sure is really powerful.

Katie Hendricks

Yes. We found that the relationship principles really can apply to all kinds of relationships, whether it's business or family, friends, colleagues.

Gay Hendricks

Children are really great at teaching us something we really need to keep in mind all the time, which is the value of spontaneity, of doing something a little different, even if it's going to work a different way today than you did yesterday. Doing different things with yourself. One of the great formative conversations of my life took place on a park bench once.

The first time I was in Europe, I was sitting on a park bench and a woman came striding across the garden. I noticed how she had this beautiful new pair of sneakers on and she sat down on my park bench and I complimented her. I said, looks like you have some new sneakers. She said, yeah, it's my 6th pair on this trip. I said, really? Where'd you come from? She said that she'd walked from Arizona. I said, okay. She walked across the United States and then took a boat to Europe and was walking across Europe. She had decided when she retired from being a school principal and she decided she was going to walk around the world.

I noticed she had a nice big wedding ring on. I said, are you married? She said, oh, yeah, my husband still lives in Arizona. I said he didn't want to come? She said, no, I invited him, but he had his favorite TV shows. He didn't want to go. I said, you can come visit me every three or four months, but I'm heading out. By golly, she sat there next to me and told me this story and then she

got up and I said, where are you going? She said, Portugal. I remember that was the last thing she said. God bless her, I hope she made it.

[00:17:00] Meagen Gibson

I love that she wasn't going a few blocks away. She was going to Portugal.

Gay Hendricks

That just amazed me. I sat there for the longest time and I said, that's who I want to be. At the time, I was only about 30 years old or something like that, but that impressed me so much. That's the kind of life that we've created. It's a life of incredible freedom, and it comes about a lot through I think - we got clear early on that our lives were really about doing creative things and also making contributions to other people and making the world a better place as best we could. We kept our attention on that and that really has led to a tremendous amount of magic because it brought forth a whole body of work that we can now use in all sorts of different situations.

Meagen Gibson

I'd love it if we could rewind just a little bit in your lives to that part where you committed to being each other's allies and really seeing one another, and the years that it took, and the patterns and the way that you undid your patterns and recommitted. I want to talk about that recommitment piece, because so many of us do this thing where we change one thing and then we expect everyone around us to appreciate how we've changed so deeply when we actually changed once.

Katie Hendricks

Ta-da.

Meagen Gibson

Everyone should treat me differently now, I've changed. When the reality is that it sometimes takes a little bit longer and a little deeper commitment and then recommitment as you have outlined. I would love for you to speak a little bit about that.

Katie Hendricks

Well, seeing your partner as your ally is something you can actually control. It came from a recognition, I realized that my filter was you're always criticizing me. Instead of trying to get him to stop, I thought, well, criticizing must mean that I see you as that enemy, so I commit to seeing you as my ally, that we're on the same team with each other. I just kept committing to that.

When I found myself slipping over into thinking he was criticizing me, I would recommit to seeing him as my ally. It began to chip away at the filters and all of the contractions and cringing and anticipation until I remember one day where Gay said, I notice. Before when he would say, I notice, I was expecting some kind of criticism or judgment. I realized he said, I notice.

I turned toward him fully and went, I could just receive what you were saying. I thought, okay. I've made a big switch in our ability to really see each other as partners. Recommitting, I think, is even more important than committing. Committing gets you into the game, but people are going to mess

up, they're going to forget. Recommitting gets you back on the horse, gets you moving in the direction that you want to go. We think recommitting is a very important partner to committing.

[00:20:21] Meagen Gibson

Gay, did you have any experiences like that with Katie that you were having to recommit about during that period?

Gay Hendricks

Well, I remember vividly one, because it really changed my way of communicating with her and my way of seeing her. One time I started criticizing her about something, and it was the time with the groceries and all that. This was a couple of years into our relationship, maybe a year or two, but anyway, it was in the early days. I found myself criticizing her. She was late. She had said she was going to be home at 7pm and she didn't come home till 7:30pm or something like that.

Katie Hendricks

By the way, this is before cell phones.

Gay Hendricks

Remember the days you had to stop your car and go get in the smelly little booth and put some coins in the phone? Yeah. Well, thank goodness. Anyway, she got home and I started criticizing her for being late. I realized as I was doing that, oh, wait a minute, my voice sounds kind of irritated, but my belly is scared. I just reported that. I said, I'm hearing myself criticize you, but I actually realize I'm scared. Her listening immediately changed. Suddenly, she wasn't listening to get away from my whiny little voice of criticism. Suddenly I said, I'm scared and that's what's real.

It's not that I'm mad at you for being late, it's that I'm scared I'm going to lose you or I'm feeling so close to you I think it brought up a big fear that something happened to you. It shifted everything because I went down, not only did my voice go down an octave, but my awareness went down one or two chakras from what I was mad about to what I was scared about.

That's a very different kind of communication, if you communicate to somebody I felt hurt or that I felt sad or I felt scared, that's very different than, you were late, you weren't here for dinner. It shifted everything in our relationship then. Where I started communicating from was further down in my body, more things I felt sad about or scared about, rather than just the irritating things on the surface.

Katie Hendricks

It completely changed. That was a watershed moment. It completely changed. I felt connected to you at a level that I had not felt connected. It really also enabled us to continue on our path of letting go of criticism because we kept getting more and more richness. The sharing of what's really going on and access to feelings, which I think is one of the key problems in our relationships in general these days, is that men are taught not to feel scared and not to feel sad. Women are taught not to feel angry. People get criticized and try to control their feelings, and then they come out sideways. Actually being able to be real, to share what's really going on, allows us to really

become partners and share energy rather than having this na na na going on. It was really an important moment.

[00:23:51] Meagen Gibson

I would love it if you described just a little bit more because you touched on it just a bit, about breathwork and about the signals in your body that can tell you that you can give you pause. I had a direct experience with this last week where I was having a conflict with someone in my family and was able to just touch it, even though all of this was happening very rapidly, was able to touch into where my breath was in my body and what the signals were that I could get from that.

It totally changed. It didn't change the conflict, but it changed my relationship to the conflict and what I was interpreting it as, because we can get so caught up in the circumstances of things. You're late, why didn't you call and why aren't you here? The minutiae of it instead of connecting to the feeling underneath all of those circumstances. I'd love it if you could describe that for me.

Gay Hendricks

Yes, well, a lot of arguments are about a race for the victim position. One person says, you did it to me, and the other person said, no, wait a minute. You're the one that's doing it to me. That goes around for sometimes decades at a time unless you can do some work with it to bust up that pattern. What our work does is drop down underneath all of those dramatic surface patterns and get you in touch with your natural organic body signals.

For example, the body basically has three big feeling zones. This area up here with your shoulders and back of your necks lights up when you're angry. Down here in your chest, it lights up when you're sad or more or less it goes dark when you're sad. It feels congested or a lump in the throat feeling or a cloudy feeling or a down in there low feeling in the chest. Heavy? Did you say heavy?

Yes. That's a very different set of sensations than the jaw clenching of anger or the hunched shoulders of anger or the tight shoulder blades of anger. Further down in our bodies, down in our bellies in that area is where you get the sensations of fear like butterflies and tight belly. Those are signs of being scared. The reason that's so important to learn how those areas work is because many people in relationship, whether it's a business relationship or a living room or a bedroom relationship or a boardroom relationship, a lot of people get to communicating just from their heads in judgments and criticisms and things like that and don't get to what the emotional underpinnings are of the whole thing.

We find that ten second communications often change everything. Where a person looks at another person and says I'm scared, or I feel so sad about that and I don't know how to express it. Those little ten second moments, we've seen lots of miracles happen just out of those things. Because it is a moment of aligning heart and head. It's when you get this part of your body aligned with this part of your body down here.

When those two things are in alignment, when your heart and your head - I always say the longest journey any human being ever takes is twelve inches from their head down to their heart. Getting those two things connected like that is so important in relationship. When people leave relationships, they do surveys about why they left the relationship. An overwhelming number of people say it was because of the chronic blame and criticism or he would never talk about his feelings or we never talked about anything real.

[00:27:45]

Those kinds of things, I just feel so sad about the number of relationships that break up because we don't ever get taught these simple things. You could learn the basics of good relationships by the time you're in the 6th grade if we had an hour a day doing it. Why isn't that? Why do we spend an hour a day figuring out the capitals of North America and South America or figuring out how to do multiplication, but we don't figure out how to do connection with other people. I think it's a societal malpractice. If anybody's listening out there, school people, let's try to get this kind of thing more into the curriculum.

Katie Hendricks

To directly respond to what you were saying about breath. Those kinds of signals from the body let you know something's going on right here. If I'm working with someone and I notice that they've suddenly stopped breathing, something just happened there. We work with people to get curious about what just happened. What's going on for you? What were you just feeling? Or what did you just remember?

There's always just tremendous pay dirt in those shifts, so holding your breath or the breath being very shallow. We have on our websites, both on [Hendricks.com](https://www.hendricks.com) and also on our charitable organization, which is the [Foundation for Conscious Living](https://www.foundationforconsciousliving.com), we have videos to show people how to use your natural body intelligence, breathing and moving and listening, and really all of the keys that people need to create thriving relationships. Rather than just talking about it, which is important, it gives you a framework, but then you get the practice and you can make it your own by looking at it and incorporating it.

Meagen Gibson

Yes, I absolutely love books, but we spend so much time reading about things and not actually incorporating things. I can't tell you even like, how many times I'm in my therapist's office and she says, and how does that make you feel? Literally I have to draw a blank. She's like, okay, I want you to think about that for the next week and pay attention to your body and tell me where you feel it, what you feel. I get a lot of homework at therapy.

Katie Hendricks

Well, that's good.

Meagen Gibson

There's so many contexts growing up in our family systems for so many people, beyond just what society tells us. In our family systems, often we're told our feelings are too big, or our feelings aren't appropriate. We've gotten so disconnected from that, and then it really does end up showing up in our relationships, I've found.

Katie Hendricks

Yes, indeed. The expression of your own authentic experience, I think, is incredibly engaging. It's very sexy when I see someone who has just discovered, oh, I just felt really angry, and they share

it. It's just electric, because everything is in alignment and they're sharing themselves fully and revealing, and it wakes everybody else up to, oh, here's what's possible in life. That can be how relationships are is really a field of discovery. One of the things I love so much about my relationship with Gay is that we have this depth of all of these years together, but we also have the discovery of what we're creating and what's interesting to you and what's opening up.

[00:31:19]

There are new facets of us opening up all the time. We're not the same old, same old that most people think of long-term relationships. In fact, some of those mythologies about relationship which is have your fun now because after you get into a relationship, it's all over, it's all compromise and settling for less. We found that that's just something that people make up and then they've used that as an excuse not to be real and not to do the practice.

Meagen Gibson

Not to be curious and engaged in the relationship. Wonderful. Well, thank you both so much. I know that you mentioned both websites, but if you could mention them again for people who want to find out more about you and your work.

Katie Hendricks

Sure.

Gay Hendricks

Yes. The big one is [Hendricks.com](https://www.hendricks.com). H-E-N-D-R-I-C-K-S.com. There you can find out about all our different trainings and e-courses and things like that. And then our charitable foundation, which is the [Foundation for Conscious Living](https://www.foundationforconsciousliving.com). The Foundation for Conscious Living does things like give scholarships and provide grants for research and funds movies and things like that that are all about the process of learning how to give and receive more love and contact more of your genius every day and express it to the world around you.

Meagen Gibson

Wonderful. Well, Gay and Katie Hendricks, thank you so much for joining us today.

Gay Hendricks

Thank you so much, Meagen, great talking to you.

Katie Hendricks

Yeah, thank you so much for all of your genius in the world.

Meagen Gibson

Thank you.