

## From judgment to genius

**Guests: Gay and Katie Hendricks**

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### **Meagen Gibson - [00:00:08]**

Hello and welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Relationship Super Conference.

Today, I'm speaking with Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, pioneers in the fields of body intelligence and relationship transformation for more than 40 years.

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.

Katie and Gay have empowered hundreds of coaches around the world to add body intelligence perspective, to enhance fields from medicine to sports psychology, education, and personal growth.

Together and singly they've authored more than 40 books, including bestsellers *Conscious Loving*, *The Big Leap*, *Conscious Loving Ever After: How to Create Thriving Relationships at Midlife and Beyond*, and *The Genius Zone*, which I actually just finished today.

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**

Well, so much of your work revolves around getting rid of judgment and abandoning negative thinking. So before we dig into some of the specifics in your work around upper limit problems and blame free zones, I'd love 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, whether 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.

So 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 - [00:02:22]**

Should I be shopping for another one?

**Gay Hendricks**

Just over her shoulder is there one?

And it's a different way of looking at the world.

And so, judgments are 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 a, not an appreciation project, but a fixer upper project that, he's a little rough around the edges but my love is going to get him all polished up.

And that mythology has caused so much misery, because rather than judging, appreciating is what we have found is probably the most underutilized, but the 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.

So 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

**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 - [00:04:40]**

Was to really allow ourselves to expand our capacity to enjoy giving and receiving more love. And we really think that is basically the only problem. And that when we top out, we've all learned, don't count your chickens before they hatch. And who do you think you are? And 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. And 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. And 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.

And 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, etc. So I just loved that context.

So 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.

And 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 been to a wargasm.

### **Gay Hendricks**

But we didn't want to run our relationship off of adrenaline. We wanted to run it off positive energy. And so we made this deal with each other. We shook on everything that we wanted to create a blame free zone where it ran on positive energy that wasn't about blame and criticism or shame or anything like that.

And 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 criticism or shame somebody else, you get a burst of adrenaline. And that's one of the most addictive drugs there is. And so you get hooked

on that adrenaline of the wargasm pattern and have to keep yourself constantly stimulated by bigger and bigger arguments to have a connection.

And so we eliminated that problem. We decided, okay, we're going to have our good time 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.

And it took us a few years to do it but for the last 30 years or so, nobody's criticized anybody else. And it's fantastic. I'll tell you, if you don't ever have any criticism and blame in your life, you'd be surprised and how much other things you can get done.

### **Katie Hendricks - [00:08:50]**

And 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 gotten pickled in my family. And so many of us had 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. And 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.

And 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. So 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 kind of 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. And 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 the 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?

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 dialogue with your genius every day.

**Katie Hendricks - [00:12:12]**

And 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 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. And I've noticed, as I've gotten better at appreciating people and appreciating the things that I noticed about them, they begin going, oh, oh, right. Oh, that's something I really love to do. It's easy for me to do. And 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**

Right.

And I know that neither of you would say that that doesn't mean that you don't try something new that's unfamiliar, right? Because you've got offices full of musical instruments and all kinds of things that you continue 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. And, in fact, genius is not a 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 to the middle school this year, so he's going to be in the band. And we were just discussing how to pick an instrument. So maybe you can do the demo for him later.

**Gay Hendricks**

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

**Meagen Gibson**

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

**Katie Hendricks**

Well, he may be strong 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.

And 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. And I can see how this would expand to all of those.

I mean, 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.

And so, leaning into that appreciation aspect and how that can help somebody else's creativity thrive and help them feel into what their genius one is, I'm sure it's really powerful.

### **Katie Hendricks - [00:15:15]**

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**

And 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, and 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, it looks like you have some new sneakers. And she said, yeah, it's my 6th pair on this trip. And I said, really? Where did you come from? And she said that she'd walked from Arizona. And I said, okay. So she walked across the United States and then had taken 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. And I noticed she had a nice big wedding ring on. And I said, are you married? And she said, oh, yeah my husband lives in Arizona still. And I said he didn't want to come? And she said, no, I invited him but he had his favorite TV shows. He didn't want to go. And so I said, you can come visit me every three or four months but I'm heading out. And by golly. And she sat there next to me and told me this story. And then she got up and I said, Where are you going? And she said, Portugal. I remember that was the last thing she said. And God bless her. I hope she made it.

### **Meagen Gibson**

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

### **Gay Hendricks**

Yeah. And 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. And that's the kind of life 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 creative, doing creative things and also making contributions to other people and making the world a better place as best we could.

And so 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**

And I 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, because I want to talk about a recommitment piece. Because so many of us do this, oh, I'm sorry. We 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 - [00:18:27]**

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. So 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. And it came from a recognition, like I realized that my filter was, you're always criticizing me. And instead of trying to get him to stop, I thought, well criticizing must mean that I see you as the enemy. So I commit to seeing you as my ally, that we're on the same team with each other.

And 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. And 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. And before when he would say I notice, I was expecting some kind of criticism or judgment. And I realized he said, I notice. And I turned toward him fully and went I could just receive what you were saying. And I thought, okay, I've made a big switch in our ability to really see each other as partners.

So 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. So recommitting gets you back on the horse, gets you moving in the direction that you want to go. So we think recommitting is a very important partner to committing.

**Meagen Gibson**

And then, 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. So this was a couple of years into our relationship, maybe a year or two or something, but anyway it was in the early days. And I found myself criticizing her. She was late. She had said she was gonna be home at 7, and she didn't get home until 7:30 or something like that.

**Katie Hendricks**

And by the way, this is before cell phones.

**Gay Hendricks**

Yeah. I remember the days you had to stop your car and go to a phone booth and put some coins in the phone. Yeah. Well, thank goodness.

So anyway, so 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. And so I just reported that, I said I'm hearing myself criticize you, but I actually realize I'm scared. And so her listening immediately changed. Suddenly she wasn't listening to get away from my whiny little voice of criticism. And suddenly I said, I'm scared. And, yeah, that's what's real. It's not that I'm mad at you for being late. I'm scared I'm going to lose you. I'm feeling so close to you I think it brought up a big fear that something happened to you.

So it shifted everything because I went down, not only my voice went down an octave, but my awareness went down one or two chakras from what I was mad about to what I was scared about.

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

### **Katie Hendricks - [00:22:51]**

It completely changed. That was a watershed motion moment. It completely changed. I felt connected to you at a level that I had not felt connected. And it really also enabled us to continue on our path of letting go of criticism because we kept getting more and more richness and 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 people are taught, men are taught not to feel, well, not to feel scared and not to feel sad. And women are taught not to feel angry, and people get criticized and try and control their feelings, and then they come out sideways.

And so 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. So it was really an important moment.

### **Meagen Gibson**

I would love it if you describe just a little bit more, because you touched on it just a bit, about breath work and about the signals in your body that can tell you, that you can give you pause.

And 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.

And it totally changed, I mean, 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, in the, you're late, and why didn't you call and why aren't here? And the minutiae of it instead of connecting to the feeling underneath all of those circumstances. So 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. And that goes around for sometimes decades at a time without, 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.



Like, for example, the body basically has three big feeling zones. This area up here with your shoulders and back of your neck lights up when you're angry. And down here in your chest, it lights up when you're sad, or more or less, it goes dark when you're sad. It kind of feels congested or lump in the throat feeling or a cloudy feeling, or kind of down in there low feeling in the chest.

**Katie Hendricks - [00:25:45]**

Heavy.

**Gay Hendricks**

Heavy, yes.

So 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.

And 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.

And so we find that 10 second communications oftentimes 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 10 second moments we've seen lots of miracles happen just out of those things, because what it is, 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. And when those two things are in alignment, when you're heart and your head, I always say the longest journey any human being ever takes is 12 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 did you leave 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. Those kinds of things are, I just feel so sad about the number of relationships that break up because we don't ever get taught these simple things.

I mean, 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.

So if anybody's listening out there, school people, let's try to get this kind of thing more into the curriculum.

**Katie Hendricks**

And 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. So if I'm working with someone and I noticed that they've suddenly stopped breathing, something just happened there.

And so 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? And there's always just tremendous Pader in those shifts. So holding your breath or the breath being very shallow.

And we have on our websites, both on [hendricks.com](http://hendricks.com) and also on our charitable organization, which is the *Foundation for Conscious Living*, 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.

So, rather than just talking about it, which is important, it gives you a framework, but then you get the practice, and then you can make it your own by looking at it and incorporating it.

**Meagen Gibson - [00:29:36]**

Yes. I absolutely love books, but we spend so much time reading about things and not actually incorporating things, right?

And I can't tell you even how many times I'm in my therapist office, and she says, and how did that make you feel? And I'm literally having to draw a blank. And 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 like. I get a lot of homework at therapy as well.

**Katie Hendricks**

Well that's good.

**Meagen Gibson**

There's so much context, 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 or our feelings... And so 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, yes, indeed. And 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. And 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. So there are new facets of us opening up all the time. So we're not same old, same old that most people think of long-term relationships.

And in fact, some of those mythologies about relationship, which is like, have your fun now, because after you get a new relationship, it's all over, it's all compromised and settling for less. And 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.

**Katie Hendricks**

Yes.

**Meagen Gibson - [00:31:57]**

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.

**Gay Hendricks**

Sure. Yes, the big one is [hendricks.com](http://hendricks.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* and *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.

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**

Thank you so much for all of your genius in the world.

**Meagen Gibson**

Thank you.