

## Ep #63: Freedom and Permission



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**Natalie Brown**

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This is *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown, episode 63.

Welcome to *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you're a successful woman who is ready to stop struggling with your weight, you're in the right place. You'll learn everything you need to know to lose weight for the last time in bitesize pieces. Here's your host, Master Certified coach, Natalie Brown.

Hey everybody. I've been holding this one back for a while and thinking about it a lot. I feel like it's a concept that is really pivotal to understand and embrace in order to move forward and find freedom around food, which is what I hear the most with my clients and potential clients. That they want to feel free.

So many of us have spent a lifetime in a tug of war with food and eating and our weight and the scale and this concept of freedom. Most of the women I talk to want desperately to experience freedom around eating, freedom in their bodies. Freedom from food chatter, freedom from judgment and shame.

And yet, most of us hold the belief that true freedom is eating whatever our in-the-moment brain tells us it wants. It's a narrow view of freedom because it discounts the consequences of all that free eating. Eating whatever we want for most of us means tuning out what our body needs and only honoring what our brain wants, what our mouth wants, what our tastebuds want.

It typically results in a body that is less free and more restricted. More restricted in its ability to move around the world in the way that we want to. More restricted when it comes to energy levels. Less free in many ways.

The idea that we are not free to eat whatever we want is also a lie. Even if we are following an eating plan that dictates what we can and can't eat, we are making the choice to follow it. We are allowing or restricting. We are putting the food in our mouths or not. It's always up to us.

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No matter what outside guidelines we are blaming the restriction and deprivation on. The drive for freedom is an intense human desire to feel we are free to do and decide for ourselves. It's an innate desire for autonomy and for self-determination.

When we feel our freedom to do and decide for ourselves as being threatened, we rebel. We hear the "Oh yeah," and, "I'll show you," and, "You can't tell me what to do" start to come up, even if the you is actually yourself telling you what to do. It's your toddler brain reacting to your adult brain.

It's like when someone says, "Don't push the red button." What do you want to do more than anything? This rebellion has an official term, and in fact, a whole psychological theory dedicated to it. It's called psychological reactance. Psychological reactance theory is based on the foundational principle that individuals cherish their freedom, choice, and autonomy.

And that when we perceive a threat to our freedom to choose, psychological reactance occurs where we seek to restore or reestablish our threatened freedom. When we think about this in the context of food and eating and weight loss, we may perceive our freedom to eat sugar threatened by a plan that recommends cutting out all sugar.

Many of us seek to restore our freedom by eating as much sugar as possible when the opportunity presents itself. Or if the plan recommends daily running for exercise, we may purposefully not exercise to restore our freedom.

This is referred to as the boomerang effect. We do the thing we're told not to do or don't do the thing we're told to do just to feel we have restored the freedom to do what we want. This is a deeply ingrained response.

When you really think about it, it seems silly that we would rebel against ourselves and often against something we think would be good for us, just because we perceive a threat to our freedom. So this is something I want you to start tuning into for you.

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Do you notice the boomerang effect happening for you? Do you see places or instances where you do the thing you have told yourself you won't, or eat the thing you have committed to cutting out? What is the perceived threat to your freedom?

Is it real? Is it true? Is your freedom actually being threatened? This is where permission comes into play. The threat we perceive when it comes to weight loss is the freedom to eat what we want, when we want, and how much we want.

We start following a plan or a program that recommends we eat/don't eat certain things. Our brain perceives that as a threat to our autonomy, our freedom to choose. But the capital T truth is no matter what the plan says, no matter what anyone says, no matter what your religion says or what allergies your doctor and your body say you have, you are always free to choose what goes into your mouth and what doesn't.

Really believing this, owning this, embodying this means we grant ourselves permission. Unrestricted, unlimited, free and clear permission to eat anything at any time and any amount. Most of us think this all-access permission will lead to us eating all the things, that we will be found in a pile of empty wrappers, having eaten ourselves to death.

But the opposite is true. We often overeat in response to a perceived freedom threat. We boomerang into a bag of chips or M&Ms because we're trying to restore that freedom. If there is no perceived threat, there is no boomerang.

If it is ultimately our choice, we will make more aligned, more conscious choices than if we blindly are rebelling against a threat to our freedom to choose. This has to start with looking at all of the irrational beliefs we have developed and hold on to around food and eating and weight.

When we believe for example that there are bad foods and good foods, that we can never waste food, that food is a reward, that hunger is scary, that

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thin is more lovable than fat, we are going to act on those beliefs, often to our detriment.

If you think there are good foods and bad foods and some of your favorite foods are in the bad category, you will perceive it as a threat to your freedom to eat your favorite foods and you will boomerang right into them. With that one, there's the added complication of thinking foods are bad, but really liking them and wanting to eat them, and therefore conflating the idea that if you like and eat bad foods, you are also bad.

As Karen Koenig says in her awesome book, which I highly recommend, *The Rules of "Normal" Eating*, "you'll have to give your belief system a rough shake, as you would a tree full of apples, so that the rotten beliefs will fall off and die and the tree can grow new healthy fruit."

Knowing all of your irrational beliefs about food, eating, your body, and your weight then allows you to start to rework and reframe into new beliefs that align with how you want to show up. If you think about it, a lack of full permission is a result of all of these rules and beliefs that tell us that full permission isn't a thing, it isn't possible.

So for example, if you believe that there are good foods and bad foods, forbidden foods you shouldn't eat, that is an irrational belief that is going to stand in the way of you giving yourself full permission to eat whatever you choose.

If we reframe that irrational belief into rational beliefs that are more true and more helpful, like there is no such thing as a bad or forbidden food, and foods can be nutritious or not but they don't have good or bad qualities, and some foods work well for my body and some don't, and no one can tell me what foods I should or shouldn't eat, only I decide that, you can see how it will be much easier to give permission to eat whatever we choose.

That's actually an interesting finding of a study I read about psychological reactance in response to persuasive health messaging. So messages

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about tobacco use, alcohol consumption, sunscreen use to prevent skin cancer, et cetera.

The researchers found that when choice-enhancing language was used, especially restorative post-scripts like, “The choice is yours, you are free to decide for yourself,” there was much less perceived freedom threat and therefore less boomerang effect. Less rebellion, less need to restore freedom.

Translation, less eating like a jerk to prove that no one can tell you what you can and can't eat. Just one more bit of evidence to prove what I'm always telling you. Language matters. Words matter. The sentences you repeat to yourself are the beliefs that drive your behavior.

Changing those sentences changes how you feel and how you react and how you show up. Another finding of the study found that participants had less perceived freedom threat and therefore less reactance when they posed two options.

For example, when they said, “You can wear protective clothing or apply sunscreen regularly,” versus just apply sunscreen regularly. When they were told only to apply sunscreen, guess what they wanted to do? The same thing that my children do when we're on our houseboat for a week.

They don't apply sunscreen, their reactance to my direction to do it so they don't get sunburned. And then guess what happens? They are little lobsters on day one and they have to spend two days wearing shirts over their swimsuits and staying out of the sun, which to me just reinforces the idea of the boomerang effect.

We throw the boomerang thinking we're going to hit the person who's trying to take away our freedom and it comes back and hits us. Who suffers when we rebel against ourselves? Who has to live with the consequences? Who feels the pain? We do.

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Let me just clear up a misconception here. We think giving ourselves full permission to eat whatever we want will mean that we overeat and only eat garbage. But it's just not true. I want you to play around with this concept. When you give yourself permission, those forbidden, which aren't really forbidden foods lose their shine. They lose a lot of their pull.

I want you to experiment with this a little bit, engage some of these tactics so we don't ever feel the need to throw the boomerang. Look at and let go of your irrational beliefs. Give yourself full permission to eat whatever you want whenever you want.

You will find that you don't eat like a jerk when you have full permission. You want to take a little bit better care of yourself. Recognize that true freedom is having the option to do and eat whatever and making the choice that creates freedom long-term. Freedom in your body, freedom in your brain, freedom in your life. Not just freedom in the moment.

Remind yourself that the choice is yours and that you are free to decide for yourself. That way, there will be no perceived freedom threat, no reactance to restore freedom. No boomerang that's going to come back and hit you in the head. Give yourself permission and be free. Have a fantastic week. I'll see you soon.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you want to learn more about how to lose weight for the last time, come on over to [itbeginswithathought.com](http://itbeginswithathought.com). We'll see you here next week.