AWARENESS

The Critic Map

Get to know the voice that says you're falling short.

So many brilliant, purpose-led people are running on empty. And behind the scenes there's often one voice making it harder than it needs to be: the inner critic. It tells you you're not good enough, not doing enough, always falling short. It's rarely kind, and it's rarely right.

The good news is that this voice isn't you. It's an old habit of mind that learnt, a long time ago, that being hard on yourself would keep you safe. You can't just switch it off, but you can get to know it. And once you know it, it has far less of a hold on you. That's what this map is for.

Where does it point?

AT YOU

"Why am I like this? I should be further along by now."

AT OTHER PEOPLE

"They always let me down. If you want it done properly, do it yourself."

AT LIFE

"It's all too much. Nothing's ever going to change."

Most of us have a favourite. Notice which one sounds most familiar.

How it hooks you

Something happens → Your critic tells a story about it → You feel it and react

The middle bit usually happens so fast we miss it. We think we're reacting to what happened, when really we're reacting to the story. Once you can see the story as a story, you get a choice.

YOUR CRITIC SAYS

"I missed the deadline. I'm useless."

A CLEARER VOICE SAYS

"I missed the deadline. What got in the way, and what would help next time?"

Map your critic

Take your time with these. There are no right answers, and a rough scribble beats a blank page. If you can, think back to the last few times you noticed it.

01

When does it show up?

Certain situations, times of day, people or places.

02

What does it say?

Write down its favourite lines, word for word. Don't tidy them up.

03

Whose voice does it sound like?

A parent, a teacher, an old boss, you at fourteen? Sometimes it's no one in particular, and that's fine too.

04

Where do you feel it in your body?

A tight chest, a clenched jaw, a sinking stomach, a rush of heat?

05

What does it make you do?

Tick any that sound familiar.

- [ ] Overwork
- [ ] Put important things off
- [ ] Compare myself to others
- [ ] Redo things until they're perfect
- [ ] Say yes when I mean no
- [ ] Go over and over things
- [ ] Shut down or go quiet
- [ ] Something else: .....

06

What might it be trying to protect you from?

Underneath the harshness, most critics are trying to help, just badly. Failure? Rejection? Being found out? Letting people down?

07

What would you call it?

Give it a name or a character. The Headteacher. Mr Never-Enough. Captain Should. The sillier the better: it's hard to take a voice too seriously once it's called Captain Should.

Look back over your map

What do you notice? Is there anything that surprises you, or anything you feel a bit softer towards now you've written it down?

THE PRACTICE

Notice it, name it, give yourself a nod.

Now you've mapped your critic, you'll start spotting it in real time. When you do:

1. **Notice it.**
   That familiar tone, the tight chest, the "you should have..."

2. **Name it.**
   "Ah, there's Captain Should." Or simply, "That's my critic talking."

3. **Give yourself a nod.**
   Seriously. Smile, do a tiny fist pump, say "got you" under your breath. Whatever works for you. Really let yourself feel good about catching it, rather than just ticking it off in your head.

Why this works

Naming the voice puts a little space between you and it. You stop being inside the story and start watching it, which is where your choice comes back.

The nod matters too. Your brain learns from what feels good, so each small celebration makes the next catch a little easier. Do it enough and it becomes a habit. That's mental fitness in action.

One last thing

Critics aren't always loud. Some just mutter in the background, nudging you to work that bit later or keep quiet in the meeting. If you're not noticing much, listen a little closer. The quiet ones are often the most influential.

Talk your map through with me

Once you've filled in your map, **book a free call** and we'll go through it together. Having someone else look at it with you is often the quickest way to turn noticing into real change.

The Alt Academy

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

Hi, I'm Sol.

I'm a mental fitness trainer. I help values-led people tame the self-critical voice that tells them they're falling short, so they can enjoy making a difference without burning out.

Think of it like having a personal trainer, but for your mind. We're not fixing what's broken. We're training the skills that help you stay steady, think clearly and act on what matters, one small rep at a time.

Your mission matters. And you matter too.

1:1 COACHING

Work through it, one to one

Start with whatever is on your mind right now, at your pace.

MENTAL FLOW

A 6-week group programme

Train awareness, acceptance and action, with short daily practices that stick.

CHANGE:MAKER COLLECTIVE

Join the community

An online community for sustainability and social change professionals.

TEAMS AND COMMUNITIES

Bring it to your people

Workshops and sessions for workplaces, wellbeing spaces and member groups.

Find where to start: thealtacademy.co.uk/start

Or book a free call. No pressure, no pitch.

Or read along with my newsletter, From the Centre.

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