

UFYB 214: The High Five Habit & Self-Encouragement - An Interview with Mel Robbins



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard Law School grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello my chickens. I think today's episode is going to hurt your brain a little bit, so I just want you to be prepared. Hurt my brain a little bit. I'll be honest with you. When I first heard from Mel about coming on my podcast and the topic of her new book, I was a little bit like, I don't know, I really teach my students that they have to change their thought practices and taking an action without changing your thought isn't going to solve your problem.

And so when I heard from her about The High 5 Habit, which we're going to be talking about in this interview, I definitely was a little bit like, I don't know, is it a fit? But I super respect Mel of course and she is a legend and so I decided, like I would teach you all, to be open-minded about it.

And so I'm so glad I did because it's such an interesting conversation about the kind of neural and biological feedback loops between thoughts and feelings and actions and how we can use physical actions sometimes to help us hack our brains even faster.

So I think it's a really deepening, rich topic of study in the world and this book is an amazing contribution to it. So we're going to talk about that in this episode.

I also want to tell you that I have a big announcement coming. I do look at the things you all Google about me. I will not be announcing my partner's name or my address or my net worth, which are the three things apparently that people Google the most about me, which is interesting and slightly concerning. I don't know why you need my address.

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But anyway, so it's not going to be any of those three things, but there will be a big announcement, but we are only making it to my email list. Because that's where I share my secrets, you guys, with all of you. That's where you find out the inside dirt.

So if you want to know what the announcement is, it is exciting, it is exciting for me, it is exciting for the business, it's going to be exciting for you. It's an amazing new exciting thing. How many times can I say it's exciting and new?

So you are going to want to be on the email list. Text your email to +1-347-997-1784. Again, text your email to +1-347-997-1784. You'll get prompted for a codeword and you just use the codeword announcement. That's it. Just text back announcement.

And then you will get the email on December 9th with the exciting announcement. That is the only way to find out. Or you can go to unfuckyourbrain.com/announcement and you will hear it first there.

Alright, let's dig into The High 5 Habit, what it is, what it means, how it works with thought work, and how it can kind of turbocharge your progress in your self-acceptance and self-encouragement. Such a good conversation. Mel is fucking whip-smart, and you know when two former lawyers start talking about the brain, it's going to be good.

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Kara: Hello my chickens. You are not going to believe who's on the podcast today. I mean, I guess the spoiler alert is you probably saw her name in the title so you will believe it, but I just want to convey my extreme excitement,

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even though we know I have a dry New York voice, and so people always tell me that I don't sound excited when I am, but I am.

We have the one and only Mel Robbins on the podcast today. Mel, like me, is a former social justice, non-profit, do-gooder lawyer. But since then, unlike me, she's had many more jobs including, very unlike me, hosting her own daytime syndicated talk show.

She's now a best-selling author, you all have heard of her. You should have heard of her if you haven't. Her work includes the global phenomenon, *The 5 Second Rule*, which we will talk about, the upcoming *The High 5 Habit*, which we will also talk about. We're going to do some numerology around the number five, which seems to be a real - I wish.

I don't know anything about numerology, but it does seem like a real consistent theme. She's the author of four number one best-selling audiobooks, the number one podcast on Audible, as well as signature online courses that have changed the lives of more than half a million students worldwide.

And Mel says there's nothing she loves more than making a real difference in people's lives by teaching them to believe in themselves and inspiring them to take the actions that will change their lives. So obviously we have a mission in common. Is there anything else you would like to tell my chickens about yourself before we get started?

Mel: I love chickens. No, it's an interesting thing. I don't know if this is a female thing but I hear my bio being read and obviously it shoves all of the accomplishments right up front. And I think, "Boy, that person sounds annoying."

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Kara: Well, I have multiple questions about failure lower down my list so we will get to talking about this. Because I do think I try to always be really transparent about I'm just a human with a half-managed mind like anybody else. Just succeeding and fucking it up all over the place, so we are totally going to talk about - I don't even think it's a dark side. It's just life. 50/50. What is the stuff that doesn't go as smoothly as all of our bios make it sound?

Mel: Yeah, it's true. That made me think of something. I can't remember if it was Howard Stern or who it was that talks about the 50% rule, that if at least half of your audience doesn't hate you, you're not saying anything interesting.

Kara: I've heard a version of that that's like, if half of your audience isn't mad at you by noon, you're not marketing hard enough. But yeah, similar thing, which is such a thing that comes up, especially with anybody that I teach or coach who wants to have any kind of public presence.

They want to write a novel, they want to be a coach, they want to have a business, whatever they want to do, it's this secret belief that if we just get it just right, then everybody will like it and nobody will disagree. But of course people have vehement life-altering disagreements about what is the best brand of jam to buy.

There are people whose whole identity is built around that. So the odds that you're going to be a change-maker in the world and everybody is going to be like, no notes, totally agree with your approach and everything you're saying, I'm 100% on board, is just so low.

I'm curious about you, this isn't even on my list but I'd love to hear about what was your journey of going through that? Did you start with those

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people-pleasing thoughts of wanting everybody to like you when you put yourself out there?

Mel: Oh my God, yes, are you kidding me? I literally am empress of people pleasers.

Kara: She's wearing a tiara, you can't see.

Mel: Seriously. Do you like it? I seriously - I don't know if it's anxiety, I don't know if it's how women are socialized or young girls are socialized, but people pleasing is a form of manipulation. Because when you call yourself a people pleaser, we call ourselves a people pleaser as if, oh, I'm this nice little people pleaser, I just want everyone to like me.

But what you're actually doing is you are manipulating what people think about you. You would rather do whatever it takes and twist yourself in knots so that nobody's disappointed or nobody "dislikes" you than to be yourself, and that's manipulation.

And so there's this ugly side to people pleasing that's all about control, and it's driven by your insecurity. And so I think that - and we're going to get into this as we talk. My biggest problem in life, other than childhood trauma and how it created a dysregulated nervous system and how it sprung me into a lifetime of anxiety and feeling disassociated, my primary problem in life can be traced back to one thing.

And that is I hated myself. I think every human being has a habit that I call the habit of self-rejection. And it is so subconscious and it is so much a part of your life that you don't realize how insidious the self-rejection is and how casual it has become.

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And despite the fact that in the past 10 years I have done all of these remarkable things, from learning how to address my anxiety, facing almost a million dollars in bankruptcy, clawing my way out of it, changing up my marriage and the dynamic between me and my husband, building this big business, cranking out content, I was a go, go, go, do, do, do machine, driven from survival and drive out of need to...

When you're a million dollars in debt, they're about to take away your house and your car and you can't pay for groceries and you've got three kids under the age of 10, you got two choices. Either let go and surrender and let it all go down the drain, or you literally fight back, and that's what I've been doing for the last 10 years.

But I'll tell you, it wasn't until recently and kind of making this discovery of what I call The High 5 Habit that I was able to confront just how much I fucking hated myself. I would look in the mirror and I would see a person that was not enough, I focused on all the things that I was doing wrong.

I was relentless in my criticism. And it wasn't relentless in my criticism because I had this pursuit to being amazing and exceptional. It was just a habit to hate on myself. And so I don't even know how I got down this lane. What was the question?

Kara: There's lots of things I want to ask about in there. So what we started out talking about, the kind of people pleasing of trying to control what everyone thinks about you and how it's impossible to be out there in the world and do that, but I love where you went and I want to get to The High 5 Habit.

But before we get to that, I think that this sort of - the casual constant self-rejection, I think part of the reason people are so attached to that is that they think that it's making them better in some way. They think that it is

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motivating them to - it is just a habit. But I think we have justifications for our habits.

And one of the things I see, I'm curious how you undid this because one of the things I see in my students all the time is that they think that if they're just nice to themselves, they won't ever do anything again. They've so associated self-criticism and achievement and of course, they're not even questioning the value of achievement, but even if we take it for granted that yeah, humans getting up off the couch sometimes and doing stuff is good, they think if they're nice to themselves, they'll never do anything.

This is this puritan capitalist culture belief that human nature is inherently lazy and gluttonous and slovenly and lascivious, whatever, we're just all going to lie around just masturbating and eating and not doing anything.

Mel: That sounds like a lot of doing.

Kara: It sounds great to me. I don't see why this is a bad outcome. But as somebody who was very successful, and it sounds like you achieved a lot even while being mean to yourself, but then you noticed that and started to shift it. I'm wondering what your experience was with how achievement does or doesn't relate to the way you talk about yourself.

Mel: Well, couple things to unpack there. I do think that we justify the self-criticism by thinking that somehow you're holding yourself to a higher standard. But I think that the self-criticism and self-rejection, it goes way deeper.

I believe that this is a pattern of thinking and speaking that's been passed down from generation to generation. And that you are so unaware of how

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fluently you are negative that when I'm speaking right now, I don't think about the English language. I just speak it.

And I believe that self-criticism and self-rejection is something that you are fluent in. So much so, you don't even realize you're speaking it. And so I don't think most people are conscious to it. I think most of us feel the impact of beating ourselves up and feel the impact and low energy that comes with having a mind that focuses on the things that you're not doing, or the things that went wrong, or the fears that you have.

And I think the relentless default that is negative or critical is everybody's primary problem. And I think most of us don't even realize how big of a problem it is and how constant of a drum beat it is in our minds. I certainly wasn't.

I did not truly realize just how awful I was to myself until I figured out how to be the opposite. When you realize that being kind to yourself, being compassionate with yourself, being forgiving with yourself is the secret to motivation, when you realize how much joy, contentment, and self-respect and pride you will feel when you start treating yourself with a little bit more acceptance and respect and sense of worth, it's a game-changer.

Just a jaw-dropping change. And to your point about achievement, when a lot of us were little, you would get positive attention when you did something right. When you got good grades, when you made the team, when you made the play, when you made the orchestra, you got positive attention.

And so we get a dopamine release when we get positive attention. And so we start to seek it out, and we start to then chase the external thing in order to feel good about ourselves. And so for most people, I think this is deeply tied to the habit of self-rejection and deeply tied to the habit of self-criticism.

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Because somewhere in our little brains, we have wired up I am worthy if I'm doing something worthy, I am lovable if I've achieved something people love. And so we've anchored our self-worth and our self-love outside of ourselves. And we have anchored it in achieving something.

And this is so hardwired into us, so it had always been a dream of mine, for example, to be named a New York Times best-selling author. And part of it might come from the fact that you and I both went to law school, so we come from the land of you got to have a credential, you got to go through the gates, you got to do this.

And so for me, I always looked at people who made that list as the real authors. And then to add a little bit of injury to this, when *The 5 Second Rule* that I published almost five years ago came out, I self-published it. Nobody told me you don't make any best-seller list except for Amazon as a self-published author, they don't even recognize you, you're not even in the game.

And so I have felt this sort of sense of rejection because that self-published book went on to sell two million copies and be translated into 36 languages. Never once made a traditional best-seller list. So I've had this outside sense of fuck all of you, I'm going to do it my way, but secretly I just want you to invite me into your party.

So I really had it as a goal that someday I would love to be recognized, I'd love to feel like I've earned that spot. So when *The High 5 Habit* gets released, sure enough, we make the New York Times. And by the way, I'm not even grateful because I fucking earned it.

So let's stop ladies and women and people that identify as a woman, I want you to understand that when you put in the fucking work, you don't need to

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be grateful that somebody recognized you. You earned it. So I get told I'm number two. And I immediately feel a wave of rage.

Kara: That you're not number one?

Mel: Correct. And this is by the way a very common experience when you're number two. They've done studies...

Kara: On the Olympic medalists. I love it. Bronze is thrilled just because they're on the podium, gold is thrilled, silver is fucking pissed because they're not gold.

Mel: Correct. That was me. And I also think I was exhausted. So I was angry. Then I cried. Then I woke up happy. But what's interesting is – and this is so important. It's a hard thing to grasp, but it's so important. Achieving your goals will not make you happy.

Kara: 100% we talk about that all the time around here.

Mel: Working on them will.

Kara: Yep, destination will always feel like the journey is what I teach about that. You cannot hate yourself through a process trying to think, "As soon as I hit the milestone, then I'll feel amazing. That is not how your brain works.

Mel: Correct. And so, sure enough, the next morning, I woke up and I felt like, "Okay, well now what?" And again, it goes back to this achievement thing. If your self-worth, if your lovability – I don't even know if that's a word – is anchored in the shit you're doing, the second you've achieved something or the second that you fail at something, you will literally feel unlovable.

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And so, it's not until – and this is even coming from me, so look, I'm out there promoting a book about self-love and about self-acceptance and about building habits around self-encouragement as the secret to taking control of your life, which it is. And I still succumb to this shit because it is so hardwired in us to seek validation for your worth outside of yourself, either in other people's approval, which gets us back to people pleasing, or in the stuff you're accomplishing.

Kara: Which is also, I think, a lot of those accomplishments are just, "What will other people think?" If you made the bestseller list and nobody knew, would it count?" It wouldn't feel as big. And I think – I often end up, when people are really fixated on a goal, I often coach them being like, "Great, go do it. I'm just telling you, you're going to be back here in six months with the same thoughts and feelings. So, do you want to have these thoughts and feelings in a mansion or in an apartment, on the bestseller list or off the bestseller list?" Ultimately this changing that circumstance...

Mel: A mansion for sure.

Kara: It's more convenient and fun, but changing – it's the same thing with people who are struggling with attachment issues and dating and then they think, "Once I'm in a relationship it's going to solve all of it." Nope, it's the same work. You cannot get away from your work. You can change the circumstance, but the work – your brain is coming with you. So, unless the change is a lobotomy, you're going to have to do that work eventually one way or the other.

Mel: You're right.

Kara: So, will you tell us about The High 5 Habit that you came up with and kind of how it helped you shift this self-relationship?

Mel: Yeah, I think this is the single most powerful thing I've ever discovered in 53 years of being alive. I'm not kidding. I'm dead serious. So, The High 5

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Habit is very, very simple. And here's how you do it. And then we can kind of unpack how I discovered it.

Basically, tomorrow morning after you brush your teeth, you're going to put down your toothbrush and you're going to look at yourself in the mirror. That's the hardest part for most people. Just take a moment and look at yourself in the mirror. And then, when you feel ready, you're just going to raise your hand and you're going to high five the human being you see in the mirror. That's it.

You're not going to say anything. No words of affirmation. You can let it feel weird. You can feel resistance to it. You can think whatever garbage you want to think. But as you raise your hand and go to high five your mirror, the science will take over. And the programming that is in your brain and your nervous system associated with the high five is so powerful and it has been pounded into your brain and your body for your entire lifetime.

And so, this is not some cheesy thing where you're just slapping the air and we're metaphorically sending you into the day. What I'm actually going to teach you to do is to destroy the habit of self-rejection that is part of your morning routine. And once we destroy and break that pattern, we are going to replace it with a habit of self-empowerment and acceptance and self-encouragement.

Because the opposite of self-rejection, which is what you currently do and nobody's talking about it – we're going to talk about it – the opposite of self-rejection is self-acceptance. And the opposite of self-criticism is self-encouragement. And the high five gesture – I don't care what culture you are in, I don't care how old or young you are, what education you have, everybody has seen somebody high five somebody else, even if you don't do it in your culture.

Most people have received them or given them. And this is where the programming comes in. And this is more than a gesture. It is neurological

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change. It is physiological change. It is chemical change. And it is a nervous system shift that you trigger based on simply high fiving the human being in the mirror.

And so, here's why this is so powerful. So, when you give somebody a high five, what does that gesture communicate to somebody? Like, when you raise your hand and you go to high five somebody?

Kara: Yeah, it's a positive sort of, "You're doing great. Good job. Something good has happened," is the cultural programming around it.

Mel: Yeah. Have you ever high fived somebody and thought, "I hate you?"

Kara: To be honest, I can't remember the last time I high fived anybody. But I certainly associate it with positive emotion. If your enemy was like, "High five, I killed your cat," you wouldn't give them a high five."

Mel: Correct. And so, there's a lifetime of neural association and conditioning from seeing it and from having it done to you. And your brain does not know the difference between somebody else raising your hand and high fiving you, "Good job, keep it up, keep going, I believe in you, I love you, I celebrate you, shake it off, you got this." It's only ever been a gesture that communicated confidence, belief, celebration, optimism, empowerment, support. That's all it's ever meant.

So, it is impossible for your brain to think anything but those feelings when you do it because it is already stored in your subconscious. The second thing that happens...

Kara: Can we pause for a minute? I just want to repeat what you're saying, just to highlight one part of it. Because I think listeners to this podcast are very used to hearing me talk about how thoughts have to come before actions and why, for instance, some of the stuff that gets recommended, like power poses or some of the other stuff that's been more debunked

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doesn't work because, if the thought process isn't there, you're just taking the action.

But what you're talking about is actually taking not just some random new action. Most of us don't actually stand around like superman all the time, so doing that doesn't really have any impact on us because we don't have a patterned behavior or emotion associated with it. But what you're talking about is taking, like, a sort of road that's already been created in your brain, patterning that already exists, and we are just going to hijack it and use it not for intended purposes.

But we are taking a mental association that already exists and then using it. So, just wanted to really spell that out because people listening to this podcast are very used to hearing me talk about how, if you take an action without a thought, it's not going to get you anywhere and why some of that stuff doesn't work. And so, I want to just articulate that you are talking about a different thing, which is an action that already is associated and has a strong association.

But I'm also curious because you say this sort of works for anyone. Do you think it is a stronger effect for people who are in a culture where high fiving is – like I would imagine that listening to this, that maybe male soccer player would have the most – like who does the most high fiving? Like dudes on sports teams? Are they going to get the most benefit because they have the most association with high fiving compared to somebody else?

Mel: I don't think so. I actually don't think so at all because – and speaking with Dr. Daniel Amen and I just spent two hours with Dr. Caroline Leaf...

Kara: I love her. I was on her podcast.

Mel: Yeah, who discovered neuroplasticity, and she literally freaked out. She goes, "Mel, I can't believe in almost four decades of studying what I

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study I didn't actually think of this." And then she used 50,000 words I didn't understand and validated everything and then some to say that, first of all, our brains don't know the difference between giving, receiving, or watching it happen. And in cultures where it's never happened to you, you still raise your arm to wave hello. You still raise your arms to hug...

Kara: It's still a positive greeting.

Mel: Yes. You also, instinctually, when you cross a finish line, raise your arms. When your favorite musician or comedian or sports team does something, you raise your arms. So, celebration and the celebratory energy associated with this has been just infused into your brain.

And so, you can stand in front of a mirror and look at yourself. Or what our research shows is 50% of men and women can't or won't do that because they are either so disgusted with themselves or so judgmental that they will look away, which is a habit of self-rejection, everybody.

It's a habit of self-rejection. You can stand in front of the mirror and if you stare at yourself and your first thought is, "Eurgh," which is what most people's first thought is, is subconsciously to focus on what you need to fix, focus on what you don't like, pick yourself apart, put on makeup to cover it up, it is a habit of self-rejection.

So, as you stand there and you go to raise your arm, you can think, "Mel Robbins is the stupidest person. This is the dumbest thing." You can think, "I hate myself." You can think, "I'm a loser." You can think, "I'm a bad person. Why am I doing this cheesy thing." You can feel all these things that you feel. But as you get closer to the mirror, your mind will go quiet because the physical action is the trigger that makes the habit loop in your brain with all the neural association and positive programming, "I believe you. I see you. I love you. I got you. Shake it off. You can handle this." And it all gets fused with your reflection.

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Your mind goes quiet. Then, you'll either laugh or you'll start crying. It's 50-50 on the positive side. You laugh or you start crying. And you do that because your brain gives you a dopamine drip. It has always given you a dopamine drip when somebody high fives you or hugs you or gives you one of these partnership trust seeing gestures.

So, you give yourself a dopamine drip. That's why you feel your mood loosen up a little bit, as cheesy as I sounds. And then, on top of it, you can drag yourself into that bathroom feeling so low-energy, like life is punching you in the face. There is something weird that happens after you pull your hand away. You feel a little lift in your energy. That's your nervous system. Your nervous system is giving you a jolt of vitality because it is hardwired for celebration. And these gestures that I just mentioned are gestures that instinctually we all do.

And so, you are tapping into and unlocking programming that is already in your body based on a lifetime of witnessing this, experiencing it. It doesn't matter how many or how little times. Even people who – I've had a couple folks say, "Well, you know, I was gay and all the sports kids bullied me and they do that high-low-hand-gotta-go, like, I hate high fives. And in just practicing this for five days, there is a complete reclaiming of it for themselves because a high five also builds partnership with you. And then we can go even deeper into that's just sort of the chemical, physiological neurological thing that's happening simply from the trigger of the physical movement.

Kara: So, how did you figure this out?

Mel: Well, I figured it out the same way I figure out everything. I basically fell into a hole and I needed to manufacture a ladder to get out of it. It was April of 2020 and my business was upside down. And because of the pandemic, things were in a freefall and I got all triggered again because just, you know, 10 years prior I'd been a million dollars in debt and I kind of

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thought, “Oh my god, you’ve got to be kidding me. I just got fired from my dream job, now they’re canceling every speech. My publisher just cancelled a book contract and wants money back that I’ve already spent. How am I going to make payroll? There’s nothing called a PPP loan yet. We’re now in virtual. My kids are freaking out because college has imploded.”

I, like everybody, took a major mental health nosedive and I found myself one morning, in front of my bathroom mirror, feeling something that’s a very familiar human experience. I was overwhelmed by my life. I felt completely defeated and I was standing there in my underwear and I was brushing my teeth, and I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and I thought, “Oh my god, you look like hell.”

And then I started casually picking myself apart; the dark circles under the eyes, one boob hanging lower than the other, you know, my stomach sagging down. I just looked exhausted. And of course, once your mind goes negative, it’s going to keep taking you down. And so, next came the beatdown, which is also very casual.

You know, if you’re not very intentional about your thoughts, your thoughts in the morning, as you brush your teeth, will drift to, “I got up too late and my Zoom call is in eight minutes and why didn’t I text her back? And I haven’t even walked the dog yet.” And just boom, boom, boom, one negative critical thought after another.

I am literally dragging myself down the drain emotionally, mentally. And this is how everybody starts their day. Cortisol levels are their highest when you wake up. Most people feel anxious or a trauma response when they wake up based on childhood issues of waking up in households that are chaotic or parents that were unstable or critical or passive aggressive or whatever.

And I don’t know what came over me. I think it was the universe. I really do. I was standing there. I could not think of a damn thing to say. And the fact is, it wouldn’t have mattered because it didn’t match what I was feeling.

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And so, I wouldn't have believed it. And that's an interesting thing about mantras, is if you don't believe the mantra, it's not going to work.

Kara: Oh yeah, we talk about that on this podcast all the time. One of the things I focus on the most in my teaching is how to figure out a thought you actually believe in and that you believe and can feel in your body. Because feeling thoughts you don't believe in, that's not good.

Mel: Yeah, and so I don't know what came over me. But standing there in my underwear feeling beaten up by life, I literally just found myself raising my hand and giving the woman I saw in the mirror a high five because she looked like she needed one.

And that first morning was not when lightning struck. The heavens didn't open, angels were like, "Here's your new book..." That was not what happened. But I'll tell you, from the very first high five, as my hand touched the mirror, I laughed at the cheesiness of it. I now know it was the dopamine that made me laugh.

But I did feel this switch flip. And the way I would describe it is this. I didn't have a thought. But energetically, I felt this sort of energy that was like, "Come on, you've got a roof over your head. Stop your bitching. You're going to be okay." Kind of like that kind of energy. And then, I went on with my day.

The next morning, this is when shit got real. This is the moment that changed my life. So, I wake up the next morning, same overwhelm, same anxious feeling, same feeling defeated, five, four, three, two, one, I get out of bed. I start walking to the bathroom and then I realize, I am having a feeling that I have never felt in my entire adult life. And it was this. I'm not even in the bathroom yet, and I'm feeling something I've never felt.

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You know when you're about to meet somebody you really, really like and they're in a café and you're about to walk in and you're about to see this person that you really like, what do you feel?

Kara: Yeah, excitement, love, you feel some sort of positive emotion that you're about to encounter somebody that you have positive thoughts about.

Mel: I felt that about seeing myself. Now, I'm 53. I can't ever recall a time in my adult life where I looked forward and felt excited to see the human being Mel Robbins.

Kara: So, what do you think happened? Was your brain anticipating the dopamine hit and getting excited about it? Like, what changed in those 24 hours based on that high five?

Mel: I think that we are so disconnected from ourselves that we have forgotten that there's a human being in there. We're so busy surviving, so busy doing that I think most of us are living very disconnected lives in terms of being disconnected from self.

And for me, that morning, you know, I started to think about the fact that I had felt excited about seeing an outfit. I'd felt excited about seeing a haircut or makeup. But the human being, never. I've spent my life judging myself.

And so, as I rounded the corner of the bathroom that second morning, kind of the profound nature of this was hitting me. And I realized something else. There are two people in the bathroom with you every morning. There's you and there's a human being in the mirror. And she's trying as hard as she can. And she needs you. And she needs you to stop beating her up and she needs you to wake up and see her and she needs you to start supporting her and encouraging her and cheering for her.

Kara: It's so interesting because it seems like the mirror is partly what helped you – like, we're talking about reconnection But part of that

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reconnection that people have to experience is almost there has to be a disidentification before there's a reconnection. It's like when I talk about thought work or when people talk about meditation, they talk about it as the watcher, the part of you that could be conscious of yourself.

When we're changing our relationship with ourselves, when it's negative, I think there is this part where you actually have to be like, "Oh, I'm a human person who I would never treat this way if I were someone else." And I think part of what's so powerful about this action, this behavior, this habit, whatever we call it is that it takes advantage of a couple of those things being kind of programmed in.

It takes advantage of the programming around the high five, but it also takes advantage of the mirror image, I think, it sounds like, as a disidentification to be like, "Oh, that's a person. It's not just the voice in my head where I'm mean to myself and I just exist in this haze of mean consciousness. That's a human being that I can see now," because on some level our brains are like three-year-olds and we don't have object permanence, "There's a person who is doing her best and trying to figure it out," or, "He's trying to figure it out."

So, I think that's so brilliant about this, that it's sort of a hack for helping you see yourself from the outside so that you can have a better relationship with that person rather than just existing in the miasma of negative self-talk in your brain.

Mel: Exactly. Exactly. You know, we've all heard that saying, "I'd never allow somebody else to talk to me that way. Why do I do it to myself? You would never talk to a friend the way you talk to yourself." Well, there is this seeing of self that really encapsulates the profound nature of how you treat yourself and how you speak to yourself. And so, the other reason why this is so powerful is because doing this in the mirror not only unlocks all the

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stuff with the high five and it's a physical action, but you're going to go a layer deeper.

Because the brain knows the high five, so you get all of the benefit of the programming from the positive dialogue associated with and meaning behind a five, from the chemical releases in your brain, and also from the energetic jolt you get from your nervous system. But there's another thing that's happening too.

Your brain is always watching. So, your brain now sees you demonstrating with your actions that you respect, that you support, and that you love yourself. That's what the gesture means objectively to the brain who's also watching it.

And so, if you tap into behavioral activation therapy, which is acting like the person you want to become – not fake it until you make it. This is actually acting intentionally like the person you want to become – the high five is an action that your brain witnesses that has your brain start to go, “Oh, wait a minute, that's not a person we criticize. This is a person we're actually rooting for. This is a person that we care about. This is a person whose feeling matter. This is a person that I'm celebrating.”

And so, I think you get several layers of benefit from this. And then of course, there's the whole field of neurobics around marrying an unexpected physical motion with a change in thought pattern, which based on research is the fastest way to plow a new neural pathway into your brain. And so, you've got that working for you as well.

Kara: I love that term also because it sounds like neural aerobics. I just imagine a bunch of little brains on their little steps. So, I want to make sure that we get to what comes next. So, you've been doing this in the mirror every morning. You're getting this physiological, psychological, neurological, all the effects. And then what happens? So, do you think you just do this once a morning, that's that?

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Do you follow it up with certain kinds of self-talk or practices? Like, how do they – I love it as a place to start. Just a few of my listeners might be perfectionists who want to do everything perfectly all at once, so starting with this – I mean, it's a five second high-five. It's another five-second habit. Like one small habit is great. But I'm just curious then, how do people build on that. Do they build on it? Do you just do that high five every morning and over time that does its work. What's the next step?

Mel: Well, first of all, I want it to be part of your morning routine. Because I want you to remove the self-rejection and insert this self-acceptance, self-worth, self-love demonstration in its place.

Kara: I would say, I think it's important to highlight that you said, especially in the beginning, it can be both. Like, your brain can be saying some shitty stuff and you can still do it anyway. Because I want to nip in the bud, those of you listening who are like, "Okay, well it's not going to work until I get rid of all my self-rejection." This is that training coming. So, they both can be there at first, and then over time it's going to displace it, it sounds like is what you're saying.

Mel: Yeah, the thing that's incredible – and then I'll give you some tips for how to kind of really implement this – you know, I've been practicing this since April of 2020. I've done a year-long research project on it. Every time I interview someone like Dr. Caroline Leaf or somebody else that studies the brain for real, we learn something even deeper and more profound about how this is changing people in an extraordinary way and why it works.

But I will tell you from personal experience that I actually have reset my entire brain. When I look in a mirror, I don't even see a face. I see a soul. I see a spirit. I see a human being I care deeply about. This doesn't turn you into some sort of narcissistic, self-absorbed jerk. This is grounded in compassion and encouragement and acceptance.

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It has profoundly changed me and my experience of life. I now default toward the little things that are going right in my business and in my life instead of harping obsessively about the things that are going wrong. It has created more momentum because I'm not anchoring down in this negative criticism. I am still a maniacal businesswoman. I am wildly successful. I have gotten even more ambitious because I am not bringing myself down all the time.

Kara: You believe in your own capacity and potential, which is only going to make your vision bigger, not smaller.

Mel: Correct. And I prove it by sending myself into the game of life every single day with that high five. And I demonstrate it. And so, one of the things that you can do, I want you to try it for five days, everybody, and if you put a little post-it note on your mirror – you don't have to write anything on it. The post-it note is enough of an environmental trigger to trigger your mind to remember it.

I recommend that you do it right after you brush your teeth. Let's get the gunk out of your mouth so you don't spread negative breath on everybody. Let's get the gunk out of your mind, body, and spirit so that you can send yourself into your day knowing that, no matter what happens, you have your own back.

I want you to do it for five days. And the reason why is, we do this free five-day challenge called the High 5 Challenge. As of this morning – I'll take a look, but as of this morning, I think we've had 128,000 people from 91 countries complete this. And – 129,593 people have completed it.

To my knowledge, we have not had a single person who has not experienced positive change. Not a single one. Not one email complaint. Not one person in the comments. What you will expect is expect it to feel weird. That's good because that's a sign that it's working. That's a sign that a new neural pathway...

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Kara: A new neural pathway, exactly, always feel awkward and weird.

Mel: Secondly, expect to either do it immediately and laugh or cry, and the crying is a really great release because it's a sense that you're finally coming back home. You are not born rejecting yourself. You did not stand as a toddler in front of a mirror and go, "I hate my thighs. I suck." You know, you did not do that. Life taught you to do this. And your true nature is celebratory, accepting, and loving.

And so, you're coming back home. So, if you cry, do not be surprised. But if what most people experience the first kind of two days is a tremendous level of resistance. And the resistance is basically judgment. So, I said there are two people in the bathroom. There's you and there's a human being. That's not your reflection. That's a human being.

If you feel resistance to raising your hand, it comes from one of two places. Either you take your past and all the things that you survived, whether it's poverty, abuse, discrimination, neglect, abandonment, heartbreak, all those things that have made you stronger, all those things that you're not responsible for that were done to you, too many people stand in the bathroom every morning and that stuff is between them and the person in the mirror.

And they see that stuff as making the person in the mirror unlovable or damaged or broken or whatever it is. And the high five becomes an act of defiance, an act of forgiveness, an act of resilience that allows you to celebrate that you're here, allows you to acknowledge everything that you've been through, and wipe it away so that you can see a human being that is deserving of love.

The other thing that people drag into the bathroom with them and put in between themselves and the human being in the mirror is all the shit that you're judging yourself for. You know, we all have done things we regret, whether it's cheating or lying or stealing or addiction or squandering

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opportunity or hurting other people or hurting yourself, things that, by the way, you would certainly forgive either one of us for.

But when you look in the mirror, you cannot forgive yourself. And the high five, which you will resist because you will say, “But I don’t deserve one. But I am a bad person. But I’ve done all these things. How could I possibly high five a person that did all those things?”

Well, the high five becomes an act of self-forgiveness. It becomes a way to say, “I see you. Life has been hard. And guess what? I still love you. And I’m still going to support you. And I’m going to still be here for you.” That’s what it becomes.

And you know, you also might feel resistance – I know when my daughter, she’s a junior in college, she typed me one morning and said, “I’ve been doing it. It feels really good. But I have a question. If I didn’t go to the gym yesterday or I didn’t practice my guitar for an hour like I said I would yesterday, do I still high five myself?” I’m like, “Yes.” She’s like, “Even if I didn’t do the things I said I would?” I said, “Yes.” Because this is not a reward...

Kara: Right, it’s not conditional upon your performance of being a good-enough person.

Mel: Correct. You get it because you exist.

Kara: Right, and also, I think resistance is just normal whenever we try something new. Your brain is just very – I mean at least for my people – the brain is just very – especially if you’re self-critical and self-conscious and your brain’s like, “Well, this going to look funny. Imagine if somebody saw you. This isn’t going to work.”

Our brains are always invested in believing that our thoughts are accurate because it takes a lot of time and energy to make new thoughts. So, we

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always want to think that we're right. And so, your brain is just going to, you know – my listeners have heard me talk about resistance so many times. It means nothing. It's just the brain being like – it's like when you're all warm and snuggly in bed and somebody wants to drag you out and you have to do something uncomfortable and your brain's just like, "No, just leave us alone."

We can run this self-criticism program on autopilot. So, I love this. I'm so glad that you shared it and I want to encourage my listeners to give it a try. And one of the things I love most about this story is that it came from an experiment. It came from you just being curious, doing something not thinking you had to already know all of the answers about, you know, not being like, "Okay, I'm going to invest something that's going to change my life an everybody's life."

From that spirit – this is something we've been talking on the podcast a lot about recently and I just recorded a podcast called No Gods, No Gurus, all about this, which is we find some kind of self-help or self-development or spiritual practice, we find thought work, we find giving ourselves a high five, we find meditation, whatever, and then we want it be like the answer that explains everything and we want to already know that everything will work and be perfect before we even try.

And so, I've been spending a lot of time sort of encouraging my students and listeners recently, like, experiment with things. Try things. Try the high five. And I love that for you it came out of this kind of like, "Well, I don't know, this is a really shitty morning. Let me try this." And then sort of discovering it and going with it, not having to already know the answer to everything ahead of time.

Mel: Yeah, I didn't know anything. I knew it felt good. I started to see the profound difference it was making. And the whole thing blew wide open.

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Again, it was not this thing like, “Okay, I wrote a book with the five, this is going to...”

Kara: “What’s my next five?”

Mel: I literally, one month into doing it on my own, my husband thought this was the stupidest thing in the world. I now know why. It’s because he, unbeknownst to me, his restaurant business had gone under. It was the reason why we were facing bankruptcy. For even years, the man has stood at the sink next to me in our bathroom and has been disgusted by his own reflection because he could not forgive himself for failing.

I was unaware of just how dark he had become mentally. And so, the high five that I’m giving myself at the sink next to him seems profoundly stupid when you’re in that place. And so, how this all cracked open is I posted a photo on my story a month later. I didn’t even say, “Hey, try this.” I just got my retainer in, I got the bed head going. And within an hour, 100 people from around the world had reposted photos doing the same thing.

And so, that gave me the, “Oh, well maybe I’m not the only one who actually needs a little encouragement.” And so, I started reaching out to the people who were doing this and getting their stories. And the one that really was compelling, it was one of the first stories, it was a woman who was in a domestic violence shelter. And I had been a crisis intervention counsellor on a domestic hotline for four years as a volunteer.

It’s a subject and topic that is something that is deeply important to me, and she wrote about how she had severe childhood trauma from the age of three to the age of 15, left home. She’s now in her early 30s, just escaped a profoundly abusive relationship, lost everything, has nothing.

She’s like, “I’ve got a huge long journey of healing. I have absolutely nothing to my name right now. Here’s what doing the high five for five days

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in this domestic violence shelter has taught me, Mel; that I may have lost everything. But I still have myself. I can get myself through this.”

And that was what had me go, “That’s it. I’ve got to call everybody that’s doing any kind of research. And I’ve got to actually find out, why is this working?” And that’s when we stumbled into all of this research about the programming in the brain that’s already there, all of the benefit from it.

And there’s something else for people who can’t look at themselves, we had a woman write to us that’s been struggling with body dysmorphia for 20 years, for 20 years she has not looked in the mirror. And a high five, if you guys ever go to high five somebody and you guys kind of miss hands, you always redo it because there’s something intentional about it.

And so, in her experience, she would try to ignore the mirror as she went for the high five, but the programming pulls you back to the high five. Again, it took about five days. Dr Caroline Leaf actually explained why five days, four to five days is profound in terms of why it’s clicking in that amount of time and the type of chemicals that get released. None of which I’m qualified or can remember how to explain in the words that she said...

Kara: They know about her. They can listen to the podcast.

Mel: She was pretty excited about it. But what this gal said is that, “By day four or five, I was not only looking at myself in the mirror. I was smiling back at myself.”

Kara: I think this goes right back to the beginning and is such a perfect place to end, which is putting yourself out there, being brave enough to do that, not you aren’t like, “Okay, I have a perfectly polished image and I’ve done all the research on the science and now I can put this out there.” You were like, “Here’s me on my Instagram Story with bedhead and my retainer. I tried this. I’m just letting you all know what I’m working on.” And that was able to change so many lives.

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That's such a perfect example of being willing to put yourself out there before it's all perfect, which is the whole point. That's what self-acceptance allows you to do.

So, tell people – obviously they should go buy the book, *The 5 Second Rule* – sorry, *The High 5 Habit*. You should also buy her book *The 5 Second Rule*. But we're talking about *The High 5 Habit*. Where else can people find you?

Mel: I mean, I'm all over the place online. Just Mel Robbins. We put out so much free content. We also have a free five-day challenge called *The High 5 Challenge*, and again, 129,000 people have completed it from 91 countries in a matter of 21 days. And it's there for free.

I wanted to do something because I know so many people are hurting and can't afford a book. So, if you can afford a book, you definitely want this book. You're going to keep coming back to it over and over and over because there's so much research in it.

And there's lots of other tools. I mean, the Trojan Horse is the high five in the mirror. But we also talk in the book about high fiving your heart to flip between your sympathetic and your parasympathetic nervous system and get you into a calm, cool, resting nervous system. So, if you struggle with anxiety or trauma or are just on edge nonstop – and who isn't – it's a hugely valuable tool that's also free and has a lot of science behind it.

And then also, I'm reading the book for free on social media. So, we're going cover to cover, a couple pages a day. There's a folder on YouTube where you can check it out, and so that's available for folks who also cannot afford a book.

Kara: Awesome. And if you do the challenge and you're in the Clutch, come post in the Facebook group. Let us know how the challenge went. If some of y'all want to do it together, that would be fun. I'll do it with you so

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we can talk about how it goes there. Thank you so much for coming on and go follow Mel on Instagram because I will also be doing an Instagram Live with her in a couple of weeks.

Mel: Amazing. Yes, we will.

Kara: Thank you for sharing with us.

Mel: Thank you.

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