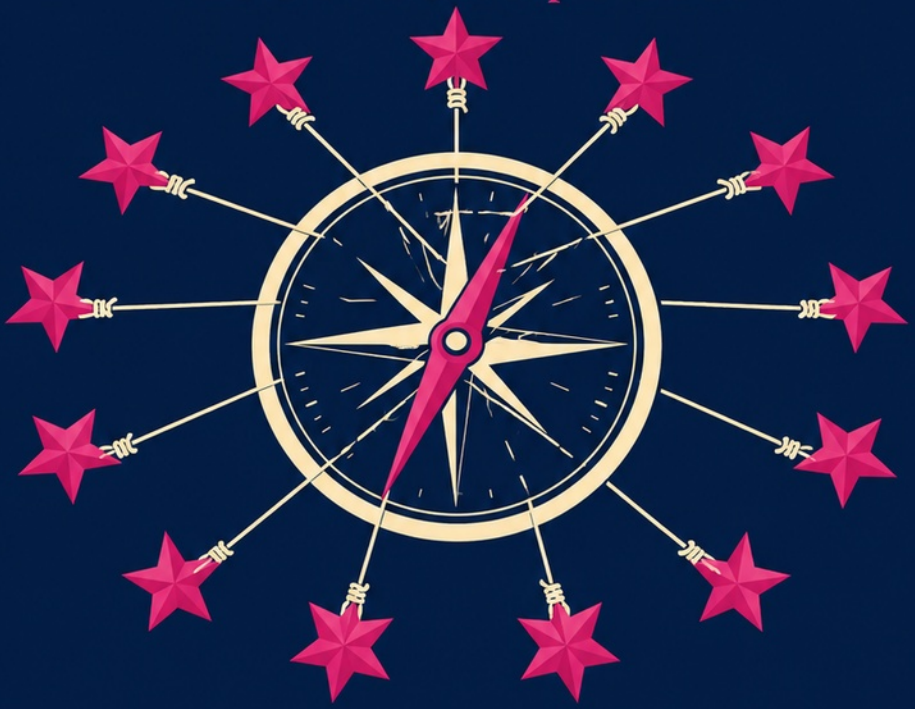
MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

I Need Too Much Approval

How to Stop Arranging Your Life Around Other People's Likes



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

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INTRO

You send a message. Nothing controversial. Nothing dramatic. Just a normal message written by a normal person attempting to communicate with another normal person.

Then ten minutes pass.

No reply.

You look at the message again, because perhaps it has changed since you sent it. It has not. You reread the final sentence. Was the period too aggressive? Should you have used an emoji? Maybe two emojis would have seemed desperate. Perhaps no emoji made you sound cold. You consider sending another message to clarify the emotional meaning of the first message, which would be an impressive achievement because the first message said, “Sounds good. See you Thursday.”

Apparently, international diplomacy has been conducted with less analysis.

This is what needing too much approval can look like. It is not always standing in a crowded room shouting, “PLEASE LIKE ME.” Usually it is quieter and much more respectable. You change your opinion slightly because someone looks unconvinced. You volunteer for something you do not want to do because saying no might disappoint somebody. You spend forty minutes choosing a photo because the first nineteen versions of your face were apparently unacceptable to the United Nations Facial Expression Committee.

You tell yourself you are being thoughtful.

Sometimes you are.

Sometimes you are redesigning your life around imaginary reactions from people who are currently thinking about lunch.

That is the strange part. Approval-seeking often feels practical. If people like you, life is easier. If your boss approves of you, work tends to go better. If your partner feels appreciated, the relationship benefits. If your friends enjoy your company, they are more likely to invite you places instead of forming a secret new group chat called “Everyone Except Kevin.”

Wanting approval is normal.

Building your internal government around it is where things get expensive.

The problem begins when other people’s reactions stop being useful information and become instructions. Someone looks disappointed, so you change your decision. Someone disagrees, so you assume you must have explained yourself badly. Someone does not praise your work, so your brain quietly downgrades six hours of effort from “pretty good” to “possible professional disaster.”

One raised eyebrow can suddenly acquire executive authority.

You may even be very good at reading people. That can make the problem worse. You notice tiny changes in tone, timing, facial expression, punctuation, and enthusiasm. Someone replies “Okay” instead of “Okay!” and your private investigation department opens a file.

What happened?

Are they annoyed?

Was it something you said?

Should you fix it?

Should you apologize?

Should you apologize for apologizing too much?

Meanwhile, the other person may simply have been carrying groceries.

Approval-seeking is not stupidity, weakness, or some mysterious personality defect. It is usually a strategy that once made sense. Being accepted matters. Humans are social creatures, which is an elegant scientific way of saying that most of us do not enjoy being excluded while everyone else eats pizza in another room.

Your brain notices social approval because social approval has value. The trouble is that the system can become oversensitive. Instead of asking, "Is there useful feedback here?" it starts asking, "How can we prevent anyone from being even mildly unhappy with us?"

This is a terrible assignment.

There are billions of people.

Some of them leave one-star reviews for national parks because it rained.

You cannot build a stable life around universal approval because universal approval does not exist. More importantly, chasing it does not even reliably produce the result you want. When you constantly adapt yourself to other people, they may like the version you present—but you are left wondering whether they would like the actual version.

So you work harder.

You become more agreeable. More available. More careful. You explain yourself more. You soften perfectly reasonable opinions until they have the structural strength of soup. You

say, “Whatever works for everyone,” while silently hoping everyone chooses the thing that works for you.

They do not.

Of course they do not. You removed the evidence.

Then resentment appears, which feels unfair because nobody technically forced you to agree. You volunteered, smiled, said “No problem,” and later became furious while loading the dishwasher with the emotional intensity of a revenge thriller.

This is one of approval-seeking’s favorite tricks: making you participate in your own frustration.

The solution is not to stop caring what anyone thinks. That sounds bold for approximately seven minutes and then becomes terrible advice. Other people sometimes know things you do not. Feedback matters. Relationships involve consideration. A person who proudly announces, “I do not care what anybody thinks,” may be emotionally liberated.

Or banned from three restaurants.

The goal is not indifference.

The goal is proportion.

You want to be able to hear an opinion without automatically obeying it. You want disappointment to feel uncomfortable without feeling catastrophic. You want to make a reasonable decision and survive the shocking possibility that another adult may not prefer it.

They will recover.

Probably without medical supervision.

In this book, we are going to separate useful approval from compulsive approval-seeking. You will learn how to notice

when you are changing your behavior for sensible social reasons and when you are performing tiny emotional gymnastics to avoid somebody's temporary disapproval.

We will look at why reassurance feels so good and lasts approximately as long as a cookie near an open laptop. We will deal with overexplaining, people-pleasing, checking reactions, changing opinions too quickly, saying yes when you mean no, and treating every lukewarm response like an annual performance review.

More importantly, you will get practical ways to stop.

Not inspirational slogans.

Not "just be yourself," as though you misplaced yourself behind the couch.

You will learn how to delay automatic reassurance-seeking, make decisions before polling the entire population, tolerate small amounts of disapproval, separate feedback from identity, and decide whose opinions actually deserve weight. You will also learn what to do when the reasonable method fails because you are tired, stressed, emotionally invested, or dealing with somebody whose favorite hobby is making other people second-guess themselves.

There will be a minimum version for bad days.

Because any system that works only when you are rested, confident, organized, hydrated, emotionally centered, and holding a freshly prepared smoothie is not a system.

It is a hostage situation.

You will not finish this book caring about nobody. That would be strange, lonely, and probably inconvenient at weddings. You will still want to be liked. You will still sometimes wonder what somebody thought. You may still

stare at a message and briefly suspect the absence of an exclamation mark has destroyed a friendship.

The difference is that you will know what to do next.

You will stop treating every opinion like a vote on whether you are allowed to continue being yourself. You will stop handing random people tiny pieces of control over decisions they do not have to live with. And you will begin building something much more useful than universal approval: the ability to respect other people without constantly abandoning your own judgment.

Which is good.

Because arranging your entire life around other people’s likes is exhausting.

And some of them have terrible taste.

Continuing directly from the INTRO and following the approved structure and voice.

Wklejony tekst

Chapter 1 - Your Imaginary Audience

You walk out of a meeting convinced something went wrong.

Nobody criticized you. Nobody interrupted you. Nobody even threw a stapler, which by modern office standards qualifies as a successful interaction. You explained your idea, answered two questions, and the meeting ended.

Then you remember Daniel's face.

For approximately four seconds, Daniel looked unconvinced.

That is enough.

By the time you reach your desk, the presentation has become questionable. Ten minutes later, your entire contribution to the project is under review. By lunch, you are wondering whether Daniel has always considered you incompetent and has merely been waiting for the appropriate spreadsheet to reveal his true feelings.

Daniel, meanwhile, has indigestion.

This is one of the most exhausting features of needing approval: you do not only react to what people actually say. You react to what you believe they might be thinking.

That creates an interesting workplace arrangement in which other people do not even need to criticize you.

You can do it for them.

Very efficient.

The imaginary audience is the collection of people you carry around mentally when making decisions. You picture their reactions before anything has happened. What will your

boss think? What will your mother say? Will your friend think this is selfish? Will your coworkers think you are lazy? Will strangers on the internet conclude that your kitchen is evidence of moral collapse because there is a dish in the sink?

The audience changes depending on the situation, but the process is similar. Instead of asking, "What do I think is reasonable?" you immediately ask, "How will this look?"

Sometimes that is useful. Social awareness prevents us from doing things such as taking conference calls on speakerphone in quiet cafés and clipping our toenails on airplanes. Civilization depends on a certain amount of concern about what other people think.

But approval-seeking takes the useful social radar and turns the sensitivity knob until you can detect disappointment from three ZIP codes away.

The first mistake is assuming you know what people are thinking.

You usually do not.

You may have clues. Someone's tone changed. They hesitated. They gave a shorter answer than usual. They did not invite you. They did not praise you. They said, "Interesting," which can mean anything from "This genuinely interests me" to "I am attempting to end this conversation without violating company policy."

Clues are not conclusions.

Your brain dislikes that distinction because uncertainty is annoying. It would rather create a complete story than sit quietly with incomplete information.

So it fills in the gaps.

A friend takes longer than usual to reply.

Fact: no reply for six hours.

Story: she is annoyed.

Expanded story: she is annoyed because of dinner last Friday.

Director's cut: everyone at dinner noticed the same thing, discussed it after you left, and there may already be a smaller group chat.

Six hours later she replies:

"Sorry, crazy day. Yes, Saturday works."

The tribunal has adjourned.

Until the next message.

The Approval Translation Service

When approval matters too much, neutral events are often translated into negative judgments.

Someone disagrees with your idea.

Translation: They think I am stupid.

Someone chooses another restaurant.

Translation: My suggestion was bad.

Your manager edits part of your work.

Translation: I disappointed them.

A friend seems quiet.

Translation: I did something.

Someone does not laugh at your joke.

Translation: I will now move to another state.

This translation happens quickly, which is why it feels true. You rarely hear the mental machinery. You just feel the result: