

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care



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With Your Host

Michelle Barry Franco

[Beyond Applause](#) with Michelle Barry Franco

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

You are listening to the *Beyond Applause* podcast episode number 11.

Welcome to *Beyond Applause*, a podcast for mission-driven leaders, coaches, and creatives who are ready to share their expertise and stories through public speaking. Here's your host, Michelle Barry Franco.

Hello, hello, my speaker friends. So we are on episode number 11, feels kind of like good luck. You know like, we used to do that when I was a kid. My daughters do this too. You know, when 11:11 is on the clock you make a wish. We just have one 11, but it's episode number 11.

So I'm super excited to be here as usual, and we're going to jump right into Story of Inspiration this week because I was thinking about some of the people that I met recently at the conference I was talking about last week, World Domination Summit, and I was thinking about how many people there came up to me after my session or throughout the conference who had often been in my session. But they came up and shared with me about their experiences running a meet-up at this conference.

One of the unique things, although I don't think it's completely unique like it doesn't happen anywhere else, but one of the special things about WDS, World Domination Summit is that they have a really - the conference branches out into the community and people run these meet-ups that you don't even have to be a part of the conference to go to them. You don't have to be a part of the conference to go to the academies either, which is one of the things that I ran.

But these meet-ups are really cool because they're even much more casual. Anyone can run one, they just sort of submit the title and the description and it gets approved and then added to the app and then all the people at the conference find it. Plus, anyone else in the area who knows to look for it on the World Domination Summit website.

So you know, it's a bold move for people to just say okay, I am going to actually stick my stick in the ground, or in my cases, put a bunch of chairs in a circle at the park and invite people to come have a conversation with

[Beyond Applause](#) with Michelle Barry Franco

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

me. So I just wanted to kind of shout out to some of my friends and new friends and friends that I've had for a while who did this, and I got to hear back from some of them that they really made a big impact in people's lives. They had people coming up to them afterwards saying, "Thank you so much, I was really struggling with this particular thing. Thank you so much, this allowed me to get to know other people in the community and other people who care about this topic."

All the kinds of things that happen when we make the courageous move of gathering a bunch of people in service of a particular goal or topic or mission. So I'm thinking about Sheila, I'm thinking about Anna, I'm thinking about my friend, Marsha Shandur, who also ran an academy and was on the main stage and did all kinds of things. But she also ran a meetup. She had all kinds of ways of serving, and I think of these examples and all the people's lives who were impacted, but also - and this is really the heart of hearts for me.

For those of us that are called, we need these avenues, we need places to go test out our ideas, share them, see how well they serve, learn what other ways we can help these audiences. And you know, creating a meet-up and inviting a bunch of people to it is a really powerful thing. I'll tell you more about it at some point but I started a meet-up a couple of years ago really on a whim, no idea what I'm doing. It was called Marin Storytelling Circle, and it really changed my life. And I didn't really like - I wasn't even that courageous. I didn't think anybody would sign up for it, I didn't know how meet-ups really worked, and it ended up being pretty amazing and I made some pretty amazing friends there too.

So let this be an inspiration to you. Is there a way you can just sort of toss it out there? Do you want to go on meetup.com? Or is there some other way that you can just gather a bunch of people and start serving them with this message that you know matters so much? Like Sheila, Anna, Marsha, and many others at World Domination Summit.

Okay, so the topic for today, which I am excited to talk about, although it's kind of a difficult topic because as much as there's inspiration and fun and

[Beyond Applause](#) with Michelle Barry Franco

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

making your difference all related to the *Beyond Applause* concept and speaking and sharing your message overall, inherent in all of that is you're going to get feedback. You're going to ask for it, or at least you probably should at least some of the time. I have mixed feelings about that.

But for the most part, we definitely want to learn how we can serve others better. So you're going to ask for it but also you're going to get it whether you ask for it or not. So let's talk about how to deal with negative feedback because it's my experience personally and my experience with many of my clients that, boy, that negative feedback can really shut you down for a long time.

I had some pretty difficult experiences around that over my lifetime in speaking. I remember when I first started teaching, and we would get feedback from the students at the end of every semester. This is especially when you're a new teacher you get feedback much more regularly. And I would get lots and lots of wonderful feedback. People were really loving the class, they liked my style, they loved what they were learning, all these great things. And then I'd get like, two or three people that are like, "Michelle is so disorganized, I don't know how she survives," or, "She favors some students over other students," and it would just break my heart.

So I would have like, a whole page of largely glowing feedback and some neutral, but really a lot of positive feedback, and then a couple of negative ones, and it would just take me down. I would hate it, I would feel like throwing up. I remember handing it to my boyfriend at the time and saying, "Do something with this, I don't ever want to look at these again." All of a sudden, even all the glowing reviews I didn't want to see anymore.

Now, maybe you're not as intense as I was way back when I was first learning how to take in the feedback, but I'll tell you, I still am impacted by feedback and I'm going to talk more about that now. I know that it makes me a better speaker, a better servant, a better leader in the world, but I still struggle with it at times, and in case you do too, I want to give you some of

[**Beyond Applause**](#) with Michelle Barry Franco

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

the strategies that have worked for me and worked for my clients over the years.

So in the last couple of months, I've had a number of opportunities to speak. I've mentioned some, some of them I haven't really talked about, they just haven't kind of fit in, but I try to be out there speaking, sharing my ideas both online and offline, out in real life, IRL, as often as I can. And it's been mostly awesome, and of course, it's a lot of work.

I mean, great speaking is a lot of work, and I hate to say it, I don't want to weigh you down, but that's another one of those like, little, kind of like having to deal with negative feedback, there's also the if you want to make a big difference in the world, it takes a lot of work. And I bring this up because sometimes that's really hard held up against the feedback element.

But I know that the hard work will pay off, that's why I do it after all these years, and so I remind myself as I'm going through the prep process, the deep, rich audience analysis process, the reading through of materials, understanding the conference I'll be speaking at, doing my best to really give them something that will serve them, I try to remind myself that all of that is going to pay off in being able to serve them powerfully.

And it did pay off at these recent events where I was speaking. In each event, I got to hear beautiful feedback, often with a line of people afterward telling me what impacted them, how it changed them, how much they can't wait to work with me further or read my book or those kinds of things, and that's all beautiful, right? And generally speaking, that line up of people, they don't tend to give you the negative feedback although sometimes I had some great conversations with people who were like, "Well, I heard you say this but what do you think of this?" Kind of like, I'm not sure I believe that, here's what I believe.

And those are rich conversations and I learn things, and I change the way I teach and speak from those kinds of conversations. But most of the negative feedback you're going to get, you're not going to be able to

[Beyond Applause](#) with Michelle Barry Franco

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

respond to it. You're not going to have a human being in front of you and that can be really hard.

So at a lot of events where I speak, they send out their own feedback form, and they'll do rating systems, and then often they'll ask for comments. A lot of times you'll get a lot more ratings than you will comments, and I remember I had the most interesting experience of this at a conference I spoke at. This was many years ago, but I did a session on presentation skills, sort of like great speaking, and I did a session on - it was sort of like how to - I can't even remember it. It was like, advances sales skills. So it wasn't even about like, how to speak so that people want to work with you or that kind of thing, which I do a lot of that kind of speaking.

And I got the highest ratings I've ever gotten on the presentation skills one and I got the lowest ratings I've ever seen for myself on the advances sales skills. I mean, obviously - looking back on it, I'm like, why did I even do that session? That is not my expertise. I am not a sales expert. I can talk about persuasive speaking, which is in the sales realm, and I think that's how the meeting organizer and I maybe got things mixed up there.

But I got some pretty intense feedback from that one, really like, she doesn't know about sales. And it's true. I didn't even hardly talk about sales. So of course, back to why it's so powerful to do that audience analysis and really check back in what is your rooftop message, what are you here on this earth to be speaking about? What are you an expert about? So that you stay in your lane.

Okay, so I've had a variety of feedback experience as in even after my most recent speaking in these last couple of months, I have gotten both very positive and some pretty negative feedback. And I struggle with it. It's hard for me still. I still get those pangs. So that's the first things I want to point out. I'm going to talk about three things, as usual, and the first one is that if you've got access to your feelings, if you're a feeling person, there's a really good chance that you're going to feel pangs of hurt, or maybe even some really deep hurt right after you hear the feedback.

[Beyond Applause](#) with Michelle Barry Franco

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

And I'm saying that to you really because I don't even think it's something you have to change. After having done this for many years and worked with over a thousand speakers individually, I can tell you that yes, we still - most of us still do respond with genuine feelings and some of them are difficult to move through. What's beautiful is after you've done it for a while, you know that this is normal.

So radical acceptance of these feelings is the number one thing I would say to you. Like, oh wow, here's the part where someone gives me feedback, maybe there's a little bit of truth to it. Someone said to me, maybe you shouldn't have mentioned that you were up until 1am working on your slides. I mean, I have mixed feelings about that, I'll talk about that in a little bit, but you know, I was up until 1am and I was having some kind of negative self-talk about, gosh, you're supposed to be a speaking coach and a trainer, shouldn't you be done way before this?

And I wasn't. And I do also though - the reason I said that and the reason I say lots of things that are pretty vulnerable when I speak is that I believe in speaking so it matters. I want us to be able to speak beyond applause, right? So for me that means look, any of you out there in my audience, if you're up until 1am even though you believe you should have been prepared, it's oaky. You can still do that and serve.

And so that was what I was trying to say, but still there was that pang of like, ugh, maybe I shouldn't have said that, or maybe I shouldn't have been in that situation. And also, this is a little reminder about - I think I've talked about this on the podcast. But I know I have talked about it on my blog, so we will put a link in the show notes about post-presentation syndrome.

PPS, and just remember, post-presentation syndrome, this is when you think of and it can come up again when you're getting the feedback, all the things you should have done differently. All the things that - all the things you forgot to say, that amazing story that was going to change their lives that you forgot to share with them.

[Beyond Applause](#) with Michelle Barry Franco

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

So just know that it's really normal to go through a period of PPS right after a talk and sometimes feedback that might come a week later or whatever, can bring that back up. It does pass, it always does, and it's not the best time to make any decisions about what you're going to do going forward.

The second thing is as you're processing these feelings, remember it's their thoughts that they're sharing. It's not a reflection of reality. So for example, on a feedback form I received once, someone said something like I'm surprised you didn't start with a story. And then they had like, three other constructive things to share with me about how I could have done a better job, and the thing is I did start with a story. And in fact, I started with one of my most powerful stories that is often very touching for people. I know just because I hear that.

Now, it obviously wasn't touching for them, right? We're not going to reach everyone, we're not going to serve everyone in the way that we wish we could. It's just not possible. So that story didn't touch that person enough to remember it, but it was on that feedback form. And I went to my - back into my memory thinking, oh my gosh, I didn't? And by the way, you don't have to start with a story every single time. That is one captivation technique and it's very powerful. But you know, that's not the only way to start off a great talk or a great workshop or whatever.

And then remember projection. Most feedback we get is at least largely infused with what's going on for that person? Now, I'm not saying we reject all feedback because it's not about us. It's just remembering that one of the sort of like, psychological things that happen between humans is we tend to project on other people things that we're struggling with in our own lives. And so especially when the feedback is harsh, I'm often pretty aware that it's probably something that they are struggling with. There may be a thread of truth and I need to watch for that, but it may be a lot about them than it is about me.

I remember getting feedback once where somebody was saying, you know, that I was being too self-deprecating, which is kind of a style I think I have at times. I talk a lot about my struggles with speaking and times when it's

[Beyond Applause](#) with Michelle Barry Franco

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

been hard or hasn't gone great. And I do that strategically, also do it just sort of like, because it's part of my personality. But this feedback was like, hey, this is your time to shine, be brilliant, you're up on a stage.

So that person believes or wants to shine and be brilliant when they're up on stage and in many ways, I want to be brilliant too in so far as in whatever way my brilliance helps illicit growth and learning and positive things in my audience. But I do not think of being on stage as my time to shine. Actually, it's their time to shine. I'm there to serve them, to help my audience shine.

So just again, not as much about me, but little nuggets. Maybe I'm being too self-deprecating. Something to look at later. And just remember also take really good care of yourself. Whenever I feel crappy, I walk my beautiful big black dog, Timber, who I adore. It just always makes me feel better. I listen to some beautiful music or I listen to some recordings from some of my favorite spiritual teachers because for me, that reminds me what really matters. They just remind me why I'm doing what I'm doing.

My husband, by the way, loves to read his favorite sports writer. Like, that'll be the thing he goes to. So whatever the thing is for you that lifts you up and helps you feel better, just take good care of yourself while you process this feedback.

Alright, the second thing is take note of what you want to learn. Take note of which elements you want to learn from. But you decide what serves you and what will serve your audience going forward. So I often get the feedback that I try to fit too much into a session. I probably try to fit too much into a podcast. This is my nemesis. I'm always working on that. That is something that I need to be reminded of and every time I hear it I think, okay, and I do get better. I do get better at it over time for sure.

I had a client who was told that she's difficult to follow because she uses a lot of unfamiliar words, a lot of jargon in her industry, but she's not always speaking to people in her very kind of niched industry. So she just started

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

speaking more simply. It was - she needed that feedback to know that it would help her be of more service.

Just don't do this taking note of what to learn too early while you're still in the like, caring for yourself and you know, releasing kind of things that aren't yours from the first main point I was covering here. I do have a spreadsheet where I gather some feedback that I want to build on. So it kind of - for me, it separates the emotion. I don't go put it in there until after I've sort of like, gone through the feelings, which happens pretty quickly now.

But I go to the spreadsheet, I'm like, things I want to do more of, things that I want to work on for the next thing, and I just add to that and I take things out when I feel like I've handled them and I've now mastered them in my speaking. So you might want to do something like that. Really that's just kind of a separate place to go as your guide, like a little checklist.

Okay, and then the third thing I want to offer to you in dealing with negative feedback is to release. Release it. Like, release the stuff that doesn't serve you after you've done the first two of this process and reconnect with just why this matters to you.

So people are going to have all the opinions. They just are. People have opinions and sometimes and oftentimes, especially if you ask them for feedback, they're going to share them with you. So many of those are projections, as I said. When you're visible, it brings out other people's desires to serve to the forefront for themselves, and sometimes it makes them edgy. Like, they're not doing what you're doing and they wish they were.

And I don't mean everybody's jealous of you and that's why they're giving that feedback. Just sometimes that is what's being brought up in them. And so just know, you know, recognize when maybe that might be happening, and send them love and compassion. Send them to this podcast so they can get out there and start sharing their ideas.

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

So I didn't love some of the feedback I got recently. In fact, it really surprised me. And I did spend a few days wondering if I was really meant for this, and this was good because it actually helped me hone in on what matters about this for me. What is it I really want to say? And it reminded me that I do this work because I want my daughters to connect to their voice, to own their expertise and their expression. I want all girls to have that because we know that that has not been the case historically.

And right now, it's not clear how to do that in a way that matters in our world. Social media is really confusing, and my daughters are - you know, I see them using it, I see what they're seeing, and I think how do they find the voice that matters, the voice that gives them strength, the conviction, and taps into who they're meant to be.

So I do this because I want to serve those girls. I want to serve the women who are mentoring those girls, the mothers and the leaders and the aunts and the neighbors. I want to serve the men in their lives so that they can step into their own voice for good and be a mentor as a voice for good.

So there's a little bit of my, like, manifesto. What is yours? Why do you do this? Stay connected with that. Sharing your ideas with conviction and passion will illicit all kinds of feedback, good and hard to hear. And I won't pretend it doesn't hit me. I have cried at times, even in the last months. So if you're having all the feelings, it's okay. Like, that's a normal part of the process. Just know that they're normal and when you're ready to make those notes, you can make them and use those to be even better the next time and take really good care of yourself.

Sharing your heart and soul through speaking and all ways of communication is not for the faint of heart, but it is for big, beautiful, big-hearted you. You were made for this. So keep taking the courageous choice to share your voice and make your difference, knowing how to deal with feedback will help.

So I've got a full guide for you to help you just get out there further and broader with your message. If you haven't gotten it yet, go to

[Beyond Applause](#) with Michelle Barry Franco

Ep #11: Processing Negative Feedback with Care

michellebarryfranco.com/start and you'll get immediate access to that guide. That's all for this week, my friends. Open that big heart of yours wide and share your voice. You make our world a better place. Take care. Can't wait until next time.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Beyond Applause*. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more, head on over to michellebarryfranco.com/start to get your free complete guide to stepping into leadership speaking right away.