

## Ep #26: Your Clients: Expectation Vs. Reality



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Lindsay Dotzlaf**

## Ep #26: Your Clients: Expectation Vs. Reality

Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills*, episode 26.

To really compete in the coaching industry, you have to be great at coaching. That's why every week, I will be answering your questions, sharing my stories, and offering tips and advice so you can be the best at what you do. Let's get to work.

Oh my goodness, I just realized, as I recorded the intro just now that this podcast is officially six months old. What? It totally blows my mind. It still feels really new and like I just started yesterday. And it also, at the same time, feels like I've been working on it for years and years. I'm sure you've experienced that before. But it's so fun.

And I'm so glad that you're here. And I have to say, this podcast has just quickly become one of my very favorite parts of my business. I spend really quite a bit of time coming up with ideas, writing the podcast, writing about the ideas, and recording. And I love every second of it.

So, I guess today, in celebration of the six months, I actually want to talk about one of my favorite topics; the thoughts you have about the way your clients should show up to coaching. Whether you're a brand-new coach or you've been coaching for years, it doesn't matter. I know you still have these thoughts that slip into your brain about your clients, about the way they should show up, about the manual, the rules that you have for them.

And I love talking about this. I talk about it in my mastermind a lot and I figured I should record an episode for you. So, being that my niche is helping coaches be the best at what they do, one thing I hear a lot of, either sometimes from my colleagues, sometimes from my clients, and sometimes you guys email me about them – so it that's one of you and you've emailed me, hopefully this will clear up your questions.

I hear so many complaints about the way your clients show up. And I love to always picture the way we think our clients will show up and have a laugh because it's so rarely true.

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I think about those memes, where they have a picture and they say, like, “What you think I do all day...” and then another picture and it’s like, “What I actually do.” And on one side it’s the perfect picture of whatever the thing is. And on the other side it’s like what the actual real life looks like. And I feel like I should probably create a meme or a Reel – I say that and in the back of my mind I laugh because I’ve never done a Reel, but maybe someday – but maybe I should create that, about coaches, how you think your clients should show up, and then how they actually do.

So, let’s just think about this for a minute. What are all of the thoughts you have about the way your clients should act? I’m going to give you a list of some of the most common things I hear. Obviously, no one comes to me with this entire list, but this is just a conglomerate of all the things that my clients come to me with just condensed down into one list.

And maybe after the podcast is over, take a minute to think about what I missed, like for you, any thoughts that you have about the way your specific clients are supposed to show up and how it would be so much easier for you if they did.

So, here we go. Here’s the list. Your clients, they should always be on time and be ready to be coached. They should have done any homework that you gave them. They should always come to the call knowing exactly what they want to work on. They should have plenty of drama so you don’t have to worry that they won’t have anything to coach on. But also, not too much drama because what are you supposed to do with that?

They should always be open and receptive to your coaching. This is a big one. I hear this a lot. And of course, all these are a little exaggerated, but I have just taken all of the ways that I hear them and just thrown them all together. They should have huge, monumental, life-altering breakthroughs in every session. And on top of that, they should definitely tell you about all of them and how they can’t live without you. They should obviously always pay on time about two minutes after a consult or renewal conversation.

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They should tell every human they know about how amazing you are. They should always show up in a calm, quiet environment with zero possibility of interruption. They should never be resistant to coaching or give you any pushback at all. They should always be open, never closed off. They should never cancel or reschedule their sessions, especially at the last minute.

I could just keep going on and on I thin. But there are so many things, so many thoughts we have about the way our clients should show up. We could even add some specifically for group coaching. So, if you only coach in groups or you have groups or programs, how about they should get the coaching they need by listening to other coaching, right? They should always be on camera, never driving, never eating, never painting their nails, anything else that they're doing that's distracting on calls.

They should definitely remember to mute when you're on Zoom. Like, if it's not their turn to talk, they should mute, right? So you can't hear any of their noise. They should always be respectful and not interrupt someone else's coaching. Also, they should always be respectful and not need too much coaching. But they better come to calls with something to coach on, just in case you call on them.

Okay, I'm going to stop here. But you get the point, right? We just have so many thoughts about how our clients are supposed to act. And if right now you're laughing at this list but also wondering, like, "Okay, Lindsay, I get it. But really, one of those, two of those, five of those, they're really real. How do I get my clients to behave like I want them to?" Fortunately for you, I have the answers. And they're not complicated. The answers are simple.

And these apply even if you don't have any big, huge problems with the way your clients show up, but just want to optimize the time you have with them and make sure you are using it effectively, being the best coach you can. Are you ready to hear this?

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First of all, and most importantly, it is always your job, always, to teach your clients how to be clients. I'm going to say it again one more time just in case. It is always your job to teach your clients how to be clients.

Maybe most of your clients have never had a coach before. Think of the first time you have done something, like the last time you did something for the first time and you kind of went into it not really knowing what to do. And then, over time, if it's something that you do regularly, over time you're like, "Oh yeah, this is how I'm supposed to show up. This is how I'm supposed to dress. These are the shoes I'm supposed to wear. These are the, you know, what I'm supposed to bring with me."

Whatever it is, over time, you learn. Your clients are the same. And as the coach, this is just a skill you learn and develop. It doesn't mean everything has gone wrong or that your clients are the worst or that you don't know what you're doing.

This is just a skill you develop over time, and even when you are a seasoned coach, even when you have lots of clients, there's always room to check back in with this and say, "Okay, I've changed some things..." even if you're a seasoned coach and you're like, "But I've changed. I'm going into groups. I'm going into programs..." How does this apply to your new thing?

So, here are my four rules for helping your clients be better at clienting. Number one, tell them what you expect. Tell them how it works and what's going to happen.

So, I know this is super-obvious, but a lot of you don't do this. I know this because you tell me. Because you come to me with problems and, you know, you complain, you say your client did this or your client did this. and I say, "Well, did you ever tell them not to?" It seems obvious to me, but sometimes when you're really in it, you just don't notice, "Oh, I just forgot. I didn't set my expectations."

And I want to be very clear. This doesn't have to be any kind of tough conversation or laying down the rules or a strict contract that they sign. It

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can truly just be like, “Hey, here’s how it works.” Maybe on your first call, or before your first call, or in an email, or on your second call, or whenever, it doesn’t matter. But it can just be a “Here’s how coaching goes. This is what you can expect and this is what I expect.”

So, for example, in my mastermind, during the first call, I do some just general housekeeping. And one of the things I go over is how to show up for calls. And I literally don’t assume anyone knows what I expect of them, even if they’ve been my client before, even if I know they’ve been in other masterminds before. It doesn’t matter. I just assume everyone is new to this specific container and I’m going to really help them know how to show up.

So, I tell them I want them to be live on as many calls as they can, most of the calls. I want them to be on camera, not looking a mess or like they just rolled out of bed, not distracted, and I also tell them, on the other side of that, that I completely understand that life happens.

So, sometimes a kid comes into your office unannounced or you don’t feel great and you show up in a sweatshirt, or it’s 2020 and your entire family is now home while you’re working. I get it. Those things happen. Sometimes people show up to my mastermind and it’s like 5AM their time.

I’m not actually looking for who’s looking great today and who looks like they just got out of bed. Every rule I set for them is because I want them to succeed. Not because I have an expectation for them to show up in a certain way.

So, if someone comes to a call at 4Am or 5Am, yeah, they’re probably going to look little tired. I would too. I’m just happy they’re there. So, it’s not like you have to look like a million bucks on every call. But how can I ensure that they are getting the best out of their experience?

Also, because I do this, because I set this standard from the beginning, it has literally never been an issue. I do not generally have to have tough conversations with my clients hardly ever, unless the rare, rare time it does

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happen is when someone I notice that they've just missed calls. And I might just check in, like, "Hey, what's going on?" Or they haven't participated in several calls, and then I might just call them and say, "Hey, I haven't heard from you. What's going on with you? Tell me something."

I used to do this with my one-on-one clients as well. I would set this up for them in the beginning, this is how this is going to go. So, I want you to do this, think about your coaching business, yourself as a coach. How are you setting your clients up for success from the beginning? And every time you feel irritated or confused by your clients' behavior, just ask yourself, what did you expect them to know that you didn't tell them? What were you just assuming they would know?

The second rule, you go first. This is where you might want to really take a second and check in with yourself. So, anything that bothers you that your clients do, where are you doing this? Where is this a thing that shows up for you? Where could you maybe use a little tweaking in the way that you show up? I'll give you an example, a personal example.

I used to get super irritated when my clients were running late. So, if I called them and they didn't answer or they weren't ready or they would text me and say, "Hey, I need a few minutes," and then it would be 10 minutes or whatever, it would really bother me.

And I can see now, looking back, and I really worked on it then, but I can definitely see now how the reason it bothered me so much is because, at the time – this is years ago – I was always running late. This was something I was really working on in my life and my business. And I was always cramming way too many things in the day.

And so, when my clients did it too, it really pointed out, in my own brain, a spot in my life that just felt a little tender. It was like, "I'm working on this. How dare you point it out to me that it feels bad?"

So, now that I don't operate that way anymore, at least for the most part, my clients are rarely, rarely late. And when they are, it doesn't bother me at



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all. So, in your business as a coach, where and how might you show up differently to lead the way for your dream clients? To find the clients that never show up late, you have to be the person that doesn't show up late. Do you want your clients to pay in full? What are your thoughts about paying for things in full?

Do you hire coaches and pay in full? If not, why not? If you want your clients to do it, you do it first. Do you want clients that are never distracted and show up prepared always? How can you be sure to keep distractions to a minimum and show up prepared more than ever for your calls or your sessions with clients?

Always going inward and saying, "How can I be better at this? How can I model it?" As uncomfortable as it is sometimes, this really goes for all relationships. You always have to go first, and then the people will follow. You always are showing people in your life, whether it's family, friends, clients, spouses, partners, anyone, you're always showing them what you expect just by who you are being.

Alright, the number three rule is allow for the humanness and real world to get in the way. So, sometimes we just forget as coaches that our clients are humans with real lives and other things going on. And that isn't a problem.

And when I say this, I don't mean excuse all of their behaviors that you don't like and definitely make sure you are using those first two steps first. But I'll give you some examples so you know what I'm saying, but this step three or rule three is just allowing for, like, yeah, sometimes stuff happens.

Sometimes, life gets in the way. Sometimes surprises come up that we obviously aren't planning for. So, here are some examples that I thought of. So, when a client, maybe when you have a client who she's always on time, she always shows up to calls on time, she always has done the work, she always comes prepared, she's like a model client.



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And then one time, she doesn't show up for a session for whatever reason, just literally not there, no call, no show, you know, doesn't show up to the Zoom, however you do your coaching, and it's very out of character.

So many of you make this mean so many things that it doesn't mean, especially if you have a thought that you're afraid clients will quit.

So, a lot of times, in this case, there truly is something else going on. There's some sort of misunderstanding or schedule mishap or even a last-minute emergency that has nothing to do with you.

A second example that I thought of is when a client shows up and they're just, like, killing it and they're getting results and they're working really hard and they're working towards their goal. And then, one time they show up to a session just very differently. Maybe in lots of negative emotion or just really believing nothing is working.

And in your brain, you want to go to the place that's like, "Oh my gosh, what is happening? Something has gone very wrong. This is not supposed to happen. But really, this isn't a problem. All of your clients have human brains and that is half of our job, as I coaches, I think is to show our clients, "Yeah, that happens. We have bad days."

Even your best clients, even the ones who are usually killing it, even the ones who are always getting results, sometimes they have bad days too. Sometimes you have bad days as a coach. None of that means anything about either of you.

The last example that I'll give that I hear sometimes is when you sign a new client or you renew a client and they don't pay their invoice in like 20 minutes. Or maybe days. Maybe a week. And your brain really freaks out and makes it mean all the things.

But sometimes, there's just a little real life happening behind the scenes that maybe you don't know about. Maybe they actually need to move some money around or they just forget about it. They're so excited for their first

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session and maybe – I'm not lying. I've been guilty of this. the day before my first session, "Oh my gosh, I haven't paid my invoice. Let me do that real quick."

If you haven't given them a firm deadline, if that isn't something that you set up to begin with, there's a good chance all of those things you're making it mean, they just aren't true. Just decide that when all of these small things happen and your brain loves to jump on the everything is wrong and everyone is quitting bandwagon, or you start to just feel really terrible or doubt yourself about your business, this is such a good indication, like your clients can be such a good mirror for you of some of the thoughts under there that may need to examination and some self-coaching, or some coaching from your coach, some coaching in my mastermind.

Come there, get some coaching, because it's just a mirror showing you all of your thoughts. And it's a lot more comfortable sometimes to blame the client and say, "Nope, they're just not showing up. This is their fault," instead of just looking inward and saying, "Well, wait a minute, where is this showing up for me? Or where can I just allow for this human behavior? And do I allow this with myself?"

One question I love to ask myself when something is just going not as planned – by the way, if you're in my mastermind, you've probably heard me say this – how would I react to the situation if it was my best friend? How would I react if I had a coffee date with my best friend and she showed up late? Or how would I react if I emailed her, called her, and she didn't return it right away? How would I react if I paid for something that we were splitting and she, like, forgot to send me the money?

Whatever it is, how would I react to my best friend in this situation? Because when it's your best friend, you're probably more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt. So, until it's like the second or third or whatever number time that your best friend does it, you're not going to overreact. You're just going to think, "Oh yeah, I'm sure something came up."

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But just notice, when your clients do these same things, maybe your brain loves to jump to, “Something has gone wrong.” And then, the fourth rule – and this goes for the same thing, like how would you react if your best friend did this – the fourth rule is the same thing. If your best friend did something for the third or fourth time, you would handle it differently than if they just accidentally forgot about a coffee date once.

So, rule number four is course-correct when needed and have the tough conversation. So, this is the one you use after you’ve done the first three things and they aren’t working.

This is the one where the client is actually not showing up for themselves and you might actually want to have the conversation about why it’s happening. You’ve set the standards. You’ve told them how coaching works. You know you’re being the example. You’ve checked in with yourself. You have looked at all your thoughts and gotten coaching. And you have allowed for the humanness and the craziness that life can sometimes be. And you can see that they still aren’t showing up for themselves and it’s affecting their results.

And this is where it really is time to step in and just ask what’s going on. With so much love and compassion for your clients. And this is where you can take it back to – I did an episode about having difficult clients and what to do about difficult clients. And the reason you want to have this conversation, just remember, it’s always for them. That’s what makes the conversation easier.

It’s not about you. It’s not about your ego. It’s not so you can feel better. It’s so that you can help your clients get what they came for. It’s literally why they paid you money. They’re paying you money for results. And if you just let them get away with showing up 15 minutes late to calls every week or doing some crazy stuff every week, that is not in the highest service of them.

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So, I'll give you one example of this in my business. And this was several years ago. At one point, I had a client that every single time we had a session – and I used to do my sessions just over the phone. So, every time we had a session, she was always driving. She was running errands, she was in the Starbucks drive-thru. She was just always doing something else.

And at that time, like I said, I did all the coaching over the phone, so I couldn't see her. I couldn't immediately say, "Oh how are you? What are you doing?"

And over time, I noticed that she was doing it and I would bring it to her attention. And even then, even after I brought it up to her, she would still be out and about running errands. And then, she would pull over quickly to do the coaching call. Because I brought it to her attention, so she's like, "Okay, okay, Lindsay doesn't want me to show up this way so let me pull over or be in this parking lot or whatever and do our coaching call."

But noticed over time, even then, she was always thinking about how many things she could get done in that hour. Or eventually, I noticed she would start wanting to cut the call short, she would even say, "So I can get back to what I was doing or finish my errands or do this thing before I have to get back to this other thing."

And so, at one point, I just had this tough reckoning, first with myself. And then with her. And it was the most powerful coaching we ever had.

So, she was an entrepreneur and she worked for herself from home. and we noticed, we really saw this, how she was always thinking about her time. She was never just still and present in what she was doing in that moment. And it was showing up everywhere in her life, in her business, in her marriage, in her parenting, literally all of it.

So, if you think about that, having that tough conversation, although she didn't want to really hear it at first, if I had just let her get away with it week after week without bringing it up, this huge breakthrough that she had, it never would have happened.

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And because I was willing to bring it up and myself feel uncomfortable in the moment, she continued to work with me for probably about two years. And I'm not kidding when I say she literally changed everything about her life; everything.

Because this was the one thing, this was the first domino that was always falling that was knocking down everything else. So, I want you to really think about that. I know it's uncomfortable sometimes to have those conversation with your clients, especially when they're clients that you really love. Sometimes we just love our clients so much and it's easy to let them get away with things.

But every time you do that, you aren't showing up in the highest service of them. So, I want to leave you with this. Every time you have these thoughts about a client not showing up or, you know, not showing up how you think they should be, check in with these four areas.

One, did you tell them how to be a client? Did you teach them? Two, did you show them how to be a client? Did you lead by that example? Three, did you allow for just humanness and real life? That's a thing for everyone. None of us can get out of that. And four, if yes on all of the first three questions, are you willing to have the conversation? Are you willing to bring it to their attention in service of them?

Alright, my loves. I hope this helps. Next time this happens, come back, maybe relisten here a couple of times. I have to remind myself even of these things sometimes. And I'll see you next week.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Mastering Coaching Skills*. If you want to learn more about my work, come visit me at [lindsaydotzlafoaching.com](http://lindsaydotzlafoaching.com). That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. See you next week.