

Ep #13: Reload: When Your Client Has Nothing to Be Coached On



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lindsay Dotzlaf

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Hey, this is Sheri Strzelecki and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 113.

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.

Hey coach, today Lindsay wants to share with you an episode from the very beginning of this podcast journey. It's one that she refers coaches and clients to often. It's an episode that answers one of the questions she gets asked a lot, what do I do if when a client comes to a session with nothing to coach on?

We hope you enjoy if you are listening for the first time, and if this is a repeat we can't wait to hear your biggest takeaway when you listen again. Enjoy.

So over the last few weeks, I've been going over the way I think about coaching and kind of some of the different aspects of things we can include when we are coaching our clients.

But today, I want to answer some of your questions. And by some, I actually only mean one. I was planning to do an episode of Q&A because you guys have been sending me some amazing questions, and I noticed that a few of the questions were the same, and this is actually a question that I get a lot, so I decided to a whole episode covering the one question.

So I originally got this question from Natalie, so shout-out to Natalie. Thank you so much. But a handful of you sent this to me and I just think it is truly one of my favorite topics, so I'm just ready to have some fun. The question is, "What do you do when a client comes to calls or to coaching sessions with nothing to coach on?"

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So today, I'm not just going to give you one answer. I'm going to give you 10. And I think truly, this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to this topic. But I decided I'm just going to give you 10 different ways to handle this situation, kind of depending on why the client is doing it, but what I encourage you to do is to think of how do you want to handle this? What are 10 other ways that you could handle this with your clients?

These are just some of the methods that I have used in the past. But of course, because I'm a coach, I also really want you to dive into examining if this is something, a question you have a lot, I want you to examine your thoughts about what thoughts do you have when this happens.

Why does it feel like a problem? How do you feel when your clients come to calls with nothing to coach on? Do you make it mean something about yourself or about your coaching? Or do you maybe make it mean something about the client?

I would just get really curious with it right now if you're like, yes, I can't believe she's going to talk about this, I have this question, this is so exciting. After the podcast, I want you to just do a little of your own thought work on why you think it's a problem.

But today, I am going to walk you through some really specific things you can use when this happens to you. And it will, even if you are a new coach or a very seasoned coach, it does not matter. Sometimes this happens. I was actually laughing because as I'm recording this, I just had a coaching session with my coach.

I work with a coach, yesterday, and I kind of did this exact thing. I came to the call, I had lots of celebrations and we talked through them, and then she kind of said, okay, what would you love coaching on? And I said, oh, I don't know.

And so we kind of talked through it and we of course found some amazing things to coach on. But I did think it was kind of funny that this just

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happened to me and I didn't think it was a problem at all. Of course, I was doing it as the client, but I also know my coach didn't think it was a problem and it turned into an amazing call.

And really, the thought that I have about it that allows me to just feel very neutral and to come up with so many options because my brain is just open, I have lots of space and lots of abundance, because I really just have the thought this isn't a problem. It's the simplest, most simple thought.

But that really is what it is. So here we go. I think there are two main reasons that clients show up with nothing to coach on. They're kind of opposites. The first one is they're loving the coaching, they're getting great results and making progress towards a goal, or maybe even they've hit their goal.

And the second one is the opposite of that. Maybe they aren't getting results, they aren't really doing the work, maybe they aren't showing up for the coaching. They're just kind of phoning in, and maybe they would just rather avoid it altogether because if they're not doing the work and they're not getting the results, it's feeling bad, so they are just like, I don't want to talk about that.

So I'm going to kind of give you solutions on each side. So let's start with the clients that aren't getting results, or they just aren't showing up for the coaching. And when I say showing up, they might be physically showing up, but they're not mentally showing up.

And remember, I feel like I need to add this in. You know your clients best. Do not use any of these things I'm about to say if they aren't the best thing for your clients. So you really want to think about why would I use this, what would be the best thing for my client in this situation.

Okay, so number one, this is when you know they aren't doing the work, they aren't getting the results, and maybe they're not taking the coaching

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seriously. You can just tell by the way they're showing up. You can give them some kind of tough love coaching on why they aren't.

Ask them why they aren't coming to calls prepared. Ask them why they aren't doing the work. So many coaches I know are scared to ask their clients these tough questions, but the way I think about it is my clients pay me a lot of money to get results that they want, and yours do too.

There's a really good chance that there are pieces of course that are going to feel hard, that aren't going to be easy, or that they would love to avoid, or they would have already created the result that they're looking for on their own. So as a coach, it's your job to just show them this, especially if it is happening week after week.

If they keep coming to calls unprepared, it's one thing for it to happen once or twice. We all have off days. But if it's something that is continually happening, just ask them why. It doesn't have to be in a way that's like, why aren't you doing this, like blaming them. But just get really curious about it. And if you do it from a place of complete and total love for your client, it won't be uncomfortable for either of you.

So number two, for that kind of same type of client, and this can go hand in hand with the first one, have them recommit to their goal. Recommit to why they hired you. Spend the call or the session talking through and recommitting and asking them if they're still committed to doing the work.

Ask them what has changed, why aren't they feeling committed, why aren't they showing up? And then have them recommit and really dive into what does that look like. What does real commitment look like? Why did they commit in the first place? Bring them maybe back to the vision that they had when they hired you as their coach. This is you as the coach just helping them get back on track, noticing this isn't a huge problem. Let's just get back on track starting today.

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Or if they are truly no longer committed to the result, you can always give them the option of quitting. If your head just exploded, I want you to really think about this. Coaching is never a relationship where we hold people against their will.

They hire us because they, the client, wants a result. If they no longer want that result, they don't have to keep working with us. Now, I actually think this second option is more rare, but one time I did actually have a client who - she was an amazing client, I loved coaching her, and then all of a sudden, I could tell she just started showing up to calls really differently.

And one week I didn't really think much of it, but the second and third week it was like, okay, this is really weird. She never had anything to coach on, and then when she did, it was kind of off topic, I guess I would say. Off topic things. And they just seemed maybe small and insignificant things she was just grabbing, oh, maybe this, let's just talk about this.

And when I finally stopped and said like, okay wait, what is happening, and I just questioned her, what I found, what I learned is that she'd actually decided - so we had been working on she was starting a business and I was coaching her on that, just getting it all started and set up and ideas and deciding exactly what she wanted to do.

And apparently, she never talked to me about it, but her and her husband had decided that they wanted to have a baby and she decided she wasn't going to start the business right now. And she felt really scared to tell me, which bless her heart, I thought it was adorable.

And once she told me that, I could tell she had this huge deep breath of just relief, and we were able to talk through all of it, and she felt so incredible about her decision. And because I was willing to ask, we were able to have this most amazing conversation and she really decided her coaching was complete.

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We both left the relationship feeling just - we stayed close, we were open, it was just this beautiful thing. And side note, she now has the most precious little girl ever. So never be afraid to just really - even if you feel uncomfortable, just never be afraid to ask your client like hey, what's going on? Tell me everything.

Number three, depending on what kind of coach you are, I think there are times when clients come and they're just deep in the feels. They don't really want coaching on the thing, whatever the thing is. Maybe they don't want coaching on it today because they aren't ready to move forward. And they're just really experiencing lots of emotion.

I think in this case, there are so many great options of other things you can do on calls that aren't just like okay, let's move towards the goal, let's move forward. You could really explore like, how do we just stay here and honor these emotions that you're feeling? Honor this place that you're in.

Maybe you do something different where you help them process the emotion or just kind of sit and be with the emotion, or even teaching them a method of calming their nervous system, if that's something that you do in your coaching, like guided meditation or breathwork, or I'm sure there are other things that I don't know of because this isn't something that I do often with my clients.

But just knowing as the coach, it's okay to not always move forward on every call. Sometimes helping your client process an emotion could be the most important thing you ever do.

Number four, you can just be very curious and start asking open-ended questions. You could, if you wanted to, if you feel like this is something that happens for you every once in a while, you can make a list of questions and just have them so that when this happens, you can just refer to your list.

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But if you get super curious, maybe ask about what other goals they have, have them name their top several emotions they experienced this week, or today, or yesterday or whatever. Ask them questions like what is something you've been avoiding, what's something that's on your mind a lot, what do you think about when you wake up in the middle of the night?

Just questions like that. Very open-ended, just very exploring, and just seeing where it leads. I promise you, if you ask enough questions and you just keep going, you will find something that they want to be coached on.

Number five, when you have a particularly resistant client and they are consistently coming to calls not prepared or not wanting to do the work, you could just give them the option to not have the session that day. You can just say okay, well if you don't have anything today, we could talk next week.

Sometimes just saying that, it will make a client like, oh no, hold on, I have something. It'll give them a little kick in the butt. Or, and I hesitate to say this, I'm going to say it, and I'm going to give you a huge caveat after I say it. You could fire them.

Now, do not go fire all of your clients. This is why I want to give this caveat. You are always the one responsible for teaching your client how to show up. So especially if you're the first coach they've ever worked with, they might not actually know to come to sessions with something to coach on, or they might not understand how it all works.

They've never done this before, they need you to teach them. So always, always check in with yourself here before you go firing your clients. Don't tell people Lindsay said I have to fire all my clients because they're just not coming to calls. You don't come to a call, you're fired. You don't come to a call, you're fired. Don't do that please.

But just check in with yourself. Did I teach them how to be a client? I have a story for you, a short story that I think about whenever I think about this. So

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we have a dog, her name is Honey. And she's about three years old. And when we got her, she wasn't a tiny puppy. She was maybe five or six months old.

And I used to joke all the time that we just got a broken model, a broken dog, a defective model because she didn't understand really how to play with humans. So things like fetch, for example. I would take her outside, she was a great dog, but her interaction with humans was and sometimes is still a little weird.

And so she wanted to love us, she wanted to have fun, but she didn't really know how. So one example is I would take her outside and we had balls. And I would try to fetch with her. I would throw the ball, she would be very excited. So I would throw the ball and she would either just stand there and look at me, like what? I don't know, why would you throw that over there, what are you doing?

Or sometimes she would run after it and then she would just sit next to it and look at me. Like, are you going to do that again? And so I would be so annoyed. I was like, this is annoying, she doesn't know how to fetch, not that she had to know how to fetch, but it was just like, I'm not playing this with her anymore.

And so I just decided this just isn't something we do. And then one day I was outside playing with my kids and her, and they were throwing the ball and I was watching, and she was doing the same thing, being a total goofball. And I had the thought, what if she just needs to learn how to fetch?

And I remembered in that moment that the reason we got her, she was older is she had actually been quite sick as a puppy and was in animal hospital, puppy hospital, whatever, for a while. And then after that, she actually lived on this huge farm and she had lots of interactions with several

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other dogs, but not really tons of human interaction. It was more of a be a farm dog, interact with other animals kind of situation.

And now she lives with us and I'm throwing this ball, we're throwing balls and she's looking at us like, why are you doing such a ridiculous thing? So I decided maybe we could teach her to fetch. So we started working on it. And we just did it step by step.

It was like okay, first, I throw the ball, and then I would literally have her run, I would call her and she would run next to me and we would run to the ball. That's how we started. And I just taught her step by step. And after a while, she started running after it on her own. And then one day, she started bringing it back to me.

And then she started bringing it back to me and letting go of it so I could have it to throw again. So it's like, I taught her to fetch. Now, she's not 100% reliable on this. She's still not amazing at it, but she has so much fun and it is fun to play with her now. I know that's a silly example but this is so true for your clients too.

I'm not saying they're like dogs, but what if they just don't know how to do what you're asking them to do because they've just never learned? So just consider that. Ask yourself if this is possible, if you're expecting them to have a skill that they don't have.

Okay, now we're going to shift gears to what to do when your client comes to calls and has nothing to coach on, but it's kind of the opposite situation where they're killing it. They're nailing it, they're hitting their goals, everything is going great. This is so fun to talk about in my opinion.

And number one, I feel so passionate about this. Do you remember when I did the episode a few weeks ago about awareness? So awareness isn't only important when things aren't going well. It's equally important when things are working. Really hear that.

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Awareness is so good when things are working. If you can take the time to help your clients see how their current thoughts and emotions and actions are creating their results, the results that they want, if you can take the time to do that, it will really help change things for them.

You are showing them why it's working. As a coach, I'm guessing you've probably seen this where you know that it probably won't always be working for them. At some point, they're going to come to a call and they're going to be like - there's just going to be a dip. Like it has been working and now it's not.

And when that happens, they now are armed with this information of how to get back to the part where it's working because you've really taken the time to explore with them how they created that. It's also so common for clients to think that when everything is going great, that it's a fluke.

They have no idea how they're creating it, they have no idea why it's happening, and this is how you show them it's not. It's like showing them the awareness that they are actually in charge of creating this.

Second thing you could do is spend some time exploring how creating the results that they want, so they're doing it, they're creating the results, they're making so much progress, show them how it's affecting other areas of their life.

So for example, let's say you have a client that has a goal to lose weight. And they're making such good progress and they're feeling great about it. Explore all the ways it's changing their day-to-day life. Because we all know, whatever the goal they're working on, so in this example weight loss, it's not just about the weight loss. There's so much more connected to it.

Have they maybe stopped obsessing over food? Do they just have so much more time and brain space because they don't think about it as often? Do they maybe feel healthier just walking up the stairs or walking into work every day?

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It's the small day to day things help them see them. Do they maybe have increased confidence at work? Or they're closer with their partner. Really show them that and let them bask in the accomplishment and see all the ways it's paying off, instead of just focusing on the one thing.

Number three, help them celebrate. I love this one so much and I love them all. I may have said that. Did I say on every one I love this so much? I may have. That's okay. I get very passionate about this.

In my case, when I used to have a full practice of one-on-one clients, I really started to notice that the people I tend to attract, which, no surprise because a lot of times you attract people like you, especially for one-on-one coaching when you're organic marketing, but they would be very hard on themselves and they love to be really good at things.

So they would always come with big goals. And they would always kind of have this head down, on to the next thing approach to life, approach to all their goals, and they would be pretty good at hitting the goals, at making this stuff happen. But what they wouldn't be great at is not putting so much pressure on themselves, not really slowing down and allowing themselves to see, oh my gosh, I am actually doing the thing and celebrating it.

So sometimes slowing them down and reminding them to celebrate the big and the small things, it just became so important in my practice. And when you have clients with these tendencies, even just asking the question, so how are you going to celebrate these wins can bring up a whole can of worms to coach on.

Okay number four, did you know there's so many books and journals out there that are full of questions and prompts? You could find some of these books and use them with your clients. Just have them handy so that when something like this happens, you have stuff to kind of fill the time in such a fun way.

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Obviously you can come up with your own questions. I just found that it was really fun to find some books that weren't just the questions in my head that were just a lot more creative maybe than what I would come up with. And of course, when you are walking them through the questions and really exploring what their answer might be, a lot of stuff will come up to coach on. And when it does, you are there as the coach to help them walk through it.

So just quickly, a couple that I have used in the past, and I've checked, they are still - these are on Amazon so you can find them there. But one that I use, which was really fun, I used it for myself, and then I started realizing wouldn't this be so fun to use with my clients. It's called Start Where You Are by Meera Patel.

And of course, when I looked this up to see if I could find it, I saw that she has some other really fun ones that I may or may not have ordered for some people for Christmas. So just in case you need to do a little shopping, it's called Start Where You Are and it's just some fun, really creative journal prompts that you could use with your clients that you could of course, take and alter them - make them work for you and your practice.

There's a series called 52 Lists where literally every page is a prompt and you write out a list of answers. So one of the examples is make a list of all the ways people that love you would describe you. I thought that was so fun. This is a great example of why it's such a good idea to do this with your clients because for some clients, this could be a really hard thing to answer. And so you can coach them on why. Why is that hard to say amazing things about yourself?

And then number five, maybe it's just time to reassess their goals or even set new ones. So maybe they've achieved the thing that they hired you for and you still have sessions left. So if that's the case, let's explore what's next. Or you can work on something else in their life that's completely unrelated to why they hired you.

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So one example might be what's the next level of the same goal? Maybe let's say your client hired you to heal after divorce, and after working together for a while, she feels like this is complete and she's so happy with her results. Maybe you just start exploring, what's the next thing? Doesn't even have to be immediate coaching on it, immediate moving there, but just helping her explore, what do you want to do next?

Does she want to not be scared of dating again maybe? Does she want to reconsider that cross-country move she never thought was possible? Maybe she just wants to learn how to enjoy the days when her ex has the kids and she's alone and bored. What is the next thing on the list and really help her just really explore all of the options, all of the places that you could go from there.

Okay, I know I've given you lots of options here today. But the biggest thing I hope you take away from this is it just doesn't have to be a problem. Because when you let go of that thought, when you fully commit to believing that this is just never a problem, it will start to be such a different experience for you. And what I will tell you is that in my experience, as a coach, but also as a client, sometimes these calls where your clients come with nothing specific to coach on, sometimes they turn out to be some of the best and most transformational calls.

So I would just spend a little bit of time exploring that. And last thing, if you have any questions like this that you would love answered, please email me at podcast@lindsaydotzlafoaching.com. See you later.

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. That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. see you next week.