

Ep #132: How Thought Models Get Messy



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With Your Host

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Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills*, episode 132.

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. So glad you're here today. I want to do just a little short episode about something pretty specific that hopefully will be really helpful to you. This is something we explore on occasion in some of my coaching spaces and I just wanted to put it out here just in case it feels useful.

So today I want to talk about kind of the coaching practice of focusing on our thoughts and our feelings, and really when it's a good idea to explore them one single thought or feeling at a time. When that's useful and when it isn't. Because sometimes it can be extremely useful, whether we're exploring it, I'm going to talk about it today through the lens of exploring it with our clients, but also with ourselves, right, in our self-coaching or just our self-exploring when we're coaching ourselves.

So, first, I'm going to tell you a little more about what I'm talking about. Then I'm going to give you some ways or times when I think it's useful to do this and some examples. And some times that I think it's not useful and some examples of that.

So, for a lot of you, if you have been to coaching schools, coach certifications, coach trainings, and this is many, many of them do this thing that I'm about to talk about. Or if you just maybe know of certain methods, even if you haven't been officially trained in it, but maybe you use it in your coaching, I want to talk about that today.

So a lot of schools, a lot of trainings or certifications teach some form of coaching that is a little bit like an equation. So, for example, for those of you that are familiar with The Life Coach School, they teach something called the model, right? Which is like there's a circumstance, you have a

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thought about the circumstance, you have a feeling. From that you take action, and that creates a result.

Now, I just used that one because I know it really well because I went to The Life Coach School. But most coach certifications or trainings or schools teach something very, very similar. And I know just from working with so many of my clients that they all, pretty much all, no matter where they were trained or where they learned to coach, they all use some kind of model like that when they're working with their clients, right? Some kind of thought model or feelings model.

And these tools are amazing. Nothing about this episode is me saying that you shouldn't be doing that, because all great tools, right? We need tools, there's a reason we have them. But sometimes where I see tools like this go wrong, where we're picking out one single thought or picking out one single feeling. It just gets a little messy, I think, when you compare that to the human experience, right?

Because as humans, we are rarely just having one thought, just repeating it over and over in our head. That's just not how our brains work. It's not how we operate. We also are rarely having just one emotion or feeling.

Now, sometimes we are, right? Sometimes, especially if you're really heavy in it you might feel a certain emotion for an extended period of time. But in general, when we're just going about our day our brains are kind of all over the place, right? We're talking to ourselves in our heads, most of us. I do know some people don't have a running dialogue in their head, which I think is fascinating.

If you don't know this, it's a thing. Definitely Google it because I think it's fascinating. I can't imagine there not being a running dialogue in my mind. Some days that sounds really nice. But most of us, we just have thoughts, right? Thoughts all day, every day.

We're like talking to ourselves, we're saying things in our head. And some of them are just passing and fleeting, a lot of them are. Probably most of

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them are. And some of them are a little more practiced, they are things that we think over and over, which I would then call beliefs, right?

To me, that's when a thought turns into a belief, is when it's one that you really can feel in your bones that you have just practiced, not necessarily on purpose, but you've just practiced in your mind over and over and over and over.

And I think feelings can be that way too. I think we can tend towards certain feelings, right? Like there are certain feelings that I don't experience that often and then other ones that I could say I'm very familiar with. If I started going down just a list of feelings right now, there would probably be ones that stood out to you that you're like, "Oh yeah, so familiar with that."

And then there would be other ones that you might even think like, "When was the last time I felt like that? Or how would that even feel to me? Is that positive or negative? What would my interpretation of that be? How would it feel in my body?" And you just wouldn't be as familiar with it.

Whereas I could hit on one that you might immediately just from your body's memory, right, you might just be able to easily access instantly, even if you're not even necessarily feeling that way right now.

So for a lot of the ways that we are taught to coach in most training programs, they give you some form of a thought model that's like you have one thought and one feeling. And this can be very useful, but I'm going to start with when I think this isn't useful, all right?

And to be clear, what I'm saying isn't useful is to think this is the only tool. We can only find one thought, and we're going to focus on that and dig into it. Here's when I think it's not useful, when it's just one of many, many thoughts. And I'm going to say thoughts but in, I think, all of these cases, you could probably replace that with feelings, right?

So when it's just one of many kinds of fleeting thoughts or feelings, a lot of places, a lot of trainings, what they'll do is have you write down all your thoughts, like list them all out. And then kind of like, okay, maybe you do

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that with your client. You have your client list all the thoughts, and they might be all over the place.

And a lot of coaches will ask me about this or come to me for help on this because they're like, okay, well, how do you know where to start when the thoughts are all over the place? And I think this is when it can be a little tricky to say, okay, let's examine this one thought or this one feeling. Because, and this kind of melds into my next one, your client might not fully believe that thought, right?

To just say like, okay, tell me all your thoughts about your relationship with your partner. And then they just start like, oh, I don't know, let me think. And then they just start kind of listing a bunch of things. Some of them they might feel more connected to than others. But also when you have them do that, they're just giving you a stream of consciousness, right?

And so this isn't a bad thing and sometimes you can just say, okay, let's just pick one thought and start there. And it just can be useful. But I think of it as useful when that can just lead to a bigger discussion or a bigger exploring. Not useful in a way that's like, oh, this one thought, and seeing what that creates in your life is going to kind of solve everything or get you on the right path.

Because a lot of clients will just give you thought after thought after thought, some of them might just create totally different feelings than others. And it might be all over the board. So when it's just one of many thoughts, or it's kind of like a passing or a fleeting thought and you don't really feel or your client doesn't really feel that connected to it, I think it can make the coaching feel a little disjointed or disconnected.

Another example would be when you don't really believe it in your body. Like when it doesn't feel like the truth. And this is very connected to those first two, right? When it's kind of just a fleeting thought and when you try to access on that you don't really believe it, right? One that you're like, yeah, I can definitely see that that's a thought and I could kind of let it go. I think

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sometimes we can do that, right? Like, oh, now that I can see it, I'm just able to not think that anymore, not believe that anymore.

But how you know it feels really true is when you can experience it in your body, right? When it's connected to a real feeling that you are experiencing right now, or that you have access to because you've practiced it so many times because you've had this thought over and over and it's a real belief that you have and you can experience it in your body. It's a lot more useful to explore things from that space, than just exploring the ones that are kind of all over.

And then the last one, which I've talked about a little bit on the podcast before. But when it really isn't useful, and I see this show up so often and I try to really break my clients of this, is when you as the coach start prioritizing finding the right equation. I'm going to say that like in air quotes. Finding the right equation over just exploring what's coming up for your clients.

So when you're using something like a thought model or any tool that is similar to that and you start prioritizing getting it right, right? Well, when I'm having, when your client is having this thought, what is the exact feeling that they're having? And when they're having only just that one singular thought and that one singular feeling, what are the actions that you take?

When you prioritize that over the exploration, and again, this is not saying you should never explore these things. Of course you should, these tools are amazing. But when you just prioritize getting it right.

The other thing that happens, I see this a lot with coaches, that can happen when you are in your head as the coach thinking I have to get this right. Like we have to get this correct thought model or this correct whatever the tool is that you're using over, like you're prioritizing that over what is actually coming up for your client in the moment.

It can take you out of the humaneness of the coaching, right? It can put you in your coach's brain trying to find the right answer. And I even see it, and this is, to me, where it really goes wrong, is where as the coach you might

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react, like when you find it, when you complete the equation, you might react with happiness even though your client might really be experiencing something heavy, right?

You can be like, “Oh, ha, ta-da, we did it. Here it is. Now we can see, now we can solve it,” right? But that can feel really weird to your client when they are really experiencing a real human moment and you’re in your head, I say it like doing some algebra, right? That just puts you in very different energetic planes as humans, and it can feel very discombobulating for the client.

And really for you as the coach too, right? Because if you’re thinking like, “Oh, this is great, we see it, we have it.” And then your client is maybe having lots of emotion come up and their level of clarity does not meet yours, it can feel very strange for both of you.

Okay, so those are just some ways to consider when maybe it isn’t useful. And something you could just do instead, which this could be probably a 10 podcast series, but just consider, like even just considering we’re not having this one singular thought or maybe we don’t need to explore this one that deeply if your client doesn’t feel that connected to it.

I’ll give you an example. I was recently doing some self-coaching and as I’m recording this, I’m in a launch right now. And I was doing some self-coaching and just kind of exploring. I don’t always sit down, I don’t every day, I know some of you do. I do not every day sit down and just write out all my thoughts.

To me, it gets very, I don’t know, confusing. It just feels like there’s a lot going on sometimes in my mind. And sometimes quieting my mind is better than ramping it up and exploring every single thought that comes up. But I was exploring some thoughts about my launch because I’m in a launch.

So I’ll use this as an example. When I just ask myself, “Okay, what are all my thoughts?” And I just allow my mind to go there, and these aren’t necessarily the thoughts that came up when I did this today. But I can just

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access these from launches in the past, they might be all over the place, right?

It might be like, well, it's not working. But also this one thing really worked. And I feel great about this result. But also, this one particular webinar I did didn't work. And nobody wants this thing. But also, it's the best offer ever. Right? I could just keep going. Like that's just the stream of consciousness of all the things.

And if I just tried to pick one of those, so if I just decide to pick no one wants this and really deeply explore that, I'm not going to feel very connected to it. I'm not going to see a lot of ways that that is really influencing how I'm showing up because I don't feel that connected to that thought.

Now, if that's a thought that I'm thinking every single day and it's just become a belief about my launch in general, that's really different. So that will move us into when it is useful to explore a singular thought or feeling. And, of course, the ways that this strategy is useful is basically just the opposite of when it's not useful, right?

So when it is useful. When it is a recurring thought that feels very heavy, that is probably more of what I would consider a belief, right? Like, this is a belief that I have, maybe about myself or about the world or about other people, or about something specific. And it's a thought that I notice or that you notice with your clients.

So I'm going to switch back to clients, that you notice that your clients say it a lot. And you as the coach can see that it's a thought, but you can tell that – And this kind of leads into the second way that it's useful, is when you can tell your client thinks, "Oh, this is like the truth of the universe." Right?

If we use the example I just used with the launch, if you're working with a client and they believe something like, no one wants this, but they say it all the time. And they really think it's true, right?

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So if I was working with a coach and every day I was telling her or telling them, “No one wants this thing. No one wants this thing. No one wants my offer.” And that was something that just came up every day all the time, but I’m still taking action. I’m still doing a launch, selling the thing with that thought.

So when your clients are doing this, this is a good time to really dig into it, right? Okay, no one wants this, let’s figure out how do you feel when you think that? And then, more importantly, when you’re thinking that and you’re feeling this way, what are all the actions you take? Let’s explore it and how are they influenced by that thought, right? How are all the actions influenced?

So some of the actions might be good, right? It might be like, oh, I’m writing all these sales emails. I’m coming up with ways to talk about it on Instagram differently than I have before. Or, you know, blah, blah, blah, all the actions, which can look like good actions to take, right?

Sometimes it can look like, oh yeah, of course, I want to take these actions, these are great. But when you’re taking an action, for example, like coming up with new ways to talk about this on Instagram, but your thought is, “No one wants this,” how is that affecting the ideas that you’re coming up with? Let’s dig into that.

That is much more useful than just, “Okay, here’s the thought. Here’s the feeling. Here are all the actions. Now you can just see, ta-da, you can just take different actions or have a different thought or whatever.”

The next time that it is really useful is when you’re in the moment of really deeply experiencing it, right? So whether that’s a thought or a feeling. So I’ll use a feeling for example. When, let’s say you are thinking about your relationship with your partner and you’re always just feeling defeated. Everything that happens, every interaction, you’re like, “That didn’t go the way I wanted it to go. This isn’t creating the results I want to create.” And you just are constantly feeling defeated.

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Okay, let's dig into that, right? When you're feeling defeated, even if there might be five thoughts creating this, and this is where maybe I sometimes explain things a little differently than some coaches. You can have a list of thoughts, and the overall feeling is I'm feeling defeated. Okay, when you're feeling that way, how are you showing up in your relationship? How are you showing up to the things that you're trying?

Just like the launch example I gave, tell me all the actions you're taking. And then when you're feeling defeated, what you're saying is most of the time, how is that influencing every single action, right? So the actions on paper might look good. It might be like, oh, I'm prioritizing conversations and I'm being more open about my feelings. And I'm marking time on my calendar to spend with my partner.

But then each of those actions you're taking, you're doing it while feeling defeated. How does that affect each of those things? When you're feeling that way, showing up for all the actions that you think are good actions to take, how does that feeling start affecting every one of those? And how is it showing up?

So I'll give you an example of this in my life. One thought that I recognized a year or two ago that I was having all of the time, constantly on repeat, it was just a belief, I could feel it in my bones. And it particularly came up in business situations. It was always some version of, "I'm so far behind." And it was just there, like the truth. It was just playing in the back of my mind all the time.

When I saw it, I brought it to the surface and I got lots of coaching on it. And I did some self-coaching on it, right? And I did all the things. I just really, really dug into it and explored it. It's so interesting, because when you just find something like that, that really is a deeply held belief or maybe just something that you've told yourself for years and years, you can explore it in different ways than you can just the thoughts that are kind of like fleeting and coming and going.

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So, for me, the thought, “I’m so far behind,” I really started exploring like, how was this useful? How has this been useful? Because there’s a reason we find thoughts like that and just hang on to them, right? So I could find so many examples, whether it’s education, school, college, work, any of it. The thought, “I’m so far behind,” I would use it to motivate myself, right? Like I’m behind, I better catch up. I’m behind, I better take all these actions.

And even though it felt terrible and it caused lots and lots of anxiety in my life, it did motivate me to create positive results. And when I say positive, I mean the results I was wanting to create, right? It motivated me to take action. But does it really matter if I’m feeling terrible the whole time because I’m telling myself I’m behind? Probably no, right? Because the whole reason we want to create certain results in our lives is because we want to feel a certain way.

So if you’re creating results that you want, or at least moving towards results you want but you’re still feeling terrible, this is a really good thing to examine. So when I noticed that and I noticed I was doing that in my business and I really started noticing all the ways that were showing up even when, again, I’m taking all these actions that on paper look like great actions to be taking. But then when I examine them through that lens of I’m so far behind, it was really interesting.

And then I was able to just really get to work. Like, okay, I see how that thought served me. What if it’s just not true at all? And I was able to just get to work and kind of poke holes in that belief, which is what I would suggest you do with your clients. When they have thoughts like this that they’ve maybe practiced their whole life, you can, one, explore how the thoughts have served them in the past.

To me that allows you to kind of show them that they can think that thought, right? Like, thank you, and maybe we’re done here. Maybe we want to find some different thoughts. You could help them see, just like I did with my thought, where it was like, “Oh, I can see how it served me. But I can also see how it’s really not serving me.”

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Because our brains really think like, “Oh, this thought is useful, because it keeps us moving forward. So I’m going to really hold on to it.” And you have to think about prying your fingers off like one at a time from the thought because once you can start to let go of it, and it still pops up, it’s not like, oh, it just disappeared altogether.

I still have it sometimes. But now I just recognize it. Oh, there it is. Okay, perfect. Let’s just keep going. I don’t need to believe that today. Are there any ways it is true? How are all the ways it’s not true? Let me just poke a hole in the story. And I don’t spend much time on it anymore. Now, when I noticed that I’m able to just kind of move forward and let it go because it doesn’t feel heavy anymore like it used to.

Okay, I hope that this was really helpful. I know this is something that creates a lot of confusion for coaches, especially newer coaches. And I hope this was really helpful. So I will see you back here, same time, same place next week. See you then. Bye.

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.