

Ep #134: What Is Peer Supervision?



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With Your Host

Lindsay Dotzlaf

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Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlafl and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 134.

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. I'm so happy you're here today. I want to share something with you just briefly about a book I've been reading, but it reminded me of something that I want to talk about. It reminded me of something that I haven't thought about in quite a while, but it's something that I actually do in my coaching spaces that I think is worth addressing.

And it's one of those things where I was reading a book, it's a fiction book, I'll tell you what it is in a second. But I was reading a book and they just briefly mentioned something and it just popped into my mind just some memories I have about when I was in school. When I was in psychology classes when I was doing research and working in the psychology department at the college I went to.

Just all these things started clicking into place and it made me really realize some of the reasons that I've made some of the decisions in my coaching spaces that I have. And I want to share them with you today because I think it'll be really helpful for you, whether it's in your spaces or with your clients, or even just the way you think about evaluating your own coaching and being an amazing coach for your clients.

So I'm reading this book called *The Silent Patient* and it's by Alex Michaelides or something like that. I apologize, Alex, I don't know how to say your last name. But I'm pretty sure that's his name, but if you're interested, just look it up, *The Silent Patient*, I'm sure you'll find it.

And it's a fiction book and – Oh, wait, actually, I want to pause. I'm actually not allowed to say I'm reading it, this is one of the biggest – You're going to laugh, this is how exciting my husband and I are. This is one of the biggest disagreements we have.

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I will say I'm reading a book and every time he will correct me and say, "No, you're listening to a book." And I'm like, "What is the difference? Just because I'm listening to it doesn't mean that I'm not reading it." But apparently to him, words matter. And I should correct myself, I'm not reading it, I'm listening to it. Or a better way maybe to put it, it is being read to me.

Okay, so I am being read this book, *The Silent Patient*. And in the book, by the way, I'm like three quarters of the way through. I would give it like an eight out of 10. I haven't finished it yet, so maybe it's a 10 out of 10, maybe it's a six out of 10. I feel like it depends on the ending. So if you rush to get it because you heard me talk about it, I cannot take credit for it being bad or amazing, because I don't know yet. Sometimes the endings make it all, right?

So in the book there is a psychologist and he works at a hospital or an institution where patients are coming in that have kind of gone through the court system. And maybe they've done something terrible, like murdered a family member, for example, in this book, if that tells you what kind of books I like to read.

It's called *The Silent Patient* because the woman the whole time doesn't speak at all. But he's determined that he's going to get her to speak or to figure out what happened. It's like a murder mystery or a psychological thriller, I don't know what you call it. And he has a session with her and then goes to his colleague or one of his peers and he says, "Hey, I need some supervision."

And it triggered a memory in me which is, and this is basically what I teach in my spaces and what we do in my spaces, particularly *The Coach Lab*, which is an element of peer supervision. And I had forgotten in psychology specifically what that term means. And it can kind of mean different things, but for the most part it doesn't mean what you think it means.

And one of the reasons I want to share this with you today is because I have so many people. So when I'm like hey, when I'm in a launch for *The*

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Coach Lab or when I'm selling any of the spaces that I have for clients to work with me, people will often ask me, "But will you review my coaching calls?" And I used to do this, but in The Coach Lab the answer is 100% no, I don't do that.

And I knew just personally because I have done it, because I've reviewed so many of them, and because I've been on the submitting end, like I have to submit coaching calls in spaces for certifications and trainings. And I just know it's not very effective, but I hadn't really spent a lot of time thinking about why.

And it's just all these – I heard him say the words and I immediately paused the book which was, again, being read to me. I paused the book and grabbed my notepad and just started scribbling notes because I remembered what peer supervision is in psychology isn't what we think it is in coaching. It's not what we think we want.

So a lot of coaches think, oh, if there's peer supervision, what that means is that someone's going to be supervising my coaching calls or be watching recordings and giving me feedback. What it actually is in the field of psychology, and this might be true for other spaces as well, I just don't have the knowledge of it like I do with psychology. But in psychology, what it means is after a session, so let's say I am your therapist, we have a session. After the session I go unpack the session with a colleague.

And what that might look like is – And of course within the constraints of privacy, right? But what it would look like is maybe if I'm feeling stuck or feeling like my client isn't moving forward, there could be a little bit of that, right? Like, here's what's kind of coming up. Here's what I tried. What do you think? What would you have tried? So that's one reason you might do it.

Another reason is to unpack some things you're feeling after a session, right? Particularly in therapy where lots of big emotions might be coming up, which can be true in coaching too, but especially in therapy where you're digging up a lot of – can possibly be, especially in this book that I'm

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listening to – possibly be digging up a lot of past trauma and big life events that a psychologist, a clinical psychologist is just going to listen and kind of hold that for you, right?

So unpacking it with a peer, AKA peer supervision, might look like really untangling what did the client actually say? What are your feelings? What were the client's feelings? How are the emotions getting mixed up and crossed over? Which belongs to you? Which belongs to the client?

There's a lot of, in the book they call it something like untangling those threads, right? Like in the session the threads might get a little bit wrapped together and afterwards you're going to work on untangling some of those threads. Really noticing, what of this is mine? What of this is the client's?

And then another reason you might do it is to just work on improving a skill, right? So like I'm practicing this very specific thing. Here's what I did, let me tell you about it. What do you think? What do you hear? And like asking for a very specific type of feedback.

So, to me, this really is the best way to improve your coaching, to just notice all the things that come up for you during a coaching session. And so that happened this morning, and then today I'm recording this on a Thursday, which is the day I have The Coach Lab calls. And today in particular was so fun.

It was like the universe just aligned perfectly for me because I had that realization and then I was coaching in The Coach Lab and every client today was like, "This thing happened in a session, let me unpack it." It was so fascinating. And we do that work a lot in The Coach Lab, and we do it in the community and on the calls, but it's not usually that specific for an entire call. And today it was and it just felt truly like the universe was handing me this gift of like, remember, this is what you're doing.

So how to think about that as a coach, and how to take this concept of peer supervision into improving your coaching, whether you do that in my space or somewhere else or with a group of peers, these are the purposes of it. And I want to tell you why I think it works and why I think, and this is just

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from my experience, why I think watching a coaching call or submitting a coaching call to be evaluated isn't actually as effective.

So in order to do that I will tell you, and when I first ran Coaching Masters, which is a mastermind, I would have my clients submit coaching calls. They had to submit, I think one coaching call or two coaching calls or something like that. And it was a recording and they had to turn it in and then I wanted them to tell me like, what do you think you did well? What maybe didn't go well or what didn't feel great? And what would you do moving forward?

And then I would watch the call or listen to the call, look at their feedback, see if I agreed and then add some of my own. And I would always encourage them to not submit the one that's like the perfect coaching, but one that you're like, "Oh, this one felt a little sticky," or whatever. Because the whole point is improvement, not just like, "Nice job, here are your gold stars."

But here's what I found, after hundreds of hours of watching these calls and or listening and my clients submitting calls, there were a few good things that came out of it like some clients really did embrace it and they took it very serious and they did submit calls that I was like, "Whoa, I feel like I could give some really incredible feedback for these sessions."

But for the most part, I would say that was like 10% of my clients. And I would say the other like 90%, no matter what I tried, no matter how I kind of changed it around, no matter what questions I asked them, a few things I would just notice would happen that I think made it just less effective.

So one, they would, because I was very clear that they had to get consent from their client, right? You can't just record a session and then send it for other people to listen to without letting your client know that it's happening. So some people didn't love that or just felt weird about it, or weird about asking their clients, or even had clients that would say I don't really want to do that.

So then what they would do instead is they would submit a peer coaching session, which was fine, but it was just different. A lot of times it wasn't

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coaching in their specific niche, it was maybe just like general coaching. And, of course, in a room full of coaches, a lot of them were coaching on business, coaching each other on their businesses, which wasn't their niche. And it just was a lot of like this is a lot of busy work for you to submit this thing that isn't the actual coaching that you usually do.

There's also something a little bit different when you're coaching another coach who isn't your client, who hasn't paid you money, who isn't at all invested in the process, versus a client out in the world who you are working with in your niche, you're very invested in their results, they are very invested in their results and the coaching is just a little different. So that was one thing.

Another thing I noticed is that I could tell sometimes it would affect the way the coach showed up. I could just tell because I'd interacted with them enough that on the calls they were nervous or they were, you know, even if it was with their regular clients, there was just a weird energy shift that happened because they knew, actually with them and or with sometimes the client.

Because if the client wasn't used to the session being recorded, then now there's this weird energy shift of, okay, now the session is being recorded. So the coach is aware of it, the client is aware of it, and the whole energy of everything just changes, right? So that was another thing.

And then a third thing is I could tell they were kind of on their best behavior. It's very similar to the last one I just said, kind of that energy shift, but they would be on their best behavior. Or I could see them second guessing things that they were going to say or phrasing things in ways that maybe they thought I thought they should say it. Just things like that. There were just weird things happening where I could just tell this is not 100% authentic to who they are as a coach.

And then from me being on the other side of that, like being the one who has to submit the coaching, I will admit that when I have done this in the past I have submitted calls, like I just know the process that I've submitted

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lots and lots of coaching calls. And I know in the past I have submitted calls that are either like older calls that I'm like, oh shoot, the deadline is coming, I have to submit a call. Let me just go to my log, pick a call and submit it.

Or I would, just like I mentioned with my clients, I would have peer coaching sessions, like with the people in the certification. And then I would submit those. There's just a lot of factors that would go into it. And what I think happens, like what the difference is, so those are the reasons, to me, that they don't work.

And I do want to be clear, I don't think that this is something that it's like, oh, this would never work, it's a bad idea. Don't do it. That is not the case. And sometimes really good things can come out of someone else watching your coaching, especially if they're willing to give you just really honest feedback.

So those are some of the reasons that I would say it's not as effective as something like peer supervision, right? Which is where you're not actually, someone isn't actually supervising you in the act of coaching, but you're talking about it after. You're unpacking.

And what I teach in The Coach Lab, and really we do this in all my spaces but especially in The Coach Lab for those foundational coaching skills, is that I teach them how to evaluate, I teach all my clients in there how to evaluate their calls. And I always suggest that if you want to record them, record them. If you want to watch them back, watch them back if that feels helpful.

But I actually think the most useful thing is to record your thoughts right after a coaching session, right? If you have the time to take a few minutes, especially if it felt like – Not every coaching session, but especially if it felt like a difficult session where you were like, this thing came up and I just don't know what to do about it. Or did I do it right? Or would I do it this way next time? Or just let me run this by someone.

I always say the best thing you can do, I think, is to capture in the moment how do you think it went? What went well? What didn't go well? What do

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you want to do differently next time? And then to bring that piece to get coached on, which is really what the peer supervision is that I'm talking about, right?

So the reason I think this works really well, one, is just you being you as the coach. There's no acting weird for the camera, or knowing it's recording, or knowing I'm going to be turning this in. There's no filtering. And it's with your real clients. Even if you're a brand new coach and you're just practicing and you just have free clients, this can be really useful.

I promise you, if you have learned to coach somewhere, if you have coaching and have learned some coaching skills, and hence even if you've just listened to this whole podcast, you have some coaching skills. Or if you're in The Coach Lab you know coaching skills. If you've been certified or trained as a coach anywhere, you have coaching skills, which means you can evaluate your own coaching.

You can also just evaluate how did you feel during the call? How did your client react during the call, right? There are ways to know, is this going well or is it not going well? Let me examine them.

So I want to talk about that specifically and under the umbrella of what happened today in The Coach Lab with all of the coaches bringing these questions about, hey, this thing, this very specific thing happened today or yesterday or last week in a client session, and I want to talk through it. I want to work through it before the next session.

Here's why that's so powerful. And it really hit me today and I felt so much gratitude for my clients. When I got off the call today I really sat for a minute and just let it kind of sink in and let it kind of settle in my body because what I noticed is that it takes so much shame. Shame, one of my least favorite feelings, right? It takes so much shame out of the coaching process as the coach.

And so often we're focused on our clients and what are they thinking, what are they feeling, what are they whatever. And we forget that also, as coaches we are human, who have completely normal human thoughts and

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reactions to situations, and feelings about things that our clients say to us. And sometimes we need a space to unpack all of that.

And I think that within The Coach Lab specifically, because we're working on foundational coaching skills, I think it is so normal for a coach to think I am doing this all wrong, or this doesn't happen for anyone else. So the most powerful thing that I see happening is it just normalizes it for everyone.

I realized that today as I was coaching some of my clients. Two or three of them, the very first thing I said to them before asking them questions, before coaching them, was something along the lines of, okay, I just want to take a second and acknowledge nothing has gone wrong that you're having these thoughts or these feelings. This is a totally safe space for you.

I didn't say that part, but I am thinking this is such a safe space that these clients have created that they can all just come and share the thoughts that we all have as coaches about our clients and about our coaching and about the results our clients are getting. And we just can lay them out there and say let's talk about it, let's just unpack it. With no judgment, no shame, like no need to feel shame because we're just human, right?

So one of my clients was telling me the story and she was like, "And I just felt so defensive." And then after she said that, she said, "And when I feel defensive, then I feel so guilty and I feel so bad because I'm not supposed to feel that way as a coach." I'm like, "Whoa, hold on. Let me just pause you right there. First of all, yes, you are. Why? Because you're human. And your client," I forget the exact situation in this one, but it was a client who was not happy about something.

Of course you feel that way, it means you care, right? Of course you don't want someone to say hey, I don't know if this is working or however a client would say it. Of course, so let's just acknowledge that, because then that takes away the reaction of just piling all the other things on top, right? Piling all the other, like the shame, the guilt, the whatever on top of the defensiveness. Let's just recognize it and then move on.

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That's going to be so much faster. Let's just solve this versus thinking, oh, well first I have to solve for the shame, and solve for the guilt, and solve for the whatever. No, actually you just get to be human. These are totally normal human responses. And every person reacts differently to these things, right?

So for some people the go-to might be anger, or defensiveness, or judgment, or sadness maybe, or inferiority or whatever, right? Each person could have a different go-to emotion in those situations. Or even confusion, right? Confusion as a coach, like and then I didn't know what to do or I didn't know what to say. And you can just look around and see everyone, because we do the calls where everyone is on the screen at the same time, which is so fun, like 50 people.

Some people have their screens off, but some people have them on. And you can just see people nodding. Like everyone is nodding, like, "Yes, I've totally been there." And in that moment I can see as the coach, oh, this is just normalizing this for everyone, which is so powerful.

And not normalizing it in a way that's like, oh, so then we just don't have to care. We just can be defensive on every call and that's fine. No, definitely not that, but just normalizing like, of course you feel that way. And now let's solve it. Because solving for the shame and the guilt and all of that is way different than just solving for the actual thing that's happening, which is way more important, right?

Okay, so this was something that just happened today. But I just had to share it with you because I think this is really powerful. If you are a coach, and you find yourself thinking, "I wish someone would just watch my coaching calls and just tell me what I'm doing wrong. Tell me what I'm doing right."

One thing that I thought of that I didn't have here in my notes that I think I forgot to leave out when I was evaluating a lot of coaching calls, one thing that's always missing when you're doing a one off, like let me evaluate your coaching is context. And even as a very experienced coach I had a hard

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time sometimes watching sessions and just kind of thinking, well, I don't know the context for this, right?

So I might think like, well, I would have asked this or maybe I would have gone in this direction. But what I don't have as the person just evaluating a call is the context of the previous 10 calls, 20 calls, however many calls, right?

So there's just something really powerful for you to develop that skill for yourself, which is why I teach it. I teach it in The Coach Lab and I just saw it in action today and it was so powerful. I also teach this at every level of, yes, you can come to me and ask me questions. And I will give a strategy, especially in The Coach Lab, I give a lot of strategy. There's tons of coaching that happens.

And I'm not just coaching and then like, okay, and then go figure out the strategy. I'll give some like, you could try this, or you could ask this, or whatever. But I don't do that until after we explore the coaching. Or I might say, go watch the decision making video or go watch this and then come back and see how that goes.

But just in general, I just wanted to tell you my message for you, for all coaches, is that you're a human, you get to be human. I've said this a million times on this podcast and I'm going to keep saying it because it's never not true.

You always get to be human. You always get to make mistakes. You always get to feel any emotion that comes up for you, none of them are bad. You always get to improve, work on improving your coaching without shame, without guilt, without blame, without judgment.

These things always get to be true for you, and there is no exception. So even if you're listening and you're like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," that's true for everyone. I hear this a lot from my clients like, well, I can see how that's true for everyone else. And I think that's so fascinating. If that's you, just think about that. How is it possibly true for every single other person and not for you? That's not even, it just can't happen. It can't be a thing, right?

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All right, I hope that this was really useful for you. I would love to hear what you think about this, what your experiences of this are. If you want to send me a message, send me an email, just let me know. I love hearing from you. I love hearing how these episodes resonate with you.

So tell me in the reviews if you want or get a hold of me somehow because it just really lights me up to come here and share these things with you that hopefully help your coaching feel even more amazing than it already does. So thank you so much for listening today. And I will see you again next time. Goodbye.

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.