

Ep #141: When Thought Work Isn't Enough



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lindsay Dotzlaf

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Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 141.

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 I want to bring you back to an oldie but goody episode that I think is really important. I think this is a topic that we don't talk about enough as coaches, especially if you consider yourself to be a mindset coach, which is the topic of really thinking about when our clients come to us with situations or circumstances that really do suck. I don't know how else to say it.

When they really are bad, right? When they are in situations that most people would agree with, that's no good. And I think as coaches sometimes we can get stuck in, well, obviously we can change our thoughts about anything, which is true and also sometimes not helpful. You've probably experienced this when coaching clients before.

I have a lot of clients who come to me who say things like but I feel like I'm kind of arguing with my client. Like this is a thought or this is not a thought, or this thing is true or not true, or whatever it is. And this episode, I think, really helps to know how to move forward and how to not have to think, oh, I need my client to change their thoughts, because sometimes we don't. Sometimes it's all about the awareness.

Sometimes a client gets to keep a thought, this situation sucks or I don't like it or I want out of this, or whatever their thoughts are. And I just want to revisit it today. So here we go, enjoy this week's episode.

Hey coach, I am so glad you're here today. I cannot wait to dive into today's topic. But one thing I want to say very quickly is stay tuned to the very end of this episode because there is a special treat for you. And I want you to listen because it is something that as you listen to it just, I cry.

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Listen, I cry every single time I listen to this and I think it is such an incredible testimony of the power of coaching. And I just want you all to know how powerful coaching is, how amazing it is, what an incredible tool it is, and that you have to keep going. You have to be an amazing coach, your clients need you, they are waiting. And hopefully just hearing what some of my clients have to say just about coaching in general will inspire you. So, let's dive in.

Hey coach, I'm so glad you're here today. So today I want to talk about something that I've been thinking a lot about and trying to figure out how to explain this, how to explain it to you because I get a lot of questions about this. So I'm going to kind of go through, like give you a very specific example today about how I think about coaching.

And I think this is going to be really helpful to help clear up a bunch, kind of like a bunch of different things. Things that I get questions about often, which are how do I know what question to ask? How do I know what to say to my client? How do I know what question to ask them?

And also the difference between having compassion in coaching, which I talk about a lot, especially in The Coach Lab. How my belief about coaching is that it is important to have compassion for our clients and their circumstances and the things in their life. And still be an amazing coach and be able to walk them through the things that they're going through and walk them out of it if that's what they want. And the difference between being in the pool versus having compassion.

So I'm going to give you an example of, I've created like a fake scenario that I'm going to share and we're going to use this as the example as we talk through all of this today.

The example I'm going to use, which I think is fairly benign, I don't think it should be very activating for many of you, but I do think we would all agree that this is a crappy situation. And so by using this example, this is also going to be a good example of how to coach someone when you believe

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that their circumstances are crappy, right? Like you're like, these circumstances suck, I agree with you.

So I want you to think about if a client came to you, and obviously this is kind of a silly example, but it works really well for what I want to walk through. So let's say a client comes to you and they're getting married tomorrow, okay? And they just checked the weather. The wedding is outside, they just checked the weather and tomorrow it is going to storm all day. It's going to be terrible weather, it looks really bad. And that's the situation, right?

And they're like, "What do I do?" And let's say in this example that the clients come to you, they're presenting you with the situation and they're pretty upset about it, right? They're like in the moment, pretty upset, maybe a little emotional about it. And I think we would all agree that that's not the best circumstance, right?

Of course, if you're having an outdoor wedding, most people probably want it to just be beautiful and be nice out and the weather to be perfect, right? Now, I'm sure that there are some humans that would say like, no, I love rain, I love storms, I planned it like this. But for most of us that wouldn't be the case. And I will say it actually did rain on my wedding day. Everything turned out fine, but I did have a little moment of panic about it.

So okay, when you think about this, I'm going to go through some different ways you can handle this and a few ways, a few things that we don't want to do, all right? So when you think about this, a client coming, it's raining, tomorrow it's supposed to rain all day and I'm getting married and it's outside.

So the first thing we want to do is just create awareness for where they are right now, right? And I've talked about this in some of the previous podcast episodes, but just really creating awareness. And in this case, what that might look like is just tell me all your thoughts about this right now.

What are you thinking? And more importantly, especially in this situation, maybe like how are you feeling? How are you feeling right now? Tell me

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everything. Because really just allowing them that space to say it, to say what they're thinking, to say how they're feeling, that's kind of the first step in helping them move through it.

This type of coaching is obviously when clients come to you with a problem. Not like, okay, I'm working on this goal and how do I get there? That might be a little bit different. This is like, I'm working on the goal, which in this case would be I'm getting married, right? And then, but something has gotten in the way, like something has happened. And so we want to create awareness, right?

How are you thinking? What are you thinking? How are you feeling about this right now? And really just honoring that feeling and allowing them to accept it, right? They might say like, well, I'm thinking this is complete bananas and I'm devastated, right? Like they might have different feelings, they might be angry, they might be whatever. Whatever comes up, just allowing space for that.

And when I talk about having compassion as a coach, one thing in this situation, my thought as the coach would be like, of course you are, this sucks, right? I also wouldn't like the situation. Now, that does not mean, and I'm sure you've heard this term before, that does not mean that I'm in the pool with them because I can still see, to me my definition of being in the pool is I can't see any way to walk out of the situation, or to get out of the situation or feel better about it at all, right?

So in the pool would be like, yeah, you're right, this is terrible and there's nothing we can do about it. We're just going to sit here in the terribleness. But in this case we want to create awareness. But then after we create awareness and we spend as much time as needed there like honoring whatever it is that they're feeling, helping them really accept that of course they feel that way and these are just human emotions and we're going to get through it.

But then the next phase is like, okay, how do we want to move forward, right? Like, yeah, it's going to suck that it's going to rain on your wedding

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day, or it sucks in this moment. How do we want to move forward? One of the, I think, really important things that you can explore with a client in a situation like this is let's just examine what do we have control over and what don't we have control over.

So that might look like let's make a list. What don't we have control over? We definitely don't have control over the weather. We don't have control over anything that has happened up until this point, right? So we don't have control over something that other people have done. Like maybe people have purchased plane tickets and hotel rooms and all of those things. We can't necessarily undo any of that.

But what do we have control over? And you can make a list of all of those things, right? Okay, we can make changes. We can move the wedding. We can cancel the wedding. Probably not what they would want to do, but I think it's important to just see here are all the options, here are all the things we have control over. We can go buy umbrellas, right?

It's like those are the things that we do have control over. Making it more comfortable. Can we move a venue? Like just digging in and really examining all of those things is really important.

So I think that in this case when a client comes to you with a problem like this, just sometimes just doing this step, just showing them what they have control over and what they don't have control over is so helpful because a lot of times what creates so much suffering for our clients is when they're thinking that they need to change things that they just can't change, that there truly is absolutely nothing they can do about it.

So then the next step would be, okay, how do we want to move forward? So now that we have a list of all the things we can control, are there changes we can make? How do we want to move forward?

And some of you right now might be thinking like, wait a minute, this is not what we're supposed to do. We are supposed to talk about their thoughts and their feelings. But sometimes, especially in a situation like this, it can

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be very useful to go straight to actions and then circle back to thoughts and feelings.

So what I mean by that is going straight to action as in just what do we want to do about this? What are all the options? Let's make a list of 100 options. What are all the ways we can handle this? And maybe we don't actually get to 100, right? Maybe you actually get to like 20. But just allowing, and I'm sure I've talked about this on here before because I do this a lot with my clients, or I used to anyway when I was a one on one coach, but just tell me, let's list all the ways.

What are all the ways that we can handle this? Some of them are going to be terrible ideas and we're definitely, like you're probably not going to do them, you're probably not going to use them. But let's just get your brain going on how we could handle it.

So that would be the next step, is just making a list. Here are all the options. Now, let's pick an option. What stands out to you? What is going to be what feels like the best option for you? Or at least let's narrow it down, right?

So maybe one of the options that they come up with is, okay, I'm going to call a, what would it be, like a tent company. Maybe they didn't have a tent planned for the wedding. So I'm going to call a tent company. I'm finding a tent. No matter what it takes, this is what's happening. We're going to have a tent, it's not going to be a problem, the wedding is going to be under the tent.

So let's say that's the option that they pick. Now you can circle back to the thoughts and the feelings, right? You could say, okay, so in order to take this action, what do you need to believe about the situation? And you can really dive in. It might not be just one thought, it might be a handful of thoughts, right?

They might need to believe that this is possible. They might need to believe that there's going to be a tent available. They might need to believe that their friends would love to help and they could call their friends and ask

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them to help call places. I could keep going, right? But it's just like, what do you need to believe in order to make this happen, in order to get it done?

And then when you believe that, when you believe all of these things that you just told me, that you can call your friends, that your friends want to help, that there's definitely a tent available, you're going to find one, how do you feel when you think those things?

So I know this was like very simplified, but that's just kind of walking you through a journey of what it could look like to coach someone when they come to you saying this thing has happened in my life and it's a problem. And you're like, yeah, it kind of is a problem, right? This is helping clients problem solve. And notice the way I was asking the questions and the way I was leading it. I'm always using the client's brain.

Now, let's say that a client, when we get to the part where I'm like, okay, let's make a list of all the things that we could do, all the options, what are they? And let's say that the client is just like, I just don't know. I don't know, I'm stuck.

Sometimes this happens. This has happened to me a lot actually. That's okay. You can say, you can offer, yeah, I'm sure that this feels very hard and very frustrating. It's going to get easier to come up with options if we just start coming up with some, even if they're terrible.

So you could even help them in that moment, right? You might say, "You could cancel the wedding, do you want to do that?" You could, and maybe don't ask, do you want to do that. But you could say, "Okay, here's an option, wedding is canceled. Here's another option, you move it to the courthouse. Here's another option, we find a church somewhere last minute." Right?

Like just really offering them some things, even if you know that they aren't going to want those options. But usually, it's kind of just like loosening the grip on like everything here is terrible, there's no way forward, right? Because at the end of the day if you're like, okay, are we still doing this?

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Are you still getting married tomorrow? If the answer is yes, the best possible thing you could do is just make a plan of how to move forward.

Now, I want to address a few things that are more along the lines of what we don't want to do. So that was a very simplified version of kind of how you can walk a client through a problem, through problem solving.

Now, here are a few things that you don't want to do. So same scenario, right, client comes to you, they're getting married tomorrow, it's supposed to storm all day, the weather is going to be terrible. One thing sometimes that I see coaches doing, and I know that this is because you've been taught this. You haven't been taught this in this exact way, but this is your interpretation of something you've been taught.

I see coaches sometimes saying, okay, all we have to do is change your thoughts about it, right? Like we can't change the weather, so we just have to change your thoughts. Now, if you think about the example I gave, that is what we did by the end of that session. But I didn't just start with, okay, so it's raining, who cares? Let's change your thoughts.

That is very different than what I said, right? And I think sometimes coaches get in their head about like, well, I don't even understand where I'm supposed to go from here because, what, they're just supposed to, I mean, I know the answer is they just have to change their thoughts, but how do I get them there by going through it the way I set it up the first part of the podcast, right?

So now that you know that, that we're not just going to say we just have to change your thoughts. Another version of that might look like, oh, we just have to think positively, right? We just have to think that this isn't a problem and why is it even a problem that it's going to rain on your wedding day? And if you just change your thoughts so that you feel good, everything will be great.

This is what sometimes people might refer to as toxic positivity, right? Because it's just bypassing all of the experience that the client is having, right? It's bypassing any of the awareness of like how are you feeling about

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this right now? And it's trying to skip straight to like, okay, let's just feel great.

And I know sometimes as coaches, we love it when our clients feel great and we love to just get to that part. But I think what happens when you go there too fast, when you go straight into that positivity of like, oh, let's just change your thoughts, it's going to feel great, I think it actually makes the client feel worse. It can have the opposite effect of what you're trying to do.

Another thing that we wouldn't want to do in this situation is try to convince the client that the thing that they're presenting isn't a problem, right? I see coaches do this sometimes where it's almost like this tug of war with a client of just trying to like force them to let go of the idea that rainstorms on your wedding day when you have an outside wedding is even a problem. Right? Like this isn't a problem, this is neutral.

This is the wrong way to use the word neutral. And I have an entire podcast about what neutrality means, but this is an excellent time, and this is why I used this example because, again, because I think most of us would be in agreement that this is a bad thing. And if someone, like if you were talking to a coach and they said, "Oh, who cares? That's fine." You would feel probably very frustrated.

Another thing that maybe we don't want to do that I've seen coaches do is they might start the coaching like I kind of went through earlier, and they might come up with solutions, right? Go straight to the actions, come up with some solutions, but then stop there. Instead of like, okay, now let's come up with what do we have to believe in order to make this happen?

It's like ending the session with your client on such a different note than when you explore those feelings and the thoughts and the beliefs, that's ending on such a different note than just like, okay, here's your task list, go do it. Because you want to check in with it, right?

If you've created an action plan and you don't check in with like, okay, well, how are you? What do we need to believe? How are we feeling about this

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now? If you don't do that check in, the client might get off of the session just being even more overwhelmed, even more feeling defeated.

One thing that has happened for me recently that is just so incredible is, and you know if you listen to the podcasts that I took some of my clients, a handful of my clients to Palm Springs. And while we were there we did some photos and we did some videos. And one of the things that we filmed is testimonials, they filmed testimonials working with me.

And I'm recently getting them back and watching them. And let me tell you, I just cry all of the tears. And I am going to be linking some up here in the podcast so you can hear some of them because they are very powerful, not just testaments to my coaching, which of course that is in there, but just testaments to coaching in general.

But I've been thinking about this a lot as I watch them. I think one reason, because in some of them they talk about some things that I know some of you would be like, "There's no way I could ever coach someone on that." And I think one reason that I can do it and that I can coach on very sensitive topics is because of this, what I'm explaining to you right now. I never, ever try to convince my clients that whatever they think is a problem isn't a problem. Because you don't have to.

In coaching you don't actually have to convince your client that they're coming to you and saying this thing has happened, it's a problem. You don't have to get to the point where you're just like, no it's not, everything's fine. And I think that that's so important, especially when coaching on sensitive topics.

This is where compassion comes in, where it's just so important to say like, yeah, this is hard. Or yes, this sounds terrible, right? I agree with you, I wouldn't want it to rain on my wedding day either. I think that there is a piece of coaching, or there is a part of being a coach where our jobs aren't just to help our clients reach their goals. Although, of course, that's a huge part of our job and one of the main things that we do.

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But part of doing that is helping our clients just accept their own humanity and have that self-compassion and love for themselves in any situation, and trust that they can handle it. And I think, as coaches, since that is one of our main jobs, when we just come in and shut a client down and say like, "Oh, this isn't a problem, we just need to change the way you're thinking." That can really create this not great relationship between the coach and the client.

It can create very much of, it's almost like using coaching against your client. Or against yourself if you're doing this in your own self-coaching. Everything I'm teaching right now, of course, you could use when just coaching yourself. You could take the framework that I just taught you and use that when you're just coaching yourself.

Jenifer Dent Brown: Somebody sent me this picture of me when I was in college. I was doing a corporate internship. I was in a very specific program where they took African American students and placed them in corporate settings. And I was the first one at this company, it was a pharmaceutical company in Pennsylvania. And they did an article in their corporate newsletter and one of the other interns found an old copy of it and he sent it to me.

And I didn't even recognize myself. And I could just look at the fear and like insecurity on my face. I was on the cover, right? It was me talking to my mentor and I just looked like a scared child in that picture. And I sent it to Lindsay and I was like, "This is why every time I see you, I just cry. Because that was who I was for so long."

It's not me anymore. But remembering who I was, it just, it's hard to even remember existing in that way for so long. And that one coaching relationship changed all of those years of insecurity, and overeating, and not me being authentically who I am. One coaching relationship changed all of that.

It's not just someone, it's Lindsay. It was Lindsay, because here she was, cute little white girl from Indiana, blonde hair. The representation of her was

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the person that I never was able to truly connect with, I felt like, as I was growing up. So for her just in her physical being to break down that barrier, that mental barrier that I had in my head that she wouldn't accept me, she doesn't accept me. And she did. Like over and over and over and over and over and over again.

That means everything because that also helped me step into being me authentically to connect with everyone. Versus like, well, I have to stay here and only coach Black people. I have to stay here and only coach the people who understand me and stay in this community. And that's not true, I have clients of all different shades, all different races, from all over the world.

And it's only because I have broken down that internal barrier within myself that allows me to energetically connect with them. And that's just something that I didn't even know I needed until I started coaching with Lindsay.

You should work with Lindsay because she is the best. She is the best coach. She studies coaching, she studies people, she's worked with all of the people. She's 100% non-judgmental and objective in her coaching. Her quiet style of coaching is unlike any I've ever experienced. Lindsay is kind of like that quiet storm that she asks just the right questions, but it's not in that harsh tone.

Because I work with Lindsay I am me. I am me. I am me fully 100% grounded in this world. And for so many years before I met Lindsay I wasn't me. I was trying to be somebody else, I was not myself. So she's given me permission to be myself.

Lindsay: So I know this was such a simple problem that I presented, but I hope it was really useful. And I would love to hear your feedback, let me know what you think. And I will talk to you next week. 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.