

**Ep #154: Are You People Pleasing your Clients?
With Sara Fisk**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lindsay Dotzlaf

Ep #154: Are You People Pleasing your Clients? With Sara Fisk

Hello, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills*, episode 154.

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 am so glad you're here today. First, one announcement before we dive in for this incredible episode I have planned for you. I want to be sure that you know about Coach Week, which is coming up October 23rd to 27th. It is a full week or full five days, business week I suppose, of coaching, workshopping, and teaching, learning, all of it for free. So I want you to join us.

This is the second annual. We did this last year, we had so much fun. And I want you to join us this year. We're going to be talking about all things coaching skill related. We're going to talk about the science of coaching, how to pick a niche, how to coach like you specifically. We're going to have a coach panel, an open coaching hour, a Q&A and so many more things.

So, register now. You'll get the full rundown when you register. The link is in the show notes, so go there now, click the link and get registered. Again, it's totally free. So you are going to be missing out if you don't join us. And there will be replays. This is, of course, the number one question I get.

There will be replays for every workshop. And there will be workshops kind of all throughout the days, different times of day for different time zones. And some of them you may not be able to make it to, so they will all be recorded and you will get your own portal login and have access to the recordings for a full two weeks.

So come join us even if you're busy that week, the recordings will be there for you. We can't wait to have you and have you hopefully join us for a lot of it live and get the learning and the coaching and the interacting and the community that you're looking for. So, do that. I will see you there.

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For today's podcast, I am so excited to tell you that my friend Sara Fisk is joining us to talk about people pleasing. And this is what Sara coaches her clients on and she is a people pleasing expert. And what I love about this recording is that we dig into people pleasing probably in a different way than what you normally hear it.

We talk a lot about it from the perspective of a coach people pleasing their client. And we know a lot about people pleasing, most of us do as coaches, and sometimes we coach our clients on them. And a lot of you have already learned a lot about that, so I really wanted to kind of approach it from a different angle.

And this podcast was supposed to come out weeks from now in November, but I decided to move it up and give it to you today because, for two reasons, actually. Sara is guest coaching in The Coach Lab, which is my lifetime access program that teaches foundational skills. She is teaching a workshop there this month.

So if you're listening in real time and you're not in The Coach Lab yet, first get in there so you can hear – Well, listen to today's episode and then if you decide you need to know more about this, get in there before Sara guest coaches. The workshops we do are the third Thursday of every month. So whatever that date is, that's when Sara will be in there coaching and you're going to want to be there.

But also I know a lot of my clients listen to this podcast as kind of an extension of what they're learning in The Coach Lab and in the certification. And if that's you and you're my client and you're listening, you want to be sure to be there for this workshop because it is going to be incredible. And I think what we talk about today in this podcast is going to give you a little taste, a little flavor of what the workshop is going to be.

So get in there, click the link, we'll put that in the show notes as well. So click the link, join us in The Coach Lab and I hope that you all really enjoy this conversation, I know I did. Here you go.

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Lindsay: Hello, hello. I am so happy you're here today. Tell everyone who you are and what you do.

Sara: I'm also super excited to be here. I'm Sara Bybee Fisk, I am one of Lindsay's dear friends. Can I say that, right, dear friends?

Lindsay: Yes.

Sara: And a fellow coach, I specialize in teaching women how to eliminate people pleasing, perfectionism and codependency. And yeah, this is going to be super fun.

Lindsay: Yeah, when we talked about doing this, I was like, you know, this is a topic I haven't really covered on the podcast. I think it comes up a lot. You and I kind of talked about this, I think it comes up a lot in coaching. Kind of as coaches, sometimes we like to people please our clients. And, of course, it is something that we sometimes coach our clients on, whether we call it people pleasing or not.

But I would love to start maybe with just your definition of people pleasing, or kind of how you describe what it is.

Sara: Such a good question.

Lindsay: It's probably like a 10 part answer.

Sara: Yeah, I mean, it shows up so differently for different people. But it's when people do not have the ability to prioritize their needs over the needs of others when it makes sense to do it. That's one way. It's when the fear of disappointing someone else keeps them from making decisions that are best for them.

When they're not able to take care of themselves because other people need things from them. When they find themselves having to lie a lot, because they think the truth will upset other people. Or they want to do something for themselves, but don't feel like they can, so they lie.

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It shows up in a lot of ways. And I think in some ways it's a badge of honor, right? And especially if you're a person who has been socialized as a woman you have a lot of programming around how you should prioritize others and their needs and wants and meet their expectations. And so I don't have a snappy definition, because it is such a complex just part of human life for a lot of different people.

But I definitely have symptoms and this is what your life feels like when you are in people pleasing.

Lindsay: Okay. So before we dive further into that, can you just give us a background? Because I think this story will tie a little bit into how you got here and why you're coaching on this. Just a little background of you and how you got into coaching and any pieces of it that you want to share.

Sara: Yeah. I have five kids, it's a three ring circus most of the time. And as they were getting older I just wanted to like, what am I going to do when I grow up kind of thing. I was a teacher before and I didn't want to go back to that. And so I was talking to a friend who's a therapist, and I wanted to be a marriage and family therapist. And she said, "Have you ever heard about life coaching?" I was like, I have no idea what that is.

She pointed me in the direction of Brooke Castillo's podcast and I started listening. Six months later I was in coach training and it felt like I had found this hidden playground of progress and opportunity and possibility. And I fell in love from the very beginning.

And after completing initial certification, back at that time kind of in terms of The Life Coach School the training program was a little different and you went into a different part of your training. And I just noticed how often I was thinking, "What do they think of me? Am I doing a good job? Do they think I'm a good coach? Did they like that? Was that right? Did I do that right?"

And all of it was over Zoom, of course, and so I just remember watching people's faces. Like, did they smile at me? Did I do a good job there? And it was just the way I thought about a lot of things. So it didn't really ping my

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radar like, hey, did you notice that? You're kind of watching other people for a lot of validation and feedback.

So fast forward a year and I started master coach training. And that's when it just really blew up because the master coach training program that I was in, also done by The Life Coach School, had a lot of projects and things to complete. And I just increasingly found myself, I felt like I was absolutely boxed in on all sides by my fear of what other people thought of me. Was I doing it right? Was it enough? I had to try harder. I had to do more. Did they like me? Did I pass that? What did they think of me?

And the first master coach training project I chose, which was a requirement, I chose almost exclusively because I thought they would like it, the people in charge of the training. And it failed spectacularly. Like in front of all of my peers one of the trainer coaches just looked into the camera and she was like, "Sara, what is going on here? What is happening?"

And if the earth could have opened and swallowed me up, I probably might have chosen that because I was embarrassed, I was ashamed. But I also was like, what is happening? I chose this so you would like me and it's not making you like me. What's going on here?

And so after crying myself to sleep and thinking about running away and changing my name and all those things I realized like, oh, this is people pleasing. And I came up with a different master coach training project that was to write a curriculum for me to stop people pleasing. It was really only intended in the beginning to help me. And after several iterations, I took some other people through it to complete my training.

And then I thought, oh, I like this. This really is the conversation I want to be having. And so ever since then it's just been the best, most meaningful, fun, quirky, weird, like all the good things that just make us humans, I think, touch our need to have community, love, connection, belonging, friendship. And that is so wrapped up with people pleasing. So I just love it.

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Lindsay: And what year was that, do you remember?

Sara: The curriculum was 2020.

Lindsay: Okay, so what would you say – I'm just curious. I hadn't planned to ask you this, but I actually didn't know that story. I don't think I knew how you chose your specific niche. And now I'm curious what has changed for you since then. Like how did that help, not just you as a coach, but just you as a human really working through that for yourself, like what has changed for you in your life?

Sara: I mean, it is not a stretch to say that while the core of me, my personality is the same, I am a different person. Some really life changing things would not have happened. I left the religious organization that I was raised in that is really central to my family culture. And was able to do it and disappoint the hell out of a lot of people over and over and over and over again. Have these conversations that I could have never imagined myself having to talk about boundaries and limitations and this is what I will be prioritizing and doing.

And at the same time I have been able to still maintain family relationships, because when you understand what people pleasing is about, which is connection, which is how am I going to be loved, how am I going to belong? I mean, I have so much compassion for this part of us.

And so when, for example, my parents are expressing disappointment in my decision and telling me I'm lost, I can say I understand why you think that. It makes sense to me, and I will not be changing my mind. And I will still be doing what I think is best and right for me.

And to find that place where I no longer feel like the puppet controlled by other people and what they want for me has been just a level of freedom and joy that is remarkable.

Lindsay: I love that, I'm just kind of like letting it sink in. So you and I are kind of, I would say new-ish friends.

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Sara: Yes.

Lindsay: Like within the last, I don't know, year or two we've become close. And so I guess I didn't know this. I knew that you had left your church, but in my mind, for some reason, I thought it was a long time ago.

Sara: No, it's not a stretch to say that there were seismic shifts in the course of 18 months, you know, two years, that some days it felt like the literal ground was shifting under my feet. But I always came back to a sense that, number one, I was going to be able to figure it out.

And number two, the thing that I will always be grateful to Brooke for is teaching me how to have my own back. And that essential skill of everybody else can be mad at me, everybody else can think I'm doing it wrong, but I will not ever be the person who beats myself up. And to have worked that out and to have that skill to go into all of those shifting changes in my life and with my family was such a gift.

Lindsay: I think I'm so intrigued by this because this reminds me so much of when I first hired a life coach. This is so much of the work that I did, and I made so many changes in my life. And I think one thing, I'll just say this and then you tell me what your opinion is on this or if you noticed the same thing.

But I think I was so afraid that when I started owning my truth and being honest with, not just myself but with everyone in my life, that people weren't going to love me anymore, right? That it was going to be like my husband was going to be mad, my parents were going to be mad. Very different circumstances than church, but just in general kind of uprooting the identity that I was putting out into the world.

And there were some rough patches for a minute. But what I know now is that I'm so, like I think it made the relationship so much stronger. Like now they know who I really am. They know the real me, they know I'm always open and honest, which is a shift. And I'm curious if you had that same experience,

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Sara: I think that sentence, “Will they still love me if I change these things,” is at the heart of so much of our fear. And rightly so because I hope we can get into how we are programmed to be people pleasers, but the way in which human life is organized, like we’re born into this group. And this group has these certain rules that either come from culture or religion or the way they were raised. There’s a lot of interesting variables.

And then we just think those rules are always going to be the way it is. And then we take on roles, like Lindsay is the peacemaker, Sara is the helper, and we get rewarded for keeping the rules and fulfilling those roles. Lindsay, you’re such a great kid, we love you so much. You’re so easy, which often translates to you never speak up and have a need, right?

Sara, you are so helpful. We can always count on you to come through for us, which means you are very willing to drop whatever you’re doing to come and help us with what we want. And so it gets us what we want: love, recognition, belonging, community, friends. And so when we rub up against our own needs like, but I don’t like dropping my things to come and help you every time. But if I don’t do it, will you still love me? I think it’s at the heart of everything.

And when we want to change the rules, I think it’s very normal for the people around us, even the people who love us to be like, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait, what’s happening? You’re changing, you’re doing this differently and you didn’t ask me, or you didn’t consult me, or you didn’t think about me.” And that’s a place where we need a lot of strength and support to be able to hold onto.

It’s like you’re discovering yourself for the first time. And how do I hold on to me, and still love you as we change the rules and change the roles together?

Lindsay: Yeah. Okay, so you said I hope we dive into this, so let’s just go back to that. How do you think it’s created? Where does it come from? Any piece of that that you want to dive into, let’s go there.

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Sara: Yes, when I saw this, it was like seeing the world through a completely new lens and it makes so much sense to me. So a baby comes into the world, whoever made all this, this is how they set it up. A baby comes into the world completely unable to take care of itself. It is utterly dependent on the big people around it. All it can do is cry.

And when it cries, someone comes, hopefully, and changes a diaper, gives it something to eat, puts it to sleep. And so the very first connection in a human brain is a cry, some kind of action with some kind of response. And so before a baby even understands that it is a separate entity from the big people around it, before it even understands who it is or what's going on, it learns I cry and someone comes, I cry and someone comes, hopefully, right, inattentive situations.

And we know that there are orphanages that are way outnumbered and babies literally stop crying when they realize their needs will not be responded to.

So as the baby gets older, it starts making connections between how it acts and the response that it gets. I know you have children, everybody listening maybe has a child, knows a child, has seen one on TV, right? And baby starts smiling and what do all the big people do? "Oh my gosh, she's smiling, look at her." And so the baby is like, "Oh, they like that." And the baby smiles bigger. And then Mom smiles bigger.

And then it begins this cycle of baby watching the big people for what they like. And then as it gets older, also for what they don't like. I remember the first time my daughter, you know. when babies are like, "Oh, I have hands" slapping me. And I would literally move her away from my body and I would say, "No, no." And my face would draw, my eyebrows would kind of pull down and that, she noticed that, right? And so after a while she stopped slapping me.

So I'm not even saying that this is good or bad, it's just the way it is. And as the baby is now a toddler, there just becomes more big people that this

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child is now watching for what do they like, how do I get rewarded? And what do they not like, what gets me punished? Which is usually separated or taken away from, like disconnected.

And it just comes up with a catalog of what I'm allowed to do, what gets rewarded, what gets me love belonging, hugs, kisses, snuggles. The good grade, what gets me the attaboy or attagirl and what doesn't. And then that's the root,

The human condition is literally the root of our people pleasing because we have to have big people to survive. And so the conclusion that this has led me to is, people pleasing is not bad.

I mean, you and I are here today because we were really good people pleasers. It's just that no one teaches us how to not people please when our priorities and desires shift and change. And when we, like we were saying before, when we want to have a more autonomous, authoritative life, nobody teaches us how to not people please. And that's where I come in.

Lindsay: And who do you do this work with, women? All women?

Sara: Yes. I mean, I'm not saying that men aren't people pleasers. I get lots of messages from men who listen to my podcasts. In broad terms humans socialized as women have more programming, the good girl programming around be nice, be kind, be accommodating. Don't rock the boat. Keep yourself small and make sure that everybody else likes you.

People socialized as boys seem to have more escape routes, right? Like boys will be boys and there's more toleration of them being naughty or undisciplined. I taught kindergarten, so I saw this like first hand play out in my class where boys, there was a lot of leeway given for rambunctiousness and naughtiness and rule breaking. And for girls, it was like you need to sit down and be good.

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And so those are very broad strokes, but patriarchy is certainly a contributor here. The way that our Western capitalist, patriarchal society just really pigeonholes women into these gender roles and we are supposed to fulfill them in a very specific way. Again, that's our role and we are rewarded. Oh, Lindsay is such a good mom. She is such a good wife. She's such a good daughter.

And so a lot of the rewards we get tend to be how we take care of our relationships to other people and how well we take care of others. And for men, the rewards are about who they are and what they accomplish, in broad terms.

Sara: Yes. I will never forget, as you were saying that I am just kind of laughing to myself thinking I have such a distinct memory. I think I was in maybe fifth grade and I was a very good, in quotes, kid and did everything that everyone wanted me to do.

And I have such a distinct memory of one time, the once in my whole school career that I got in trouble and didn't get to go to recess. I walked in, it was like every day or every week or something one teacher was assigned to stay in and the kids that got in trouble, they went to that classroom, right?

And I will never forget walking in, it was my math teacher and he was one of my favorite teachers. And I walked in and he looked at me and said, "I would never expect this from you." Right? And it was such a moment of like, oh my gosh, I'm terrible. I just had so much shame in that moment.

And as you were talking, it was just so funny because it was so distinct to me. And I can look back and know for certain that he did not say that to anyone else walking in the room. It was very clear, I was not supposed to be there. That was not my behavior. That was not the normal for me. And from that point on, I was like, oh, never again. I just remember having that thought, "Can't ever do that again. I let people down."

Sara: That's so fascinating, like the imprint on your psyche.

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Lindsay: Oh, it's so distinct. I mean, I can picture the room. I can picture everything. He was even like, you just come up here and sit by my desk. It was kind of like an eye roll. Like this is so silly after that, right? It was like do you want to help me grade papers or you can help me do something versus those kids, they're all troublemakers. Obviously you're not, so I'm not sure why you're here, let's just put you to work. Which, looking back, it's kind of funny, I guess.

Sara: Yeah, I think it also just kind of informs the confusion that some people around us have when we do break the rules or try to break out of a role, and I can really understand that. Like I have said, and I continue to say, that the only people who are consistently pushing back on you changing are the people who benefit from you staying in that old role.

But I think we also need to have, it just makes sense that even the people who love us and are close to us might have some like, wait, what's going on here? You seem to be changing. Of course, they will eventually come to a place where they support us and love us. And then there will be those people who really just want us to go back to doing it the old way because they liked us better that way.

But this is a complex part of human development and I'm just fascinated with how different people navigate it. And that at the heart of it, is learning to tolerate just a different kind of discomfort.

My second favorite thing to talk about is, it is uncomfortable either way. When you are stuck in people pleasing, when you are giving your time to things you don't really want to do, when you have a lot of resentful accommodation of other people where you're like smiling and nodding, "Oh, it's fine. No, no, I'm happy." And on the inside you are so filled with resentment and irritation.

That is one type of discomfort, but it's so familiar because we spend decades and decades and decades just with this part of the fabric of our

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lives, right? Isn't that like a fabric softener commercial or something?
Anyway.

Lindsay: It's definitely a commercial. It's like for cotton or something.

Sara: It's definitely a commercial, right? The fabric of our lives. Anyway, people pleasing becomes just part of the way we do things. And so it's a very known type of discomfort.

I remember all the time just thinking, ugh, I said yes to that thing and I'm just going to have to do it now. And just like, yeah, this is just the way life is. But in order to change our roles, in order to find new rules and break old ones, we have to tolerate. And by tolerate, I just mean allow ourselves to feel and negotiate a new relationship with some pretty interesting emotions: anxiety, fear, worry.

Like when you said, "Will they love me?" That is like primal human fear. And we have to learn how to negotiate a relationship with that fear in order to be able to feel it as we move through whatever changes we want to make.

Lindsay: And how do you, so one thing I see sometimes with my clients, they'll say to me things like, well, so then I just told her it was people pleasing. Not exactly that, but some form of that where my thought about that is always –

And maybe this is why I haven't specifically talked about people pleasing because I try to stay away from – I don't know what you would call this, but I'm going to almost call it like diagnosing our clients, right? Like, well, that is people pleasing, that is imposter syndrome, that is whatever. It feels almost like putting a diagnosis on someone.

And I think what you're saying is so different. Like you're using the term, but then I'm sure the coaching isn't just pointing out that someone is people pleasing.

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Sara: No, my coaching focuses 100% on what is that experience like for you? Because there's always tension and pressure and literally like two opposing forces in your body. Like, I know this person wants this for me, and I want this other thing. And I can feel those things in my body in tension with each other and in opposition to each other.

And the coaching is always about what are your reasons for doing what he wants? What are your reasons for doing what you want? Which ones do you like better, and why? Because here's the thing, people pleasing, if we just want to call it the act of doing things for other people that they want us to do, that is a part of healthy human relationships, right?

Lindsay: Yes, sometimes.

Sara: Well, if it's for reasons that you like that move the relationship forward. And, for example, if you and I are friends, I want to do things that are helpful to you.

Lindsay: Like when you walked through all the construction sites, I will never forget this. I was sick. I was not feeling well. We were traveling and you said, "Can I go to Starbucks and get you a medicine ball?" Which, listen, if you're listening and you don't know what that is, if you're sick, go get one. So good.

Sara: Immediately.

Lindsay: Yes, today or send someone to get it for you. Whatever you need to do, have it delivered to your house. Find one, trust me. That's like you were doing that for me.

Sara: Yeah.

Lindsay: But I assume because you wanted to.

Sara: I did, yeah. I was like I was going to go on a walk anyway. Lindsay is not able to leave the hotel room, she feels terrible. I want to do this.

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So again, to me, it is not about not ever people pleasing. It's knowing what are my reasons? Do I like them? Because honestly, sometimes there are things that come up, for example, in my relationship with my parents when it revolves around religion, when it just kind of doesn't matter to me to do it their way that's kind of tied up with some religion. It just doesn't matter.

I don't care enough about it to really insist, no, we have to do it my way. And I like my reasons. Like, I don't want to make this a big deal. It doesn't matter. But there are other things where it does really matter to me and I'm going to say something and I am going to be making my own decision.

So I don't think there is a way to just slap a label on something like that's people pleasing and have it be very constructive, because it's a deeply personal experience.

And the solution is to feel that deeply personal connection to yourself and to become really aware of the reasons why you're doing things. To honor deeply our human need for connection and our human needs to be autonomous and to be sovereign and to differentiate. And how can I have both of those in connected, loving relationships?

Lindsay: Yes. Well, just so you know, I will never forget the tea. It made my whole day. And it was actually kind of magic, it made me feel better.

Sara: They're amazing.

Lindsay: Okay, so from there let's move into how does this show up? How would you say it shows up? I know you have contract coached in other communities. You have, obviously, your own thriving coaching practice. And you just in general have coached lots of humans.

How do you think people pleasing shows up in coaching, like with the coach? Not just coaching our clients on people pleasing, but what are ways that you see it, whether it's for you or that you just know it comes up? I'm curious what your thoughts are about that.

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Sara; Probably the biggest thing that I see in working with coaches is that oftentimes we have some insight into what is going on for the client that is going to be hard for them to hear because it challenges a core belief that they have had about themselves. Or I mean, it's interesting, right? Because they've signed up to do this work with us, which means they have a willingness.

But sometimes the coach can see like, actually, you just have this belief that I don't think is serving you. I want to point it out or I want you to consider it, and we back off from that. We don't say something that we think will risk them liking us, because them liking us is attached to them paying us. And so it gets kind of bound up with are they going to like me? Are they going to continue to work with me? Are they going to continue to pay me? And so we soft pedal.

And I'm not saying, like I don't believe in the truth bomb way of coaching in that you shout something or give something, like there's a loving, kind, generous, gracious way to say, "Hey, I would like to offer you something. Are you open to hearing something?" And to ask for consent. And what I see is, you're really invested in making sure that your mother-in-law really likes you. And as long as you are invested more in her liking you, that's going to continue to create this cycle that you're in.

And offering something that could be potentially challenging is really hard when you're worried about being liked and maintaining the liking aspect of any relationship, right? That's one way that it shows up. Do you see that?

Lindsay: Oh, yeah. Yes, and I love that you brought that up because I was actually writing some emails this morning. And I was writing an email kind of describing myself as a coach. And I was trying to think how to say this particular thing, which someone gave me some feedback, very kind feedback, that was something like you're the toughest coach that doesn't feel tough at all. Like you're the toughest coach I've ever worked with.

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And I think what she meant was I'm just really good at pointing out things, but in a very gentle way where it doesn't feel like I'm attacking you with it or like, "Do you see this? Because this has to change." Which I think is very different than what you said, which is like with consent, offering it kindly and then allowing them –

I think then the second part of that that you touched on a little bit is then allowing them to take it or not, right? To like, yeah, let's explore that. Or, okay, maybe that's not for me today. Can we come back to it next time or whatever, however it lands.

Sara: Yeah, you just put in words the second way that I see it showing up in that when a client doesn't take the coaching, when the client doesn't agree with the coach, when the client doesn't change what the coach thinks needs to be changed, the coach takes it personally. The coach makes it mean something about them. And, I mean, that's not your job, right?

It's not your job to make them think what you want them to think. But there's a lot of coaches saying, my client is resistant to coaching, or my client won't do the work. I want to stab myself in the eye whenever I hear a coach talk about that because we just don't know. I mean, maybe they're paying you a lot of money to just not do the work, but I don't think that's it.

And so when coaches look at their clients as someone who should comply with what they coach them to do, I think that has to do with like, if they don't and you make it mean you're not a good coach, you have two options, either I'm not a good coach or they're a bad client. And neither one of those contribute to productive relationships where change can actually feel safe to do together.

Lindsay: Yes. Oh my gosh. I'm so glad you said that. This is something that comes up in The Coach Lab all the time, either in the form of my client is very resistant or, well, she's just a difficult client.

And what I always say is, okay, what if you're just not allowed to say that, like that's off the table. What else could it be? Or how else could you

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describe it, right? Because it just is so easy to be like, well, she's just resistant, so here we are.

Sara: Yeah.

Lindsay: Versus, well, what does that actually mean? Tell me how is she responding to what you're saying? Or what are you saying that's creating a resistance in her? I just think it's such an interesting thing to explore versus just kind of writing it off like, well, here we are, I guess it's just not going to work.

Sara: Yeah. I mean, I think it usually comes back to at the heart of every change we want to make, there is a difficult emotion that's new, that is scary, that we've never allowed. I mean, I had disappointed my parents by making some "bad," quote unquote, choices. But when I said to them I am leaving this religious tradition that you think is the ultimate decider of my eternal position with God and happiness, that was a different level of disappointment, right?

And so at the heart of having that conversation was really disappointing them for really the first time ever. And that was really, I had to do a lot of practicing and allowing myself to just know that they were going to be disappointed and sad and scared.

And so at the heart of every change, there is some emotion that needs our generosity and our graciousness. And when you get into condemning a client or judging a client because they won't do it, I think you miss an opportunity to help them create a new level of safety and of confidence for themselves.

Lindsay: Yes, totally. One thing I say sometimes is there are two types of difficult, I'm going to say difficult in quotes, difficult clients. One is the one that never asks to be coached, right? Like sometimes people come into The Coach Lab and they're like, I want coaching on... And they'll keep going. And the whole time I'm thinking it seems like a strange situation. And

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what I'll find out is like, oh, it's actually my partner or my sister or whatever that didn't sign up for coaching, right?

And so that's one. I'm like, no, we shouldn't be doing that. Don't coach that person, that's what's happening here. Of course, they're resistant or difficult. And then two, which is the main, usually this is the main one, it's just the client you don't know how to coach yet. And I think when you think about it that way, then you can solve for it instead of just like, well, that's just a difficult client and kind of write it off.

Because what my thought is, like if someone pays you for coaching, kind of like what you said, they want the result. They want to want to do the work and you just have to, like it's your job as a coach to find the way that it works for them.

Sara: I love that you said that because I think if we're going to go to the third thing I see in the coach/client relationship, it's that we are so good as humans at reading each other. Like our survival depends on it. And so if I am people pleasing my client, they know. They might not be able to identify it necessarily as people pleasing, but they know and I think it reduces their trust, their confidence, and thus their safety.

Lindsay: Oh, so interesting because guaranteed a lot of people probably think it's the opposite, right?

Sara: They always think it's the opposite.

Lindsay: Like if I people please, I can even think in my life like if I just do the things that the people in my life want me to do, that's going to create a different relationship and safety for them.

Sara: 100%.

Lindsay: And it's probably the same with clients.

Sara: It is. And I had a client, this was early, actually it was like a couple months of writing the curriculum for my master coach training project. And I

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had a client and I was just doing some kind of general coaching and she wanted my help building a coaching business. She was doing a webinar, she wanted me to come. I told her I would come if I was able. I was not able to come, so our next session she was really mad that I didn't come to her webinar.

And I felt the impulse to apologize and tell her that she could send me the recording and that I would take a look at it. And I'll just call her Jane. I was like, Jane, I'm really sorry that we've had what seems like a miscommunication here. And she was like, you know what, let's just get on to the coaching. I was like, I trust us to have this conversation. And I trust that we can each talk about what contributed to this.

And I was shaking on the inside because normally I would be like, okay, all right, what are we coaching on today? What can I help you with? What do you need from me? Like, how can I make up for this? But slowing it down and saying, this is absolutely not the option that my body wants me to take because I'm utterly shaking and terrified, it's so difficult for me to tolerate someone else being disappointed in me. But I think we'll be better for it.

And our coaching relationship was different after that. I felt like it was deeper, it was more full of trust and safety because I didn't just pretend and perform for her. And that's what I'm talking about, when coaches are doing a lot of pretending and performing for their clients there's a sense of that. And I think it does the opposite of what we hope it will do.

Lindsay: Yes. As you're describing it this way, I can think of so many examples of the ways that this shows up with clients. Just a hundred ways, but things like my client will come and they'll start talking and kind of telling a story. And then they'll go to the next thing and go to the next thing. And I just don't know what to do, right? And I'm like, well stop them first. Maybe, depending on the situation.

But I think it's that thought of like, I just have to follow wherever they go. And I think so much trust is created when you're very clear about why your

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client hired you and why they're there. And you, as the coach, have the confidence to say like, oh, wait, okay, hold on. I want to bring you back to this first thing that you said. Or I'm curious, why is this coming up where I thought we were coaching on this, but you're talking about your dog or whatever.

And I think just being able to have that confidence and just know I'm the coach, I'm going to say I'm in charge for lack of a better word, but more just like, I know what I'm doing. I know how to help my client. It sometimes does feel uncomfortable. It doesn't just always feel like rainbows and butterflies and every one is feeling great.

Sara: Yeah. I actually want to propose maybe a little bit of a difference, and I know you said in charge, I don't think you love those words.

Lindsay: Yeah, that's definitely not the word I'm looking for. But just in the moment that was how it came to my mind.

Sara: And yes, in that I have a set of skills that I can call on and use for your benefit. And I think a beautiful piece to add to that is more like a partnership model where it's like you hired me. Sometimes I'm going to interrupt you because I just don't want you to miss what you just said because I think it has some value. But if you want to keep going and you just want me to listen, that's an option as well.

But you and I are working on this together. I am not the boss of you. I am not the one who knows more than you. I have some skills that I can use to your benefit. And you and I together are going to figure out what that looks like, and that is more important to me than being the one who's in charge or being the one –

When I was going through master coach training, whenever I felt like I didn't know how to coach, I would teach, right? So I would default to like, well, let's talk about boundaries. A boundary is... And I had one of my master coach trainers, she would see my arm reach for my whiteboard.

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And she was like, you take that whiteboard out of the room. It's not allowed to be in your office anymore. You are not allowed to default to teaching. Because in my brain I was like, I've got to give value. I've got to give value. I've got to give value.

And in wanting to be perceived as a good coach who gave value, who always knew what to say, I would just fill the space with talking. And so when you have a sense of like, I'm a good coach. I have these skills. I can slow everything down, sometimes I'm going to interrupt you, sometimes I'm not. We're going to work out this relationship together, and sometimes it's going to be uncomfortable. And that's yes, yes, that's coaching.

Lindsay: Yes. Okay, for all of you that message me all the time or that ask for coaching on this, like the difference like why sometimes I teach, like why do I over teach? Just let this sink in and maybe consider that this is why. I never would have thought of that being related to people pleasing, but I can definitely see it when you describe it that way.

Sara: Yeah, it's like a hustling for value. It's hustling to be good or to be perceived as good. And it feels good to the coach because, especially when you're thinking, I have to know, I have to offer, I have to give, which is so people pleasing, right? Rather than my client is a wise person, and if I can just let their brain think for a minute. And if I can watch their face, and if I can trust both of us, it's going to work out.

Lindsay: Yes, I can see how it also offers immediate relief for a client who maybe is uncomfortable, right? So if I'm coaching you and there's lots of emotion coming up, that's okay. Like that's part of coaching. If I just slip right into teaching, then your brain would turn into like, okay, oh, good. Okay, now I'm a student. Like it just immediately releases the pressure of feeling any feelings. And it's really interesting to see it from that angle.

Okay. Is there anything else? So we're on a bit of a schedule, so I want to be sure that we get in anything else that you were hoping to talk about. I feel like we have time for one more thing.

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Sara: The other thing where I think it shows up, and it's fine if we're over a little bit, it's like worries or angstiness, anxiousness around honoring your contract, like your policies, your payment plans and rules. Like whenever clients are humans and they want to change their mind or want to do things differently, I'm not going to say 100% of the time that the coach always should.

I mean, first of all, you should be very, very clear in the beginning and upfront, which again, sometimes we're reticent to do because we're like, but what if they don't like it that my cancellation policy is 48 hours? Well, you need to decide for reasons that you like and then be very upfront about it. And then to hold, like you get to decide. Do I want to enforce this or not for reasons that you like. But whenever there's anxiousness and fear in there, that's something to take a look at.

And you and I both know as our businesses have grown, whatever is in there scales with your business.

Lindsay: Oh yeah, so fun.

Sara: So if you have trouble enforcing a payment plan with one person, what's going to happen when you have 10 people, or 100 people or 1,000 people in your program? It's going to just be the same problem, but bigger. And so that's another place where I see it showing up.

And then just the last one that was on my list about this is, oftentimes as the coach, I think we are so concerned about doing a good job and listening to the client, that sometimes we're not aware that clients please the coach oftentimes. I mean, they're humans, too, and they want to give us the right answer. They want to feel like they're doing a good job. That is just so human.

And so to slow it down and to teach the client to check in with themselves. Okay, you just said that. I just want you to take a minute, what's the feeling in your body when you give me that answer? Is it congruence? Is it like, yes? Is it something else? And to just teach the client on purpose, this is

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going to come up, you are going to want to give me the right answer because it is just what humans do.

And so I have a process in my coaching for just checking in and for trying to reconnect you to your own internal authority as the ultimate check on the things that you say and do. And I have nothing to do with that. That is you. And that is one of the gifts that you will develop in our coaching time together that you will take with you and have for the rest of your life.

Lindsay: That's a really good one. I am glad you shared that. And I can think of so many times that this has shown up for my clients, or even I can think of myself when I was – I mean, I'm sure I probably still do it now. But especially when I was a one-on-one coach, when I would have clients and I would think like this is very strange. It's like every time they come to the call and they're kind of just reporting back all this amazing progress.

And then that's kind of like it. They're like, ta-da, here's the list of all the things. And it took me a bit to realize, whoa, this isn't actually useful. Like, okay, yes, let's celebrate all of these. This is amazing. But looking to bring them back to what's the goal? What are we working towards? Why did you hire me?

Because I think sometimes clients that really love that people pleasing, love to be told they're doing a good job, it can be hard for them to come to a call and say like, okay, here are the things I worked on. And here's what felt really hard or here's what I didn't do at all and here's why, or just to dig into that side of it. And I think that that's a very specific type of client.

So just for anyone listening, if you have clients like that, just know to just be aware. Oh, of course they want to make you happy. You're the coach, they want to report back and be like, I did all the things just like you said.

Sara: Yeah. And even beyond that, like here's where I disagree with you, coach. Here's where I don't think that's valuable for me. As a contract coach, I would evaluate other people's coaching when they were coaching, you know, they were going to get better, right? And I would see the coach

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say, oh, this is what's happening for you, right? Like, this is what you're describing.

Lindsay: And then there's the awkward pause until the client is like, uh-huh.

Sara: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's what it is. That's what it is. And again, some of our hierarchical-ness as humans is baked into this where if I'm the coach, I have this automatic assignation of authority as the one who knows. And so I think keeping an eye on that, and we were talking about like the partnership.

But for a client to say, no, that's not what's going on for me, sometimes clients are not yet capable of that. And so they will just take your diagnosis. And where it will show up is you will notice they're not making progress, right? Or you're just kind of rehashing the same thing over and over.

And I get it, as coaches we want to be the ones who help and who offer value. But even our wanting to be that person can kind of actually ingrain people pleasing into the relationship unknowingly because the client is now reliant on you to tell them what's going on for them. And they're just going to take what you say because you're the authority, and yet it doesn't actually make the difference.

And then here's the ultimate negative outcome of that, is that they don't get a change, a result, a transformation. They don't become your client anymore and they either blame themselves, oftentimes they're like, it's something extra special, super broken about me. Or they think coaching doesn't work.

Lindsay: Yeah, it almost reinforces the thoughts they maybe had about themselves in the beginning if something wasn't working. Like, oh yeah, well, now it's obvious that it is just me.

Sara: Yeah, yeah. Which doesn't serve anyone because we all are in this as coaches because we love humans and transformation. And we believe in our ability to change and to create more of what we want, and to have

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less of what we don't want. And people pleasing, if it is responsive and reciprocal in relationships, meaning it's tied to like do I like my reasons, is this helpful?

Like, I have clients who break my rescheduling, right? They're like, I'm so sorry, this happened. I'm like, you know what? It is fine. Because I actually truly do not care and it's not hard for me to give that to them. Could that be titled as people pleasing? Sure, but my internal experience is one of generosity and graciousness and they accommodate me sometimes when I have unexpected human things happen.

So that is not the kind of people pleasing that we're talking about that is toxic and kind of gets in relationships and mucks things up. But, first of all, I think if you're going to make any progress with this, you have to understand what people pleasing is like for you and get really good at sleuthing that out for you and understand your ability to tolerate and accommodate and allow negative emotions for you, because then that's the skill that you have to teach your clients.

We're just going to say and then it's not theoretical anymore. It's like, you know what? I'm a human who deals with this too.

Lindsay: Yeah. I think a good example, just to build on what you just said, the example of the scheduling, because that's how I was as a one on one coach, very flexible, very whatever. But I think the difference is maybe at some point you have a client who starts canceling every call, always rescheduling.

You know, a six month coaching package turns into a 12 month coaching package, like whatever is happening and it really doesn't work for you as the coach. Maybe all your slots are full and now it's like taking up a slot for someone else or for so many reasons it just isn't working.

And now you don't say anything. Instead of just like, hey, I noticed. Like instead of just bringing it up, right, which can be done in such a loving, beautiful way, without just like, well, my contract says, right? But I think

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that's the distinction, is at some point it could turn into an unhealthy situation or relationship with your client that now you are people pleasing.

But I think that's the line, right? It's like, just saying, yes, of course, you can reschedule because I'm flexible today, versus you've been rescheduling for six months, let's dig into what's happening here.

Sara: And I love that you said that conversation can be had in such a loving, beautiful way. I think the prerequisite to that is understanding the tension in your own body about these new uncomfortable emotions and how I allow it, because then I'm not the prisoner of those emotions myself. I can hold them. I can recognize them. I can feel them.

And I can say, hey, I want to have this conversation with you because I think it will be beneficial for us. I can hold my own discomfort in a loving way and have the conversation at the same time. Because when we're not able to do that we are just shut down by so many of those negative emotions that we don't know how to allow ourselves to have.

Lindsay: I love this so much. Thank you. Thank you for being here today. I think this is so fun. And my clients are the luckiest because you, I don't know if this is coming out before or after, but at some point soon you are coaching in The Coach Lab as a guest coach on this very topic doing a workshop and they're going to be so happy. I can already tell just from what we've talked about today, they're going to learn so much goodness from you.

Sara: Well, thank you. I'm so excited, it is one of the most transformative subjects that I think deserves our time and attention. I'm so thrilled and excited for it. So tell them, anyone that's listening, if they want to find you where do they do that? How do they connect with you?

Sara: My website is sarafisk.coach, S-A-R-A-F-I-S-K.coach, it is a website URL. And Instagram, Sara Fisk Coach there and yeah, come find me. I would love to hear about how people pleasing shows up for you and how I might be able to help.

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Lindsay: And we will put all those links in the show notes as well. So if anyone's driving or showering or whatever they're doing while listening to a podcast, just go to the show notes after, you will find all of the links. I'm so grateful for you being here. This was incredible and I can't wait to do it again someday.

Sara: Me too. Thanks, Lindsay.

Lindsay: Yeah.

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.