

# Ep #158: Coaching Integrity: How to Decide What It Means to You



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**With Your Host**

**Lindsay Dotzlaf**

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## **Ep #158: Coaching Integrity: How to Decide What It Means to You**

Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 158.

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 happy you're here today. I want to talk about something this week that came up over the last week. As I'm recording this, last week I hosted something called Coach Week. A lot of you were probably there and participated. If you were, we had so much fun, right? Or at least I did. I know a lot of you did. So I'm so glad that you could participate. I know a lot of you then also joined us in The Coach Lab and I'm just so excited to welcome you and to have you there.

If you were there for Coach Week, you may have seen this come up a couple times. And I just took note of it as it was coming up during the week because it was something that just stood out to me as like, ooh, I must record a podcast talking about this and sharing just some things that I mentioned during Coach Week that people were surprised by or kind of like, oh my gosh, I never thought about it like that, or whatever.

So it feels kind of like, I don't know, maybe obvious to me. Not obvious in a way that everyone should know, just in a way that it's like I haven't really put a lot of time into thinking about teaching this. But it became very apparent during Coach Week, during some of the workshops and some of the open coaching, that it just needs to be said, it needs to be put out there. So that's what I'm doing today.

And the topic that I'm going to be talking about today is integrity. What it means to have integrity as a coach. What integrity is. And also kind of how some of you are using it against yourself, like using the concept of integrity against yourself. So let's just dive in.

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So my first thought, I've done this before, my first thought is like, well, let me Google the definition of integrity. And so I did and, of course, lots of different options came up. But the one that stood out to me for the definition of kind of like a person that's in integrity, what does that mean? What it said is you live in accordance to your deepest values, you're honest with everyone, and you always keep your word.

So that was the closest, I would say, to kind of how I think about integrity as a coach. And it's a word, really, that gets kind of thrown around a lot in the industry and it can mean different things to different people. Sometimes I see people use it in a way that doesn't align with how I think about it, and so I think it can be kind of personal, right?

So what I want you to do today is to listen to this episode and to just think about, like, what is your definition of integrity as a coach? How does it show up for you? How do you want it to show up for you? And what do you want it personally to look like for you in your coaching and in your coaching business?

So here are a couple of things that I will say, I'm just going to go through. I made a list of things that I think integrity isn't or ways that coaches are using the word integrity against themselves, or even sometimes against other coaches or other people. And I just want to share some of my beliefs around this, just in case they're useful, all right?

So one thing, this is one thing that came up during Coach Week and that I coached someone on. And she was really surprised, I think it was she, I can't remember. Whoever it was, they were very surprised, I think, by my answer. And one thing that they said is to be in integrity, it feels like I have to be sharing everything all the time.

And so what I said about that is, first of all, that's not true, right? Just because you're a coach, just because you may even be building a business using social media and maybe using yourself as the face of your business, the face of your brand, it doesn't mean that every single part of your life is

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open for sharing always, right? Like that everyone who works with you, everyone that follows you, everyone that is just paying attention to what you're doing needs to know every single part of your life at all times in order for you to be an integrity.

Now the definition did say that you're open and honest, right? Which to me, this is the most important piece of being in integrity when I think about myself and how I show up in the world as a coach. When I think about integrity, one of the biggest things is that I'm just open and honest with everything I do.

But notice open and honest doesn't mean, and so that means I must share every single second of my life. All the hard things that I'm going through, all the hard things that I ever have gone through, every single thing that I've used coaching for with myself, right? It doesn't mean that. It just means with what I'm offering, with what I'm coaching, am I open and honest with the people that work with me and the people that are following me and the people that are thinking of working with me?

And so one example of this, I don't remember the exact example from Coach Week, but one example would be let's say you're going through something really hard in your life, right? Like you just have a situation or a circumstance in your life that we would just all agree is hard. And it's taking up some of your time, some of your personal time, it's where a lot of your time and attention are going. And it feels very personal to you, right?

Maybe it's like a family member is sick, or you are sick, or you are having relationship troubles with your partner, or anything like that that just feels sensitive, right? And you're in it and it feels sensitive and maybe it feels heavy. Sometimes coaches think if I'm not putting this all out there, if I'm not sharing every aspect of myself with people watching or people paying attention, then I'm not in integrity.

And I just want to offer you that that is 100% not true. Just because you're a coach doesn't mean that everybody needs to know all of your business.

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You get to keep some things just for you. You also get to decide if you want to ever share them, right? Like for some of you listening, and for myself included, there are things that have happened in my past, even things that I've used coaching personally to help with, right?

Things that I've had coaching on. Things that I have coached myself on and that I've never shared, that you all listening, unless you know me personally, that you just don't know about me. Part of it is my childhood, things that I went through growing up, just things like that.

You don't hear me talking about those things often, but they are things that I have taken to therapy, that I have brought up in coaching on occasion, right? Just like very specific things. But it doesn't mean that I have to get on here and tell you, every single one of you every part of my story. Every human gets to decide how much we want to share, how much we don't want to share and that has nothing to do with your coaching.

The second kind of part of that and to build on that is sometimes people think, okay, well, if I'm going through something in my life – This is something I coach on a lot. If I'm going through something in my life I, obviously, because I'm a coach, have to use coaching on it immediately in order for me to be in integrity, right? Because I have these tools, because I have this training, because I know all of these coaches, I either need to hire someone immediately to help me work through this, or I need to use my own tools on myself always.

I want to say that also, that's also not true. Sometimes, now I do think as coaches, we are lucky to have the tools that we have, right? We have created that for ourselves. We have tools that we can use at our disposal when we want to. But that doesn't mean that we're not human. It doesn't mean that sometimes we don't just sit right where we are and say this situation sucks, I don't like it. Right?

It doesn't mean that we never complain. Or that we don't have bad days. Or that when something really bad happens, we have to move through it

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and get on the other side of it as quickly as possible, just because we're coaches and we have those tools. I promise you, I know some of you need to hear this today, so just let it sink in. It doesn't mean you have to stop everything you're doing and use your tools immediately to get on the other side of things. That is just not how being human works, right? Sometimes this even shows up with our clients.

Sometimes they come and something big has just happened. It feels really heavy. It feels, you know, they show up and they're just like, I don't even know what I want today. I don't know if I want coaching on this. And I think it's our job as coaches to sometimes say, that's okay, what would help you today? We don't have to coach on this, right? Like, I know it feels really heavy, maybe something we can do is just learn how to care for ourselves through the heaviness, right?

Like learn how to sit in the heaviness and be okay, or find the comfort we need, find the support we need. There are so many options, it doesn't always have to be the very first answer for every single thing that happens to you is coaching. And it doesn't make you out of integrity to think that way, right? To not immediately double down on coaching tools, when maybe just as a human you aren't ready for that yet.

The next one is sometimes I think that some of you think to be in integrity, you can only coach on things that you have specifically been through yourself, right? So every specific circumstance that your clients might bring to you, the only way you can be good at coaching them or be in integrity is if you have been in that exact situation yourself and you have coached yourself out of it.

Again, totally not true, right? Think about a physician, or a physical therapist, or there are so many others, or a teacher. I could come up with so many different examples. But being a coach is just your profession, right? It does mean you have tools that you can use, absolutely. It doesn't mean that, hopefully, when things come up for you that you have those tools at your disposal when you're ready to use them.

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But it doesn't mean that you can only use those tools with your clients if you can totally relate to what they're going through. Sometimes I actually think some really powerful coaching can come out of you coaching someone on a situation that you have never been in. It helps you just be really neutral and not have lots of opinions or not be sucked right into kind of like the big drama of the situation.

So just consider this if this comes up for you, right? If you're like, well, I mean, I couldn't possibly coach on that because I've never been there. No, there might be situations that you think, "I don't have tools to coach on this," totally different. Like that could be true sometimes, right?

Sometimes there are situations that call for different styles of coaching or call for different tools that you may not have. That, to me, knowing what tools you have and what you don't, that is totally being in integrity as a coach. But that doesn't mean that, like that is very different than thinking I had to have been in the situation before in order to coach on something.

Now, to kind of build on that, one situation where I see coaches meet what I would consider kind of a coach being out of integrity is when a client comes to you, they bring up something that you've never been through. And instead of just relying on your coaching tools, you immediately think like, oh no, I need to help them solve this. I need to help them.

I mean, of course, we're going to help them solve it, if that's what they want. But I need to give them a strategy, right? I need to give them steps like one through 10 of how to get through this situation. And because I've never been in this situation, I don't know what those steps are. And so then I know, I know what some of you do because you've told me and it's totally fine. But listen, we're not going to shame.

There's no shame in this, but maybe just think about not doing it anymore. I know what some of you do, then you'll go to Google and you'll be like, "How do we solve this problem? How do we do this thing?" And there's nothing wrong with Googling, right? But your clients could also Google.



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Where it becomes a problem is if you pretend like you are an expert at the thing, right? Instead of your client coming to you, telling you about the situation and you saying, I don't actually know how to solve this, but let's talk about it. I can definitely help you make a plan. We can definitely decide together how you want to move forward, right? I can help you explore all of the options.

Like there are so many ways that you can help a client that's totally in integrity with who you are and what you do, that are very different than let me go Google or read a book or whatever, like find this training on this specific thing so that then I can come back and be an expert in this area. Because being an expert, as most of us know, isn't just learning something and then just knowing it, just like memorizing it and then teaching it to our clients.

If you're really an expert at something, you've studied it, you have practiced it over and over and over. You have evaluated. You've said, how can I be better at this? What's working? What's not working? Like there are so many steps to being an expert that isn't just like, well, I looked this up on Google, I memorized it or printed it off or saved it, bookmarked it, whatever. And now I'm just going to go share it with my clients like I'm the expert.

So just take note, if that's you, if you're doing that, just question why, right? To me, when I see coaches who come to me with this and who ask for coaching on it, what's usually happening is they get to this place where they forget that the coaching is enough, right? They're thinking like the coaching is not enough. I need to look like an expert at everything. And that just is 100% not true. Can you imagine having to be an expert at every single thing that a client could possibly bring you?

When I was a new coach, when I was in the first, I don't know, first few years of my business I was a general life coach. There were so many things I coached on that I had never been through, right? I had clients who were separating from their spouse, from their partner. I had clients who



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were taking care of parents in their home. I had clients, I mean, just I don't know, I could keep going, right?

I was even coaching clients who, in the beginning none of my clients were coaches. But I was coaching other business owners, and some of them were doing Google ads and strategic things like that. And they would always ask me, like can you coach me on this? And I would just be so honest. And this, to me, is the open honesty that I'm talking about of being in integrity.

I would say, well, I have never done it, so I can't give you strategy. I'm happy to help you. Like if you find a strategy that you think will work that you want to use, I'm happy to help you make decisions. I'm happy to help you move through it. I'm happy to help you with all of it, except coming up with the actual strategy, right? I'm happy to question your thinking around it, to explore how you are feeling about it, all of that. But, to me, that's what creates so much respect with your clients and with potential clients.

I know for sure that I signed, in the beginning of my business I signed clients because I would say things like, I've never actually done that, but here's how I can help you. Right? And I was just really clear about the difference between strategy and even what's Google-able. I always say that, right? Like, you certainly don't have to be an expert at anything that's Google-able. Versus what does it look like for me to coach you on this? And that just gave me such a good opportunity to explain that to them.

And I even had clients who still say to me things like, I just appreciate you saying that so much, right? Like, I appreciate you being so honest and saying I – Actually just today on a mastermind call. I have a client who is working on – She was talking about a webinar that she's doing and it was just a really brief mention. And I had told her, because her webinar content connects to the program that she had built inside of my certification and they have an option to continue working with me in a mastermind.

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And so she built this program. I know all about her program. And now she wants to do a webinar to lead to the program. And she said, well, here are all the things I'm working through. And I was like, okay, I'm just going to be really honest, I am more than happy to look through any of your webinar content, you can post it on the page, right? I can look at it. What I can't do, because she had mentioned that she was running her own Facebook ads.

And I said I run ads, but I hire someone to do them. I cannot walk you through, like if you want to know the settings when it comes to a specific ad, I just can't help you do that. That is definitely not my area of expertise. That creates so much trust and safety with your clients when you are just really honest. To me, being honest as a coach is being fully in your integrity.

Another area where this comes up, and this actually came up during Coach Week and we talked about it, I talked about it with one of the attendees. I gave them permission, everybody that was in the workshop that I was leading, I gave them permission to have areas that they just don't coach on. So even if you're a general life coach, you can have really specific areas that you just know, I am not the coach for this.

So, for example, in the beginning when I was a new life coach, a newer life coach and I was a general life coach coaching everyone on everything, there were a couple topics that I just didn't coach on. One of them was weight loss, right? So if someone came to me, it was very rare because I never talked about weight loss. I never talked about it in my marketing or on Facebook or anywhere.

But someone might, you know, a couple of my clients would come to me and say like, hey, I want coaching on this. And I would just be so honest and I would say I am not the person to get coaching from on weight loss. I would love to teach you how to just love your body the way it is, but I'm just not, I don't know weight loss strategy. It's just not something that I want to think about.

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And so I would just recommend other coaches, right? I would say there are specific weight loss coaches who are going to be so much more equipped, so much better at this than I am. To me that's being in integrity, right? Just being totally honest.

Taking that situation, what it would look like to not be in integrity is to just say yes, take a client who wants coaching on something that you know you do not coach on, you don't like to coach on, but taking the client anyway because you just need to make the money, right? You just want to sign a client and not really thinking through, is this something I do?

Okay, so the short and sweet today, that is all. I'll wrap it up, I'll go through some of the points again. But I just want you to start redefining the word integrity for yourself, right?

As a coach to be in integrity, it does not mean you have to share everything, always, with anyone who's paying attention. It does not mean you always have to use coaching tools immediately to get on the other side of a situation you don't love or a negative emotion, or anything that's coming up for you. You still have full permission to be human.

It does not mean that you need to pretend to be an expert at every single thing. It doesn't mean that you can only coach on things that you've been through. And let's see, is that it? Just in general, it just doesn't mean that you have to do things that you don't want to do, right?

So when you think of being integrity, if things come up that you're like, but I just don't want to do that, you find a lot of resistance towards whatever it is, just question it. And question, does that actually mean integrity, that you're in integrity, right? Does that have anything to do with you being open and honest with your clients and potential clients? Or is it the opposite?

All right, I hope this was helpful. I'm sure it was for a lot of you. If you were on Coach Week, if you attended Coach Week, thank you so much for being there. If you attended Coach Week and you are still wanting to join The Coach Lab, let's do it.

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And if you are looking to enroll in my Advanced Certification, now is the time. Applications are going to be open all of November. We will link that to the show notes. And there's even an opportunity to book a call with me if you're unsure if the certification is for you. We'll get you the link for that too. And I will hopefully see you there. All right, 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](http://lindsaydotzlafoaching.com). That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. See you next week.