

# Ep #163: Intellectual Property for Coaches: What You Need to Know



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Lindsay Dotzlaf**

## Ep #163: Intellectual Property for Coaches: What You Need to Know

Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 163.

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 cracking myself up right now. I have to just tell on myself and tell you what just happened. I just hit record to record this podcast and I literally forgot what I say. I forgot my own podcast intro. So I started saying something else and then I was like, that's not right. And then I restarted it multiple times. And then I was saying it in my head and I was like, those are not the right words. Whoa.

Okay. At least we got through it. All I had to say was my name and the podcast name. It's not like it's difficult, but I don't know what just happened. It just did not want to come out. So that's the kind of day we're having, apparently.

Okay, I am really excited to talk about this today and I'm hoping that you find it really useful. I already know – I'm just going to call this out now. I already know that I have some good friends, some colleagues, some coaches who know me who are going to be like, "What? I can't believe you said that on your podcast," because they might disagree with me. But maybe not, we'll see.

Listen, just let me get through all of it and then decide if you agree with me or disagree, because I have been noticing something that happens in the coaching industry that's really weird. It's really particular. I mean, it might also happen in other industries, but it definitely happens in the coaching industry. And now that I have seen it, I can't see it. And it is very connected to what I teach and to what I do. And it has been coming up for me a lot in kind of different ways.

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So we're going to talk today about intellectual property and creating your own tools and theories and whatever it is that you're creating as a coach. Like thinking about, do you have to create something that's yours? Should you be focused on intellectual property? Is that a thing and why do we think it's important as coaches?

So here's what happened. If you're listening in real-time, I'm currently enrolling for the next round of the Advanced Certification of Coaching Mastery. And I'm doing like 20 minute calls with people that are interested in joining and they've been so amazing. And if you're listening in real-time and you're interested, for sure book a call with me. Go to my website, find the link or my Instagram or wherever. Find the link, book a call and I would love to chat with you.

But what happened is I was on a call with someone and she said, you know, she described her business to me and she said, I'm just afraid I'm not kind of in the right place in my business to join your certification. But then she described her business and in my mind I'm like, oh, I think you're a perfect fit.

And so then I asked her, why do you think you're not a great fit? And she said, well, when I read your website and your sales page, it kind of sounds like one of the main things you do in this room, in this space is you help coaches create their own work and their own intellectual property and name their own tools and all the things. And I was like, well, I mean, yes, that is part of the work I do.

And anyway, we had a whole conversation about it. It was a great conversation. And then I got off of that call and I started really thinking about it. And yes I do think coaching mastery, I think there's so much of coaching mastery that is really coming into your own awareness, having a better understanding of who you are as a coach, how you work with your clients, what you do with your clients, the tools you use with your clients, all of that.

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And that doesn't necessarily mean creating brand new tools from scratch or having your own processes or your own tools that you're naming and claiming like these are mine, they're different than when everybody else is doing.

I think a lot of coaching mastery and a lot of you standing out as a coach comes from, one, being great at using the tools that you have. The tools that you've learned. And two, within that space really knowing how to be yourself and be comfortable being yourself and show up just as who you are and being able from there to just kind of handle any situation.

But that is very different than thinking in order to be an expert coach, I have to have kind of created all of my own intellectual property, et cetera, et cetera. And if you're listening and you're like, what are you talking about? Intellectual property is just ideas, new ideas that you create, processes, tools, any of that that you give a name that you're like, this is a thing that I created.

So I have this call with this person. And then I get off the call and I start thinking about it. And then later that day, like literally the same day I'm just scrolling on Instagram, which I rarely do. So it's like, what's the word, like synchronicity that I was – Is that the word? Serendipity? Whatever that word is, I happened to be doing this day.

So I'm just like scrolling and one thing that really stood out to me while I was scrolling is how many coaches who kind of do similar things to what I do or who are business coaches, teaching coaches how to make money, or talking about marketing and talking about whatever. There was so much focus on thought leadership, intellectual property, creating your own IP, intellectual property, or just like that's the way to stand out, right? In order for you to be an expert, you have to be creating all of this new stuff.

And so I immediately, right after this, it just was like everything kind of fell into place and I was like, oh my gosh, I actually completely disagree with this. And I spent a lot of time thinking about it. And so then right after that I

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went and wrote an email to my list about the certification. And that email went out today and just within, I don't know how long it's been now, but within like 15 minutes of the email going out –

I don't schedule my own email, so I didn't even know that it happened. So I look and all of a sudden I have all these responses and messages of just people saying, oh my gosh, thank you for saying this. So first I'm going to tell you a little bit about what I said in the email, and then we're going to talk about it a little bit.

So one thing I said is that I realized, and I'll own I've probably been guilty of this. I do talk about creating, like really knowing what is your process to help clients get results and understanding the work you do on a really deep level, and on occasion creating your own intellectual property. But I think the implication that comes from that is that every person that's a coach, every coach, at least in the circles I'm in and what I see on Instagram and all the places, is that in order to be an expert and be an excellent coach, in order to be considered that, you have to be kind of like a trailblazer.

Like you have to be the first one to do something. You have to be creating concepts, creating new ideas, naming them, and just like ta-da, I made this new thing. Consider if that was a thing that happened in other industries. It's really just not, right?

Now, with my background in research I used to work in a psychology department. I worked for the head of the department helping her with research and also worked with some of the other professors doing research. And so maybe this is my research background showing, but when you think about science, whether it's psychology or any other kind of science, there are so many different roles in that field, right?

There are people doing research and discovering new things. There are people creating new concepts and putting new things out into the world. But for the most part, like the majority I would say, of the industry are

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people that are taking those concepts and using them out in the world, right?

Let's go with psychology, right? It's like there are people doing research. And a lot of that research, by the way, isn't even discovering new things or creating brand-new concepts. It's really looking at things that have already been proposed or studied or proven and researched and there's just more research being done.

And then every once in a while someone will come along who really stands out, who has a totally different way of thinking about things and who is like, here's my idea, let's test it. And even then that, especially now because in fields that have been around for a while, a lot of that is just building on other people's research, right? Building on other people's ideas or saying like, I do agree with this, but here's something that I think is slightly different.

So that is happening. But most of the people, let's say who work as psychologists, are not doing research, they're not creating new ideas. They are in the field working with clients, working with clients, patients, whatever. And they're just implementing the tools that they've learned and doing the work.

But if you think of if I was like, okay, who is a renowned psychologist in my area that works with, let's say, I was looking for one for my daughter or something, that works with teenagers with anxiety. I would get some names. I would probably get some referrals from friends. I would Google. I would do all the things.

But in order for that person to be considered a great therapist or psychologist, or whatever it is, I wouldn't be wondering like, have they created their own concepts? Have they advanced the field of psychology?

I would be thinking, is it going to be, like personality-wise, is it going to be a good fit for my daughter or for whoever it is that I'm looking up someone for, for myself? Is it going to be, like do I like the way they work? What are

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the tools that they use? What are the methods that they use? Is this what I'm interested in? Does this resonate with me? Do I enjoy going to their office or will my daughter enjoy going to their office or whatever?

Those are all the things that I'm going to question. And I just think it's very fascinating that in this field of coaching, that we have decided, a lot of people have decided that the way to be really great at what you do is to be the person who's making all of these new concepts. And I just want to debunk that a little bit and tell you, if you're listening, why it could actually be harming your coaching practice.

Now, I also want to be really, really clear, it's not a problem when people do this. There are really good reasons to do this. And I've even had like, yes, I help – In my certification I sometimes help coaches create their own concepts. But I think of it as we're doing it from a place of there's something missing here. Like there is a gap in my process and I need to create something to fill it.

And then they might name it, they might whatever. And my thought always is pretty much anything that's being created, even when my clients are doing it, I'm like this work is genius. I rarely think it's brand new. Usually you can go find – I know some of my good friends, my colleagues, maybe they even have podcasts, they're always talking about like, here's this concept I created or here's this thing I created.

I honestly, this is going to sound a little judgmental, but I think it's sometimes just a little strange because you could literally Google it and find other concepts that are the exact same, right? Now, I'm not saying that they shouldn't be doing that or that they are stealing other people's work. Because for what I know, at least, that's not what they're doing. They're just like I've never seen this talked about in this way before and they really think it's a concept they're creating.

I just have a thought that's like really anything we're creating isn't new. It's already out there. I'm going to give you a really specific example. I want

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you to consider, no matter where you are certified as a coach or where you've learned to coach or where you've heard about coaching or learned about coaching, you've probably heard of a tool that coaches use that's some form of a thought model.

And there are so many names for it and it's all the same tool, or different versions of the same tool. And it's all created off of kind of one facet of cognitive behavioral therapy, CBT. And it's not exactly the same, but like one facet of that it's like kind of taken, simplified, and used as a coaching tool. And then other people have then adopted it and maybe changed some words around or done it in a different order, or just used it in a different way.

Sometimes I think this is great, right? And I think it's great that we have different versions of similar tools, especially when there's a really great reason that they've been redone, right? Like maybe it's the same tool, but used very specifically for a really specific niche and it's altered in a different way to include whatever it is you're wanting to include in your niche.

Or someone taking a tool, using it over and over and over, saying this part right here, I don't think it quite works the way I want it to. Here's how I think it works and then testing it that way over and over, maybe over time developing a new tool.

But where I think it goes wrong, and this is where we'll get into how this, if you relate to this, if you're like oh my gosh. Where I think it can be hurting coaches, especially new coaches, is when you think that that is what is expected of you, right? When you're like in order to be – Or coaches who have been around for a long time who are like, but in order to really be considered an expert in this field or really great at what I do, I'm supposed to be creating all of this new intellectual property, all of this new stuff.

And so then sometimes what some coaches do, I've seen it happen, is either, one, not take themselves as seriously as a coach because they're like, well, I'm not doing that so, obviously, I'm not a great coach. Which, to me, has nothing to do with being a great coach.



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Or two, they force themselves to create new concepts and they do it in a way that just doesn't feel great because it didn't really evolve over time, it didn't happen naturally. They kind of know that they're taking someone else's tool and then kind of just reframing it so that now they can put a new name on it or whatever it is that they want to do, instead of just saying, this is the thought model that I learned at The Life Coach School or whatever. So many different tools like that, right? And just giving credit to that.

You know this about me if you're in The Coach Lab or you're in any of my spaces. I very freely, first of all, give credit to anyone that's created a tool. Like if I'm teaching that tool, I give credit. Also, although I'm certified in certain places, I never teach their exact tool but I teach more of a general kind of awareness around concepts.

So I teach you how to create awareness with your clients. I teach you how to set goals. I teach you how to evaluate. I teach you how to help your clients do so many different things, but I don't take other people's tools and then reframe them and give them fancy new names.

If I ever create something that I'm like, this is a brand new thing, no one has ever made it, then I will be sure to give it the fanciest of fancy names, I promise. But for now, although I might be teaching it in a different way than you've heard before, I might be making it a lot more simple than what you've heard before, I might be saying different things about it or adding things to it or just framing it in a different way, I am not saying –

So, for example, I've taught how to do evaluations on this podcast, right? That is not my evaluation method. I learned it from someone. I learned it from a coach that I worked with. I also know she learned it from someone. But it's also just to think about what's working, what's not working, how do I want to move forward, none of that is new. That is a very, very old process that has been used over and over and over in so many different fields, all the different ways. And it's just a really basic way to start out an evaluation.

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Now, I'm currently in the process of creating some new material for The Coach Lab and one of the things that I'm doing is creating variations of the evaluation that I have never seen taught before. But even then, I'm not necessarily going to be giving those things brand new names. It's just going to be like, here is this version of an evaluation, here is this version of evaluation. Here is when to use this. Here is when to use this.

And so I just think it's really interesting to consider how much pressure we're putting on coaches, especially new coaches, to create their own intellectual property. If this is you, and I actually want to say this is not what I planned on recording today. But when I had a bunch of responses to this email that I sent, all the responses were some version of, "Oh my gosh, thank you so much. I feel so much relief hearing you say this. I have been really sitting in this spot of thinking I need to create my own tools."

And some of these are coaches who are incredible at what they do, I just happen to know because I know some of them. They're incredible at what they do and they're spending time beating themselves up for not reinventing the wheel. And I just don't want you, any of you, to think that you have to do that.

And I also want you to be able to take whatever tools you've learned wherever you have learned them and allow yourself to be an expert at those. You don't need to change them, unless you realize you need to change them over time, right? After using them over and over and over with your clients, you might need to adapt them for your niche. You might need to adapt them for your clients. But that's very different than thinking I just need to start from the beginning and create this whole new tool.

The other ways that it can kind of, I think, hurt the industry is it makes it a little confusing. So just imagine if – I use the example of teachers all the time, right?

Just imagine if you're learning algebra and every math teacher, like every algebra teacher, instead of just saying like, okay, here's the quadratic

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formula. This is how you use it. Here's the equation. This is how you work through it, every math teacher, algebra teacher doing that in the exact same way. What if instead, every algebra teacher was like, okay, I know this method works. It's proven over and over and over, but I also know to be really a great teacher, I have to take this and make it my own.

It doesn't make sense, right? Now, for some few, like people who are studying these things, they might say, oh, this quadratic formula doesn't actually work in this situation or in this situation. That's actually going to require a new formula. Maybe we need to look into that, right? But that is so rare. That is a very small amount of people.

And if anyone is a mathematician, you're probably just laughing at that example. But it was just the one that came to mind. I don't even know if it makes sense the way I just said it. But just imagine that, right? How confusing would that be to students?

How confusing would it be to the industry if the quadratic formula, instead of always being called that, was called by different names depending on the situation in which it was being used. But it was basically still the same thing, right? Or maybe someone takes it and adds parentheses and adds the same thing on the numerator and denominator so that it looks different, but it is actually exactly the same. That's what a lot of coaches are doing.

Now, if you're doing this, if you're like, "Oh my gosh, this is me," I want you to know I am not shaming you for this. This is 100% what you have been taught to do. And I just want you to consider, is it useful the way you're doing it? Because sometimes it really is, for sure. Sometimes there are, I have worked with several coaches who have a very specific niche who have created tools for their niche, who have taken tools and over a long period of time have really combined them and kind of made a new tool or shifted it so much that it's no longer the original tool.

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There is a time and place for this, right? So I'm not saying don't ever do this. It's great if you are. I just want to relieve any pressure that anyone may be feeling around thinking that this is what you have to do.

So I'm going to read you in this email that I sent, I'm going to read you – The email is called a different kind of expert. And I'm going to read you kind of how I think about it, at least in my spaces, because I'm helping coaches especially in the certification, the Advanced Certification of Coaching Mastery, I'm helping coaches be experts in their field. So I'm going to describe to you what that means to me.

I think of an expert as a coach that fully understands the coaching tools and methods they have learned, and knows how to integrate those into the processes and structures that they have created, learned or created, in order for their clients to create the results they hire them for, while staying aligned with their values. To me, that makes you an expert, if all of those things are true.

If you are excellent at the tools that you've learned, if you are excellent at the methods of coaching that you know, if your clients are creating results hand over hand, whatever it's called, hand over fist, whatever. I don't even know what that means. If all of your clients are creating results or most of your clients are creating results and you're deeply invested in the results they are creating, that makes you an expert over time.

And it takes time. It takes practice, it takes time, it takes a lot more than just creating a new concept, putting a name on it and just putting it out into the world.

And another thing I talk about a lot in my email sequences and in my sales page for the certification, one thing I talk about is innovation. But I also want to offer a reframe for innovation because I think a lot of times people hear that word, and this is like the coach that came to the call with me, right? She thought innovation meant she had to be creating new concepts

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and processes that no one had ever heard of. And she was making this whole big thing.

Here's what I write about innovation. Innovation can happen anywhere within your expertise. That could include creating new tools. But it could also include combining tools in a different way, adding an extra step to something so that it's more useful for your clients. Taking an existing tool and using it in a new way. Building a community that's different than most. Filling a gap that's been overlooked in the industry. Finding ways to reach underserved populations.

And the list could go on exponentially, right? So innovation can show up in so many different ways. Yes, it can show up in intellectual property and thought leadership, but I think more – And sometimes that's amazing. But sometimes more interesting innovation is taking what's already around and saying I want to create this new thing.

I'll give you an example of this. When people join The Coach Lab, my lifetime access program, one thing that I hear from a lot of coaches is I've never heard of a space that does this, that is like this. And usually what they mean by that is I've created a program, I've created a space and a community with coaches from all over the industry.

So it's not me just teaching brand new coaching tools that nobody's ever heard of and giving it a different name and then saying like, okay, this is what I teach and this is my coaching school, period. It's really a community and a space, and this was my kind of dream when I was creating it, is to have a community and a space for all kinds of coaches, any kind of coach to come to really have the ongoing support and community that they need.

Because I was just seeing a lot of coaches that were certified or trained in all different kinds of methods and all different types of schools and their kind of complaint was like, and now what? Like there's no support past what I learned.

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Some coaches do come into The Coach Lab to learn coaching tools for the very first time, and that's amazing. But I just also welcome coaches from all over the industry. And I'm not saying there's nothing else like it because, again, I never really believe that that's true. I'm sure there's something similar somewhere. But I really tried to create something that was innovative, that was just a space for anyone to come.

If I ever turn The Coach Lab into some type of certification or make it like an upgrade to have a certification, I will think a lot more about – Like instead of right now I teach very broad concepts, and I teach them in a specific way so they're very clear. I just don't make them all new, right? It's not like, here are all these new things with brand-new names.

If I do create a certification, which this is one of the main reasons I haven't done it yet for new coaches, like a new coach certification, I would spend a lot more time thinking about what are the exact coaching tools that I think every coach needs to have and really honing the tools that I very specifically teach.

Again, I do this in The Coach Lab, just not in the same way that I'm talking about right now. Like if I had a certification it would be, okay, here are the five tools. Here are the names of the tools. Here's how we're going to use them. And I would be checking to make sure that anyone that I'm certifying really knows how to use those specific tools.

Okay, I digress. That was just one example, right? There are so many examples. I love helping my clients be innovative in the Advanced Certification, that is so much of what we do. And I want to be really clear that I don't think that innovation always has to be or should be creating brand new concepts, creating intellectual property.

So if you're listening and you are like, "This feels like such a relief," or the opposite, like, "Oh no, I've created all of this stuff," I just want you to know, no matter what you've been doing, I'm sure it's amazing.

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And I want to just give you some permission that you can be an incredible coach, like expert level incredible, you can be innovative, you can be all the things that you want to be without having to spend years or months or whatever it is, like without putting pressure on yourself that you have to be creating, creating, creating brand-new tools all the time, brand-new methods, brand-new all of it.

I hope that this was really helpful. I would love to hear your feedback, of course. As always, you can find me on Instagram at Lindsay Dotzlaf. You can also get on my email list to make sure you're getting emails like this so that you can always reply to the emails and respond to me personally.

If you go to my website there should be, I believe, I should have checked this before I recorded. I believe if you go to my website, there's a place where you can opt-in to get a list of just coaching questions. It's like my just general email list opt-in. And that will just get you on the list so that you're getting these emails if you're interested in hearing more about stuff like this.

And, of course, if you're like, oh my gosh, this is the work that I want to do, please check out the link, we'll put it in the show notes, for the Advanced Certification in Coaching Mastery. I would love it, I'd be more than honored to help you do this work.

If you're listening in real-time, I'm currently doing calls for the next round, which starts at the beginning of 2024, the beginning of February 2024. I'm currently enrolling for that round of certifications. So I hope to see you there, but if I don't, I hope this was really useful and I'll 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 [lindsaydotzlafcoaching.com](http://lindsaydotzlafcoaching.com). That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. See you next week.