

Ep #170: The Right Time to Interrupt Your Clients



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 170.

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. First, I just want to say I apologize for last week. Sometimes we do plan to run reruns of the podcast because if I have weeks off and I didn't get things recorded in time, totally fine.

Last week was a little bit of a scheduling mishap. I was in Puerto Rico, I thought I had turned in an episode before I left. Turns out I did not. And then I was going to record one on the fly and my mic would not connect to my laptop. So we just had to call it at the last minute and say, here's a replay.

Now, the only reason I'm telling you that, and the only reason it matters, well, actually two reasons. First, because I want you to know I'm human, I make mistakes. Like this is a thing. I have to remind my clients of this often. I think sometimes you see coaches that have big platforms, are in front of a lot of people, and there's a tendency to think like, oh, they just don't make mistakes. They don't mess up. 100% not true. Never, ever true. I've talked about this on the podcast before, but this is just one more example of how it's not true.

But the other reason is because the week before I recorded a podcast about listening, and this was actually meant to be, as I kind of thought through it, I realized it's kind of a three-part series, and that was part one. So I'm just kind of bummed that we had to interrupt that with a replay. But that's okay, I'll give you a little overview.

So if you are a regular listener, you know I have been currently redoing a lot of content and adding more content into my program, The Coach Lab. And I've been having so much fun doing it. And if you're in The Coach Lab

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or if you've heard me talk about it, you know that I teach coaching skills in there, foundational coaching skills.

And one thing I realized as I was looking through the content and redoing some of it and thinking of different ways to teach it, one thing I realized is there are these tangible skills, right? How to create awareness, how to help your clients set goals, how to ask great questions. All of those things are skills that every coach needs.

But then I started thinking about it and I'm like, oh, there are also kind of these intangible skills – I mean, they're tangible, but they're a little harder to teach, they just take time and practice – that also every coach needs. And one of the ones that I see, and I coach a ton on this in The Coach Lab, is the first one is listening, which was episode 168.

Today, I'm going to be talking about the opposite of that, when to interrupt, when to pause your client, when to kind of jump in and take the wheel for a minute. And then the third one is, so it's like how to listen, how to interrupt or jump in, and then how to be flexible and go with the flow, know what your client needs in the moment. To me, those three things kind of all go together. So it's going to be just a little bit of a three-part series. And today's the second one, so let's just dive in.

I think that this is a skill that you can definitely learn. Some people think, oh, I don't know when to do it. No, you can definitely learn it, but it does take practice. And just like listening, when to jump in or when to say like, oh, let me dive in here for a second, when to interrupt, when to kind of cut your client off, that is also a skill that you learn by just practicing and practicing and practicing.

And I know a few things that kind of get in the way of knowing when to do it, because this is something that comes up lots and lots in The Coach Lab. And if you're in The Coach Lab or if you're a client of mine, you've seen me do this. It might be really subtle. You might not be like, oh, wow, she just interrupted the client, because that's probably not usually what it feels like in the moment to the client or to someone watching.

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I do it very conversationally and very gently. But learning to do it, you know, I've been a coach for eight years, it's just something I've learned over time. I am sure I could find some clients, either now or in the past, that would say, oh yeah, this one time I was talking, she interrupted me. Maybe not, I don't know. But I'm sure we could find, they might not remember it, I'm sure we could find some old recordings or something like that where it was like, oh, that transition could have been smoother.

So I'm not perfect. You're not perfect. We're all just working on this in real time. But a couple of the things that get in the way of this are some of you thinking maybe it's rude to interrupt. Or I don't know how to do it. Or it's going to come off as, you know, me taking control or me being pushy. Those things can be true, which is why this is a skill. There's like a skill attached to it that you can use when you're doing it.

Now, if you're in The Coach Lab, there's going to be a lot more around this coming. This podcast episode is kind of just going to be an overview of how to notice it, how to interrupt, and mostly like when to know when to interrupt.

And I do want to preface this by saying, of course, there's so much nuance that goes into this. I'm going to go through a list of examples of when might be a good time to interrupt your clients, and I want you to know, and this is going to be what the third episode is about, is like finding the nuance, being flexible, figuring out your style and how to use these skills from call to call with all different types of clients.

Okay, I already kind of mentioned the things that get in the way of you kind of pausing your client or interrupting your client. Now I'm going to go through just a list that I've made, and this might not be all inclusive, but they're most of the things that I thought of, like when is a good time to kind of pause or interrupt. Then I'm going to give you some examples of ways that you can do it kind of as I go through, right? Ways that you can, like, I'll just say this is how I would do it. So you can hear, it's just kind of a natural conversation.

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So here are some examples of times when it might be important for you to interrupt your client. So the first one, I think this is one of the most common, is when your client is just going on and on and on, and they're jumping from topic to topic. Now these might be, as I go through these, these might be a little different depending on whether we're talking about one-on-one sessions or group coaching sessions, so I'm going to kind of hopefully cover some of that nuance as I go.

But this is one that, no matter what, whether it's one-on-one, whether you're coaching them in a group, whether you're coaching them in a program or a big group, this is one that I find happens in all the different spaces. It happens for different reasons. Maybe your client's nervous. Maybe that's just how their brain works.

Maybe they don't fully understand how to bring what to a coaching session and they just start talking and then they're just going on and on and on. And at some point they're not giving you any more important parts of the story or they're becoming more confused, you're becoming more confused. This can be a great time to say, oh, let me pause you and bring you back to that first thing you said. Or, oh, maybe that's enough for now. Can we explore this for a second?

What can happen if you don't, right? If you are just in your head and you're thinking, oh no, I can't interrupt. Or how do I know when to interrupt? What can happen is you both are lost, right? Your client is confused. They are now on the 10th topic. You didn't interrupt them at any point and you have forgotten all the things they said in the beginning. And now you're just like down this road and you'll kind of have to reel it back.

And that's okay. It's totally fine. Sometimes, and I'll get more into this in a minute, sometimes it can be okay to just let your client do it, right? To just like get it all out. But this comes down to you having to know the client and you have to know the container. In some containers, especially if it's a group, there's a lot of people listening, especially then this probably wouldn't be appropriate.

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But sometimes if you know this is out of character for your client, maybe there's a reason this is happening. But if this is happening, especially in the beginning of a coaching relationship, this might just be a factor of you didn't set the coaching container very well. You didn't explain to them very well how calls are going to go, right? How the coaching sessions are going to go.

The next one is when your client, and this actually usually happens when they're doing the thing I just mentioned, like when they're kind of going from topic to topic or they're on one topic, but they just keep going and going and going. When your client is getting very emotionally charged as they continue to talk, right?

Like you can see the more they keep going, the more kind of worked up they're getting. Not in a useful way, not in like, oh, this is bringing up some feelings, like let's explore those. Let's process them. Let's talk about them. But in a, like if you imagine if you've seen watching two people argue or watching one person explain something that has happened in their life and it's like the more they talk, the more worked up they get, the more kind of out of the present moment they get. That's what I'm talking about, right?

So when you notice that, again, just bringing it back, do you mind if I pause you for just a second? And notice that the way I just said that is asking for consent all at the same time, right? You're interrupting, but also do you mind if we just bring it back for a second to something you said?

Do you mind if we just explore what's coming up for you? I can hear in your voice that you're having, you know, lots of big emotions are coming up. Can we explore that? Again, I'm just giving some of my examples, but you can definitely come up with your own.

The next good time for interrupting, and this kind of goes along with the first two, is when it has just turned into a venting session. So even though your client might not be getting very emotionally charged, now it's just turning into a venting, right? So, for example, let's say you are a marriage coach or a relationship coach and your client is talking about their spouse.

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And they're talking about this one thing that their partner did that really bothered them. And then they just start like, and here's another way that they bothered me, and here's another way that they bothered me. And it's just turned into, okay, like the client isn't even pausing, they're not saying this is specifically what I want coaching on. They're just like, and here's one more thing, and here's one more thing, and here's one more thing.

Now, let's be clear, every once in a while this can be okay. Especially if you've worked with your client for a while, you know that this isn't the norm, and you can just tell, oh, they just have a few things they need to get off their chest. Totally fine. This comes back to what I said in the beginning, like this is not black and white, right? Sometimes you just know your client and you're like, yeah, maybe this is just what they need today, right?

One thing you can do, just like I said before, is kind of bring it back. Oh, do you mind if I pause you? Can I jump in here for a second? Another thing you can do in this situation is you can say, especially if you've been working with your client for a while and you know them and you're very attuned to how they usually show up, you can say, oh, it kind of feels like you just need to vent. Do you want to do that for a minute?

I think that's super useful because it's bringing awareness to them that, yeah, this is what I need, instead of just letting them vent, and vent, and vent. And then you're like, okay, now what do you want coaching on? Or trying to kind of bring it back after they've finished. You can pause them, pause the client, and say, hey, it kind of feels like you just need to vent. Is that what you want to do?

That can be so useful, right? Sometimes venting is useful. And pointing that out to them could even show them in the future, right? That's like a teaching moment, not like a pause and do a whole big teaching, but it's just giving them some self-awareness of, hey, sometimes you just need to vent. Totally fine.

What that can also do in the future is maybe they're going to come in a different session and say, do you mind if I just vent to you for a few

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minutes, right? It's also pointing out that this isn't coaching, this is kind of like a different thing. Let's get it all out, and then we'll jump into the coaching. It can just be useful in so many ways.

Another time, which again, these kind of all go hand in hand and they can overlap and all the things, but when a client has really gone down a rabbit hole. So they bring something, they're like, here's what I want coaching on. They start telling you about it, but then it takes a left turn, right? And they bring up something that is kind of related, but not really related. And it kind of sounds like this isn't really the thing that they need coaching on, but now they're somehow involved in this story that they're telling you.

Sometimes rabbit holes can be useful. So again, you just have to know in the moment, you either go with it or you're like, ooh, I don't think this is useful at all, let me bring them back. Oh, hey, let me bring you back. I think we've gone down a rabbit hole, right? Like pointing it out just in the most loving way.

And notice when I'm giving you these examples of what I might say or how I might interrupt my client, I'm never thinking, oh, this is a big problem or I can't believe this is happening, right? Like I'm just so matter of fact, like, oh, of course, you're human. Human's going to human, right? And I am the coach and I'm noticing maybe this isn't useful and I'm just going to kind of bring you back.

Like that's the only thought that I'm having in those moments. When you are having bigger thoughts, right, feeling frustrated, feeling irritated, feeling whatever, that's what you want to notice as the coach. Because then the interrupting is going to feel a little more jarring. Okay, speaking of rabbit holes, right? I just went down one a little bit, but that's okay.

The next time that you want to interrupt your client is when you notice that these things happen on every call, that your client is always super distracted, that they're always coming with like, here's a story and then here's a rabbit hole. And next thing you know, 75% of your coaching session is over and all you've done is listen to your client, either vent or go

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down rabbit holes, jump from topic to topic, any of those things I was just saying.

Now, again, sometimes that can be useful. When you notice that it's happening on every call, this is a really good time to interrupt and just to kind of point out, I noticed you are venting or I notice we've gone down this rabbit hole. I notice that a lot of times on our calls, you like to come and just kind of talk and talk and talk, and here's why I feel like it could be really useful to have some parameters around that.

If it feels useful for you, maybe we do it at the beginning of every session, but we just have a time limit so we can get into the coaching, right? Like maybe it's easy for you to process out loud, which to you as the coach might sound like venting or going down rabbit holes. But maybe you can say to your client, maybe it's really useful for you to come and for the first five to 10 minutes of our calls you're just going to process some things out loud. And then we're going to examine everything you just said. And we're going to say, okay, now what would you love coaching on?

Another time would be when you hear your client say something really important and you as the coach really want to jump in or pause, right? When you hear something that you're like, ooh, we need to touch on this.

You can do this one of two ways. You can either jot down a note and let them finish talking. Or you can say, oh, I just heard something that feels a little important, do you mind if we explore it for a second? Something you said just really stood out to me, can I just jump in for one second? If not, that's okay, we can keep going. But I definitely want to come back to this thing you said so I'm going to make a note of it.

Another time is when you notice they're saying the same thing over and over. So they're telling you a story, here's what happened. Here's what happened since our last call. Here's what I tried. Here's some strategy that I'm working on, whatever. And they just keep repeating themselves. I think this can happen often, especially in the beginning of a coaching

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relationship when a client isn't totally sure exactly what coaching is and how to show up.

It's kind of like, okay, if I just keep saying this thing, and maybe I'll just keep saying it in different ways, I'm not sure like what else I'm supposed to be doing. That's when it's your job as the coach to jump in and say, oh, and kind of having the thought like I've got you. Like that's okay, we have enough information, right? Oh, perfect. Let's just pause there and look at what you just said.

Another one, and this is, again, related to the last thing I just said. When you can tell that a client is maybe flustered. They're not sure what to say and they keep talking anyway. Sometimes I think that your thought as the coach might be, just from what I've found from coaching my clients, especially in The Coach Lab, that maybe sometimes your thought is I'm not really sure what to coach on yet. I didn't really hear anything to coach on yet. But also, I don't really know what else to do, so I'm just going to let them keep talking, right?

This is a time when you have to put on your big person pants as the coach and just remember, oh yeah, I'm the coach. I'm the expert. This is my job to guide them. My client shouldn't be feeling flustered because I don't know what to do, right? Like my client shouldn't be kind of floundering all over the place. It's okay for me to jump in and give them a little direction.

And then the last one that I have on my list, and this is one, again, that comes up a lot, especially when you're a newer coach, is when the session is coming to an end, right? Like you're watching the time, you're getting close to the end of a call. Maybe you have five minutes left, maybe you have 10 minutes left and you know, ooh, I want to kind of strategically wrap up this session. And if I let my client keep talking and talking, that's not going to happen.

So let me pause, I'll just say, oh, I just noticed it's the last five minutes of our session, or it's the last 10 minutes of our session. I want to be sure to wrap this up in a useful way for you so that we're both clear on what you're

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going to kind of do between calls, what you're going to work on between sessions. So you can keep telling me this, or we can stay on this thing that we are coaching on right now. I just wanted to point out, we have about five minutes left, I want to wrap this up in a really useful way.

And from there you do whatever you would do at the end of a call. Or even just point it out and then the client says like, okay, perfect, I want to finish working through this thing we're doing. And at that point it's kind of a redirect, but it also could be just giving them the choice. Is this what you want to do for the last five or 10 minutes? Or do you want to make a plan for that thing we were talking about? Do you want to make a plan for the next conversation you're having with that person? Do you want to, right?

It's just kind of like giving them the reins a little bit to say, how do you want to spend the last five minutes of this session? What feels the most useful for you?

Okay, I hope this was really useful. I know these are all things that come up so often with so many of my clients. So if any of these are happening in your sessions, just know totally normal. You just need to get better at recognizing them, deciding when you want to interrupt, when you want to pause, again, often with consent, right?

Sometimes it can be a natural flow of the conversation. Sometimes it's like, oh, your client does this all the time, they know it, you know it, you laugh about it, right? Like, oh, let me jump in and ha-ha, whatever. But sometimes it's like, do you mind if I? Do you mind if I jump in? Do you mind if I pause you right here? That's such a good way to get consent around it, build that trust and safety with your client, give them the choice.

So much of coaching, which I'm sure you've hopefully heard me say before, so much of coaching is really just giving clients awareness of who they are, how they show up in the world, all of those things. And this is just one more small way you can do that, right? Putting the ball back in their court. Let me give you some awareness, you've been talking and talking,

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you've been venting, we've kind of gone down a rabbit hole. How do you want to proceed?

Have an amazing week. Get out there, do all the coaching. Don't be afraid to practice this. Don't be afraid to try all these different things. And if you find this is something you struggle with, definitely join The Coach Lab. If you've been thinking about it and you're like, I don't know, is it for me? These are things we talk about all the time on the weekly calls and that I can help you work through, right?

Like the genius of this podcast is that I'm like, here are some strategies. The genius of The Coach Lab is here are some strategies and go try them, bring them to calls, tell me how it went, let me help you problem solve. Let me help you solve this. You don't have to feel like you're alone. Okay?

So hopefully I'll see you in there. We'll put the link in the show notes. Otherwise I will be back next week to really talk about how to be flexible on calls, how to be more attuned to what your client needs in the moment, how to know when to listen, when to interrupt, like how to really lean into your knowing as a coach and how to build that skill.

All right, I'll see you next week. Goodbye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Mastering Coaching Skills*. If you want to learn more about my work, come visit me at lindsaydotzlafoaching.com. That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. See you next week.