

# Ep #171: Why You Need to Embrace Flexibility for Coaching Success



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Lindsay Dotzlaf**

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Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 171.

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, as usual. Today I want to talk about something that I told you about in the last episode. So if you haven't listened, maybe go back and listen to that one. But over the last few episodes, I've been talking about three skills that I think are extremely important in your coaching practice.

And if you remember, if you listened from the very first episode, the first few episodes of my podcast, I talked about the foundational coaching skills that I think every coach needs to have in some form, right? Like awareness, creating goals, all of those things that I talked about in the first episodes.

These skills that I'm talking about are not quite as tangible, not quite as, you know, like the actual way you coach, but the way you show up for coaching. So a few episodes ago I talked about listening and how that is one of the most important skills you can have as a coach.

So then I talked about interrupting and how sometimes it can be important to interrupt or to just, you know, step in for a second and cut your clients off. If you don't know what I'm talking about and you're like, what, why would I ever do that? Go listen to the last episode. You'll see what I'm saying. I give lots of examples of when might be the right time to do that.

And today I want to talk about the third skill that I think is really important for every coach, which is flexibility. Or maybe we would call these qualities of a coach, right? Like great at listening, the ability to know when is the right time to interrupt or to step in or to take the reins of a coaching session. And this last one is flexibility.

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And I do think that they just kind of all flow together, right? It's like you have to know how to listen. If you can't, then it's like you're not going to be a great coach. When we think about stepping in, I do think that every great coach needs to have that, but that can be something, I think, that you can work on and learn along the way.

Then this part of being flexible is something that I see my clients struggle with a lot, and in very different ways. So I want to talk about it today. And some of you might find yourself, I find this is like a spectrum.

Some coaches are really great at being flexible and sometimes almost maybe too good at being flexible. And then there are clients all the way on the other side who just want to have very strict programs, processes, systems, all of that. And they never, ever want to deviate or they've just learned a way of coaching that is pretty formulaic and they don't know how to deviate from that.

So first I'm going to tell you a little story and I'm going to show you how it connects to what I'm talking about. So a couple of weeks ago, so actually for Christmas we got a bread maker, right? Like the electric kind that you just put all the ingredients in and then you just push the buttons and then, voila, you have bread hours later.

Now what we've learned is that it's not quite that easy, sometimes we fail. But that's okay, we're working on it. But my kids really love it. They love picking out the recipes and they love helping because it's super easy. So they can pretty much do it on their own. Ironically, somehow they are better at it than my husband and I are. I don't know.

My husband and I have both made recipes that have completely failed. Like didn't even make bread, didn't rise, didn't whatever. We've done something very wrong. The kids are just like, oh, look at mine. It comes out great. So there's that for whatever it's worth.

But my daughter and I, she's 14 as I'm recording this, she loves to organize. She is probably the most organized person, actually, in our

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house. And sometimes I'm like, poor thing probably has a hard time living with us because I can be very organized. I'm either on one end of the spectrum or the other. But her room is always clean. She likes things tidy. She's very particular.

And she wanted to help me organize the pantry. And what happened was we got this bread machine. So we went out and got all these different kinds of flours, right? There's like regular bread flour, whole wheat flour, white whole wheat flour. I don't even know, whatever, all the different kinds. Gluten-free, coconut flour, all the things.

And then there are all these other ingredients that we did not previously have that we had to get for the bread making. And I clearly didn't think about this ahead of time. What we decided was that we needed a different canister, perfectly labeled because we have a label maker and she really loves to use that.

And so we decided we need a different canister for each kind of flour and a different small canister for some of the other ingredients. And we're going to label each thing and it's going to be so beautiful and so perfect. And what we didn't take into account is kind of how much room each canister would take up, which even though it seems so organized, the canisters are actually a little bit bigger than the bag of flour might be.

And so we started buying all these things. We bought so many, so many canisters. And then while we were doing that, of course, you have to organize the entire pantry, not just the flour and the bread making ingredients. So we also bought all these other bins and just things of different shapes and sizes to perfectly organize our pantry.

And so as one does, we go in, my daughter and I, and pretty much take everything out of the pantry. And we may have started this project at like 8 p.m. Now, it was over winter break so she didn't have school or anything. And she's 14, she loves to stay up late. And I'm like, sure, why not?

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So about two hours in, when we are just making sure everything is just perfect and organized, what we realize as we're using the label maker, labeling all these canisters, pouring all these, like putting also the expiration dates on the canisters and getting rid of the packaging. So now we've thrown out all the bags from the flour.

And if anybody here is like, oh my gosh. Like if you're a baker and you're like, that is not how you store the stuff. It's okay. I don't need to know. Just let me live in this world where maybe this was a good idea.

So a couple hours in we just realize like, oh, okay. One, it's a way bigger task than we thought it was going to be. And two, we may have overshot on the organization. And by that, I mean I'm starting to notice somehow we took all this stuff out that was already kind of organized by the way. It's not like it was just in a pile on the floor or something. The pantry was already organized.

But now we've created this system where I start to notice somehow this is all going to take up way more space than it did before. And I'm not sure if this was a great choice. And so now a few weeks later, because mind you, I've traveled twice since then and she's back in school. Now we still have canisters of flour sitting on the ground that we're like, okay, we're going to have to come back to this.

We had to just kind of stop. Don't worry, we have a plan. We're coming back to it. But it was just a realization of like, oh, organization is amazing. And having this beautiful plan was amazing. But sometimes you need to step back and take a look and say, okay, is this going how I thought it was going to go? Is this actually working for what I'm trying to create?

You see where I'm going with this, hopefully. Sometimes so many of you are doing this in your coaching sessions, either in a single session or even in your coaching packages. And what you'll do is you'll think I need this perfectly organized system. Or maybe you've even learned a perfectly organized system somewhere, which is all great in theory, right?

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And then you start coaching clients, and humans are messy. I say this all the time, right? Humans are just messy. That's just how we are. It's how we're made. Like there's no getting around that. And they don't always fit into the perfectly planned organization system, just like the flour and all the ingredients and the chips and the crackers and whatever else is in the pantry. It just doesn't always go exactly the way you think it's going to go.

And what I see a lot of coaches do, which always just breaks my heart. I want to interrupt and be like, no, wait, hold on. They forget that it's okay to be flexible. It's okay to say, oh, I see this isn't working, even in the middle of a session, I'm going to make some adjustments on the spot.

Or show up to a session and say, oh, maybe, you know, sometimes in The Coach Lab my client might say, so I showed up for my session. I knew exactly what we were going to talk about because it's kind of where we left off last time. I gave my client homework. And then my client showed up and she started talking about something totally different. And then she started crying and it was this whole thing. And I just didn't know what to do and I kind of panicked.

And I just want to offer that, first of all, nothing has gone wrong, right? A lot of coaches that I work with want to make that mean that they've somehow done something wrong and like, oh no, now we're off track. And this is where, first of all, just lots of self-compassion, right? Like, oh, you had no control over this. Like I said, humans are messy. That's just how they show up sometimes.

But what is really important, and I think what distinguishes between a newer coach and a coach who's really great at knowing what their client maybe needs in the moment is having that flexibility. And having that ability to say, oh, we're actually like, I'm totally setting my agenda aside because this is what the client needs today. This is what the client wants today.

Or even using that flexibility within your coaching tools, right? So a lot of my clients, again, if they've learned to coach somewhere else or they have

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learned certain tools somewhere else, they'll come to me and say like, okay, so – Specifically for tools that feel very formulaic, right? Any type of coaching model, there's different ones, we can call them all different things. But any kind of thing where it's like, we just plug in like, okay, what was your thought about that? How did you feel? That also is a place where I see coaches become very rigid.

And really what happens when you do that in your coaching, either in session or in your entire process or within a single coaching session, is it really removes all humanity from the coaching, right? It's like, no, no, no. Here's the plan, we don't deviate from the plan. Here's the coaching tool I'm trying to work through. We don't deviate through that because that's what I know how to do.

But when you think about that on the receiving end of being the client, and I've been in these situations before, and honestly they feel really terrible where you're like, no, no, you're not hearing what I'm saying to you, or you're not understanding, or you're not listening. You're making it too simple, or this isn't what I need today, or that's not the path I want to go down.

Now, for me, because I've been coaching for a long time and I've worked with lots of different coaches, I've gotten really good at saying, oh, I actually don't want to coach on that today, or like I'll kind of take over and redirect the session. But most clients will not do that. They will just follow your lead.

So I would just get curious, for all of you that are listening, just get really curious about where are you already being flexible? Let's celebrate that. Where do you bring some flexibility, which also is bringing lots of humanity into your coaching.

And where are you always very rigid and afraid to deviate at all from the plan? Or you get very uncomfortable when you deviate from the plan. Or you aren't quite sure how to take a tool and sometimes throw it out the window and say, okay, we'll come back to that, but right now I can see this

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discomfort is happening and I want to talk through this. Or I want to zoom in or zoom out in the session and follow where the client wants to go.

And that's nuanced, right? Because sometimes a client will – I talked about this a little bit on the episode about when to interrupt your client, but sometimes a client will take you down rabbit hole after rabbit hole after rabbit hole. Now, that's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is more of being flexible in really showing up for however your client shows up to a session.

So for example, if you start every coaching session with, okay, let's celebrate. What do you have to celebrate today? I know a lot of coaches do this. It can be really great. Sometimes that's a really great thing to do. What do you want to celebrate today? Tell me something that's happened since our last session.

And then your client immediately starts crying. Or you can just tell, like you can just read the room is what I call it. Read the room, right? Either literally read their face on Zoom, read the quiver in their voice. If you're on the phone, read the like sigh or the heavy pause. Just really picking up on those small human moments and saying to yourself in your head, right? Like, oh, maybe this energy is not what we need right now.

I've had clients say to me, and I love this. Listen, if you're in The Coach Lab, or you're thinking about joining The Coach Lab, one of my very favorite things is when coaches open up to me and say, this thing happened in a session and I think I handled it not the way I wanted to handle it. And can you help me? Can we unpack it? And I'll coach on it. I'll give some strategy.

But I think it's so brave. Like, I know for sure that one reason I created The Coach Lab is because I wanted a space like that when I was a new coach. To just go and say like, oh my gosh, this thing happened. I don't know what to do, or I could have done better, or it was okay, but something felt a little off or whatever, right?



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So I just want to acknowledge my clients are so brave, whether they're asking for coaching in the community or they're asking for coaching on a live coaching session. I just think it's so brave to say, I did this thing, I don't think it went quite right. But that's the only way you get better, right, is to truly face it and say like, okay, how am I going to do it better next time?

Anyway, that was a little tangent. I love it when my clients are brave enough to come to a session and say, okay, here's the thing that happened. And I have had this happen, they've said here's the thing that happened. So at the beginning of every session, I always ask for celebrations. I always ask for updates since last week.

And my client got really upset and it was clearly like she didn't want to celebrate. And so what I did was kind of dug deeper, right? That's just what we do. I know we can find at least one celebration. And she just kind of kept on, and she was like and I stayed at it and I stayed at it. And I think I stayed at it too long and she was really upset. It just made my client more upset.

This is what I'm talking about, where I love that bravery, right? To just admit like, ooh, and then I saw it and then I realized this was maybe not the best thing. But I think that's such a good example of reading your client, right? Just reading the energy. What are they bringing to the call?

It's amazing if you start every coaching session with, tell me your celebrations, tell me your wins this week. And it's also amazing if you just pick up on that's not the vibe right now, right? That's not the energy the client has shown up with.

Now, it's different if this happens every time. Like maybe there could be coaching possibly around that, but especially when usually the client is like, here's the celebration. And I did this. And I worked through this. And I noticed this. Here's this awareness or whatever. And sometimes even if you have to hold their hand through it, because they're just not used to celebrating. Those are different.

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What I'm talking about is when you can clearly see a bristle, right? Like, this is so opposite of how I'm feeling right now. This energy of like, let's celebrate this thing feels really bad when I feel so low. And I've been there also in those types of situations. And it does feel bad as a client.

One thing that we talk about in the coaching industry is having an agenda. And I think usually the agenda is referenced in the way of like, I know what's best for my clients, which that's a totally different episode by the way that I'll be doing.

But like I know what's best for my clients, let me lead them into the way I think about it or the way I would do it or the way I would solve it or whatever. Versus I think there's also a having an agenda that is actually wanting to stick to your agenda as the coach, without flexibility, without really saying like, okay, but what does the client need today?

So I hope this was helpful. I hope as you think through these things that you can kind of see like, oh yeah, I'm really good at this here. Or like, oh, here are some ways where I'm really not flexible and maybe I should consider examining that. And just start noticing. I think don't make this a problem if it's not a problem, right?

So I think there's just a piece of it that is just noticing if and when it's coming up in your sessions. And you'll know, because a client will kind of have like a leaned back energy. Not leaned back like relaxed, but leaned back like, ugh, not what I want right now. I think you can feel that if you allow yourself to relax.

I think it's one reason that I do so much talking about being confident in your coaching, because when you relax into your coaching and into knowing what you're doing, it's a lot easier to have the space to pick up on things like that, right? To pick up on like, ooh, something feels weird. Something's off today. Something isn't going quite right. Let me check in.

I don't even think it always has to be that, okay, now you just know the answer, right? Like, you know how to adjust and that's all you have to do.

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Sometimes it might just be checking in with the client. And not asking them, okay, how do you want to adjust? But just checking in and saying, it seems like that didn't land well for you. Or it feels like maybe we're not up for celebrations today. Or I felt a shift in the energy in the session and I'm just curious what just came up.

There are so many different ways, right? So many different ways you can check in. And I spend so much time doing this, giving coaches permission to just ask their client instead of having to know, here's the perfect way to handle it. Here's the perfect answer. Sometimes it's better, instead of you guessing, and can actually be a lot more powerful for the client to kind of help them figure out what it is they want in that moment.

All right, friends, thank you for putting up with my voice today. I am a little horse. I'm doing my best. I've been traveling and every time I travel, I come home and just I'm fine while I travel, and then I get home and it's like, my voice is just like, okay, that's enough talking. So thank you for putting up with that.

If you are loving these, this is all part of new content I'm creating for The Coach Lab, you should definitely come join us. We are having a lot of fun. It's also coming up on the two year anniversary of The Coach Lab being open and I have so many fun plans that will be happening inside The Coach Lab, outside The Coach Lab, just all the things.

So if you're still not quite sure, stay tuned because I'm going to convince you. I'm going to get you in there for my two year celebration, because it's going to be fun. And it is a really fun community. I think if you're not there, you're missing out just a little bit. But either way, I'm just glad you're here listening to this podcast, hopefully taking away everything you can from it, using it in your coaching.

And I would love to hear from you. So if you want to let me know what you think or topics that you would love coaching on, I know a few of you sent topics in, which are so fun. Thank you for that. I love to hear them. So email

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me, message me, find me on Instagram, send me a DM. I check them myself. And I can't wait to hear from you. 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.