

Ep #174: When Your Client Has Multiple Goals



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With Your Host

Lindsay Dotzlaf

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Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 174.

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. Today I want to talk about a question that I got from one of you, from a listener and actually a client of mine. But this is something that comes up in The Coach Lab every once in a while, and so I thought it would be fun to just kind of riff on this question.

And I'm just going to answer it the way I would if you were just sitting here with me and I was like, oh, let me think. Here's, I think, my answer to it. I don't have notes planned. I don't have bullet points because this is truly something that comes up all of the time and I just want to give you kind of my unfiltered thoughts about it and some things for you to think about.

So Regina Sloan, thank you. Shout out for sending in this question. I did see your email. I don't know that I responded, but I'm so grateful for you for sending an email. She sent me an email with multiple questions on it because inside The Coach Lab, I asked what topics would you love to hear on the podcast? And I appreciate you. Thanks, girl.

So I think this is a great question. Regina said, "When you're a general life coach, or if you aren't a general life coach this probably still comes up anyway. And when your client has a bunch of different goals, when they hire you and they have a bunch of different goals or they have multiple goals that aren't necessarily related to each other, how do you know where to start? How do you manage it? Like, do you stick to just one at a time? Or do you kind of go through one and then go onto the next and/or how do you keep track of progress?"

I think this is an excellent question. And again, this does come up inside The Coach Lab, inside my container quite often. Or not often, but every once in a while it'll come up on a call. So I think it's a great topic. And of

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course, just like always, my answer is it totally depends, but I'll walk through a couple of different scenarios.

So first of all, when your client is hiring you, it's so important, you've heard me say this, it's so important to get really clear about what their goals are, right? So that's the first thing, like the setup for how you're going to handle this.

When a client hires you, let's say you are a general life coach. Or you aren't but you don't have a super kind of strict coaching container and your clients, maybe they hire you for, I don't know, building a business, but then sometimes they'll come to you for things going on with their family or things that are happening adjacent to that, right?

So I'm going to speak like I'm answering this for a general life coach who's kind of up for coaching on anything. But if you're not and you have a specific niche, but this still comes up for you, just listen through that lens and make it apply to however you would think about this.

Okay, so you're a general life coach, you do a consult or a sales call or intro call or whatever it is that you're doing. You know that there are several different things the client wants to work on. What I would do, how I would handle this, let's say you have a six month container. Again, if this isn't what you have, just make it fit for whatever your container looks like.

Let's say you have a six month container and you are doing weekly coaching sessions. What I would do the very first call, even though you probably went over it possibly on the consult or on the intro call, on that very first contact you had with the potential client. Once they've hired you, on the very first call I would probably spend the whole first call at least, at least the whole first call, getting very specific about their goals.

Even if they have, let's say five different goals, I would do this with each goal. I would talk about them separately. I would ask them, okay – Let me think of an example. Let's say I want to feel more confident at work. I'm just making something up. Let's say that's one of their goals, right? I want to feel more confident at work.

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I would get so specific. Like, okay, what do you mean by that? What does that look like for you? How will you know when you are more confident at work? What do you think that will create? Like, why do you want to feel that way? I would just ask a bunch of questions about the goal to get very specific, right? So that you are both on the same page and know kind of like what success looks like or what it looks like to be on the way to that goal.

Some goals are very measurable, you've heard me talk about this a million times, and some aren't. If someone tells you, I want to just feel better about my decision making. Okay, that's not at all specific. I want to feel more confident at work. I want to improve my relationship with my partner. None of those things are actually very specific. Even if you as the coach first hear it and think like, oh yeah, I know exactly what that means, just notice that you're probably running it through a filter of what it would mean to you.

So you want to ask just a bunch of questions. Stay super curious because not only do you want to know so that you can know moving forward, are we making progress on this, but you also want to make it clear. Like you want to create clarity for your client around it. They might not actually know.

So you might say, you know, they might say something like, well, I just want to improve my relationship with my partner. And you might say, okay, what does that mean? Like, tell me specifically, what will it look like when you've done that? How will you know when it's improving?

As coaches, we're used to thinking about stuff like this, but for a lot of humans in the world who don't have some of the tools that we have and who aren't used to, especially if it's their first time working with a coach, maybe they're just not used to that type of awareness. It might be like, well, what do you mean? Like, obviously doesn't everybody know what that means? I just want to improve my relationship with my partner.

But to get them to explore it is going to be something totally different. Like just that in itself, just exploring the concept of what does that mean to you,

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it's going to be very eye opening. It's going to be like the beginning of the coaching.

Now, they might already know. They might've been thinking about it and it might be very like, well, it would be this and it would be this and this, and they might be able to name it. And for some clients, it might be very like a process to really get them to think through, okay, what does that specifically look like to you? Not to everyone else. Not like if we take a poll and ask everybody, what does an improved relationship look like? But specifically to you, what does that look like?

So I would do that with each goal, right? So that it's super clear what you're working with, like how they would define the goal. Not how you would define it, but how they would define it. How will you know if it's working?

And then one of my favorite things, so one of my favorite questions, you can use this question at the beginning of just a coaching session, if you have very kind of loose structure to your coaching sessions where they kind of come and like, okay, kind of like a thought download and then you just start coaching. You can use this question there, or you can use this question in this situation where a client is like, okay, here are my five goals that I want to work on over the next six months.

You can just ask, great. You can say, great, where would you love to start? I think sometimes as coaches, we love to take it on ourselves that if we really know what we're doing, we should always be the one guiding the session and in charge of the session. And in some ways that is true, but not for this case. This can be, like you can really leave this up to the client.

You could even ask them, depending on if you think it makes sense, you could ask them, you could say, great, where would you love to start? Which one of these do you want to start working on? You could also ask them, do you think you want to work on these kind of one at a time? Like, which would be your preference, right? Would you like to work on these one at a time, or do we want to just keep in mind, like, here are the five goals and you can kind of bring whichever one you want to the call?

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Now you do kind of want to be careful with that. I think it's always great to ask them and to leave it up to them. Like if that were me, if I was doing it, I might give them just a little bit of a warning and say, okay, let's pick, for now like just which one are we going to start on today? And you can bring whatever you want to the next calls, but I'm going to just give you a little something to pay attention to.

What's probably going to happen is that every week when you come to the calls, your brain, because this is what brains do, is going to want to focus on the easiest one. The one that feels the easiest, the most efficient, the less maybe like confronting. And sometimes that might be perfect. But we just want to be aware of it just in case. Like just to be sure that you're not putting off the thing that feels actually like the heaviest and that might be affecting you the most day to day or in the moment.

So that's just something to consider. You might just give them that little prompt if they say, like if you do give them the option and then they say, oh yeah, I think I just want to bring whatever to the calls. You might just kind of point that out.

Also, as far as how to keep track of it, I personally have never been a huge note taker in coaching sessions, unless I'm making scribbles of just like something for me to remember. But I don't take notes for every single thing that my clients say or whatever. But in this case, I probably would take specific notes on what are the goals and what does the client say they would look like when they're met, right?

Just especially if it's more than one. Like if it's just one goal, you might be able to remember. But if it's, let's say five different goals, it might be really important for you to remember, and maybe possibly even share with your client so that you can stay on track.

Now, I think it depends what type of goals they are. One thought that I have just about coaching in general is that when you're coaching someone on their life, on different areas of their life, helping a client become more self-aware, helping a client really recognize their thoughts, their feelings,

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helping them see how they're making decisions, notice how they're being reactive in situations versus proactive, just like doing all of those things in one area is going to influence all of the areas. Which is why I don't think it really strongly matters if you do one at a time or if you kind of go back and forth between the goals.

I do think, however, that the risk of going back and forth between, you know, kind of like skipping all around is that maybe, this wouldn't be true for all clients, but you just want to notice it might allow you as the coach and it might allow the client to stay very surface level, which sometimes that's okay. Not every single call has to feel like you're just really like digging in there and digging deep. Sometimes it's totally fine that some sessions feel a little more surface level than others.

But if you're coaching someone for an entire six months and it always feels like that, I would check in on this and see if that could be why, right? Because if a client is just coming with kind of the easiest thing that's on their mind that day, it could allow sessions to just stay like, what's just the easiest thing? What's the thing I could just talk about and get through this 45 minutes or get through this hour, or however long the session is, and then just move on? So I think those are a few things to keep in mind.

Also one thing to consider is that so let's say you've taken notes, you know exactly what their goals are and what they describe, like here's what it's going to look like when I hit them. One thing you can consider too, is that as the coach, you can bring them up, right?

So if let's say they pick, okay, I really want to focus on just one thing at a time. First, let's focus on my relationship. But then you notice a few calls in that something that you're talking about also pertains to one of the other goals that they've set for themselves. You could kind of point that out or bring it up or say like, oh, let's examine this. If you're having this thought over here, or if you're reacting this way to this situation, I'm curious if it's also, like if you also think it's affecting the way you treat money, just as an example.

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I'm just thinking about maybe they want coaching on their relationship with their partner and they also want coaching on money, their thoughts about money, lack of money, a difference with their partner in how they spend money, like whatever it is. That often tends to be – I'm just thinking back to when I was a one-on-one coach, that was like an overlap that happened often.

So to come back to the answer, again, I do not think there's a right way. I also think you as the coach get to choose what you love. So for example, if right now you're listening to me and you're like, there's no way that I could focus on five different things at a time with one client, that's great. You can decide ahead of time, okay, we're going to focus on one of these.

And depending on how big the goals are, right? Some of them might be things that you know are going to be ongoing work, right? There's no, like we're talking about how I want to have a better relationship with my partner, that's probably something your client is going to be working on forever, as long as they choose to. Not necessarily with you or with a coach, but there's just no exact end line, right? There's no exact finish of like, okay, checked off. Now I never have to think about that again.

So it kind of depends on if it's a goal like that, or if it's something very specific and very, you know, more short-term, more measurable. I want to improve my relationship with my partner, which would be very broad, right? There could be something a lot more specific, but under that same guise, that's like, I want to be less reactive or want to react less angry when my partner leaves dishes on the sink, right? That might not take really that long to coach on. And it could be, like that's very specific.

So kind of depending on what kind of goals your clients bring you, I think that's where you get to decide. If you're like, okay, all of these things are very broad, very kind of more like if we focused a little more on coaching theory or like showing them in all of these different situations, let's really create some self-awareness in the moment. How are you feeling? Like, what does your body feel like? What are you thinking? What are you

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reacting to? What are you wishing would be different, right? Like just focusing almost like zooming.

Sometimes I talk about this in The Coach Lab. So if you're in there, you're going to know what I'm talking about. If you're not, you might be like, wait, what are you talking about? But sometimes I think of it as like zooming out versus zooming in.

So you could zoom out a little bit and say, okay, what's almost like the coaching theory that we could talk about that's going to help in all these situations? Or there's the zoom in, which focuses very specifically on how do I not react when my partner leaves dishes in the sink? Which by the way, this is a totally made up example because in my relationship, I'm probably the one that leaves more dishes in the sink. So this is not something I react to.

But okay, so that kind of answers, again, of course, no right answer. I know it's your favorite thing to hear from me, but just really thinking about you as the coach, how would you like to handle it? What feels best to you? How experienced are you, maybe.

Like maybe the more experienced of a coach you are, the more comfortable you might feel kind of gauging, kind of saying, like leaving it up to the client and saying, well, bring whatever you want, but kind of gauging also, are they putting this thing off? Does it feel like we're avoiding certain topics and then gently bringing those things up.

So hopefully that feels helpful. I also think like truly when you think about, like sometimes there's a fear that comes in for coaches when I can tell when they ask me this question, like when I dig a little into it there tends to be a little bit of a fear that's like, well, they just hired me for general life coaching. And it seems like so much to cover even in six months or in however long. Like I just already know there's no way we're going to get to all of this. And it can bring up some anxiousness or anxiety.

And I think that's when really leaning into when you show them how coaching works in one area, it really is going to affect all the areas. And just

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because they, let's say they've hired you for six months and then they say to you, well, I want to improve my relationship, get a new job, work out more, you know, just whatever.

It's like all very big, very broad things. I think it's like you don't have to be afraid to say, oh, okay, these are all like, this is basically that you're telling me that you want to change your entire life in the next six months. So we'll do our best, but let's dig into which one feels the most important to you right now. I think that's a great question if they come to you with just very broad answers, very much kind of, you know, I want to do it all in the next six months.

And you could even explain to them, when we work on one thing, you're going to see how having more self-awareness, trusting yourself more, being less confrontational in your communication, like whatever the things are that they bring up, whenever you improve it in one area, it's going to automatically start affecting the other areas. So it's not like we have to work totally through one thing until the finish line and then we're starting at zero with the next thing because that's just not how coaching works.

I would consider that. You can just be totally honest with them and say, this is a lot. We're going to do our best, where would you love to start? Which feels the most pressing, which feels the most important to you right now? Or you could even start your calls like that each week or however often you're coaching them, right? What feels the most pressing for you today?

Another option, I'm just giving you options all over the board. Another option is that you can, let's say they choose one thing. So maybe there's a main focus. And then every once in a while there are other pieces of it that bubble up a little bit and you can give them permission to like, well, when these things feel pressing though, like don't hesitate to bring them.

I remember when I was a one-on-one coach and I was just coaching everyone on everything. A lot of my clients, because I was an entrepreneur before I was a coach, a lot of my clients were entrepreneurs. And sometimes, a lot of times they were running businesses that I really didn't

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know anything about, but I was just coaching them on specific situations in their companies, in their businesses, in how they showed up with their employees, like those types of things.

And so even if that was the main thing we coached on, sometimes they would come to coaching sessions and say, okay, I know we've been coaching on this thing with my business partner, but yesterday, this thing happened with my spouse, with my partner, with my husband, whatever, and it just feels really heavy today. Can we coach on that? And of course I would say yes, while also being very aware of when that was happening consistently.

You've probably heard me talk about this before, but when there are a bunch of goals and it's all over the place, I think also don't be afraid to point out or to notice, oh, I think that my client is maybe putting off this main thing that she said she wanted coaching on, that they said they wanted coaching on, right? Don't be afraid to bring it up. I just want to point out, you hired me specifically to coach you on your relationship with your business partner. And we did a lot of coaching on that, but we haven't talked about it in weeks. Let's just check in. How's it going?

Just never be afraid to involve the client in the decision, also to just kind of trust your gut to bring something up or to ask about it when you're like, hmm, that's weird. I haven't heard about this thing in a while. Or to shift the conversation in a different direction with consent, like, okay, we can definitely coach on that today. Can we just check in on this thing that we were talking about last week real quick?

And then the last thing I'll say when it comes to this topic is to just not be afraid to bring the client back, to kind of pause through, you know, halfway through, a quarter of the way through your sessions, however many sessions, let's say they're working with you for six months, to check in with the goals every two months. You know, at two months, at three months, however many, however often you think makes sense, but to really come back to what they told you in the beginning, what progress looks like, what success looks like.

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And I think this could be one reason why it's very important, especially in this situation, if there's a bunch of different goals, it's very important to write it down and to take notes. Because what can happen on occasion is that you might be coaching on something and we'll just use the business partner as an example. I haven't coached on that in so long, but for a client I had a long time ago it's something that came up all the time.

And let's say, this part is totally made up. Let's say at the beginning she told me, you know, she was like, I want a better relationship with my business partner. And I might have asked like, okay, what does that look like? Like, what does it look like now? What do you envision it looking like? What does a better relationship mean in this situation?

And then she told me and let's say she gave me all these answers, right? And just like, this is what it would look like day to day. This is how I might feel differently about it. This is what I want to think about her. And then let's say a few months down the road, and we've coached on this a lot and it's just something that she brings to calls a lot and she's really doing the work. But I notice that the things that she is saying, or the things that she's kind of hinting at or telling me that she wants at that point, two months down the line, aren't actually matching what she told me at the beginning.

Don't be afraid as the coach to go back and say, here's what you told me when you hired me. Here's what you told me success would look like. Here's what you told me what kind of progress towards the goal would look like. It kind of feels like now you're saying something different, so I just want to be sure that we're moving in the right direction. I just want to be sure. Like, maybe something has changed. Totally fine, right? Because the client always gets to be in charge.

This isn't like calling them out or saying, no, we're headed in the wrong direction, this is what you told me. But to just really check in and say, this is what you said before, this is what you're saying now. It's totally possible that with more awareness and all of the coaching that the situation has started to look different to you, right? Or you've changed your mind about

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some things. But I just want to be really clear about it for myself and for you.

Because it could be that there might be some coaching in there around maybe your client started to believe that that thing they said at the beginning isn't possible. Or that, I don't know, something could have happened in that situation where the answer is actually coaching, not changing the goal.

Sometimes my clients in The Coach Lab, sometimes this comes up if you're like a fitness coach or a weight loss coach or something that has some sort of health coach. And they'll say to me, like, well, halfway through it seems like what we're coaching on is I'm helping them love themselves and love their body. But that's not why they hired me.

So what I'm saying to you right now is don't be afraid to just check in on that. It could be that they've totally changed their mind about what they want. That's amazing. But it could also be that they've totally given up and they have the thought like, well, I'm never going to be able to lift that amount of weight, so I might as well just be satisfied with where I am. Or I'm never going to be able to, you know, hit all those grams of protein in a week, so now I've just decided like, whatever, I'm not doing that anymore.

Those are opportunities for coaching if they want it, or at least for you to see that and know it. Because that's a very different answer than, actually, after we've created so much of this awareness, I can see that that goal that I thought I wanted was just created from what I thought I was supposed to be doing in the world, right? Like created by society, created by ideas that have been put in my head since I was a little kid. But it turns out when I really check in with myself, that's not actually what I want. Those are just different things.

Okay, I've covered a lot of ground and answered it in a bunch of different ways. So hopefully this was really helpful. I do want to tell you, all of you, that I am super excited for the next month of the podcast. I'm doing something that I haven't done before. In March of 2024, it's the two-year

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anniversary for The Coach Lab. And so I'm going to be creating a lot of content on the podcast, sharing some things that we talk about in The Coach Lab, sharing some Coach Lab ideas with you, answering questions.

So not questions like, how much is it or whatever. Not like that. Not like selling you on it, but answering questions about how I created it, where some of the ideas come from, how I made some of the decisions that I made, like why is it lifetime access versus a membership? And I will be interviewing many of my clients, doing short interviews, and talking about The Coach Lab. Clients that are inside The Coach Lab.

I had everybody fill out, everybody that wanted to fill out a questionnaire telling me that they would love to come on the podcast to talk about just one small concept, one takeaway, one thing they've learned since being in there. And they're going to do a little teaching for you, the listener. So first, you get a little taste of what's going on in there, but also there are going to be, I promise you, so many takeaways.

This is already happening. I've been reading their applications and they are so good. I can't wait for them to come on and share some of their genius with you. Yes, some of it was created in The Coach Lab, but it's mostly their genius that has just been enhanced from being in that space or just better defined or little tiny, tiny shifts that they've made that have made huge differences in their coaching that they're excited to share with you, that you can make probably just from listening to them.

So I look forward to that. Hopefully you will look forward to it as well. I'll be back next week to start the two year Coach Lab celebration. All right, I'll see you then. 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.