

Ep #181: Become a Better Coach with One Simple Question



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 181.

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'm so happy you joined us today. I just, like full disclosure, there was just a little blip in the podcast recording time-space universe on my end and I thought I was a week ahead, which means I did not get a podcast recorded and turned in on time to air today.

What that means for you is we didn't want to leave just a big gaping hole, so we have chosen one of my past episodes that I think is really important. It's such a good reminder. Even if you've heard it before, definitely listen again and get a different take away this time.

All right, I hope you enjoy. Love you, mean it. And I will be back next week with some brand-new episodes.

I am really excited about this episode, I just have to say. I asked myself, this is kind of how I prepped for this episode.

I asked myself if I could just teach you one thing, if this is the only interaction you ever have with me as a coach. If you never work with me. If you don't know me outside of this podcast. Even if you just listen to one episode of this podcast you have come across it and then you are like, "Yeah, it's fine." And don't listen to anymore, which is fine.

I just asked myself what can I teach you, what is the one thing that would change your coaching forever? Just one thing. And that's what I'm teaching you today. It's going to be really simple, but it's going to be so powerful for your coaching.

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And this is going to apply whether you have four clients, zero clients, two clients, only peer clients, or you have 400 clients, or 200 clients, or 20 clients, or however many it is. I don't care how long you've been a coach, this is something that I use, that I check in with myself on all the time. And I didn't realize until recently how important it is to teach this.

So, what I'm going to talk about today, the one thing that will change your coaching forever, that will make you a better coach is how are you feeling while you are coaching? So like when you are actually in client sessions, whether they're on the phone, or they're on Zoom, or in person, or online coaching 100 people at a time. Whatever it is, whatever it looks like for you, what are the emotions you are experiencing while you are coaching?

So I made a list of kind of the top few that come to mind of emotions that are not useful as the coach while you're coaching, and emotions that are useful. And then I'm going to kind of talk about why they aren't or are useful and what you can do about it. All right?

So, sometimes you might not notice this in the moment but you might look back after a coaching session and think, "Oh, I was really feeling..." Fill in the blank. I was really feeling this way while I was coaching.

So the first thing I want to do is be really clear before I get started, before I dive into the emotions, that there's a difference on your calls between when you're coaching and doing something else. So for example, sometimes on a coaching call, you might be doing something that isn't actually coaching. That's like teaching, or explaining, or cheer leading, or motivating.

It might be something different that isn't coaching someone's mind, like really examining their thoughts, helping them process their emotions, you might be doing something different. So those are not the times I'm talking about, although this will be useful for that as well. But I'm really talking about the times that you are just coaching. Okay, I think that's important to distinguish before I dive in.

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So let's examine some of the feelings or some of the emotions that coaches might have while they're coaching that aren't that useful. Some of them are going to be very obvious and some of them you might think, "Oh my gosh, hold on, I do this all the time." And I'm just going to say, hey, let's check in on that.

So, first one, very obvious, boredom. Now, if you're like, "What? I would never be bored with my clients." If you have coached hundreds of clients, like I have, there are times where your brain, even if it's like maybe you're tired, but where your brain goes to a little bit of just checked out land, whatever that's called. Where you notice all of a sudden, "Oh my gosh, I wasn't paying attention." Or your brain might be wandering.

Not like you're in your head thinking about the coaching or thinking about yourself in the moment, but really just kind of checked out. One thing I would say about this is just noticing that you have a human brain. Knowing you have a human brain, knowing that this is something that happens and just bringing your attention immediately back and just really checking in, really being super curious. Staying in that curiosity and love for your client, and just re-engaging. So that one's pretty typical and very easy to fix.

Also know that sometimes when you feel bored, it's actually because your brain is working really hard and it decides to check out. So for example, if you've ever been sitting in maybe like a lecture, I can think of like lectures in college or something where you don't feel super connected to the material. But you have to listen to it because you have to learn the thing if you want to pass the class or whatever it is.

And you feel very bored and you notice, "Oh, I just checked out, I wasn't even listening." This is why. Your brain is just trying so hard to focus, so hard to pay attention. And that can lead to this kind of checking out or boredom feeling. And it's really important to just notice it and just reengage. Just get back on track, no problem.

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The next emotion that is not useful as a coach is confusion. So confusion shows up a lot when you think you don't know what you're doing. When you're in your mind thinking, "I don't know what to say next. I don't know what to do. This isn't going the way I think it should." Any thoughts like that, that just keep you completely out of your coach power and you're just like, "I don't know, I don't know what's happening." And you feel confused.

This is very similar to boredom. The solution is the same. It's really just checking back in. Leaning back in saying, "Okay, here I am, I do know what I'm doing. I don't have to have the answers."

This is one of my favorite thoughts as a coach, "I don't have to have any answers. I just can ask questions. They have the answers, we're pulling the answers out of their brain, out of their body, we're just examining what's happening. I don't have to solve this problem for them. And a lot of times when you're thinking you do or you're thinking like, "I need to fix this. I need to know what to do." That's when confusion can come in.

Here's another emotion that might actually feel really useful when it happens, and it's the opposite of confusion. And I call it like absolute certainty. And if you follow me on Instagram, you may see that sometimes I talk about having certainty as a coach and how it's a good thing. And so I actually have certainty on the emotion that doesn't work and the emotion that does work list and here's why.

When certainty is not good is when you, as the coach, are thinking, "Oh, I know exactly where this is going." It's like you're watching a movie that you've watched for the 100th time and your brain is just like, "Oh yeah, I know where we're going." And you kind of take off and start coaching from there and then you're leading the client.

Which is very different than listening to the client asking questions. It becomes very like, "Oh yeah, I already know this." And you can kind of sometimes rob the client from really like a deeper understanding or a transformation because they'll probably agree with you.

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If you are very certain, they will probably agree with you, whatever it is you're saying. But that's not really a good thing. So you want to check in. And remember, this is when you're coaching, not when you're teaching.

So when you're teaching, of course, feeling certain is amazing, right? Like, I'm certain I know what I'm talking about. Amazing. But when you're coaching and you slip into certainty, which again can feel good, it doesn't feel bad.

You probably don't get off the coaching session and think, "Oh, that didn't go well." You actually probably feel great. But that's always just something to check in with, was I leaving the client the whole time?

The next two, I have two more, and they're going to be pretty obvious. But then I'm going to really tell you where they're coming from and help you understand them more so that you don't have to judge yourself for feeling these emotions. There's nothing here that's like, you don't need to judge yourself for any of these things, just notice them.

The next one is kind of two in one. So it's irritation or annoyance or judgment. Three in one, sorry. I said two, I meant three. Irritation, annoyance, judgment. These happen, again, always because of your thoughts, your thoughts during the session.

Which a lot of them that I hear usually are, "I can't believe we have to coach on this again. We should be further along. Why are you not getting results? Why aren't you understanding this?" Like, "Why aren't you getting it? Why aren't you listening?"

Any question like that that comes up for you about your client or a judgment about your client, which really if we look inward and internalize it, this is really probably a judgment on your coaching skills, right? Because if they were moving faster, if they were further along, if they were getting results faster, that would mean you're an amazing coach, right? But it usually

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shows up as an irritation or an annoyance with the client, or even a judgment.

The way to get out of that is, first of all, if it happens after the call, is to maybe dig into it. Coach yourself a little bit, “Why was I feeling irritated? What are the thoughts I was having?” They're probably not true. Now, I'm not talking about if a client is like actually being mean to you or doing something outside a regular coaching relationship, that's totally different.

But what I'm talking about is when you are just coaching, your client is being vulnerable, they're telling you the things, or maybe they're not being vulnerable, which is where your judgment and irritation are coming from, whatever it is, just checking in and saying, “Why was I feeling this way? And what am I making it mean about myself as a coach?”

Like what am I making this thing that I don't like that my client is doing, what am I making it mean about me? And how would it be different if I was curious instead? We're going to talk more about that because obviously curious is one of the best feelings you can have while you're coaching.

So the last one, and actually, I decided there are two more. I'm adding one just on the fly. The next one I'm going to say and I don't know exactly what the word would be but it is like victorious. Which kind of goes along with the certainty, but it's even more so. It's like, “Ha, I got it. I see the thing. I win as the coach.”

I've heard some of my clients describe it this way before. And I'm like, “Oh, yeah, that's not good.” Because what's happening if you're feeling that way and you're having this like, “Ha, I got it. I found the hole, I found the gap.” Think about how your client is feeling. If your energy is coming off as like, “I won. I found it. I did it.” Whatever that is, how do you think your client is feeling in that moment?

I use the example, I don't know if I've used it on the podcast or not. But I talk about this in my mastermind, where I say if you ever are in a client

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session, and it feels a little bit like you're playing tennis, or you're playing ping pong, or table tennis or something like that, where it's like you would be hitting a ball back and forth with a person.

When you are doing that in real life, like if you're playing tennis – So funny that this is the example I use, because I've literally played tennis, maybe twice in my entire life, but here we are. But when you're playing tennis, you would be looking for like, “Where's the hole and how can I just hit the ball into that hole when they're not paying attention or that they can't get to it fast enough so that I win?”

And that is not how you want to feel when you're coaching. And I know sometimes you can because it's like, “Oh, I see it. I see where their thoughts are creating these results in their life. I can see how painful this is for them. I see how I can help them.”

It's not useful. I mean, it's great to see it, maybe. But when you slip into that energy of like, “Ha, got it, got you.” That's no good, just because of the way it feels to the client and because you might not necessarily be right. That's like the assumption, it comes back to the certainty of, “I know what you need. I know what's best for you. I know exactly what's happening, let me explain your brain to you, or your emotions.” Instead of letting the client do it.

So the last one is defensive or even angry. And this is a little similar to the irritation and judgment. But again, it's just like the next level. This shows up in your coaching when you are really getting very irritated and then defensive because maybe your client is saying something like this isn't working. Or you're not a good coach, or you don't know what you're doing.

I don't know, I've never had clients say those exact words, but some nicer form of that. Or something that you are taking to mean that that's what they're saying when maybe even they aren't. In that moment when you slip into defensiveness or anger, you are completely forgetting that they're just

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having thoughts. And they're just telling you their thoughts and it could be an opportunity to lovingly coach them or even just listen and hear them out.

But anytime you slip into defensiveness, or anger, or just you're not doing it right, like you're not client-ing right, that is a good sign that it's time to just maybe lean back a little bit. This is like the number one tip I can give you. If you're feeling defensive, if you're feeling angry, or even if you're feeling what I just said a minute ago, like the victorious, there has to be a better word. Someone message me and tell me what's the emotion I'm looking for there.

But the number one tip I can give you as the coach is just take a second and actually physically lean your body back and take a deep breath. And I know when you're feeling defensive or you're feeling angry that can be hard to do because you want to like come back with something quick. It's like also the victorious, like hitting the ball across the net and getting in the hole when they're not paying attention. It's the gap and you got it, you won, you got the point. This is the same thing, right?

Leaning back, taking a breath. And instantly even just that act of leaning your body back, like your physical body leaning back will change your tone. It will change the way you show up to the coaching, the way you listen to the what they're saying. It will just change so much even just taking that action of leaning your body back and taking a deep breath.

I know it might sound crazy, but I promise you it works. Even if just for a second, just enough to give you the awareness of like, "Oh, I'm really feeling my emotions are very high right now. Let me take a second." There's no reason you should ever feel like that as a coach.

That's just you're having thoughts in the moment, whatever they are, about your client or about yourself, or about whatever. And they're creating those emotions that are coming up for you. And so just check in with them. Take a deep breath, regroup, and then just ask a question. Be really curious.

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This leads me to feelings that work really well when you're coaching. The number one feeling, which is probably obvious because I've mentioned a few times is curiosity. And curiosity is actually the cure for a lot of the feelings that I mentioned earlier. You can cure boredom or the not paying attention with pure curiosity.

Confusion, curiosity. Certainty, for sure curiosity. Irritation, annoyance, defensiveness, anger, all of those are some other emotions that will help with those too, but for sure curiosity is always just where you want to lead from. It can help you anytime you're like, "I don't know what I'm doing." Or "This isn't going how I thought it would," or, "I'm not a good coach." Anything you're thinking like that in the moment, if you can find curiosity, find it in your body, it will change the game for you.

Very closely linked to that is openness. Now, this to me, when I think of you've probably heard coaches use the term holding the space. This is what I think of, is openness. And curiosity and openness, and the next emotion I'm going to talk about, which is love and compassion, they're all very connected.

But to me, holding the space is just this openness of, "I'm just here, I'm just listening. I'm going to be very curious about what you're saying. I'm going to ask you amazing questions." It just creates this feeling in my chest that is an actual experience of openness and vastness.

And what that does is it allows anything my clients are saying, it just allows them to come into me and me really process and listen to what they're saying. Instead of going to my brain having all the thoughts and then experiencing different emotions and trying to get out of it.

So curiosity, openness, the next one which I already said is love or compassion. So when I say love, I've had a lot of people ask me about this, like what do you mean love your client? This is obviously a very different kind of love than I would have for my kids, or my husband, or my mom.

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It's a very different type of love but it is very connected to that openness. I would describe it almost more as like a lack of judgment, which we know this is different than kids and husband because I judge them all the time. I just choose to love them also. It's just is a different type of love. It's an openness and a lack of judgment and like, "I am just here for you. I am here to help you. What do you need? How can I help?"

The same with compassion. I think compassion is something that we don't talk about often enough in coaching. And I think it could go a really long way. Now, what compassion isn't, and maybe this is something that should go on the emotions that aren't great in coaching. But I'm not saying you should feel empathy in your coaching.

Empathy is like, "I believe everything you're saying. I feel it too. You're feeling sad so I'm going to feel sad." It's like believing all of the story. It takes you right out of any coaching authority to be able to help them.

Now, your clients can come to you and tell you things maybe that have happened to them or that they've experienced and you can have empathy, this is not a problem. But for you to be able to really coach them, and again, coach, not any of the other things you're doing on a coaching call. But for you to be able to really coach them on something, you don't want to have empathy with your clients. But compassion, yes.

Compassion is like, "I understand that you're hurting right now. Or I understand that you are having this negative emotion. I understand." It's like an understanding of the human experience is how I would describe compassion. It's more like, "I'm not in the story with you. But I also am sorry that you're feeling this way. And so I'm going to help you out by coaching." That's very different than empathy.

Compassion allows you to have so much tolerance for all of the things that create some of the emotions I was talking about before, the irritation, annoyance, defensiveness. Compassion is like, "Let me just lean into this

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and help you because I love you.” Just like I was saying a second ago, love, compassion.

The last one, which I think is useful in every circumstance, on every coaching session is calm. And this is more of like the overarching, I would say, emotion that can show up anytime you're coaching. It's just a general calm which is completely opposite, obviously, from the defensiveness and anger.

Calm is like, “My mind is calm. My mind is clear, It's ready to just hear you.” It really facilitates the other feelings of curiosity, openness, love, compassion. And it just allows you to show up for your clients.

I want you to think about this, I have had this experience before, not for a long time. But I've had this experience where I've shown up for coaching, with whatever coach I was working with at the time and I could tell that my coach was not feeling calm.

She either had tons of energy, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. But it can feel bad if you're showing up to coaching with lots of negative emotion as the client, and then your coach is like, “I'm ready to go, let's do it. What do you have? Let's go.” And you're like, “Uh, I feel terrible.” It can be very kind of jarring.

Also, you could show up to coaching and your coach isn't feeling calm and maybe they're getting in the pool with you. Maybe they're really believing your story, they're getting very upset, they're getting angry, whatever it is. That also doesn't feel great as the client. You want your coach to just be calm. You want them to be this open, empty bucket that you can pour all your things into.

I think one time it's really important to check in with some of these last ones that I'm saying right now. And this is interesting to think about because you think like, “Oh, the better I know my client, the better coach I may be for them.” But sometimes that's not true. So one important time to check in

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with this is if you have become kind of friends with your clients, which isn't a problem.

I think I've talked about that in an episode previously. But anyway, it's not a problem to be friends with your client. But you really want to be sure that you're separating that from any coaching that you're giving. And so when you, as the coach, when your job is to show up and be just calm, you're being like a blank slate for them, sometimes your thoughts about friendship or something that you want to tell them can get in the way.

And one thing that I love, a coach that I have worked with, Maggie Reyes. she has been here on the podcast, she's incredible. And one thing she has done before, which I just love, is she'll coach me and we'll get to the end of our session and we finish and then she'll say, "Okay, I have something to tell you."

I forget exactly how she says that but basically like the coaching is complete. We are closing this, and then we're opening this friendship window. And now I have something to tell you. Or like I can't wait to see you next week. Or something that could create an emotion in both of us that is something besides calm. It's really important to not let that into the coaching, into the actual coaching.

So, I hope that this was so helpful. This has been coming up a lot in my masterminds lately so I've really been thinking about how to teach it. And I just thought if I could just share one thing with you that could change everything about the way you coach. Without even having to go learn any more tools, any more skills, anymore anything. Just really paying attention to your emotion, to your energy as the coach.

What are you bringing to the table? How can you fix it? If you notice, no don't judge yourself, but if you notice, "Oh, I'm really experiencing a lot of defensiveness or annoyance or confusion in my coaching." Okay, how can you fix it? And then knowing where I want to go, curiosity, openness, love, compassion, calm. Really take a second and think about how do any of

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those feel in your body? Your body, as the coach, so different than the ones that I said in the beginning.

Oh, and I just realized one thing that I didn't say. I said I had certainty on both lists but I think I actually forgot to write it down on the second list. Here's how certainty is a great emotion to have as a coach. When you are just feeling certain in your ability as a coach, which is very different than like, "I'm certain I know what my clients about to say, or what they need." Or whatever, fill in the blank. That's very different than certainty in yourself.

Let's just add that in the end. But feeling that certainty is a really good thing when it's certainty in you and what you do. What you're bringing to the table. So, one more time, curiosity, openness, love, compassion, calm and certainty. That is all for today. Love you, mean it. I will see 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 lindsaydotzlafoaching.com. That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. See you next week.