

Ep #182: How to Help Your Overthinking Clients (Part 1)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 182.

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. I have something new to talk about with you today. I'm currently in the middle of redoing some content that we have inside The Coach Lab. And one thing I realized I haven't talked about on the podcast yet, which I thought could be really interesting for a few episodes, is to talk about what to do when you have clients who kind of get stuck in one – How do I want to say it? In one form of self-awareness, or I don't even know if that's the right way to say it because honestly it's kind of a lack of self-awareness, but I'll just say what it is.

When your client gets stuck in overthinking, or when your client gets stuck in processing and feeling emotions. I think that one's a little less common, at least in my experience. Or when your client gets stuck in taking action, taking action, taking action, without kind of pausing to recognize thoughts and feelings.

Now, sometimes this is because a client is new and they don't know what coaching is and they're just coming to you like this is just what they do. And when I think about this, when I think about these three things, I've seen them show up in so many clients that I've worked with. And I want to be very clear, they're not a problem, but they can feel like a problem when you're coaching someone and your client keeps coming back to you with the same things kind of over and over.

And don't worry, I will give very specific examples so that you know what I'm talking about. And we're going to do this in three episodes. So today we're going to talk about clients who tend to be in their head, who tend towards overthinking. And I kind of think of this as speaking different languages.

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Some of you have heard me talk about this before, where I think some people just naturally are very aware of their thoughts. Just clients come to you who they might not even have the words to say that, but that is what they are. They're just in their head thinking a lot. They could sit around and think about things.

This is totally me. For me, thinking sometimes is an action. I could get lost in thinking about something all day if I let myself. And I'll tell you, I'll give you some examples of why it can be a problem, but specifically when you're coaching someone like this, it can be a problem because it feels like a good thing at first, right? It's disguised as a good thing.

And I also want to be clear, all three of these are good things to an extent, and I'll tell you kind of where it starts to be a problem and how you know. But all three of these things are good things to an extent, right? As coaches, one of our main jobs, in my opinion, kind of what coaching is, is helping our clients create self-awareness that they didn't have before.

And that can be done in so many different ways, right? That can be done through thought work, through feeling and processing emotions, through just learning to recognize what is going on in my head, what is going on in my body, even awareness around the actions they take, right? Why are you doing this? Why do you want to do this? What do you want?

Just creating a new realm of self-awareness that they've not had before, and then helping them decide, okay, here's where you are now. Where is it that you want to go? And what's the new awareness that we need to get there? What's the strategy you're going to use? And then along the way, still continually creating awareness, right?

So let's be very clear that it is a great thing when your client comes to you very aware of their thoughts, especially if it's new for them. It can feel very exciting. I remember this part of coaching when I was a client and I had a coach and just being aware of like, oh my gosh, when I believe this thing, I can very clearly see how it affects the results that I'm creating in my life, right?

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So let's talk about when you have a client who is, I'm going to call it like overthinking, getting stuck in the thinking piece. And again, it can be great, right? We want them to be aware. We want them to be self-aware. We want them to understand how they're thinking, why they're thinking it. All of those things, so good. But here's how you know this is happening.

Actually, first I want to say, here's why it's a problem. And this is the same reason it's a problem in all three cases, is when there's no forward movement towards the goal. That's how you know, right? So sometimes you're going to teach a client to recognize what they're thinking about certain situations, maybe throughout the day, like whatever it is, however you do it with your clients, you're going to teach them this thing.

They're going to practice it at some point, either you're going to give them homework to practice it, or they're just naturally going to practice it because you're helping them do it on calls in sessions or whatever. They're going to practice it and they're going to come to you and report back, oh my gosh, I have this awareness. They might not say it like that, but I realized I am constantly believing that I can't do that thing or whatever. And that's going to be great. We're always going to celebrate that. It's amazing.

When it becomes a problem is when you see that that's all that's happening and there's no forward momentum. So that is the case if they're overthinking, if they're over feeling, or if they are over actioning, we'll call it that for now. But today we're going to talk specifically just about overthinking.

So how do you know? Like, what are the things that actually show up in sessions to kind of indicate to you, like, hey, let's be onto this because we might need to step in at some point and point them in a different direction. How you know, and these are the ones that I have experienced. You might even have some of your own to add. So if you do, make sure to take note of that or notice when it comes up in your sessions.

They come to sessions over and over kind of reporting back to you, here are the things I've been thinking about. And they kind of report or indicate

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that no action has been taken. Now, again, I want to be clear with this one, sometimes this is okay. Sometimes there are parts of coaching that really are sitting in self awareness.

But when it's happening week after week after week, and it feels very like I have so much to report here, all the things that I've been thinking about, right? Eventually it might be like, okay, and are you moving forward? Like what actions have you taken to resolve this issue or to get closer to your goal or to create what you want, right?

So they kind of come to each session reporting all the things they've been thinking about. They might say things consistently like, well, this shows up for me, and I work with coaches so this is how coaches would say it, but your clients might say it a little differently. But coaches will say it was really a belief problem. And they'll say it consistently, right?

And I'm like, what does that mean? Like a belief problem. Beliefs are so big. Like that can mean so many different things, right? So when someone says to me, I think it's a belief problem, it's kind of like we have to get to the bottom of it.

Now, again, once or twice, great. I'm so glad that they're onto themselves, that they see this thing that they really want to work through. But sometimes they're just using this as like, we just have to, there's like more there. I need to believe differently, believe harder, right, whatever it is.

Here's one that might not stand out at first, but this stands out to me a lot because I actually think I do this sometimes so I really recognize it when other people do it. They seem like they are great at getting coached. They're a great student, like a great client, because when you are an overthinker and you're super aware of your thoughts, it's very easy to report back to your coach, oh, here's all the awareness I found over the last week or since our last session or whatever, right?

That can seem to a coach, it can be like, oh, this is amazing. Look how self-aware they are. Again, the thing to be onto is like, how often are they doing that without actually taking any action towards the thing? Maybe they

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report to you or this happens in a session where they are thinking about one thing and maybe you're even coaching on it. And then that leads to another thing. And then that leads to another thing. And that leads to another thing.

And they're consistently just thinking their way from problem to problem, right? Like they start over here at point A and by the end of the coaching session, you've landed on like point G, but you haven't actually gotten anywhere. You've just jumped from thing to thing, right? That just shows you like, oh, they're really good at following their thoughts. Like, oh, here's this thought. Oh, now that leads to this thought. Oh, now that leads to this thought.

That's probably what they're doing on their own as well, like when they are in the shower, putting on makeup, blow drying their hair, whatever. Like in those mundane moments or when they're supposed to be working and they're not, or when they're supposed to be working out and they're not, like whatever. That's probably happening in their brain, they have a thought, it leads to another thought, it leads to another thought. They're just used to that. They're used to just thinking their way from point A to point whatever.

So when they're doing that, as they're going from thought to thought, they're thinking through like, okay, how do I solve this? How do I solve this? And they're just always onto the next thing, thinking about how do I solve it? But they're only solving it from a thought standpoint, right? And that actually, again, comes back to they're not actually taking action on it. They're just thinking through it, solving it.

Now, sometimes this can be a great thing. Sometimes as a coach you might be working with a client, you point out something, a belief that they have, a thought that they're consistently telling themselves about their goal. You point it out. They realize that it actually is a thought and not the truth of the universe. And every once in a while a client can just immediately, like once they see it, they can just let it go.

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That's great, right? But you're still going to see that reflected in the actions that they take, like how they're feeling and then the actions that they're taking. Because if they really let it go, then they're not going to take any more actions based on that old belief.

Maybe they show up and they've thought through something, then they come up with a solution, or maybe you're even doing this in a session. They come up with a solution or a strategy, but then they immediately start thinking about all the things that can go wrong. This is very similar to the last one. It's like problem hopping, right? Like they have a problem, they think of a solution. Now there's a new problem. Now they need a solution for that.

And it's just kind of like a cycle instead of, okay, at some point you have to go out and try the things. And don't worry, I'm going to get to like, how do you solve for these?

They may seem to have heightened emotion, it could be positive or negative, that doesn't make a ton of sense for the situation. So they might come to sessions, and sometimes this does happen when someone is a new client and they've never had coaching before. They might just feel almost elated or excited about just their newfound self-awareness and how it really helps them feel differently in their life, right?

Okay, that's amazing. But sometimes if this continues over long periods of time, again, it comes back to like, they're not moving forward. They're maybe not taking a lot of action. Their emotion to you as the coach may seem a little out of place or a little heightened. And it's because they've been sitting in, oh, if I have this new belief, then it could lead to this and I could create these new results.

It's like, I can think back to my business when I was brand new in business and it was like the very first time I believed that I could make money in my business. That this could be like a real thing. That I could build this business and it was going to support me the way I wanted it to. It was going to be the business I wanted it to be.

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And it was like this. I felt almost elated, right? And I could have sat in that and just sat there forever because it feels really good, right? It's like this new belief, I've never had it before. Here it is, I'm just going to sit in it because it feels really scary to move outside of it and take action on it because then it might go away, which we'll get to, right? Like that's a good example.

So when a client has a new awareness, it might happen over and over, right? You're like, yeah, you've realized that before. We've come to this conclusion before. When you just kind of have that sense of like, okay, great, and let's talk about where do we go from here? I want you to trust that intuition as a coach when it's something that keeps coming up with certain clients.

And you'll notice it probably, probably whichever one of these you tend to be, you'll probably attract a lot of clients that are like that, especially when you're working with one-on-one clients. But just notice, you know, I think one of the reasons I wanted to teach these is like going through them is going to help you start to notice them.

And you might start to notice differences in your clients. This person loves to just be in their feels, right? This person loves to be in their head and likes thinking about things. This person loves to just hustle and go take all the action. Just notice which is which. And of course, I don't think it's all black and white. There's some overlap between all of those things.

Okay, coming back to, they may have a heightened sense of emotion. They could also, it could be a negative emotion too, right? Because now they've thought to themselves, it's like the problem hopping, right? They thought themselves into here are all the problems and now they're in dread.

It's like they created a new awareness. They moved on in their head and they created a lot of hypotheticals instead of going out and taking action and seeing what actually happens. They've created a lot of hypotheticals and then all those hypotheticals fail and now they're in dread or in this

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negative emotion. And it's all things happening in their mind, not actually in the world.

The last one is maybe they stay really big picture. They don't want to drill down into, okay, but how do we get there? What are the first steps? What's the first obstacle I have to get through, right? Maybe it's like, because I just used this example it's just in my mind, but it's like I see this sometimes when coaches start a business, they've never run a business before. They've certainly never had a coaching business before.

And they're like, I want to make \$100,000 this year. But they haven't done the math. They have no idea how many clients that would be. They haven't dug into it at all. They're just holding onto this really big picture belief, which is amazing as long as you start attaching actions to it and saying like, okay, now how do I get there?

Okay, so what's really happening when this is happening? When your client is overthinking, what is actually happening? It's not all of these things, but maybe one, maybe a couple of them, or maybe something different that I haven't thought of. But usually the biggest one, they're just scared it won't work, right?

When they're overthinking, overthinking, like staying in the big picture, staying in like, if I just stay, it's almost like a fake belief kind of. If I just stay here in this fake belief and I just keep thinking about it and keep believing it as hard as I can, I don't actually have to think about what are the steps, what happens if it doesn't work, right? They're just scared something's going to go wrong and that it won't work. They don't want to move out of that part where it feels good, where they're just believing.

Maybe they don't want to get it wrong. This tends to be my thing a lot, I think, is that when I find myself overthinking and hopping from thing to thing, it's like I'm thinking at it. I'm thinking at something from every single angle because I don't want to get it wrong. I don't want to miss anything. So your clients might be doing that too. Of course, I see my clients do this all the time.

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Maybe the thinking feels good or predictable, right? So that thing I was talking about where it's like you can feel a little elated when you first realize like, oh, I'm a little in control of my thoughts. More in control of my thoughts than I knew I was and I feel so good about it. They don't want to move out of that, right? Or maybe it even just feels kind of neutral or it feels like, oh, this is like a new skill that I have, but it feels predictable and they don't want to move out of it.

Maybe they have the thought, no one has to know, right? So I've seen this come up with my clients before where it's like, but if I start taking action and I get it wrong, it comes back to that kind of fake belief. Like it's going to burst the bubble. If I start taking action, if I get it wrong, like if I only do it in my head, then no one else has to know if I failed, what my real hopes and dreams are. Like no one has to know any of it. I just get to keep it to myself.

Along those same lines, staying in your head for people that like to do that, I can feel just very safe. It can feel like planning. It can feel like this is just what I'm supposed to be doing. I'm planning ahead. I'm being very thoughtful. I'm being proactive in my thinking. I am really planning for any outcome. I am protecting myself from anything that could go wrong. I'm protecting myself to just stay in this little bubble of how I feel right now.

And so it can be kind of addicting because it can feel just safe and protective, right? It can feel like this is my bubble of safety in my own head and I don't really want to or care to move out of it. But it feels good now because I've learned how to change my thoughts and change my beliefs. So it feels way safer in here than it used to maybe, right?

Now, again, I just want to point out nothing has gone wrong. You definitely want to celebrate these clients. Amazing. This is so amazing that you've created all this awareness, right?

Now let's move on to, then what do you do? First you celebrate them, all this awareness is amazing. Then the most simple thing that you can do, I think, especially when it's egregious, when it's like happening over and over

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and over is you just lovingly point it out. I just want to show you what's happening, right?

Let's say it's like the fifth call. They've come to the fifth call in a row where they're coming with like, okay, I've been working on this all week. Here are my new thoughts. Here are my new beliefs. Here are the things I'm believing about myself right now. Here are the goals I set. They're just like presenting it to you over like a PowerPoint, right?

Here are all the things and they're just waiting for you to be like, this is amazing. But that's where it stops, right? They aren't like, okay, so then I went out and I tried this thing and I did this and I tweaked this and I talked to this person this way because I had different thoughts about her. They're not saying any of those things. They might be talking about action that they've thought about, but not that they're actually taking, right?

So let's say it's like the fifth call. You can just lovingly point it out, here's what I want to show you. This is amazing. I'm so glad that you have all this self-awareness. I'm so glad that you've really taken time to think through all of this. Now, I just want to show you that you can stay there, you can just stay in your head thinking all these things. But if you don't go into the world and try out these new things, try out these new thoughts, try out these new beliefs, your results aren't actually going to change.

And what you told me is that what you want out of this is X, Y, Z out of this coaching. You're never going to get there. You might now think that you believe you can get there, but you're never actually going to get there without making a plan, without having some strategy, without taking some action. So let's do that, right?

So you just really lovingly point it out. You can even laugh about it. If they continue to do it, which hopefully they won't because I'm going to tell you how to get them out of it. But then let's say five calls later you see they're kind of doing it again. You just kind of laugh about it. Point it out lovingly, gently again, right? Oh, remember you love to just be in your head thinking through all these things. Here's what happens when you do that.

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You can also coach them on why they do it. You can ask them what feels safe about it. You can ask them how it feels or why they think they do it. If it feels like that would be productive, you can go down that road. Why do you think that you love to just spend time thinking about all this stuff, but you're not wanting to go take action? What is that about? Let's dig in there. So you can do that if it feels like something productive would come out of that.

You also, if you're like, oh, that feels kind of uncomfortable to actually point it out, which I don't think it should. If your thought is like this isn't a problem, right? That's one of my favorite thoughts. This is not a problem. If that's your thought, and then you can just be super curious about it, it won't feel weird to point it out.

But every once in a while, you might have a client that just doesn't like things to be pointed out so bluntly. So what you can do instead and, or do both of the things, right? Like point it out, coach them on it if you want. But then you could say, this is amazing awareness. What I want to do in today's session, if it's okay with you, I want to actually take all this new awareness, all these new thoughts that you have and I want to help you create a plan.

Maybe just the first couple steps. Like what are we going to do differently now with these new beliefs? How are you going to show up? Let's say you're a relationship coach and you've been coaching on these conversations that your client has with their partner. How are you going to show up to these conversations with your partner differently now that you're believing these new things about yourself?

Now that you're believing these new things about maybe your partner or about your relationship or about really wanting to be in this relationship and make it work. How are you going to show up to this conversation that you're having, that you know you want to have that we've been talking about? How are you going to show up differently? Let's just explore that for a minute, right?

Like you get to be in charge as the coach. Just lead them down that path. And if you notice they just keep going, like they go back right into their

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head, well, I'm going to think... Okay, great. And what are you going to do? When would you like to initiate that conversation, right?

Like let's pretend there's like a conversation they've been wanting to have about something and they haven't done it for the last three or four weeks. They keep coming back to you, telling you all these new beliefs they have about themselves, all these new beliefs they have about their partner, about their relationship, about their life, whatever it is, right? Amazing. You have this whole pile of new beliefs, of new thoughts.

Now, when do you want to have this conversation? Because you can stay over here in these rainbow, sunshine, daisy thoughts, or you can do the hard thing, which is actually have the conversation. When do you want to do that? Because that's the thing that's actually going to move you forward.

You have enough awareness at this point. We need you to take action so that there's something new to coach on so that there are new things. Instead of like hypothetical things, now there are new things coming up that we can coach on. That is the fastest way to move forward.

And if you can kind of tell that's overwhelming, right, like I said in the beginning, you bring it back to, okay, what's just the first step? Let's just schedule the conversation. You can break it down into the teensiest step. If they're terrified to schedule the conversation, great, now that's what you coach on. Why does it feel scary? What's going to help you get through that feeling scared?

Let's borrow some of these new thoughts you have, right? Remember one thing I said is that clients that tend to do this, they know that once they're out of that gushy headspace, they're actually in the world taking action and they could be rejected. They could be disappointed. They could be, like they open themselves up to feeling all the feels and it not going the way they want it to go, right?

So what's just the very first step? Is there a step before scheduling the conversation? Do you need to schedule it or can you have it impromptu,

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right? Like really breaking it down to the most simple step if they are like, oh, that's so scary moving out of my head.

You can also spend a little time coaching them through the what ifs. So if they've spent tons of time in their head and they're like, we'll just use this example that I've been talking about. So they have to have this conversation with their partner. They are really scared to do it. And they've spent the last three weeks thinking about their new beliefs, their new thoughts about themselves, all the things, guaranteed they've probably also thought about what could go wrong.

Or at least those things have popped up, even if they've pushed them away. Like, no, no, we're not thinking about that. We're only thinking these lovely new thoughts about ourselves, right? They've probably popped up. And if they haven't, you could explore them, right? If they're really scared to move out of just the thinking phase, okay, what's going to go wrong? What are you scared of? Let's get very specific. We're going to coach through all of them. Let's bring up all the what ifs.

And you can usually show them the worst case scenario, like the thing that they're afraid of, right, they're afraid they're not going to be close with their partner. That their partner is going to be mad at them or going to ignore them. Or they're not going to be in this happy relationship, which by the way, they already aren't, or they wouldn't have hired you. Or they're not going to, right? All these things.

Usually you can show a client that that worst case scenario is already happening just by them doing nothing. Like a lot of times that's true. Not 100% because they could be like, well, I'm scared that they will totally just leave, right? And maybe they're like, this right now is better than if that person just leaves or whatever it is, right?

But you can just bring them all up. Okay, let's coach through that. Let's coach through that. But you can kind of tell them, give me a chance to actually coach you through these things, not just let the what ifs come up and you just feel scared and then you just ignore them and shut down.

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You can also coach them on, okay, well, those are all the scary things. Those are the reasons you're not moving forward. If we're going to do what ifs, what are all the other what ifs? What are all the possibilities of how this could go? Let's also focus on those.

You can also show them how staying in their head, staying in that belief, staying in that space doesn't actually create safety, right? That it is a perceived safety. It's like a fake safety because they're not moving forward. They're not getting the results that they want in their lives.

They, yes, might be safe in the moment because they might be safe with their thoughts. But usually whatever they're scared of; someone will reject them, someone will – Now, I'm talking about your own psychological safety, not like actual safety in the world, right? So this does not apply in this situation, let's say if it's like an abusive relationship or whatever. I'm talking about just like in a situation where everyone is physically safe, the only harm that's going to happen is emotion, right? We're going to feel some negative emotion and that's what they're afraid of.

You can show them how it might just feel better because they're not taking action, they're not putting themselves out there to feel the negative emotion, but they also, in that case, don't get the results that they want. They don't get to experience whatever that positive emotion is that's going to come from the results. They also don't get to experience that.

So moral of the story here, if you notice all of these things when I say like what to do, the first thing is that you as the coach, you just can't be scared of it, right? This isn't a problem. This is where, if you've heard me say this before, I've talked about it in past episodes, this is where the phrase, nothing has gone wrong, it's a great place to use it. Absolutely nothing has gone wrong.

We can celebrate that your client has all this self-awareness and then what's next, right? When you're not scared of it and you're believing nothing has gone wrong, then you're willing to just point it out. You're willing to say, hey, here's what I see happening. I want you to move forward.

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What's the first step? Let me help you create a plan. Let me help you. Let's dig into the strategy. Let's dig into the solution.

I know as coaches, not all coaches but a lot of you, especially depending on where you've learned to coach, where you've been trained, you might be a coach that's like, oh, but we're supposed to stay with the thoughts and feelings. We're not supposed to dig into the action. I think that's totally false.

I think the action is the most interesting part, right? Like when you teach someone to change the way they think about themselves, the thoughts they believe about themselves, about the world, about other people, about whatever, the most interesting part isn't that they sit around and think those things, it's that they go into the world and behave differently because of thinking those things, because of their new thoughts, because of their new beliefs.

You could even say that. You can take the words that I just said and say them to your client. Like, this is all lovely, but here's the most interesting part, is what are you going to do with these new things that you're believing?

All right, I hope that this was super helpful. I will be back next week. I'm going to, this will be a three part series. This one's overthinking. There will be over – I don't know if this is what they'll be called, but over feeling and over actioning, over strategizing, something. I'll come up with a name for that one. But come back, listen to all of them. I can't wait to 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.