

Ep #233: Your Perfectionism Is Hurting Your Coaching (& What to Do About It)



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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 233.

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, as always. And today I want to talk about a thought or a situation that comes up often with my clients. And it comes up in lots of different ways. And as you can probably tell, because if you've listened to the last few episodes, this is something that I've been talking about. I have been exploring and making a list of the things I coach on and talk about and the things that come up often inside of all of my coaching containers inside the Coach Lab and even inside of, you know, Reimagine, which is a more business focused mastermind, and really just all over the place and even with colleagues and friends and all the things.

And I've just been making a list, but this one is pretty high on the list. I have realized that as a coach, I spend a lot of time telling my clients, you know, when they bring me something, kind of telling them, okay, well, the first step here is let's just recognize that you're human, or that like this response you're having or this thought you're having, this feeling you're having is just a very human thing to happen, and you're not alone. Right? I spend a lot of time saying that because what I've noticed, not with every single coach, although I would bet this does show up pretty much with every coach in some way.

But what I've noticed is this underlying kind of belief or thought that's something like, because I'm a coach, I should be fill in the blank. I should be better at this. I should be not feeling this way. I shouldn't be going through this. I should know better. I should have the answers, right? Some kind of underlying rule that coaches have mostly made up or have internalized from things that they've heard or seen, you know, in the

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industry, on social media, wherever. And they've really internalized that and made it mean something that there's this underlying kind of perfectionism, like because I'm a coach, I should have transcended the human experience.

And I'm just here to say, this is not true. And I know I've talked about this on the podcast before. I have something to share. Actually, this is just a quick side note. At some point recently, maybe around episode 215 or so. And those of you with the podcast, you hopefully will think this is funny. Maybe you'll know what I'm talking about. But it's like I've forgotten all the episodes that I've recorded. And actually, maybe what is more close to what has happened. First, that is true, right? Like that's a lot of episodes. I can't possibly have all of them stored in my memory, although, of course, I can always go back and look.

But I think what is more true is recently that I have had this like birthing, I think of new ideas, new concepts. Like I feel like I have had this huge kind of growth or awareness around kind of what my next evolution in my business is and it feels very exciting. And so some of these things, even though I know I've talked about them before, it's like I'm seeing them in a new light and in a new way, and it feels like I have to talk about them. So, that was just a side note. I don't know if it's because I've had so many episodes or it's because of this kind of next level that I feel happening or maybe it's a combination of both, who knows.

But all that to say, I may have talked about this before. I'm going to talk about it in a really specific way today because it's coming up so often. So even if this is the exact same thing I've said in the past, it is worth a revisit because this is so, so, so important. Right? And even if you go back, I do remember this in some of my very first episodes, I talk about how as coaches, we should not be expected to be perfect humans or to be robots or to all think and experience the world in the exact same way, right? Like that is not at all the purpose of coaching. It's actually the opposite in my opinion.

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And when I hear my clients say things like this, it kind of breaks my heart because, you know, the way they're presenting it, it's followed by so much maybe guilt and shame and, you know, layers of feeling badly about these things that are just like, oh wait, no, you're a coach. Of course you're a coach, but you're also just a human having the human experience living in this world that we live in where no one's perfect and every human is different and, you know, just all the things that come along with just being human.

So, because it's been coming up a ton lately, or maybe I'm just noticing it recently because I do think a large part of what I do, like part of my calling, part of the reason I am a coach, part of the reason I'm also drawn to helping coaches is this very thing, right? To kind of show you that just because you're a coach, never, ever means you should have all the answers, that you should be a perfect human, that you should be better than where you are right now, that you should never have hard situations in your life. None of these things are true. Right? And you know that. I know you know that logically. But hopefully today I'll help you get under the surface and find the little, tiny ways this may be showing up for you and unpack some of them.

So first I want to tell you actually how I think of it instead and maybe help you reframe what it means to be a coach. Then I'm going to give you some really specific examples of how this shows up in my world with some of my clients and maybe even with me. And then I'm going to give you some reasons why it's really important that you notice when this is happening and the ways that it can affect your coaching and your coaching business.

And of course, everything I'm about to say, you can also apply any of this as always to your clients, right? So I'm going to talk about it today specifically talking to you, but you can also take this exact same concept and notice when your clients are doing this as well, even if they aren't coaches, right? Like this, this isn't just a thought that coaches have. This is a thought that anyone could have in a different way. And, you know, especially if maybe let's say they've been working with you for a while,

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they've really been working through some things, they feel so good and so, you know, whatever, evolved and they've grown and all the things. And they have some kind of setback or, you know, something happens and they're like, oh, they get so frustrated with themselves, like, oh, this shouldn't be happening. It's a similar concept.

So, first, here's how I think about this instead. When I think about what coaching is, I think coaching actually, and this is like the exact opposite of what you're believing when you think, oh, I should be better than this. I should have all the answers. I think what coaching does, it gives us tools and it helps us open up to a wider possibility for the human experience. Right? And that could be a really good thing, right? When I think about what coaching has created in my life, I think about all the emotional freedom that it has created, all of the sometimes financial freedom, the freedom to know myself, to own my thoughts, to have a better experience of the way I talk to myself, right? Like it's done all of those things. But overall, it has just opened me up to a wider array of the human experience.

And sometimes that's a great thing. Sometimes it's not, right? So let's be clear about that. When I say a wider array to the human experience, sometimes that also involves sitting with sadness, with grief, with things that don't feel so great in a way that I wasn't able to before, right? That I would just kind of ignore, set aside, push away, just pile it all up on the inside, which came out as me experiencing quite a bit of anxiety. But that's very different, right? Than like me thinking because I'm a coach, I should be some version of a perfect human.

No, that's not true at all. Because I'm a coach, I just have tools that help me in any situation that I experience as a human. And because I have a coach and coaches on and off throughout, you know, my years of being a coach, that does the same thing, right? That allows me to experience all the things that I can experience as a human and know that I'm going to be okay. Know that I'm going to get through on the other side. Know that I always have a choice in how I respond to anything, that I always have a choice in what I'm creating in the world, what I'm putting out in the world. Right?

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Those are just some of the ways I would describe it. I'm so curious for you, if you sit with this and really think about it, like what would that be for you? If you want to share it with me, I would love that. But also, even if you just pause this episode before I even continue and think about what does coaching mean to you.

Okay, here are some just specific examples of how I have seen this show up. The first one is in the coach lab, right? It comes up often when it comes to client situations, kind of like, well, I know I have tools for this. I'm a coach. Like, why does this happen in our sessions? Why do I freeze? Why do I not know how to solve this problem for my client? Right? Basically like, because I'm a coach, I should have all the answers. I should be perfect at what I do. Why am I not? That's one way that it shows up for a lot of coaches.

Or one thing I hear often is when coaches, you know, do something, maybe they have a big fail or something's not working, and then they get very upset, very frustrated with themselves. And then they judge themselves for that. Like I have the tools, I should know better. Why is this coming up for me again? Why is this happening? And, you know, my response to that always is like, well, because you're human, let's start there. Right? And that doesn't mean we don't move on to like unpack it and explore it and say, okay, how can you have a better experience through this? But first, just acknowledging because you're a human. That's why.

The next area where I see this showing up for a lot of coaches is when it is something like when something specific to your niche is happening in your life. Right? If you're a business coach and you're having a terrible launch and, you know, things aren't going your way. Or if you're a marriage coach and you are having arguments with your partner every day and you guys are just going through like a rough patch. Right? And then, those are just examples. This could happen in really any niche.

But then, instead of telling yourself like, oh, of course, this is part of being human. Just because I'm a business coach doesn't mean I'm never going

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to have fails in my business or just because I'm a marriage coach, that doesn't mean I'm never going to have hard days in my marriage. What I see coaches saying is like, oh, I should be past this. I shouldn't be experiencing this anymore. Right? That's just another subtle version of I should be better than this. I should be not human, right? I'm like not allowed to have this part of the human experience.

So using some of those examples, let's talk about how thinking this way can hurt you, right? Can like just harm you as a coach. First of all, it can create unreal pressure, right? The pressure of maintaining whatever this image is of the perfect coach, the perfect human. That in whatever way, even if you're doing it in just small, small ways, right? It can create pressure and become a really big mental and emotional load. Just create a load of that energy that can eventually lead to burnout or to like, I don't even like this anymore. I want it, I want out, right? I'm done doing this.

The next way is it can prevent authentic connection. Right? I think it's this is one thing, connection is one of my highest values. I often feel very connected with my clients, the ones especially the ones that come often to live calls. And it's something my clients tell me a lot is that they feel very connected to me, that they, you know, really like that about me. They like this kind of like warmth that I have. I know part of what creates that, not 100%, but part of what creates that is because I'm so willing to say, oh yeah, I had this, this silly thing happened to me or, oh, I've been there done that.

Like, you know, whatever, like they'll bring me something and I'm like, oh, you're having a thought. Like I can just tell by the way they present it, right? That I'm like, oh, you're thinking I've never had that experience that you're talking about right now. And you're totally wrong. It happened last week or whatever, right? Not where I'm like making it all about me, but where I'm just saying, oh yeah, I've been there, done that. Like this is totally normal.

And another side note, by the way, I am planning an upcoming episode on huge fails in my business, kind of like a, thinking of it like a blooper reel, like

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things that have happened as a coach for me that you might find entertaining and maybe comforting, like, oh, okay, she's going through these too.

The next one is it could just block your growth, right? When you are as a coach, when you're thinking, oh, this shouldn't be happening right now and you feel shame about it. I do know for sure I've done an episode about shame where I talk about shame just makes you want to hide, right? Shame kind of gives you this thought, no one can know. Been there, done that. I've had that thought before. And when it's that, it's really hard to get help with it. Right?

I'm always so, so inspired by the coaches that show up to the Coach Lab calls who say, okay, this is embarrassing, but here's this thing that happened in a client session, right? Because they want coaching on it. And I always think, gosh, that is so brave. I love that they're willing to say like, this thing happened. I kind of failed. I didn't handle it the way I wanted to or, you know, whatever their version of that is, and that they're willing to show up to get on the other side of it. That to me, so inspiring.

It also can bring up imposter syndrome, right? It can bring up this thought like, I'm not made for this. I'm a fraud. This is a fluke. I could never recreate this thing that happened. You know, any thought like that that is, you might not necessarily consider it imposter syndrome, but one of my favorites that I hear all of the time when it comes to business and coaching is, yeah, but that was a fluke. It always blows my mind. Like that is a version of just imposter syndrome, right? That's like not accepting, oh, I created this, like, oh, that was a fluke.

It can also lead to shame spirals and shutting down or being argumentative or being very defensive or just showing up in a way that will for sure affect the coaching that your clients experience and the way you are showing up in places like social media or, you know, networking events or wherever it is that you're out in the world talking about coaching. Because when you're in a shame spiral, people react to it differently, right?

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Some coaches will hide. That obviously is going to have a big impact on your marketing, on your, you know, you showing up in the world saying, hey, I'm a coach. And it can have you avoiding certain things, you know, in client sessions or basically just hiding from whatever the challenge or the mistake you think you've made or whatever. Like whatever that thing is, you it'll just have you hiding from it all together instead of facing it. Or it'll have you out in the world kind of trying to cover it up. You might not even know you're doing it in the moment. I'm positive I've done this before. Kind of like arguing about it. Right?

Which when you see someone doing that on the outside when it's not you and you see it, you can usually kind of see what's going on. Like, ooh, there must be something going on there in the background, right? That's causing this to come up. That's causing their nature to shift, right? Like when someone is really arguing about something or, you know, seems very inflexible about something. Sometimes it is because of something that's going on in the background for them that they're not sharing, that they're trying just really hard to cover up.

Okay, now let me give you some, just a couple of ways of how it can affect your coaching specifically. Right? These are things that I see my clients doing often that sometimes can be a good thing, but sometimes when it's coming from this place, right? From like, I should have all the answers, I should be better than this, whatever, how it can these things are like when it goes wrong. Right? So like over preparing for client sessions, spending tons of time because you think you need to know all the answers, right? Ahead of time, trying to predict, here are all the things I think my client's going to bring to the call and here's how I'm going to solve it. Right?

That's not the best. First of all, it's not the best way to coach because it takes you out of being present, which leads to my second one, right? It can create a difficulty in being present. When so much of your mental energy is going towards being perfect or being looking polished or, you know, creating a certain image of yourself as a coach, it can take you out of just

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showing up and just hearing your clients and listening and being there for them.

I already mentioned this a little bit, but it can also have you avoiding certain topics, right? It can have you just like steering conversations away from areas where you feel less confident coaching or where you are thinking, who am I to even coach on this when this thing is happening in my life. It can also have you reluctant to admit knowledge gaps.

So I actually talk about this all the time in lots of different ways and I model it a lot inside of my containers. This is something that I've always been fairly good at. I don't know why. I'm sure that there are many ways that I'm not good at it, but in this specific arena, I tend to be fairly good at it about just saying, oh, I don't know, let's explore it. Right? Like just admitting. Like if a client asks me a very technical question or, you know, they want my opinion on something specific and I don't have an answer. I have no problem saying, I actually have no idea. Let's just explore it together. I don't make that mean anything about myself as a coach because I don't think that as a coach, I am supposed to have all the answers or have, you know, the key of the universe. Like that is not what I'm doing as a coach.

And then of course, it can also have you criticizing yourself and create a really harsh internal dialogue that can just kind of drain your energy and enthusiasm for coaching in general. Right? I've seen this happen with coaches where over periods of time, these tiny thoughts start to creep in. I should be better than this. I shouldn't be going through this. I shouldn't be experiencing this. And because they believe them and they don't do anything about them, and they don't have anyone, maybe they're not working with someone like me who's like, hey, this is just a human experience, right? To like point that out, then it can over time take these teensy little digs into their belief about coaching in general and what coaching is, right? And it can start to shift their views of what coaching is, if it's useful, if they should even be in the industry at all.

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Now I want to give you just a few ways. Like what can happen? Show you some things that can happen when you embrace that you're not a perfect human, you should never have all the answers, and that of course you're going to go through really hard things in your life, even though you're a coach, right? That you just can't prevent them. The first one is just modeling vulnerability. Right? The ability to say that you don't know the answer or that you are really impacted by something. You're in deep feels right now, right? Like all of those things, maybe not like in the middle of a coaching session, but just in general modeling that in the world.

Also, you know, there's a lot of talk about integrity in the coaching industry. And sometimes that can be warped into this thing that I'm talking about, right? Which is like to be in integrity, I have to be always growing, always perfect, always have the answers, you know, some form of that. Whereas really integrity, to me, is very similar to authenticity. Integrity is I walk what I teach, right? I there's a there's a really specific way to say that that I'm not saying right now. I don't know what it is, whatever. But I walk the walk, right? Like it's like the opposite of do what I say, not what I do. It's the opposite of that, right? If that's your motto, like do what I say, not what I do, like that can sometimes be inauthentic and out of integrity.

Whereas with coaching, being in integrity doesn't mean that you never have problems, that you never feel heavy feelings or negative emotion, that you never have bad experiences or have huge fails. Being in integrity means you know you have tools to handle these things and that you allow yourself to experience all of it. Right? That you are showing up authentic to all the experiences in your life and that you aren't hiding that when you're talking to clients or pretending like that's not a thing or pretending to be someone who you aren't.

To me, authenticity, when I'm thinking about coaches that I've worked with, coaches I've been around, my friends who are coaches. This is something that to me, like really draws me to people because you can just feel it, right? Like I'm pretty good at sniffing out when someone's not being authentic. And you know, we do that for many different reasons. Most

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people aren't usually doing it on purpose, but I'm pretty good at sniffing that out for reasons maybe I'll talk about later. But when I feel that, my thought never is like, oh, I should hire this person or I should be friends with this person or whatever. Now, everyone is inauthentic sometimes. Let's just that's also part of the human experience. Right? But it's like when you're really trying to be someone who you aren't, that can come off like people can feel that.

It takes you out of your most powerful tools as a coach sometimes when you are coaching and you're thinking you need to have all the answers. When you realize that you don't, when you're open to that, then you can just really start to see yourself as like, I'm on this journey with you instead of I'm the expert, I have all the answers. And that can be really compelling and comforting for most clients. It can also provide so much relief when you embrace this of like it's okay to say I don't know. It's okay to not know something. It's okay to have gaps in knowledge even when it comes to your area of expertise. Right? You cannot possibly know everything there is to know about your niche and about, you know, all the things that your clients are going to bring you. It's literally impossible.

So, when you're knowing that that's okay, and always filling those gaps when you see that they are big gaps and that you really do want to have, you know, more knowledge in certain areas. That's very different. Right? When you're filling those in, but in order to fill them in, first you have to be able to say, oh, I don't know this thing. I see I have a gap here. Let me explore this. Let me be curious. Let me find a way to learn this thing. Right? Actually, when you are able to say, I don't know, this isn't my area of expertise, you're actually able to fill the gaps a lot faster to gain a lot more knowledge and to move forward way faster than when you're telling yourself, I should know, I should have the answers.

Right? And then the last thing is, you're a coach. And when you embrace this, when you're like, yeah, I'm still human, it will give you so much compassion for yourself and for your clients, which will ultimately overall affect every single thing about your coaching sessions. It will keep you out

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of judgment of yourself and of your clients. It will influence the way they experience your coaching and it'll change a lot.

So, when you find yourself thinking any of these things, you know, I should be better than this. I shouldn't be experiencing this or whatever your version of that is. I want you to just take a second. I'm going to give you some questions you can ask yourself just if they're helpful. You can use any of these or all of them. For whatever's coming up, you could write down what are my shoulds in this situation, right? What am I believing about this situation? That I should fill in the blank. I should know better. I should be past this. I should what? Write them down. Then for each one, if it feels helpful, you can explore them. Where did I learn this? Is this actually true? Should I be better? Should I, you know, fill in the blank? And then see if you can take that and turn this kind of perfectionist view, the should into a more compassionate, realistic statement. Right?

So I'll give you an example. Instead of I should have an answer for this. When my client brings me this thing, I should know what I'm doing. A more compassionate, realistic statement of that as for you as a coach might look something like as a coach, I should be present and there for my clients even when I don't know what the right answer is for them. Right? See the difference? Right? It'll keep you in curiosity and exploring and very much in coach mode versus the judgment and lack of self-compassion that you're in when you are telling yourself, I should be different than I am right now.

All right. I hope this was helpful. I know that at least a few of you needed to hear this. So for those of you that did, hope it was super helpful. And I hope it also might be helpful when you see your clients exhibiting the same behavior. Thank you so much for being here and I will see you again 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.