

3: 3 Ways to Use Coaching in Other Jobs



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Kara Loewentheil

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Most people think that coaching certifications are for people who want to quit their day job, build a business, and coach full-time. Makes sense, but that's actually not true. The most valuable thing a coaching certification will ever do for you might have absolutely nothing to do with starting a business.

It might be the next time you meet with a direct report in your current job who keeps being late with their assignments, and you're actually finally able to figure out why and coach them to fix it. It might be that you understand what a potential client is thinking during a consultation for your consulting business and are able to coach them through their fears to approve your retainer. Or it could even be that the next time your kid says, "I'm bad at math," you actually have a useful response.

Welcome back to *The Future Coach*. I'm Kara Loewentheil, and a coaching certification is for anyone whose job involves helping other human beings create results they are not currently creating, which is most jobs. And it's even for anyone whose personal life involves other human beings they want to understand better or support more effectively, which is also most of us.

So today, I'm going to show you exactly what changes when you bring coaching skills into the work you're already doing and into the relationships you already have, whether or not you ever hang up an official shingle as a coach.

Welcome to *The Future Coach*, the podcast for independent coaches, in-house coaches, and the coach curious. I'm your host Kara Loewentheil, founder of The Socratic Coaching Academy. If you want to chart a new path, uplevel your skills, and build a successful career around coaching, you're in the right place. Let's go.

So let me start by telling you something that often makes people do a double take about my background. I spent years as a lawyer before I

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became a coach. I went to Yale. I graduated from Harvard Law School. I was a women's rights attorney. My last job in law was running a think tank at Columbia Law School, and I was on the path to become a law professor. By every reasonable standard measure, I had built a career that you don't just walk away from. But that's exactly what I did.

And when people hear that I'm now a life coach, it sounds very, very different to them. But being a life coach, being a legal academic, not actually as different as they sound. Because what law actually trained me to do, day in and day out, was get extremely precise about the premise of an argument. It taught me how to look at a set of facts and analyze every way those facts could be presented and interpreted. It taught me to become very specific about exactly what chain of reasoning I was using to get from premise A to conclusion B and to understand what chain of reasoning other people were using, because I needed to see their reasoning clearly in order to contest it or pick it apart. And those skills turned out to be the foundation of being an excellent world-class coach.

Because every human being on the planet is walking around all day operating on the basis of subconscious stories, interpretations, opinions, and conclusions about themselves and the world around them, and they have no idea that's what they're doing. They think that they're perceiving reality, when in fact, they're actually interpreting it through about 17 layers of conditioning, family of origin programming, gender-based socialization, cultural assumptions, personal narrative, right, all sorts of things.

And then people are just taking action based on what they think they're objectively observing, when in fact, they are now acting on the basis of completely optional thoughts. So this is how the human brain actually works. There's no version of perception that bypasses our conditioning and our subjective interpretation. The whole brain system runs on interpretation. But the problem is, if you don't know that the brain works this way, which most people don't, you end up attributing all kinds of intentionality, often negative, to the people around you.

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So you think the colleague who never says hi in the kitchen doesn't like you. You think your partner leaves their socks on the floor because they don't respect your time. You think the direct report who pushes back on every piece of feedback is resistant or trying to undermine you or doesn't respect your authority. You make sense of other people's behavior by inventing a motive for it, and you don't realize that the motive you're inventing is actually telling you a lot more about your brain than about theirs.

But once you learn how to spot the unspoken thoughts and assumptions and premises and beliefs that are actually driving people, you start to see them in a completely different way. Because first, you start to see more clearly because you are able to spot your own assumptions, premises, interpretations. So you see more clearly, and you become an extremely well-trained noticer, which means you can understand problems correctly and actually solve them.

Problems that involve other human beings, whether they are a client, a direct report, a boss, a spouse, a nine-year-old, whatever, involve other human brains. If you don't know how the brain works, you don't understand the problem correctly. And if you don't understand the problem correctly, you cannot solve it. You can only address the surface level manifestation of the problem, which often is unrelated to the actual issue. And so you can spend your entire career solving the wrong layer.

So let's talk about what that looks like in a couple of examples. Think about an HR leader who keeps watching women with high potential, on the partner track, leave the company or the firm, whatever. And she's doing everything she's trained to do. She runs exit interviews. She tweaks the compensation package. She tweaks the flexible work policy. She tries to launch an internal mentorship program, but it's not working. Because the actual issue isn't really about any of those things. The issue is what the women believe about the organization, what they believe is available to them, what they believe it will cost them to stay, what they believe about

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their chances for success. None of that's going to come out in a standard exit interview because often these beliefs are actually subconscious. So the women involved, they feel the emotions those thoughts create, and they make decisions and take actions because of them, but they're not necessarily even aware of them.

Or let's think about a personal trainer. They might have a client who is brilliant, motivated, committed, gets shit done in other areas of their life, talks about their goals like they mean it, and then just comes back to the next session not having done any of what she said she would do. And so the trainer keeps giving her pep talks about consistency and choosing your hard and reminding her how much she wants this, right? And maybe the trainer redesigns the program a million times trying to make it work better.

She's doing the trainer version of everything she knows how to do. But the program isn't the issue. The issue is what's happening in her client's head when she wakes up the day after her session. What thought is making her dread her workouts or put them off or skip them entirely? The story that she has about herself and about doing those things is what is preventing her from doing them. And the trainer can't fix that with a different workout plan.

Or let's take a third example. Think about a project manager who has a direct report or a colleague who's chronically late with their data or their report, their contribution, their piece of the project. She has had the same conversation with this person eight times. And the colleague or the direct report nods, agrees, says she gets it, says it won't happen again. And yet, she's late on the next deliverable like always.

The project manager is so frustrated, she doesn't know what else to say, and she's starting to think that this person just can't be trained up and isn't a good fit, and she may have to recommend letting them go, or if they're a direct report, actually letting them go herself. But in fact, this person isn't being disrespectful. They don't not care. What's happening is they have a thought creating anxiety. The anxiety is creating procrastination, and so

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their stuff is showing up late. And lectures about timeliness are just no match for that.

So in every single one of these examples, the professional is solving the wrong problem. The actual problem is sitting completely untouched underneath it, generating the same outcome over and over while everyone just gets more and more frustrated and more and more convinced that this isn't solvable, when really they've just been trying to solve the wrong problem.

So what changes when you actually understand the mental model driving people's behavior? Let me walk you through what each of these professionals could do differently and what that looks like. The HR leader with coaching skills would not be redesigning the compensation policy for the 15th time. She would sit down with a few of the women on the advancement track at her company who haven't left yet, and she would ask different questions.

She would ask about what they see as their potential paths for progress in the organization. She would ask them what they believe is possible, what their thoughts are about the culture and their options. And because she is actually asking and really wants to know, and people can tell that's genuine, she'll learn what they're really thinking. She'll learn that they see that there isn't a path for them, or that they believe the organization doesn't value women in senior positions, whatever it is. That's not a compensation problem, it's not a flexibility problem, right? That's a belief problem, which means it needs a belief solution.

So now she can actually work on it. She can create alternative advancement paths. She can bring forth women whose trajectory contradicts that story and have them mentor these women specifically on these issues. She can just bring attention and awareness to this problem and have those hard conversations with senior leadership that she needs

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to have if they want to retain the best talent. But none of that would happen if she didn't know what the actual problem was.

The personal trainer with coaching skills doesn't redesign the program or give another pep talk. She actually just asks her client, "What's happening in your mind when you wake up and you're supposed to work out?" And then she's able to coach her and follow that thread in that conversation until they figure it out, until she finds out that the client has a story about herself as someone who hates exercise, or the client has a lot of thoughts about how she doesn't have any time to do it, or whatever the actual problem is. Once that's been surfaced, a trainer who knows how to coach can actually help her change that thinking or problem solve those conditions so that she can actually start showing up differently, doing those workouts, following through on whatever those commitments are.

The project manager with coaching skills can finally stop having the same conversation where she just says, "You really need to get your stuff in on time," and instead she can actually ask, "When you sit down to do this work, what's happening?" And she can actually be curious and listen for the thought underneath. "I don't know what I'm doing. I'm afraid if I turn this in, people are going to realize that I'm an imposter. Maybe it means if I have trouble with this, I don't really deserve to be here." Whatever those thoughts are, then that project manager can help that colleague or direct report come up with a new way of thinking about it. It's not just vowing to be on time, which is a behavior, not a thought. It's a thought that supports them in believing in themselves and their own ability to do the work. Now, she's able to think in a way that will reduce or eliminate that anxiety, and then her behavior can actually change.

So after this break, I'm going to give you one more professional example because I know a lot of you listening are in leadership roles. And then I want to talk about something that almost nobody talks about when they talk about coaching certifications, which is what having the skill set does in your personal life. Your partnership, your parenting, the relationships that can't

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help but be impacted when you learn this way of understanding the world. So we'll be right back. Stay with us.

Welcome back. So I want to dig into one more professional example because this is a really underappreciated element of leadership or managing a team. If you are in some kind of leadership role, inside a bigger organization or running your own business, your effectiveness and your outcomes depend a lot on the performance of other people, and you can't directly control them, obviously. That would be inappropriate even if you could. But what you can do is develop them effectively or ineffectively. And a lot of what passes for developing and managing your team is ineffective because it never gets at the actual thoughts that the people on your team have.

So let's say you've got a woman on your team who is technically brilliant. She closes loops. She anticipates problems. She's smart. She's prepared. She's dependable. She never lets you down. She has a lot of potential. And you want her to be able to move up. In fact, you want to be able to get her promoted to be your right hand, let's say. But you need approval from your boss or from your partners, whatever it is. And every time that you bring her in front of those people, she freezes.

So the person that you see all the time is just gone, and she's mumbling a little. She's falling over her words. She's understating things or qualifying things. Just her energy is collapsing. She is half the presence in that room that she is when you're with her. And you've given her that feedback, and you've talked to her about being more confident and how she modulates her voice. Maybe you've even sent her to some kind of training that's supposed to help her with her executive presence, and you've done mock presentations, and just nothing has changed.

When you understand how the brain works, when you know how to coach, you are able to actually get to what is going on under this. You're able to ask her, "What are you feeling when we are showing up to those meetings?"

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What are you thinking?" Underneath her behavior, there's some kind of thought running like, "I don't know what I'm doing. People are going to realize that I shouldn't be here. If I make a mistake, it confirms that I can't move up." Whatever it is, there's deep socialization, there's gender-based socialization, there could be family stuff, who knows. But what we do know is that there's a thought that's creating a feeling that is impacting these actions and the way that she's showing up.

When you send her to some kind of executive presence training, it just taught her how she could tweak her voice and her posture if she was actually showing up at current capacity. But she's not. And only coaching gets at why she's not able to show up fully in the first place. It's a completely different level of intervention and you get completely different results. When you actually know what's going on with her, then you and she can work on that together to truly increase her confidence in a way that will actually happen.

So the last thing I want to talk about is what people don't really think about when it comes to a coaching certification and learning how to coach. Because everything I just described is more in the realm of what people would anticipate in the sense that it fits inside a job description. You are a coach or you bring coaching into a role you're already doing. It helps you understand people, it helps you manage, it helps you mentor, it helps you help other people change their behavior. But going in-depth with this work doesn't just change how you manage other people. It changes how you manage yourself. It changes your own reactivity. It changes your own unconscious interpretations and evaluations and the intentionality that you project onto other people. It changes how you communicate and how you show up. It changes your performance in your relationships.

Human brains don't compartmentalize skills, so everything you're learning flows directly into your personal life, whether you wanted it to or not, really. And that personal payoff is actually pretty important, and it's not the focus of a coaching certification, but it makes a big difference in your life.

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There are two levels at which the skill set can kind of intervene or make a difference in your personal life. Level one is understanding without intervening. So you see what's actually happening in someone else's brain instead of just reacting to the surface behavior and creating a story about that. So you stop taking things personally. You stop trying to fix the wrong thing. You stop having the same fight on a loop, and you communicate a lot more effectively because you're not as reactive, and you can understand the mental model that might be going on.

Level two is more active intervention with people who are open to it or where it's appropriate. So, for instance, your kids, teaching kids how to think and how to handle their feelings and what to make of the world is actually your job as a parent. Maybe your partner is open to coaching. Maybe a friend wants help thinking something through, and they'd like something a little deeper and more formal than just validation. I'm not talking about taking your loved ones on as clients, and I'm definitely not talking about coaching loved ones without permission, which we don't do. Doesn't end well. I'm talking about the fact that when you learn to think this way, you inevitably bring the skill set into the kinds of conversations that we all have with people we love all the time anyway. And it changes how you show up in those conversations, and it changes how you manage yourself.

So let's take a work example, how you show up is still different, even if you are not, of course, coaching your boss without permission. But let's say your boss is short with you in a meeting on Tuesday. And then she doesn't say hi when you pass her in the hall. And then you send her a question on Slack, and she doesn't respond. Your unmanaged mind immediately starts catastrophizing. She's annoyed with you, you did something wrong, you wrote that last email the wrong way, you're being managed out, she has bad news, she just doesn't want to tell you, all of that. And then the whole day just disappears into this. You're distracted, you're talking to your coworkers to see if she's being cold to them, you're rehearsing what you're going to say if she's mad at you. You walk into your one-to-one already braced for a fight and freaked out.

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But when you know how to think about other people's brains and not take things personally, you can see that she's under pressure from her own boss. Your whole team is behind on an important project. She probably has a story going on about her own competence or what her boss thinks of her or something in her personal life that's making her short, right? You don't take it so personally, so you don't absorb it. You don't ruminate. You don't spend a whole work day stressing out about it.

Let's say you're at work and you have a colleague who presents your ideas as her own in meetings or a colleague who's passive aggressive in an email or that direct report I mentioned earlier who pushes back on every piece of feedback like you're attacking them. Without this skill set, with an unmanaged mind, all of this takes over your brain.

Your brain spends so much time on the drama of replaying the interactions with the colleagues, showing up to meetings already on guard, feeling resentful, gossiping with other colleagues about what's wrong with these people, thinking and thinking and thinking about it without actually producing any change. When you understand how people's brains work, you're able to see what's really going on. You're able to see that one person has scarcity beliefs about getting ahead in the company. You're able to see that another person believes that they aren't seen or aren't visible or that their contributions aren't appreciated.

You're able to see that your direct report is scared of failing, and so they respond to feedback like an attack. That doesn't mean that you just ignore all of this behavior, but it means that you can address it strategically when needed without letting yourself devolve into resentment and drama and catastrophizing. You can name what's going on to yourself. You can understand it, and you can calibrate your approach based on that understanding.

The same is true at home. You are able to manage yourself better when you get feedback or input from people in your life that hits on your

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sensitivities. Your mother makes a comment about your weight or your parenting or how you spend your money or how clean your house is or how you're raising your kids, whatever it is. But instead of then being soaked in a cocktail of shame and rage and picking a fight with your partner and texting all of your siblings to yell about it, you're able to just let it go. You're able to see what's coming from her own brain, her own anxiety about appearance, her own beliefs about parenting, right? Her own fears about money, whatever they are. You're able to see the models running in her brain, so you don't take it personally.

Or let's say your teenager walks in the door and slams it and gives you one-word answers and rolls her eyes. With an unmanaged mind, you take that personally, you feel upset, you lecture about respect, you mourn the little girl she used to be, you catastrophize that you'll never be close again, you talk about it with your partner, you get yourself more and more upset. By bedtime, everybody is crying. We've all been there. When you know how the brain works, you're able to see your kid's model, what's running in their brain, why and how they're thinking and feeling, and you're able to approach that with compassion without taking it personally. You don't escalate, you don't take the bait. You allow her to have her experience or you show her that you're there to connect if she wants it, and your relationship is all the better for it.

So I want to say one more thing about parenting specifically, because parenting is the one relationship where it's actually appropriate to bring coaching into it, even without an explicit invitation. We don't coach other adults without permission, but a core part of parenting is coaching, even though we don't really call it that. Part of our job is to teach our kids emotional resilience, mental strength, how to think on purpose about their lives, what's happening to them, what they're capable of. That's part of the job. It's just most of us are doing it without any actual training.

So let's say your kid comes home and they say, "I'm so bad at math. I missed questions on the quiz. Now I'll never be able to be an astronaut or a

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doctor or whatever." When it sounds like it's about is math, but underneath is your kid's belief in themselves, right? Their growth mindset, their overidentification with success. A parent without coaching skills just tries to tell her kid what to think. "You are good at math. You did really well on the test last week." Or if it's about being left out, "Of course people like you. You do have friends." We're all trying to just tell our kids what we wish they would believe, but your kid's brain just rejects it because you're just contradicting their thought. You're arguing with the symptom on top, and it's not effective.

A parent with coaching skills can be receptive and open. They can ask questions that let the kid surface what's actually going on. "What makes you think you're bad at math? What part of math feels hard? What part of math do you understand and what feels easy? What does it mean to be bad at something and how do we get better at it?" We're able to ask those questions that build their resilience, their self-belief, their growth mindset, because with our kids, we are supposed to coach them, but most of us are just trying to tell them what to think, which doesn't work on children or adults.

I hear so often from people who learn about coaching that they wish they'd known this when they were nine years old instead of 39. And with our kids, we have a chance to teach them this when they are kids, and that's such an exponential advantage in the world.

So this is what coaching skills do when you put them into any context: work, home, parenting, your own inner life. It doesn't really matter where you are. When your brain is changed, everything in your life changes. And this is why we have people in our current Socratic Coaching Method certification cohort that are not aspiring full-time coaches and are never thinking about doing that.

Of course, we have some people who want to be entrepreneurs or who want to coach in other people's coaching businesses. But we also have a

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software product manager who wants to lead her team better. She doesn't plan to quit her job. She just wants to be the kind of leader who can get the best out of her team. We have a law firm partner who wants to mentor associates differently than she was mentored because she wants to practice law in a different way. We have a therapist who's adding the cognitive change tools and the lens of socialization to her clinical practice, even though it was already strong, because her training didn't give her either of those things, and her clients need both of them.

We have already certified coaches who come in for a sharpened methodology, right? They've been coaching for a while. They can feel where the gap is. And of course, we have brand new coaches building a first practice from scratch. And we have people who come in saying, "I'm not even sure if I'm going to be a coach professionally, but I want to be able to think this way and I want to be able to help the other people in my life think that way." And all of them are doing the same work because the underlying skills are the same.

So here's what I want you to practice this week. The next time you notice yourself getting reactive about something someone else did, your boss, your direct report, your colleague, your mother, your kid, your partner, your friend, whatever, before you do anything, ask yourself one question: "What are they possibly thinking right now that isn't about me at all?" You'll be wrong sometimes. Sometimes they are thinking about you. But often what is going on in the background for people is their own unconscious beliefs about themselves and the world that have nothing to do with you. And just learning how to be curious about what's happening in someone else's brain will reduce your reactivity and improve your communication. So give it a try this week and let me know what happens. I'll see you next time.