

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

[The Future Coach Podcast with Kara Loewentheil](#)

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

If you've been thinking about becoming a coach, but you've also been watching the news about AI and thinking, maybe I'm getting into this at exactly the wrong moment. Maybe the world is about to not have any use for what I want to offer. I want you to know I've heard that concern so many times in the last couple of years, and I think it's exactly backwards. Not just like slightly wrong, totally backwards.

So today, I'm going to give you five specific reasons why coaching is not just going to survive the age of AI, it's going to become more valuable, more necessary, and more in demand than it ever has been. And I'm going to talk about what I think are the appropriate and inappropriate or dangerous ways to use AI as a coach. So let's get into these hot button topics.

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's episode is one I have been wanting to make for a while because the AI and coaching conversation has gotten really muddled, I think. There's a lot of noise out there, and it kind of boomerangs from like uncritically enthusiastic about AI or just reflective doomerism. And what I haven't really heard enough of is a clear, specific argument for why the skills of a live human coach are not only irreplaceable but are actually going to become more valuable in a world that is increasingly saturated with AI slop.

So that is the case I'm going to make today. Like the former lawyer I am, I'm going to build this argument, and in the second half of the episode, I'm going to talk about what I do and don't recommend that coaches use AI for, especially coaches who are just starting out as entrepreneurs.

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

So let's start with the first reason. I think that AI is going to create more demand for coaches, not less, and that's for two different reasons. So the first is that AI is obviously creating a period of genuine disruption. It's not just replacing one or two jobs here or there, it's really either already reorganizing entire categories of work, like software, like legal, or healthcare administration, and there are probably more that are coming. And the people caught in that reorganization, the people whose professional identities were built around jobs that are now no longer worth what they once were in the market, those people are going to need support. And that support is going to need to go well beyond a resume update or like a blog post about pivoting your career.

Because when someone's career is disrupted, what they're dealing with is not primarily a strategy problem, right? It's really like an identity crisis. They're having thoughts like, I spent 15 years becoming really good at something that is no longer really a role, right, or that's not available anymore. What does that mean about me? Like, what am I worth now? What was it even for? Am I too old to start over? How can I possibly catch up?

People think of their work as their identity. Like their identity is being a successful VP or a partner at a law firm or whatever. And they need to transition to having the identity of a person who always succeeds and can transfer skills across categories. AI is going to replace some jobs, and it's going to probably create new jobs that we don't even know about yet. But people who are going to make those transitions have to believe in themselves as people who can be successful in a completely different context.

And that is not a mental identity shift that most people are able to make alone. Like, you can't Google your way out of an identity crisis, and you really can't ask AI to help you like make the shift that you need to make given the context, right? There's a human conversation that's a coaching conversation. So the very technology that's disrupting industries, I think is

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

simultaneously going to create a big wave of people who are going to be in transition and who are going to be looking for support navigating not just what to do next but who to be next. And that is something that coaching does, and that is something you need a human coach to help you do.

The second thing that I think is actually unexpectedly or maybe paradoxically going to increase demand for coaching is that I think a lot of people are absolutely experimenting right now with using AI chatbots for personal development. And people think that means, oh, we're not going to need coaches or therapists anymore because a lot of folks are out here asking AI to help them with their confidence, their career decisions, their relationship dynamics, their anxiety, their inner critic, whatever, right? AI is lowering the perceived barrier to individualized coaching. Now, what people are getting is not actual coaching. They're getting access to a simulacrum of coaching.

And obviously, there's a big downside to this, right? We're seeing that all over the news, like people being encouraged in delusions, people having psychotic breaks, people harming themselves. Like if I was in charge of the universe, this would not be a resource that people could use this way. But sadly, I'm not in charge of the universe. It is available, but I actually think it may increase desire for human coaching long term because I think people are going to discover that something's missing.

If just having a computer tell you what to do was enough to change your behavior, coaching already wouldn't exist. Really, it's not that different from what there already was. There are a million, in this sense, I mean, in this context, there are a million customizable meal plans or fitness routines or parenting scripts or organizational systems available online already that people already try to use that don't produce the change they need.

And so I think that people are going to interact with AI chatbots in much the same way. It's going to seem so useful at first, but then it's going to turn out that it didn't really change them, and they are going to realize that they

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

need to be seen and challenged and held accountable by a live human being. But I think the fact that so many people are experimenting with AI-based personal development is going to sort of be this teaser or taster for the power of self-development, but people are going to realize that they really need a live human coach to help them.

Now, I think it's our job to communicate that and share that with our audience, but I think that it's possible that AI is actually warming our future clients up for us. So those are my thoughts on how I think AI may actually be creating more of a coaching market.

Another reason that I don't think AI is ever going to replace a human coach is that AI has structural blind spots that harm the people who need coaching most. And this is the part that I don't think most people who talk about this are talking about. AI was trained on data from the internet, right? So it's trained on centuries of accumulated human thought, which means centuries of accumulated human bias about who's smart, who's capable, who's credible, beliefs about what women should want, how women should speak, what women should be afraid of, beliefs about other marginalized groups, like all of that was embedded in the data that AI was trained on because it's embedded in the expressions of our particular civilization.

So the data that trained these models is not neutral. It reflects the culture that produced it, and that culture has a long history of teaching women that they need to stay small, be quiet, be supportive, that being direct is aggressive, right? That they shouldn't be too ambitious, that they should fulfill their social roles, just all the shit, we know that we talk about all the time. All of the kind of baked in misogyny, racism, ableism, all of it is part of what trained AIs.

So when a woman or another marginalized person goes to AI to try to get help with her confidence or her career or the way she feels about herself, she's getting advice that was shaped by the same cultural programming that created her problem in the first place.

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

So it's like, let's imagine a scenario where a woman is getting feedback at work that she seems too aggressive, right, when she's direct with her team. So she wants to figure out how to communicate more effectively. That's what she's told she needs to do. So she goes to AI or to a chatbot or whatever, and the chatbot gives her a list of ways to like soften her language and signal more warmth. It's telling her about like body positioning and tone and whatever.

Okay, so she implements that, and then she gets feedback that she's too soft and she needs to show more leadership and initiative. So then she feels frustrated and hopeless, right? She's starting to blame herself. If she brings this back to her AI chatbot, it is not going to have any idea what to do.

But a human coach who's trained in an intersectional feminist lens has a different perspective. Right, a human coach with an intersectional feminist lens can help the client see that she's being subjected to a double standard, that this is a catch-22 that she can't escape by just trying to successfully manage the perceptions of everyone else perfectly around her. She's going to have to have a hard conversation with herself about her current company, her role, her prospects there. She's going to need to build her confidence to navigate all of that. And AI is not going to see or call any of that out. And I think particularly women and other marginalized people are going to become more and more aware of the ways in which AI is shaped by our dominant culture and are going to be looking for alternatives.

Third reason that I don't think that AI is going to be replacing coaching is that it simply cannot be as effective because AI is designed to tell you what you want to hear. What is that saying like, it's not a bug, it's a feature. Is that how it goes? Anyway, right, it's not a flaw. Like, it's not a design flaw, it's a design choice. AI was built to be helpful, by which we mean mostly agreeable. It's a product. And the people who built it want you to keep using it because that's how they're going to make money. And they're

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

making a little bit, well, they're making a lot right now, but they're going to absolutely jack the price and make even more once everyone feels dependent on it.

So AI is optimized to give you a response that satisfies your request in a way that feels good and will keep you coming back. And that is kind of the opposite of what actually makes coaching work. It is for sure important in coaching for a client to feel seen and heard and have it reflected that their thoughts and feelings are valid in the sense of like, they're not morally wrong for having them. Their thoughts and feelings are allowed to exist, but most of what's powerful about coaching is the opposite of validating a client's thoughts and feelings in terms of agreeing with them, which is what AI will do.

The mechanism of change is generally much more uncomfortable than that. It is asking questions that your client never thought about and maybe doesn't want to be asked on the surface, right? Because it's uncomfortable. It's talking about a pattern they have successfully avoided looking at. It is pointing out a belief that they have been kind of protecting without knowing they are protecting it. So good coaching is bringing all these things to the surface that your client isn't even aware of or is avoiding or finds uncomfortable.

And AI models are not going to do that because a good coach is willing to say the thing that doesn't feel good and could make a client mad in the service of helping them actually change. That's not what an AI is programmed to do.

So for instance, a client may think, let's say a client who's dating may think and might come to a coach or an AI chatbot and start off by saying they're so emotionally available, but they're just not meeting, you know, men in the dating pool who are emotionally available too. A chatbot is not going to question that, right? A chatbot is going to be like, it's so brave of you to put yourself out there. You're so self-aware, right? Like it's totally valid that you

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

want an emotionally available partner. So which is going to do nothing. The person's going to feel good, but that's it. It's not going to help solve their problem. Maybe the chatbot is going to tell them to, I don't know, try to meet men in a different way or like ask them these three questions on the first date to screen them. Whatever. It's mostly going to validate, it is not going to ask questions that get under the story.

But a well-trained coach knows, especially a coach who's been trained in an intersectional lens, knows that many women who think they're emotionally available are actually dating out of an unconscious and painful desire to prove themselves worthy by finding a partner, which actually means they're not emotionally available. So the client's story about themselves is totally wrong, and a well-trained coach can spot this in five minutes and a chatbot never will spot it.

The fourth reason I don't think that AI chatbots or AI coaches are going to replace human coaches is that AI does not come up with new ideas. How did I know that thing about how women are actually emotionally unavailable when they are dating to prove their own worth? Because I was that person, and I figured this out after training as a coach and coaching myself.

So most of my best ideas have come from applying what I learned to my own brain and to the clients I was coaching. Any successful coach will tell you they are their first and most important client and that they figure out a lot of what sets them apart from doing the work on themselves. That is not something that AI can do.

AI is a tool for synthesizing and retrieving existing information. And I'm not underestimating that for tasks that require accessing what is already known, AI can be useful. But coaching is not primarily about what's already known. The insight that changes a client's life isn't something they can usually find researching on the internet. You can find things researching on the internet that sound good, that make intellectual sense, but that don't change your brain at all.

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

What a client really needs, the kind of insight they really need is specific to them. It comes out of the particular way that their brain works, their specific thoughts, and the particular way the coach can listen, reflect back, and offer alternative perspectives and offer tools to change them. This is a live interactive relational process. So the insight didn't exist separate from that conversation, that back and forth. It was generated by it.

That's why the coaching methodology I teach is built on the Socratic method. So the idea is that the most powerful transformation happens not from telling someone what to think, but from guiding someone to discover what they think and what they want to think themselves. And what emerges from that process is new every time. So the coach is not just like retrieving an answer from a database. The coach is creating the conditions in which the client can create a new way of thinking.

And finally, the fifth reason that I don't think that AI is going to replace human coaches is that human change requires human connection. Many people come to coaching have already tried informational resources, Instagram posts, self-help books, self-study courses. Those haven't solved the problem.

What they need is help applying the concepts to their own brain, to their own idiosyncrasies, their own blind spots, and they need to have self-compassion and emotional safety with themselves modeled for them by another human. This is how humans learn. We've been learning this way for thousands of years, and an AI chatbot cannot create that same felt safety for a client.

There are meta studies of therapy that show that the most effective aspect of therapy is not the type of approach, like, you know, CBT versus Freudian versus whatever. It's the relationship between the client and the therapist. And I believe the same is most likely true for coaching, even if it hasn't been studied in the same way yet. And that is something that AI can never provide.

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

I think we're already seeing a lot of alienation from how much AI slop is out there, and younger people, especially, are aware of that and are turning on it in some cases. Now, I don't think we're going to be able to get rid of it. It will probably become integrated into our lives in many ways, much like the internet did. But the internet did not destroy the desire for human connection or the power of human coregulation, empathy, and reflection. And AI won't either. If anything, I think we'll all be hungrier for human connection. So those are my five reasons that I believe coaching is going to thrive despite AI or even because of it.

And now I want to talk about how AI can help coaching businesses, especially for those just starting out and how I really recommend you do not use it. Everything I just said about why AI cannot replace a live coach is absolutely true, and if you are a new coach who understands how to use AI kind of appropriately and effectively, you're going to have a significant advantage compared to the people who came before you. So that's what's coming after the break. Stay with us.

So we've talked about what AI cannot do, but what can it do? If you're building a solo coaching practice or you're thinking about building one, you need to understand something about what it's historically taken to run a business like this. There have always been two kind of completely different categories of work inside a coaching practice when you're a solopreneur. The first is the actual coaching, right? So it's like your literal coaching sessions.

The second is everything that makes it possible to do the first. So like dealing with your emails, dealing with the scheduling, client contracts, onboarding clients, social media, website copy, graphics, doing a webinar, like all of the stuff you have to do, marketing, messaging, administrative, operational, all that stuff. And solopreneurs have, by definition, had to handle all that stuff alone.

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

Now, within this non-coaching category, I think there are two more subcategories of work. And one is the kinds of skills that I think you do need to master because they're integral to your success long term. Those are things like messaging, like offer strategy, like brand positioning. So those sound complicated, but I just mean messaging is like, what do you say about what you do that explains to people why it's valuable, right?

Strategy is like, if you're going to sell something, let's say you want to sell some one-to-one coaching slots, what's your strategy? How are you going to do that? What are you going to post? What are you going to share? Where's the messaging going to go? Are you going to email people or DM them? Are you going to offer a bonus when people sign up at a certain amount of time? Like, those are all the strategy questions.

Brand positioning means like, what's your kind of identity? Right? Are you like your, no nonsense best friend? Are you like a sophisticated mentor? These are higher-level things, right? Messaging, strategy, what your brand's going to be like, your intellectual property. You ideally go through a good coaching certification, and then you start to build on that and add on that and develop your own ideas. And then your coaching skills, of course, right? Like there's the coaching and then there's any sort of professional development. You know, in my coaching certification, we teach you how to self-assess your coaching sessions so you can improve your skills.

So all of these things are things that are so important for you to invest time and energy in. Even though they are somewhat all in service of being able to do the coaching, they're still really important because even when you get bigger, if you want to grow and scale a business, you still need to be involved in that stuff for a long time.

The other category are things that I don't think a solopreneur who really wants to be a coach actually needs to be good at themselves. These are the things you would eventually outsource to other people, but you can't always afford to outsource right away. So that is like organizing your

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

calendar, formatting your worksheets, administrative follow-up, editing your audio file that you want to publish on Instagram. Like whatever it is, these are kind of non-zone of genius operational layers that used to consume a significant portion of a solo practitioner's working week. And a lot of that now can be automated in a way that it was not before. And that means a solo coach today can run a more professional, polished practice with less of their time spent on those things because they don't have to hire a team to do it, starting out the way you used to have to. The operational overhead is now a lot cheaper.

The problem and the thing you need to be careful of is that a lot of what people are wanting to outsource to AI is their marketing. And I get it. You have to market, you have to sell, a lot of people are uncomfortable doing that. It's hard. You have to try things. A lot of them fail, right? So it's tempting to outsource it. But I think there's a really big difference between using AI for the things that you're not going to do long term and aren't your zone of genius and you're not interested in and using AI for the strategic and creative pieces. And those categories should really be treated completely differently.

What AI should not be doing for you is your niche, your message, your point of view, your positioning, or your marketing strategy. Even if you think to yourself, well, okay, Kara, but those are things I'm not that interested in. I don't really want to do them. So why isn't that just the same as like organizing my calendar if I could get AI to do it? Great. AI can generate stuff in these categories. It'll be like baseline competent and coherent, and it will also be totally indistinguishable from what every other coach who asks the same question of the same AI is getting, right? If you use AI to figure out your niche, you're going to end up with the same niche as everyone else who used AI to figure out their niche. If you use AI to write your bio, your bio is going to sound like every other AI generated bio. If you use AI to develop your core message, your message is the average of everything else that everybody's already said.

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

AI is just going to give you conventional wisdom. And you know, when I think about when I started out, the conventional wisdom was that you needed to have an ideal client avatar and a niche that was like, she's 25 to 35 and she lives in a big city and she, whatever, wants to find a boyfriend. And I was like, I'm not doing it that way. My niche is going to be high-achieving anxious women, right? It's a very different way of thinking about a niche, but it totally worked. But if I had AI and I had used AI, I would never have come up with that niche.

The things that differentiate you as a coach, the specific way you see the problem your clients are dealing with, the specific framework you've developed from your own experience, like the specific voice that makes someone read your content and feel like you're talking directly to them. Those things have to come from you. Okay, they can't come from a model trained on everyone else's thinking. And those things are the things the clients actually want. That's what they're hiring. That's what they're buying. When someone hires you as a coach, they're hiring your mind and your perspective.

Now, they care about getting their own result. Nobody just wants to pay you because you seem smart, right? They want their result, but the reason they want to get it with you is because of the way you think and the way you talk and the way you express things. That's what they resonate with. And AI can't give you that. You have to develop it. So I really don't recommend outsourcing that stuff.

What AI is useful for is things like organizing your client notes, maybe creating the graphics for your Instagram post, building a content calendar, connecting your different softwares so they can speak to each other more easily. Like, you know, you can connect your softwares that the client recording gets sent to the client automatically and you don't have to go in and do it. Maybe even, you know, taking your brain dump and cleaning it up into a list of ideas you can then develop. Like, these are tasks that matter. They help make your practice run, but they don't require your

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

specific intelligence or your specific point of view or your specific creativity. They just require competent execution, and that is something that AI can be good at, although you still have to check it.

So I think that the coach who understands this distinction and uses AI for what it's appropriate for is going to have a real advantage over the coach who either refuses to use AI at all or who outsources everything, including the thinking that really needs to stay with them.

Now, I think there is a genuine concern, obviously, for instance, if you are having AI do this stuff, does that mean you are now not hiring a VA when otherwise you would have hired a VA, somebody would have had that job, right? This is part of how AI can impact the labor markets. And this comes down to your personal ethics around how you use AI. I believe we still need people because people have human brains and they have human creativity and strategy, and they can think in a way that AI cannot. But I think when you're a solopreneur and your options are either I do it all myself or I can use AI to take care of some of this day-to-day stuff that doesn't require my zone of genius, that I can't afford to outsource now and that I never really care about being able to do well myself. There's a reasonable argument for using it for those things.

So let me pull that all together. AI can access and synthesize information at a speed and scale a human brain can't do, but it will never be able to do what a skilled live coach does. That's my belief. Understanding what it can and what it can't do is what positions you best in this moment. And I want to be clear that I'm not saying you should use AI at all. It is a totally legitimate principled, ideological, or moral stance to not use AI at all. I also don't think it's going anywhere, and we're all going to have to decide how much if at all we're going to use it. And so my belief in this episode and what I wanted to share with you is what I think is a reasonable use case and what I really don't recommend you do because it's convenient in the short term, but will rob you of the skills you need to build that will make you successful in the long term.

4: Why Coaching Will Thrive in the Age of AI

And I do think there is a long term for coaching. I don't think that AI is going to replace coaching. I think the demand for skilled coaching is only going to grow. I think the disruption AI is creating is going to create a lot of people who need support and coaching, and I think that people over time are going to see more and more the ways in which AI doesn't help solve their interpersonal or their personal development problems, and they are going to value more and more that real human connection and relationship presence and insight. And part of the reason it's so important for you to not outsource your thinking to AI is that a lot of people are doing that. And the more AI slop there is in the personal development or coaching space, the more people who are still using their human brains to come up with novel ideas and new perspectives and lived experience that, you know, you can feel when you read it or hear it, those people are going to stand out more and more.

So the better your relational skills and the better your personal intellectual property, the better your own thinking and perspective and communication, the more you're going to stand out and the more successful you're going to be in the era of AI.

So in order to develop all those things, you obviously need a solid foundation of coaching tools and you need sophisticated education in coaching concepts. So next episode, we're going to get specific about what to look for in a coaching certification. Not all of them are teaching what you need to thrive in this new era where the same old kind of recyclable surface level concepts are going to be what everyone with a chatbot can access. So I think the certification you choose has never been more important. Obviously, I'm biased towards ours. I am going to tell you about it, but I am going to share regardless of my own certification, what I think are the really important principles to be looking for when you're choosing a certification.

So that is what we'll be talking about next time. I'll see you then.