

8: What Clients Actually Want (And Why You Can't Get It Wrong)



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With Your Host

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Many new coaches worry about whether their clients will get the results that they want. I mean, many established coaches worry about this too. And business coaches left and right are telling you that you aren't selling your time, you're selling a result. That makes sense on the surface. People hire you to solve a problem, so you better solve it, right?

Surprisingly, no. You actually do not have to get clients the exact results they come in wanting in order to be a successful coach. And I don't mean just because clients are responsible for their own results. They are, for sure. But you do also have a job that you need to do as the coach. It's just a matter of understanding it correctly. When you understand your role as a coach correctly, you don't worry about getting your clients their results for them. So that's what I'm going to teach you today.

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.

One of the biggest blocks new coaches have to charging is the fear that they won't be able to get clients the results they want. So, that means that many coaches feel okay doing free coaching, but then as soon as it's time to charge or if you're established, like as soon as it's time to raise your price or even ask for renewal, you start to feel afraid to do it because you're afraid that you can't deliver what your client wants. And that fear makes sense on the surface. If you were running a grocery store and you promised to sell a bag of oranges for 15 dollars, you'd feel confident that as long as someone gave you 15 dollars and you gave them a bag of oranges, everyone would leave happy.

And clients often come to coaching wanting really specific things. They want to be happier in their marriage. They want to make more money. They want to stop emotional eating. They want to have toned upper arms. No

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kidding. There's a seven-figure coach out there who just teaches people how to have more toned upper arms. So whatever the client is seeking, they seek you out because they want that specific result. And so, I think that coaches often feel like it's responsible to not charge or to like undercharge if they aren't completely sure they can deliver that result.

So, one half of this issue is the mental drama new coaches have around charging for their services, which is an outcome of the socialization that women get around money for coaches who are socialized as women. Now I'm going to talk about that in a future episode. But today I want to clarify what we're even charging for. You'll hear a million times as a coach that people are not paying for your time, they're paying for their results. And that gets repeated over and over for two reasons. First, it's supposed to help you get out of the trading hours for pay mindset. And that mindset is sort of natural when you're an employee, even though it's still incorrect. Plenty of people get fired who are showing up at their jobs for the required number of hours.

Unless your job is being a movie extra, being in a certain place for a certain amount of time, is not actually why anyone pays you. Like it's not useful for your employer if you work eight hours a day and do a bad job. So, in reality, we're all always being paid for the results that we facilitate, right? Not for our time. But then when it comes time to start charging independently for a service like coaching, people who have been employees naturally start thinking in like hourly rates. And when they do that, they're not including the cost and time they spent training, the cost and time of overhead, of expertise, etc.

So, I think a lot of well-meaning business coaches tell you, hey, you're not charging for time, you're charging for your client's results. They're trying to help you get out of the habit of just trying to break this down to an hourly wage, which feels very kind of arbitrary and often results in undercharging. The problem is that when your brain hears that, if you don't know how to manage your mind as a coach, your brain starts to obsess about whether or not you can get your clients those results. Right?

If you're just charging for your time, then you can guarantee you'll show up and spend that time, but you can't guarantee results. And when you think

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you need to be able to guarantee results, and you're not sure you can, then you don't put yourself out there. You feel like you might be a fraud, you think you don't deserve to be paid, you feel like you're tricking people if you pitch them. And then even if you do get a client, you're not going to be able to coach them cleanly because you're going to be so fixated on making sure that they get the result they want, right? And then your coaching is going to have an agenda. You're going to be pushing them to try to make that exact change, whatever it is, so you can feel like you earned your fee and they got their result.

None of this has to happen. It is not a good way to coach or run a business. It's not enjoyable for anybody, and there is a better way. But here's something you probably didn't expect me to say. It honestly makes sense to not be certain that you can get them results. And there are two reasons why. One you may have heard before, but the second I'm pretty sure you haven't, and it's the one that is actually a game changer. So we're going to take a quick break and then I'm going to share them with you and share why neither one is a problem.

Okay, so let's talk about what people are actually coming to coaching for. What we hear is that people are coming for a result. They want to change something in their lives. They want to feel less overwhelmed in their parenting and more present with their kids. They want to stop quitting on healthy habits, right? They want to get a new job or a new partner. They want to make more money. These are all really tangible, concrete outcomes. The first reason you can't guarantee any of these things is that you can't control what your client does.

This sounds obvious, but because women especially are socialized to be over-responsible, and people of any gender who choose a helping profession really want to help, we get over our skis and we think we can control everything that happens and that we're responsible for whatever happens. But we can't control our clients. We can't control if they're listening during sessions. We can't control if they take notes or remember what we say. We can't control if they practice the new thought we helped them find. We can't control if they do that emotional regulation practice we recommended.

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We can't control if they're sleeping well, keeping their blood sugar stable, having a personal life crisis, are ready to face their own responsibility in their lives, right? Or whatever else might get in the way of working on their issue. We can't control any of that. At its best, coaching is a co-creation of a new outcome for a client. But at most, you're the architect. The client is like the homeowner and the contractor. They tell you where they want to go, and they have to do the day-to-day building.

You're just there to help them outline what needs to change and how it could theoretically be done to get them there, but they have to do the day-by-day rewiring in their own brains. If you go to the doctor and they diagnose and prescribe medication and you don't take the meds, should the doctor not get paid? Obviously not, right? They invested time, education, and mental energy into treating you, and you didn't follow through. And that's not to shame or blame you or a client when that happens. Like there are lots of reasons that people sometimes pay for something they don't fully use or use at all. And that's fine.

But it doesn't mean the person who produced or facilitated the thing doesn't deserve to be compensated or shouldn't be paid. The other thing to notice here is that if your brain is happy to jump to taking responsibility for a client's failure, is it going to take responsibility for a client's success? For a lot of people socialized as women, the answer is no. If the client succeeds, it's because they were so coachable and they did such a good job and it wasn't your coaching that did it. But if they fail, then it was definitely that you failed as a coach. Something's not right there.

So, reason number one is that you can't control your client. So you obviously can't control if they get results. But here's reason number two and this is the one I think is much less understood. I actually already made an untrue assumption in explaining this that you probably missed, because most people do miss this. That was the assumption that clients come in wanting a specific result from coaching, and that is the goal of coaching. It's true that clients have something they want. That's why they pay, right? In time or money or both for coaching.

But what they want is not actually the concrete outcome they think they want. The only reason we want anything is the feeling we think we will have when we get it. So, a client thinks that they're coming to coaching for a

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thing, and if we aren't paying attention as coaches, we think they are too. But they're not. They come to coaching because they want to feel better. Why do you want to stop yelling at your kids? Because it feels bad to lose your temper, and then you guilt yourself for being a bad mom, and you imagine how they're going to turn out because of your yelling, and then you feel bad.

Why do you want to make more money? Because you tell yourself that if you did, you'd feel more secure. You could buy things that would make you happy. You'd be able to think you were doing well for yourself. Why do you want to find a partner? Because you want to feel accepted, good enough, normal. Maybe you want to feel more love or feel loved. People want what they want because of the subconscious or conscious expectation they have of how they will feel when they get it.

When we are coaching someone to create new outcomes in their lives, we're coaching them about how to change the thoughts and feelings they have that are motivating the actions they take that produce the outcomes, the results, the returns that they get in their lives. Those thoughts and feelings take time to change, and they have to interact with the outside world on timelines that we can't completely control. We can't guarantee someone meets their partner during a three-month coaching engagement. We can't guarantee someone doubles their revenue by the time an initial package happens to be over. But we don't have to.

Because what our clients really want is to feel differently. They think circumstances or actions are what change their feelings. So they come to coaching wanting help changing those circumstances or those actions. But as coaches, we know that what creates their feelings are their thoughts. So when we teach them how to change their thoughts, assuming that they do their part in that process, they are going to get what they wanted and what they came for. Regardless of what happens with their outcomes or their circumstances on any specific timeline.

Now, often they absolutely do get the outcome they wanted, right? Whether it's during the coaching relationship or after. Sometimes, once they've learned how to change the way they think and create the feelings they want now, they realize that they didn't even care about that goal for a good

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reason and they don't want it anymore anyway. And usually they see themselves in a new way at a deeper level, and they become much more interested in addressing their mental and emotional patterns instead of fixating on a specific external goal. So sometimes they'll achieve that external goal, sometimes it's during the coaching engagement, sometimes it's later. Sometimes they realize that goal really wasn't the point.

But regardless, the bottom line is that as a coach, your job is not to make sure that your client gets an external result in their lives. It is to facilitate, not produce, not guarantee, stay in your lane and facilitate, the emotional change that a client wants. That's what they're really after. And that emotional change comes from within. That's what they really want when they sign up for coaching, even if they don't know it when they start. Because I promise you, if you said, "Listen, I can make sure you get a partner, but you'll feel as lonely and unworthy as you do now." Or, "I can guarantee you'll make more money, but you'll feel as much scarcity and fear as you do now."

If they truly believed that would happen, they would not take that deal. Do you hear what I'm saying? Nobody pays for an outcome that they don't think is going to change their emotional state. Nobody pays for an outcome if they don't think it's going to change their emotional state. What they really want is that emotional change. And in order to get the outcome they want, they have to change the emotion anyway.

I have this small group high-end mastermind, I may have talked about it before, called the Mission Impossible Mastermind. And people pay fifteen thousand dollars every six months for this, and most people renew multiple times. And I am notorious for telling people in that group that I don't care what their goal is and that in all likelihood, whatever goal they came in with is probably not what they will end up working on. Because the goal they come in with is just the circumstance or outcome that they think is going to change how they feel about themselves or the world.

And I know my job as a coach is to help them change how they think and feel about themselves or the world, regardless of what circumstances or outcomes they have. And that's your job too. Your client's job is to show up, pay attention, participate in the process, and practice what they're learning.

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Your job is not to guarantee a specific practical outcome. It's to facilitate the emotional change, which is what the client truly wants anyway. And when you see your job that way, it becomes a lot less stressful.

Because honestly, it makes sense to not feel confident that you can guarantee that someone will get a promotion or that their kids' behavior will change if they parent differently. You can't guarantee that and you can't guarantee what your client's going to do. But you can feel sure that you know more than your client does about cognitive change and emotional regulation and that if they practice what you teach, they will think and feel differently. That is the one thing you can guarantee. If they do the work, they will think and feel differently. And the good news is that's actually what they want and what they're paying for, even if they don't know it when they start.