

9: You're Not Starting Over & It Wasn't A Waste



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

9: You're Not Starting Over & It Wasn't A Waste

Somewhere in the last few years or decades, you've built real expertise at something. You got good enough that people started trusting your judgment without checking it twice. Maybe you ran a team, maybe you argued cases, maybe you kept a hospital floor running on no sleep, maybe you raised multiple small humans without ever leaving one of them at the firehouse and running away.

And now you're looking at becoming a coach, and your brain has done something sneaky. It's decided that none of that counts anymore, that the moment you start pursuing being a coach, you go back to zero, back to being the least experienced person in the room. Your brain tells you that you would be starting over, and it announces this like it's just an objective truth about the world. But that's actually a thought. And not only that, it's an incorrect thought that can hold you back for years or forever.

So today I want to show you exactly why that's the case and what to think instead. Plus, I'll walk you through three examples of real people I've talked to recently in completely different career stages who all had the same fear and how they were able to change that perspective. So, let's get into it.

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.

Before we get started here, let me just remind you that I was not born a life coach. If you're new here, you may not know much about my history, but I had an entire career before I became a coach. I went to Harvard Law School. I clerked for a federal appellate court judge. Then I litigated constitutional rights, and I held several academic fellowships. I was about to go on the market for a law professor job when I quit to become a coach. Even now when I think about the fact that I did that, it's kind of wild to me.

9: You're Not Starting Over & It Wasn't A Waste

But I'm reviewing my resume here just so that you know that when it comes to having invested a lot of time, energy, and money into a previous field of expertise, and a very socially approved and high prestige one at that, I know what I'm talking about. I had the thought that I was starting over too, and it held me back from going all in until I finally figured out that this was not just a weather report from my brain, but simply an optional thought that wasn't even true. So that's what I want to offer you as a powerful mindset shift today.

Let's start with why your brain is fixating on this idea or ruminating on this thought. The fear underneath starting over is about status and competence. You spent years, in some cases decades, becoming the person in the room who knows what she's doing. You're invested in your current career, you're identified with it, and you've put a lot of time into it. So, when you think about being a beginner again, it may feel scary and vulnerable. You may feel like you'd be exposed as an imposter or a fraud, which is a weird thing our brain tells us because if you're a beginner, you can't really be an imposter, right? You're just beginning, which is normal as a beginner. You're only an imposter or a fraud if you're telling people you've been a coach for 20 years when you haven't.

We also know human brains are susceptible to the sunk cost fallacy, which is a brain glitch in which if we have put a lot of time into something or money into something or effort into something, we don't want to stop doing it because we tell ourselves that would mean everything we put in is a waste. That's why we continue investing in things that are not giving us returns, like that relationship you're just sure will turn around if you give it more time or that investment that's already failing, but you don't want to admit you've lost money, so you put in more. It's all driven by this thought that if we change course, then what we did before was wasted or didn't count.

Part of this is how we're trained to think about careers, like it's supposed to be a ladder that goes up in one direction until you retire or die. And this can feel more and more true the more established you get. The more impressive your credentials were the first time, the more your brain insists

9: You're Not Starting Over & It Wasn't A Waste

you need an equally impressive pile of proof before this new thing is allowed to count. It requires the same 15 years of receipts that you already built in your last career. But that's an impossible standard to hold yourself to because it means you're never allowed to start anything new.

If we step back and think about this logically, it doesn't make any sense. First of all, the accomplishments you've created don't cease to exist if you change your job. The buildings you designed, if you're an architect, they're still standing. The lawsuits you won, they're still precedent, right? The patients you helped, they're still healed, living their lives. What you accomplished isn't undone by changing your career. It still exists. Starting over makes it sound like everything you've done is erased, but that's not true. Everything you contributed to your field, everything you created, everything you accomplished, still exists and is still creating meaning out in the world without you. So what you've already done continues to exist.

But what about the thought that you're starting over as a beginner? That thought causes a lot of hesitation and anxiety, so that's what I want to flip for you next. Stay tuned because after this quick break, I'm going to reframe that thought for you, and I'm going to give you three real-life examples from people I've talked to in the last few weeks to help you apply it to your own career.

Okay, welcome back. So let's talk about the thought that you're starting over from the perspective of considering yourself a beginner. The technique of coaching, the specific frameworks, the models, the tools, that part is genuinely new, and it should be. That's what training and a coach certification is actually for. So we can think of those as like the hard skills, right? The field-specific expertise and domain-specific training. That's why we have coaching certifications.

But coaching is also made up of so-called soft skills, right? Your ability to hold space for someone, your ability to be compassionate, your ability to be curious. Those are skills you've been building as a human your whole life. And whatever you did before becoming a coach, you probably developed domain-specific skills that are transferable too. If you were a lawyer, you

9: You're Not Starting Over & It Wasn't A Waste

learned how to think logically, which will help you deconstruct a client's thought errors. If you were a doctor, you learned how to listen to symptoms and understand the cause underneath, which will help you interpret what a client says versus what's really going on under the surface. If you managed people, you've learned how to encourage them, how to provide structure, how to help people rise to their potential.

So let me show you what this actually looks like using a few examples of people who came through our last Coach Curious Prep School who I coached about this specific fear. So for instance, I talked to one woman who worked in retail. She's leading teams of up to 50 people, been doing that for a decade, and she wants to become a coach, but she was telling herself that she would be starting over and didn't have any qualifications. But once we talked through her career, we found that she spent a decade managing people, handling people's emotional needs, their stress, their burnout, managing difficult conversations, and helping people work through their personal issues to move ahead in their career. That is ideal training for any coach, right? Especially if she's going to coach around career or burnout.

Another student I talked to was a man who had a career in the arts but was interested in becoming a coach. And his brain was telling him the same story. He'd be starting over, he'd be a beginner. His brain was telling him he had no idea if he would like it or be good at it. But when I asked him like, well, what even made you think about becoming a coach, he talked about spending five years coaching a local sports league where he coached on performance, helped people work through their confidence and mindset issues as players, and supported them in resolving interpersonal dynamics. So in other words, he'd already been coaching, and he'd racked up years of experience. His brain discounted this, but the fact that he'd been coaching on sports versus whatever his niche might be made no difference in reality because brains are brains.

Then there was the family law attorney who was years into a serious legal career, was really drawn to coaching but was stuck on the idea that she

9: You're Not Starting Over & It Wasn't A Waste

hadn't seen someone else do exactly what she wanted to do. But when we dug into her past, what we discovered is that she had already forged her own path, creating a unique kind of law practice that hadn't existed before she started it. Far from sort of starting over and becoming a coach, she actually would be deploying the exact skill set she'd already developed and proven once, using her imagination and her vision to create something new that she didn't see around her but believed it should exist.

Each of these people had the same thought error I did when I was thinking about becoming a coach: the belief that I would be starting over and that my previous career would have been a very expensive waste. But I was just as wrong as they were. The law review articles I wrote are still out there, and they still even get cited sometimes. The cases I worked on are still on the books. And the logical reasoning skills, the ability to deconstruct society's ideology, the non-judgmental listening, all of those skills transferred and made me an even better coach.

So here's my homework for you. If you've been thinking about becoming a coach or you're an early-stage coach right now, and your brain is giving you the whole starting over, it was a waste, rigmarole, I want you to make two lists. The first are all the things you've created or done that continue to bear fruit in the world, even if you retired tomorrow. The second is all the skills, hard, soft, quote, whatever, that you built in your current career and how they would transfer to coaching. I think you'll find that you are not starting over at all.