

12: Coaching Confessions: How Hadar Shemesh Faked Her Way to a Million Followers (Sort Of)



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Kara Loewentheil

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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.

All right, my friends. I am really excited to welcome you to the first episode of what I'm calling Coaching Confessions. And this is a series that I'll be doing every once in a while when our schedules align, basically, where I interview coaches who are really big in the coaching world, have very successful businesses, seven figures and above. But we're going to be talking about what it was like when they first started out.

And that's why I'm calling it coaching confessions because I think that when you look at somebody who has a million followers on YouTube, like our guest today, or makes seven figures, it's easy to think that they just were birthed whole like Athena from the brain of Zeus and sailed off into success. But in fact, the beginning is often really messy. And that's where a lot of you are. And so I want to normalize that for you and get you some good advice for how you can keep going or start moving forward.

So, my guest today is Hadar Shemesh, who's a great friend of mine and an amazing coach and entrepreneur. Will you introduce yourself, brag a little about yourself, tell us what you do.

Hadar: Yes, thank you so much. Happy to be here. So my name is Hadar. I help non-native speakers of English communicate in English confidently and succeed in life and at work. I have an online business. I started as a one-on-one coach in my apartment, and I have an online business with thousands of students from around the world. I'm a content creator. I run a multiple seven-figure business. And yeah, I have a team of 10 people and 10 more teachers. And I've been doing this for the past, I think, 18 years.

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Kara: 18 years? I did not know that.

Hadar: Yes, I mean, I started as, a teacher, one-on-one, but yeah, I've been doing this for 18 years.

Kara: And you have a million and a half YouTube followers, am I right about that?

Hadar: A million and a half YouTube followers, over a million on Instagram. So we're producing content in the business.

Kara: Right. I mean, I was very excited when I got to like 100,000 Instagram followers recently.

Hadar: It's a nice milestone.

Kara: Okay, so that's amazing. Tell us, when you started, so 18 years ago, which I don't think I knew that. It's wild to me. You look so young. What, what did your business look like? What were you selling? Who were you selling it to? And what if anything had you been doing before you started doing that?

Hadar: So, I actually started as an actress, studied acting in New York City, and this is where I worked on my own pronunciation and I kind of coached myself through being a non-native speaker and having to succeed in the US as an actress. I'm originally from Israel, so I moved back home and then I started my business there. Actually, I didn't start the business. I was kind of like searching for what I wanted to do because the acting path did not work for me.

And then I was just trying to figure out, I was working in restaurants, and I studied nutrition and at some point, I was like, I really wanted to work with people and I wanted to make more money. And I was like, what am I good

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at? And I remembered my own journey in English and I said, there's something I can help other people who are where I was when I first started. So I took a note and I put it on a bulletin board on the street for pronunciation classes.

Kara: Amazing. Okay, hold on. For all of you who are like, “everybody has to be on social media. I can't possibly have a business if I'm not on social media. I don't want to be doing dances on TikTok, so I can't have a business.” Notes on the street.

Hadar: On the street. And it was just one note, one note. And I was like, I'll just give it a shot. I don't know. And then I got a call, I think a week later, someone wanted to come for a lesson. I was like, okay, I charge 10 dollars an hour. A ridiculous amount.

Kara: Was it really 10 dollars?

Hadar: It was 20. But I didn't know. I didn't plan beyond like just trying to see if people were interested.

Kara: I guess 18 years ago, 20 dollars meant something. Now that's like the cost of an iced coffee in New York.

Hadar: Yeah. And it went really well. Like I prepared the first class, he came in, he never returned. But...

Kara: Okay, wait, there's so much good stuff here. I can't let you get through a minute of this story. Okay, first of all, you didn't have, here's my 19-week program all worked out, and I know exactly what I'm doing, right? No, you had one. And number two, your first client was like, nah, and never came back.

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Hadar: Well, no, he did call me a few weeks later to say, I had a great time, but then I got into an accident and I couldn't come back. But then he didn't want to return.

Kara: But my point is like, but look where you are now, right? Because so many people starting out would be like, well, I don't have the perfect 19-week program and the first person I did it, they didn't like it and they didn't come back. So I shouldn't be a coach. I should give up. I should quit. But that's not what happened with you. So you had that one guy and then what happened?

Hadar: Yeah, and I think that you just listen to clues and try to listen to the good clues because yeah, him not coming back could have been, oh, that's not the right path. But the fact that I really enjoyed it and I felt like I was in my purpose and it was the first time I was doing it. I was like, okay, maybe there is more to it. Then, again, talking about being scrappy, back then there were forums, right? So I would go into one forum...

Kara: Online forums.

Hadar: ...Online forums where people would go to get advice. And I would post a question, how can you improve your pronunciation and your accent? And then I would log in from another user.

Kara: Oh my God, I'm dead.

Hadar: I had to be resourceful.

Kara: I love it. I love this. I love it. So you were on there at the beginning of an Instagram bot. You were like being your own booster. That is so good.

Hadar: I was, yeah, I was a fake user and I responded, "Oh, there's this really good teacher. Her name is Hadar. Here's her number."

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Kara: Oh my God.

Hadar: And then I got my second student, and she was a 60-year-old woman who was teaching technology. And she enjoyed my lessons so much and she was like, you have to do more of this. And she taught me about SEO and how to start my own Google site. And that's how I started. And then, yeah, and I just started building it.

Like content was a big part of what I was doing from the very early days. And if I could give someone a piece of advice, it's just like to start as early as possible putting out content even when you feel like no one's there watching because at some point it does catch up. Which it did. And then I started getting more students. And that's how I started, like just teaching one-on-one in my living room. I would close the cat in the bedroom.

Kara: My cat would scream the whole time if I did that.

Hadar: And she was okay. But yeah, like that was a risk. And then at some point I started coaching small groups. And every step was just like trying something a little more scary, a little more challenging to sell. The first group that I sold, no one signed up. And then I just had to say it sold out.

For that one person that asked. You have to kind of like figure it out on the way and not to be afraid, right? If we're already talking about these things. And then in 2015, I started my YouTube channel. And since then, that created the infrastructure to build my now online business.

Kara: I love you're like, no one signed up. It's sold out is actually what happened. So when you were first getting started, what do you think you were most afraid of?

Hadar: First of all, just how would I find my next client? Where are they going to come from? Because there are cycles when you first start. There

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are a few months where you get a lot of work and then all of a sudden you have no work whatsoever. And then you think that's it, it's done. No one's going to call you again.

So that happened for a few cycles until I realized, okay, just like seasons, when that season comes, I need to be prepared for doing other things, working on the infrastructure. So recognizing, I don't need to look for another job because that was what I was doing at the beginning. I think that's the first thing. And the second thing would be investing in myself and in my business. Whether it's to buy equipment at the beginning, to hiring my first person.

Kara: Yeah, I love that advice, especially that it's normal for things to be herky jerky because I think people are not prepared for that or are not emotionally willing to go through that. And so they want everything to work perfectly to prove that they're on the right path and they're doing what they should be doing.

And that's really proven at the beginning, but even in my Mission Impossible mastermind, one of my seven-figure coaches who's in there, this is what we worked on all of last year because she was actually someone who started a business and she does very high level CEO executive coaching and she had a long background in HR in that industry.

So actually when she started, she had a really easy time of it at first and she made a million dollars in a couple of years and she was just like, great, this is what happens forever now. Nothing will ever change. And then she had an absolutely normal dip because of whatever, market changes, people wanted different things. She needed to adapt her business, but instead she lost her mind, right? And thought she should quit and get a job.

And so you have to work on that at every level, but so many entrepreneurs would save themselves so much pain if they just accepted that whether you

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are making 10 dollars or 10 million dollars, there are phases and cycles. I think one of the reasons that I didn't lose my mind and quit in the 2024 coaching industry reshuffle that happened was I really think was from almost just knowing history, just being like, industries change, the economy goes up and down.

It's like you have to be in it for the long haul. So I love that advice. Was there a moment that you, you said that you considered quitting, it sounds like. Like you were sometimes like, oh, I should go get a job. Did you ever have a moment where you really came close to quitting and what kept you on the path?

Hadar: I don't think I ever, I want to think that there, like at the beginning, yes, like I would look for a bunch of other jobs. Like I would do translation, I would work with kids, but it was never to replace what I was doing. In 2024, that was never a real thought, but I really struggled not just because of the changes in the business, but also personal reasons and my business internally, we made a lot of changes. And I remember it was the first real thought of, if I just worked for someone, it would have been so much easier. Which is not true because...

Kara: Right. You would get fired or you would quit.

Hadar: Yeah. And also I can't work for someone.

Kara: Right. It's also constitutionally incapable, so that would have been hard.

Hadar: Incapable. I'd be unhappy. I would quit in two days. And also work is work. When you're an entrepreneur, you want to get things done well. It doesn't matter if you do it for yourself or for someone else. And I think it's just a belief that, oh, there's something better for me out there. And I love what you said.

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I think that lesson that I've learned at the beginning is really about adapting and not, okay, things are changing. So instead of dwelling on it and being like, oh, what am I going to do now? Everything's changed. It's like, okay, to think quickly, okay, what can I change? How is that an opportunity?

Kara: Everything is always changing. There's so much drama, I think in early entrepreneurs of feeling like, oh, I did this thing and it worked, but then I did it again and it didn't work. So I'm a failure and I should quit. You're like, no, most things won't work more than once when you're an entrepreneur.

I mean, and we were just at this mastermind, we're in this mastermind together that's all seven-figure earners and is led by someone who's an eight-figure coach and she just changed her whole business model, right?

It's like there's no stage at which you just get to be like, I don't know, maybe in the 1840s, but not now. You don't just get to be like, okay, I built the factory and I'm done. It's just going to make widgets for the next 20 years and I never have to think about it again. That is not a thing.

But I also love that you are saying, even when you needed to take another job, do translation work, that didn't mean you needed to give up because I think there's also so much perfectionism and so much, I don't know if it's just because people socialized as women are so perfectionistic and always looking for how they're not good enough, but I think there's also this sort of fetishization of being all in and being a full-time coach and it takes a while sometimes to build to that and that's not a problem.

Hadar: And I think it's so stressful to not have money. So for me it was like, okay, if I need to be able to focus on my business, I need to not be stressed about that and also pay my rent. So I would do whatever it takes to allow myself to invest in this and to grow and to keep going. I think now it

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is harder with all the messages that you get from social media and you see all these shining businesses and you don't see the behind the scenes of them really, if you're just starting out.

And even if you do, you don't pay attention to it because you pay attention to what you don't have. And I think it's really important to remember that what we're talking about, they are going through as well. And the most important thing is that you do whatever you need to do to create the business that you want, and there's nothing wrong about not going in the path that you're supposed to take.

Kara: Yeah, or I mean, social media algorithms are an echo chamber, right? And the people with the most time to make content about being full-time coaches are full-time coaches. The person who's nursing three days a week and has a full coaching load from her contacts from that job or who's doing coaching in a hospital program or whatever, she's not online making videos about that probably. So you're getting a distorted view.

Part of what I think is challenging is that because of the way women especially are socialized around money, they bring this almost consumer debt mindset into coaching, right? Into any business. When the truth is the whole reason we have capitalism is that businesses need capital to get going. So either you are investing in your own capital in your business, which means maybe you're working a part-time job or even a full-time job and doing it on the side.

Maybe you're investing your savings or you're investing other people's money. You're getting a loan, you're getting investors. There is no other way, right? And coaching is actually very low overhead to start compared to trying to start a restaurant or something. But the idea, people have this fantasy that's like, I get certified as a coach and then my business is supposed to be somehow self-funding, self-supporting and supporting me all from day one or else I'm a failure.

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This is just not how any business works, right? It's so unrealistic. So now here we are, you got a million and a half followers on YouTube, you've been doing this for 18 years, you've made many millions of dollars. What did you worry about at the beginning that turned out to be completely irrelevant?

Hadar: I think that for me, I thought that I would never get that level of success ever. I never imagined crossing the seven-figure mark in US dollars. For me, and clearly that's irrelevant. And also it didn't happen overnight, right? It was a long journey with a lot of work, but because I was in it and I was doing it and I kept seeing progress either way, I was busy doing that. And all of a sudden when, it was, I remember in 2018, I had one really viral video that with that, I created my then community on Facebook and that blew up.

Kara: Wait, 2018 is how many years into it from when you started?

Hadar: It's like three years into starting my digital business, 10 years into starting my business in general, like teaching, coaching.

Kara: Okay, but even three years, that's three years of posting before you go viral. Whereas people are out here being like, I went on Instagram every week for three months and I'm not viral yet. I'm doing it wrong.

Hadar: I see that as well. And then people kind of lose confidence and then they stop, which is the worst thing to do because then you won't have that one thing that would pick up. It didn't pick up because it was a good video. It was first of all because I knew how to talk about things because I had the track record of recording all these videos until then, right? I'm practicing. I got so much better at it. And also people looked at that video, checked out the rest of my content.

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They realized who I was and then they said, yes, I'm going to continue with her to the next stage. So for me, when that happened, when that blew up, I was so overwhelmed. I felt bad almost in a way. I remember after my first six-figure launch, I had to take a few days off and I felt sick because I couldn't understand how all of this was happening.

I received it as a lot of love as well because it was like my community was really popping and it also translated to money. And I had to train myself to create the capacity to receive all of that because it happened quickly after growing so slowly.

Kara: It's an overnight success after eight years of working on the business.

Hadar: Exactly.

Kara: Yeah. Which I think is so important because those of us who are on social media are in that bubble, right? And Americans have always been obsessed with the overnight success, but you don't see all the work that leads up to it. And I mean, if you're listening to this and you've been being wishy-washy about posting or if you're not on social media, emailing a list or reaching out to your networking clients, right?

Whatever it is, your contacts. Are you willing to do it every week for three years? If at the end of that you're going to succeed, it's a really important question. For me to have what I really want, what am I willing to do? How long am I willing to go without seeing the result while holding the faith and looking for the little bits of result, right? Looking for the okay, well, 200 people watch this video. If you think about 200 people in a room, that's a big room, that many people watch my video and celebrating that.

Hadar: And as a coach, I think it's so important to be in the work and coaching a lot before you are able to handle more clients and more work

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and both in terms of creating content, but also in terms of coaching or if you want to create a digital course, you can't do it without having the experience of coaching for hundreds of hours really, because then how would you know how to talk about the things? I mean, you could, but it's a different experience completely.

Kara: Right. You have to build that skill, right? When people want to go straight to coaching a group, it's like, well, A, you may not have the following, but even if you did have the following and you're just moving into coaching, you need to build the skill.

Hadar: And the confidence in yourself.

Kara: Yes. And how lucky are we that you can get paid to do that? So as someone who has a really big audience, what do you think most new coaches get wrong about audience building?

Hadar: I think that first, I think people are looking for that one viral clip and I think the nurturing is really important, even if you get the 2 or 300 views because they're the ones who are actually watching the content and 2 or 300 people is a lot.

Kara: Right. And if they're consistently watching it, they are invested in you versus one viral clip, a million people see it for 90 seconds and then never see you again, who cares?

Hadar: Right. And not to get distracted and not to look for perfection, not a perfect grid, just post and to be prolific about creating content so that you understand what sticks and how you show up and train yourself to feel comfortable creating content, being on video because that's also a skill that you need to build. We're not born as presenters. So I think look at the algorithm, but if you want to talk about something, just talk about it. That's what I feel and that has worked for me.

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Kara: Yeah, so it's being authentic, it's celebrating what you have. And then I also think it's recognizing that some people make seven figures with a seven-figure audience and some people make seven figures with almost no social media audience, right?

There are infinite ways to build a business, including a coaching business. You can look at me versus you, right? We both have seven-figure businesses and I just got to 100,000 followers on Instagram and for most of my career, I think I had like 25, right? We just started paying attention to it last year.

Hadar: And you reach people.

Kara: Right, I have a podcast. And I know people, but then my seven-figure client who I was talking about earlier, she has really no social media. I think she just started a LinkedIn newsletter, but she was working her contacts from her previous work, right? There's so many ways to find those clients. The best thought I think you can have when you're starting out is there's a million ways to build a business and I will figure out the one that works for me.

Hadar: Before I had a digital business, I had a very successful business and I was working eight hours every day, loved every minute of it, and it was all word of mouth. I had a wait list of people working with me. I had to hire a coach, right? So even if you have an in-person business with no digital presence, you can still succeed and have a successful business.

Kara: I love that because I don't think we even talked about that much, right? So you got to fully booked out with a wait list. What were you making when you were doing that? Six figures?

Hadar: Yeah.

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Kara: So multiple six figures, you have an employee or a coach you're working with before you even got online.

Hadar: Yes.

Kara: And so that's another great point is you can do one and then the other, but you don't have to limit yourself by telling yourself business can only be built in one way. All right, so here's our last question. If you could go back to the you who you were when you were starting out, what is the one piece of advice you'd give her or the one thought you would tell her to think? What's the one thing you would want her to know?

Hadar: I think it would be when you make a decision, don't spend another two, three months making that decision again. And just execute on it, because first, the decision is always going to be the same as the decision that you have originally made.

Kara: Right. Like, I made this decision but now I think I should question it for a while and pretend I might make a different decision and ask a bunch of people and still not feel satisfied and then I'm back to my first decision.

Hadar: Yeah.

Kara: I just did this. We never stop doing this. I just did this.

Hadar: I know, but it's kind of like you have to just make the decision, right? You want to do something and then you're thinking about it and then planning and testing and talking to ChatGPT and then, no, like you make a decision, you do it and you try it. And if something goes not in the right direction, what you will have learned doing this work will take you to the next right decision, right?

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And I've seen that in my business throughout the years. I wish I could say to trust that and to just work quickly. Once I make a decision, not waste time so that I could have done so many things in a shorter period of time if I hadn't wasted time re-deciding.

Kara: Yeah, I think your success is proportional to how quickly you're willing to make decisions.

Hadar: Yeah, 100%. And to pivot when you need.

Kara: Yeah, and then make another decision.

Hadar: Right. And not to think that you have made the wrong decision. It's just because you didn't have the information that you needed to pivot and now you do.

Kara: If you think of each decision as a potential multiplier of whatever you're doing, the more decisions you make, the more often you get to multiply what you're doing.

Hadar: And I've been asked before, what is your biggest failure? And I really, really don't know how to answer that because there is none.

Kara: Yeah, I don't have one, right? I learned something every time and I wouldn't be who I am without them and I wouldn't have had the next idea I had without that failure.

Hadar: Exactly. That's just business. Love it.

Kara: Love it. Thank you so much for coming on. Where can people find you, follow you?

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Hadar: Google Hadar Shemesh, my name, and you'll find my website and hadar.accentway on Instagram and YouTube.

Kara: Thank you so much.