

Ep #184: How to Help Your Over-Strategizing Clients (Part 3)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lindsay Dotzlaf

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Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 184.

To really compete in the coaching industry, you have to be great at coaching. That's why every week, I will be answering your questions, sharing my stories, and offering tips and advice so you can be the best at what you do. Let's get to work.

Hello, coach. I am so happy you're here today. If you've been tuning in the last couple of weeks, one thing that I am doing in this episode, this is part three of a three-part series where I have just been going through some of the new content that I'm creating inside The Coach Lab. Kind of dipping into what to do when your clients show up in specific ways.

When you have clients that are just always in their head, always thinking, spending more time thinking than taking action. Last week – that was part one. Then last week was part two, which was just exploring clients that are just in their feelings a lot and always bringing things back to their feelings and how they feel in a way that is not moving them forward, right?

Then this week, we're going to explore those clients that come to sessions that they've taken so many actions. Sometimes these are dream clients when they are getting results, but when they aren't and they're just taking so many actions, maybe even a little resistant to looking at what's going on in their head, in their body, just a little resistant to coaching or to exploring anything about the mindset, how they're feeling, all of that. But they are really great at taking action.

And I want to be really clear, I want to remind you, if you've listened to the other episodes, you've heard me say this. But if this is the first of the three, it's totally fine, you don't have to go back and listen to the other two if you just popped in here because of this specific topic. But I want to remind you, this is for when things aren't working.

And I'm going to talk even more about that in this episode, probably even than I did in the other two, because I think sometimes as coaches, we sometimes like to think that our clients, even if they aren't coaches and this

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is not the work they're used to doing, or even if they're brand new clients, we're used to sometimes –

Coaches come to me a lot for this in The Coach Lab and in other spaces where it's like, oh, this is a problem because my client is just hustling, taking so much action, so much strategizing, so much doing, and is not totally open to the coaching. I'm trying to get them to slow down and to really look at their thoughts, look at their feelings, all of that. But they don't want to, or they think that it's whatever, and it creates this push and pull in a client session or convincing.

First of all, I've said this 1 million times probably, but you never want to feel like you're convincing your clients of anything. And you really don't want to feel that tug of war or push and pull in a client session.

And here's how you know when this is something to really look into, is when your clients aren't taking so much action and the actions aren't working, right? They aren't creating the results that they want to create. That is a problem. That's like, okay, let's solve this.

Now, if they're taking action, action, action, and they are creating the results they want to create, there are sneaky ways that you can coach them, even on their thoughts and their feelings. And through this episode, you might hear some of those things, some tips about that. But just notice that if your client is getting the results that they want, which means whatever the goal is that they set, they are creating the result and they are feeling the way they want to feel and doing it in the way that they want to do it, don't feel like you need to slow them down, right?

If you yourself are a person that doesn't tend to move super fast, I think it can be easy to see that and think, like you just decide as the coach that your client is taking too much action, moving too fast, doing too much, hustling, whatever. And that could be true. It could be true that the pace they are moving isn't sustainable, but I don't think that's up to you to decide.

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And if you just let them keep going and creating the results that they want, there are so many things that you can explore throughout that that will help point out the parts of it that they might not like or that aren't sustainable. But maybe we'll talk about that in a different episode or just listen to this episode and get some pointers from here and decide how you can use that with your clients who are creating results, but still tend to just always want to focus on the strategy and the actions.

So what does this look like in your client sessions? So this is going to look like clients who come to calls, come to sessions – I always say calls because when I was a one-on-one coach I literally did most of my sessions over the phone, so I always say calls. It's just a habit, but your sessions. However you're doing your sessions, right? They come to their sessions and they just report in, here are all the things I did. And it's a lot, right? It's like so many things.

And they also report that none of it's working or that some of it's kind of working, but they aren't happy with the results that they're creating. It might look like they are so proud of themselves for taking all of the action. Just this alone is an accomplishment.

Now, for some clients, that would be an accomplishment, right? If you go back to the over-thinkers podcast, sometimes we are encouraging our clients to take action once they're really in check with their beliefs and their thoughts and all of that. But these are clients that have little to no awareness of those things.

If you ask them, why did you decide to take that action? Why did you decide to use that strategy? They might not be able to tell you. Or they'll probably have an answer, right? Most clients would have an answer for that, but it won't be a very deep answer or make a lot of sense. It'll just kind of be like, oh, I read this book or just kind of like a blanket, like the same reason I take all the actions.

They don't spend much time, and even might be resistant to, in their client sessions, checking in with what are your thoughts about this? How are you

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feeling when you're thinking about doing these things? They really want to spend more time strategizing and just getting to it, like getting to the next thing.

They might show up on the verge of burnout, right? Or they might even call it burnout. We're going to use that term here and recognize that it's a little different than what I would call clinical burnout, which is actual burnout happening in your body. True exhaustion from overdoing it, overworking. But they might report burnout that is more like they are exhausted, probably on the verge of what I would call clinical burnout.

They're just exhausted, right? They're exhausted and they're especially exhausted because everything they try isn't working. They might be super frustrated. They might even be frustrated with you. They might think coaching is a waste of time. They never understand why something isn't working.

One of two things, they either try the same thing over and over and over and over, maybe because someone else, like they saw someone else doing this and getting the results that they want, or they don't know what else to do. This is the only way, right? So they're just trying it over and over and over. It's like Groundhog Day in your sessions, right?

They report back and they're like, here are all the things. And you're like, those are all the things that you've been doing the whole time. Why do you think it's going to be different this time, right? So because of that, they're feeling, again, frustrated, exhausted, whatever, right?

Or the opposite of that can sometimes be true as well. They're switching from strategy to strategy to strategy to strategy, always trying a new thing, never even giving it time to actually see if it works, right? Like, could this thing create results over time? We'll never know because by the time you're having a new session with them they're onto the next thing, maybe in a way that it's like you all haven't even discussed any of this in your coaching sessions. It's just something they decided to try and they're just kind of winging it, right?

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I always envision this situation where it's not working, if you've heard that term, like they're throwing spaghetti against the wall to see what works. I don't love it when it's used in a positive way always. Like, I don't know, I'm just out here like throwing spaghetti against the wall, seeing what works. Even though that can be a good thing to do sometimes.

But in this case it, to me, paints the perfect picture of what they might be doing. Like if you think about that visual, an actual human just throwing spaghetti at the wall, seeing if it sticks, right? Which, technically I think that just means it's actually ready to eat or whatever, right? But instead of setting a timer or knowing how long to cook it, you just keep throwing it at the wall to see when it's ready. I'm pretty sure that's where that phrase comes from.

But just truly envision that, right? And they're getting so frustrated because it's never working. It's never sticking. That's kind of how I picture these clients.

Or they are getting results, and this one's a little trickier. This is the one that might deserve its own episode. They are getting results, but not in the way that they want or they're miserable the whole time, right? They think like, okay, well, it's working. So they don't make changes. They don't believe they can slow down. They don't believe that they can try something else and get the same results or even better, or that the way they want to operate through this strategy or the way they want to feel while implementing, they think it's just not possible, so they just keep going.

And that is very much linked to the next thing, which is they think that they've kind of decided that it'll be better when they get there, right? Like they're unwilling to make any changes until they get the result because they think that it's better there. We'll come back to that in a second.

And I think they might even report like, I'm going to get this result and then I'm going to slow down. Which if you've been coaching for awhile, you probably know that's not usually true because however you get there is

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how you have to stay there, unless you make changes, right? Especially if you think about your business, your coaching business, anything.

I think about this all the time, especially when I'm creating things for The Coach Lab or if I'm going to add something or take it away or whatever. I always think, however I got here, however I am helping my clients get results, however I have decided to deliver this program, whatever my clients fall in love with, I'm going to have to continue. Now that's not always true. I could take things away, but that's way harder than adding something, right?

So just consider that for your clients. If they are creating results that they like, but they hate the way that they got there. It's super important that you point that out to them, right? Like however you've taught yourself to create these results is how you're going to keep creating them, or you have to slow down and eventually learn this lesson that's like, we have to find a different way if that's what you want to do.

Okay, so what these clients are actually doing in most cases, there might be things that you could add to this. And I'd be super curious, actually, if you have more to add to this. Send me an email, drop into my, probably my DMs is the best way, honestly, on Instagram. I will see those. My email, I get so many emails, but I will see my DMs.

I'm going to tell you what I have seen, what my clients are usually doing when they're doing this and not creating results, remember. But I'm curious how this shows up for your clients, especially if you have very different niches than I do. I'm just really curious. So drop into my DMs and tell me.

Here's what I see that they're actually doing. Probably the number one thing, they're avoiding emotions, right? They're avoiding feeling certain things along the way. They are possibly buffering with the action or with the strategies, with the constant planning, with the constant motion. Partially because they're avoiding feeling whatever they have to feel if they slow down.

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Even if they slow down and learn to create the results they want, sometimes there are other reasons that our clients just don't like to slow down, right? Then their brain is overactive. They're feeling too many things. It's like this discomfort that keeps them in this constant motion, constant avoidance of feeling things and buffering with action because they don't know what else to do.

They don't know how to maybe feel their feelings. They don't know how to process emotions. So they do know, what they've learned, and they've probably learned this over their lifetime, and they probably don't do this in every single area. But what they do know is that if they just stay in constant motion, they don't have to feel whatever it is.

This was 100% me before I hired my own coach. I was busy all the time. I thought it was a good thing, in constant motion. I was also exhausted all of the time, right? But I was avoiding the anxiety that I would feel if I just slowed down and checked in.

Okay, they are thinking, address this a little bit, I'm going to say it again. They're thinking it will be better once they get there, right? Once I just create this result, then I can regroup. Then I can slow down. Then I'm allowed to maybe enjoy it. They're putting off enjoyment. Putting off enjoying it, it's like I don't enjoy the process, but that's okay because once I get there, it'll be totally worth it.

That's not usually true, especially if they're not creating the results that they want, right? Then it's just like such misery. If they're thinking I can't feel good until I create the results and then they're not creating the results over and over and over, that's terrible, right? That would feel so bad. Constant misery.

They are just doing what they know, right? So maybe they're afraid to try something new. They're afraid to make changes because of what they are doing, even though it's not totally working, maybe it's working the teensiest bit. Or even tougher, right, like if it is working, but that example I gave where it's like it is working, but they're miserable along the way. That can

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be even scarier to change your action or to slow down to check in because it is working. And what if it doesn't, right? Like what if it stops is a thought that a lot of clients have. So they're just doing what they know, right?

For whatever reason, this is how they've learned to do it. It's either working or it's not working, but even when it's not working, it's like the familiar is still better than the unknown. So the familiar action, action, action, that is helping them avoid emotions and helping them not be in their head and helping them feel productive. That's the other thing, right? And they might feel very productive taking all the action.

I see coaches do this a lot in their businesses, right? Where they're just like doing all the business actions, but not creating any results that they want. And even coaches do this where they get weird about slowing down, even though they're not creating the results they want, right? Slowing down, checking in, all of that. That's just all they know how to do, right?

And I think when you believe some of these things, when you see some of them, it can really help you as the coach drop into some compassion, I think, for your clients where it's like if that's just what they know how to do, or if they're avoiding feeling a certain thing because they just really don't want to, right? If they're just really holding onto the belief it's going to be better when I get there, you can really find compassion for that.

You can probably find a place where you do this in your life. And I just really think it is useful sometimes, especially if you're feeling frustrated ever with a client, to just drop into that compassion for them. Even if you don't do whatever it is they're doing in this exact area, which you probably don't if you're coaching them on it, but you could probably find an area in your life where you have similar tendencies.

Here's another one. They're believing that achievements have to feel hard, right? So they are thinking, if I'm going to go after this big goal, if I'm going to make these big changes, if I'm going to find the love of my life, right? Let's say you're a dating coach and your clients have the thought, if I'm

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going to find the love of my life, it's going to be hard. It's going to be so hard. I'm going to have to work for it. It's going to be so worth it.

Now, sometimes this belief can serve clients, right? But remember, we're talking about when it's not working. So this belief paired with them taking actions over and over and over, just making it even harder than it has to be, and it's not working isn't great.

Or they're overcompensating for a lack of belief, right? So you might even know this as their coach. Maybe they have gone there with you and they're like, okay, here are my beliefs about it. Here's how I feel about that. But then they come back session after session, they're just reporting all of these strategies that they've tried, all of the actions that they're taking. And you can tell it's really uncomfortable if you try to slow them down to check in with, like, what are your beliefs about this, right?

If their belief is like this is never going to work, taking action, action, action, and avoiding seeing that belief or facing that belief can be a really powerful drug for clients, right? It's like, of course you don't want to see that. Especially if you really want whatever the result is that you're trying to create, of course you don't want to see that this is never going to work for me or whatever the belief is that they have.

Okay, so now let's dig a little bit into what you can do about it. And of course, this is the part where I tell you, this is the same content that I am posting in The Coach Lab, right? That's why I'm doing this three-part series. This is like an overview of some of the things that I teach inside The Coach Lab. So I'm not going to go as in-depth.

If you're like, this is amazing, I really want to dig more into this, definitely come join us in The Coach Lab because this is where, first, you can get coaching on it from me, but I will give more specific examples. For the sake of this podcast just so that, first of all, so that it's not like the longest podcast ever, but second, so that I can just briefly touch on each of them, I'm just going to go through the list. All right?

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So what you can do, let them take action, especially if they're a new client, especially if they're new to coaching. Of course, when I say let them take action, they can take action at any point, right? I'm not saying that normally you would not be allowing that, but what I mean is follow them. Let them lead. Let them dig into that strategy over and over. Let them go out and try all the things.

Sometimes, this comes up so often with my clients, when they have a new client that's brand new to coaching and they are very stuck in one coaching tool and they're like, right, but I'm really trying to dig into what are the thoughts that they're having that are creating these actions, creating these results, right? I'm really trying to dig in and they just don't really want to do it. I say, release the reins. Let them.

Let them do it because here's what's going to happen. They're going to go take action. They're going to try it. It's going to work or not work. If it doesn't work, this is where you can slowly start getting into, okay, now we really have some stuff to coach on, right? Sometimes letting them take action, letting them see the results they're creating is going to give you juicier stuff to coach on anyway.

So if they want to start with strategy, and I know some of you just do that in general in your coaching, but if they just want to start with strategy and they're like, no, I just need a plan, help me figure this out. Let's create a plan so I can just go do it. Let them. No problem.

And then get curious about it, right? Ask really great questions when they come back. I tried this, this, and this. All right, now's the time. Now's the time, coach, right? Get in there. This is the part where you get to do what you're amazing at, which is asking great questions.

The next thing you can try, which is very related, is to disguise the coaching. So for example, depending on where you learned to coach, you might have a specific – A lot of coaching training programs, certification, schools teach coaching in a very tool-based manner. So you might have

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like one main tool that you use with your clients, which is amazing, except when you don't know what to do outside of just the tool, right?

This is where you have to get creative, disguise the coaching. Ask different questions. Let them take the action and then ask questions like, why do you think that didn't work, right? And then maybe they're going to tell you. And then you're going to say, and they're probably going to give you reasons outside of themselves that they have no control over, which could be true. Like you can acknowledge that. Yes, those could be true, right?

They're going to give you maybe like, I didn't do enough. I didn't do it right. And you can just keep getting super curious, getting closer and closer to examining their thoughts about it, right? Like, okay, well, what were your beliefs about this strategy that you created that you decided to use? Like, did you think it would work ahead of time? Did you not? Tell me about that, right?

You can just ask adjacent questions that are a little bit like you're still getting into, what were they thinking? What were they believing? What are they afraid of? What were they hoping would happen? What actually happened? Just get a little creative, disguise the coaching, even though it's still coaching.

One thing you could do if they keep coming back over and over, taking all the action, you can show them that it's not working. Gently and lovingly point it out, right? Point out, hey, you've been trying this over and over and over, and it's just not working. Maybe today we could try it my way. Can we try something different in today's session?

It's already not working, can we dig into maybe some of the beliefs that are creating these results for you or that are influencing the results that you're getting? Can we look at this and see if there's anything you can control that we haven't thought of yet, right? Like maybe if you had different beliefs about yourself going into these same actions, maybe you'd get different results. Like, are you willing to try that, right? Just getting a little crafty.

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You can figure out what they're avoiding in their life. You could get super curious, especially when you see that a client is overworking and they're working – Okay, I say working, I'm framing this like I'm talking to a coach about how you show up in your coaching business, but this could be true for any client, right?

If they are super strategizing, strategizing in one area of their life and it's not working, but they're doing it anyway over and over and over, and they're aware of it, I think it could be interesting to figure out what else in their life they are avoiding. Why are they taking so much action in this one area? Action that they know isn't working.

Is there possibly something else that they're avoiding, right? That they're like, okay, well, I know that all these new rules I'm creating for my kids because I'm working with a parenting coach and just like all I'm thinking about is being the best mom ever, the best parent ever. And it's just like a constant kind of obsession, a buffer, right? I just think it's interesting to see like, oh, well, what else is happening in their life that they're throwing everything they have into this one area?

I see this happen also with coaches a ton, right? Where they are, they throw everything into their coaching business and then part of it is to avoid something else in their life. Like they have an unhappy relationship or they don't like, you know, just other things in their life that they're just like, I don't want to think about that, so all I'm going to think about is my business.

I've actually seen this happen with coaches where they'll come back and say like, my coaching business ruined my relationship or something, right? No, to me that's never true. What happens is your focus on your coaching business, your obsession with your coaching business, you're buffering possibly with your business. Now, we know that there are other things that could be going on, right?

But a lot of times, a lot of coaches that I have coached personally, that is what is happening. And it's super easy to fix once they see it, right? Once

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it's like, oh, no, my business didn't hurt my relationship. My lack of focus on that thing, on my relationship is what's hurting my relationship.

Find out what they need to believe about themselves to create the results that they want, right? So I touched on this a little bit, but this is like, what are you believing about yourself now? What are you believing about the strategies that you're using? What are you believing, like is it a good match, right?

One thing I sometimes coach my clients on is their schedules. I find it very interesting, I'm a person who I'm not the best at following every rule. And because of that, I do a pretty good job of taking any strategy that's given to me and then making it my own, right? Like changing it up, taking full ownership of it, like I can change this in any way I want to in order to work for me.

I find it fascinating when I coach some of my clients and they're like, well, I'm using this. It might be like a specific, you know, they'll say like a name of a time blocking strategy or whatever. And, but as I dig, what I'll learn is from the beginning they're like, this is never going to work for me. I hate organizing my schedule like this, right? Or I hate being this strict or whatever.

So look into those things, right? Do they have some beliefs that are really butting up against all the actions that they're taking, which is basically going to make – it's like the actions then become a little performative, right?

So if you use the scheduling example I just gave you, what coaches will say is, well, so this is how I'm doing it. And so they'll describe the strategy, like exactly how they're doing it. And they're like, I'm doing it perfectly. And it's almost like to prove that it won't work, right? Because they believe this will never work for me. So then they're like, okay, in order to uphold my belief that I'm just not a person that can schedule my time, they're like, I'm going to try all the methods. I'll try all the different strategies, none of them are going to work. That's their belief.

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And so they're just kind of performative doing each different one or the same one over and over and over instead of saying, pause, what do I like about this strategy? What don't I like about this strategy? How can I make it – What are the parts that really go against how I operate as a human? How can I make it suit my needs better? All of those great questions.

Here's one thing that could be very effective, if you have a client who is constantly taking action, constantly strategizing, constantly making plans about what's next, what's next, and it just keeps not working, and you've kind of gently pointed it out, right? You have talked about it. And when you can see you've gained their trust around this, right? Where you've kind of pointed it out with consent, like, hey, this isn't working. Do you want to try something else?

You could create an exercise or something for them when they're about to do whatever it is they're going to do, right? So let's just use a coaching business for example. It's the morning, every day you sit down at your desk at 9am, and every day it feels terrible. And you just keep doing the same actions over and over and over, not creating the results you want.

One thing you could try is some sort of exercise that has you checking in with yourself, that has you really noticing, how am I feeling right now? You can do this with your clients. Give them something to check in, whether it's with their thoughts, with their feelings, check in with their body, right? Check in with their intuition.

However you coach, whatever you would call it, but just do like a body scan, right? How are you feeling right now? You're about to have this tough conversation with your partner. You've been planning it for a while. You've been trying to have it over and over and over, and it's not working. Okay, next time, would you want to try this little exercise, right?

It could be deep breaths. It could be just noticing like what are the couple thoughts that are like screaming in the back of your mind right now as you're about to do this? And how can you just show them how to shift that in the moment or decide to not take that action right then because they've

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done that over and over and it's not working. Or to check in with their body, show them how to calm, like to create safety in their body, right? To come back to awareness of just their breath, whatever it is.

And it can be so brief. You could sell it to them, right? Here's the thing, you can still take all the action, but here's what I want you to try. Are you willing to do it? It'll take 30 seconds before you do X, Y, Z every time.

And then I think this one is super, super powerful, especially for action takers, because it is an action. So it's like thought work, feelings work, all the things disguised as an action. Either do this in a session with them or have them do it, but do evaluations of the actions that they're taking, right? Whatever the result is they're trying to create, do evaluations. Okay, how did it go this week? Like when you know it's just not working over and over and over, let's get really specific. Let's dig into this.

Let's do an evaluation. Tell me, and I have a podcast episode all about evaluations. You can go back and listen. Just tell me, like, what did work? Is there anything that did work? Tell me what didn't work and be sure that you're getting some of what did work, right? This isn't like the point here for you as the coach.

I've seen coaches do this. We all probably actually have done this a time or two. So just notice, it's okay if you've done this, but just don't do it anymore. If you are like we're doing an evaluation in order to show them that absolutely nothing is working, everything they're trying is stupid and that they shouldn't be doing it, that's not why we're doing it, right?

An evaluation is just an awareness tool and will actually help them create better strategies moving forward. So it's like a twofer. It's like you get to dig in a little bit to their thoughts and beliefs. You can make that part of your evaluation, right? You can say like, okay, like this is just the normal part of the evaluation, tell me what you were believing when you did that. Whatever form of that question would make sense to you for your clients, for your niche.

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And they get to also create a new strategy, but that will keep them out of just doing the same thing over and over and over. And it will have them creating a new strategy with much more intention, right? With much more awareness.

So even if you need to just spend an entire session doing this with them, it will force them to slow down. It will force them to evaluate each action that they're taking and see if it's working or not. It'll force them to look at what are the things that are not working. And then it'll help them create a new strategy, a new way forward that you can then check in with the next week.

I think this is probably one of the biggest things I want you to take away from this. If you have a client who is just all in the over-actioning, over-strategizing, this is kind of like meeting in the middle, like going there with them. Okay, I'm down for this, but let me help you create a new strategy. But first we have to see, we have to really examine this, what worked? What didn't work? Let's dig in.

All right, I hope that this was super helpful. I've been getting so much feedback about these podcast episodes. So if you love them, let me know. If you really love them and you want to go a little deeper, join us in The Coach Lab. I will put that link in the show notes. And otherwise, I will just talk to you next week. All right, goodbye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Mastering Coaching Skills*. If you want to learn more about my work, come visit me at lindsaydotzlafcoaching.com. That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. See you next week.