

Ep #188: Processing Emotions: The What, Why, and How



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 188.

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.

Hey coach, I am so happy you're here today, as always. I'm doing something a little bit different today, just a little bit different format, kind of free flowing from something that I posted on Instagram today that had some of you sending me some questions. And as I was kind of thinking about them and answering them, I am creating some content around them for Instagram.

So if you want to follow me, or if you want to see the post I'm about to tell you about, you can go find me just @LindsayDotzlaf, and we can link that in the show notes, of course. But I posted on Instagram today, I just posted a reel and a lot of people are reacting to it. And a lot of people are sending me just private messages with questions, a lot of coaches.

And some of the questions are really, really great because of course a reel is only 90 seconds. I do cover a kind of deep topic very briefly, and I'll tell you what that is in a second in the reel. And of course, I can't answer a lot of questions in those 90 seconds, right? So it's like a brief overview and some of you had questions. So I thought they were amazing questions and I want to answer them.

So today I posted a reel about something that happened to me today in real time, real time. Haha. I'm so funny. I just laugh at my own jokes. It's fine. If you're laughing, amazing. If you're not, it's totally fine, that was pretty cheesy.

Okay, so I posted a reel today about something that actually happened today. So first I'll just tell you what happened today. This morning I had a meeting with my business manager, my amazing business manager. And

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we were just talking through some of the goals for the quarter and for next quarter and how things are going. And I started to feel, in the meeting I started to feel kind of overwhelmed. And we took a minute and kind of talked through some of the reasons I was feeling overwhelmed.

And the meeting was great. It ended great. And when it was over, I still felt heavy, right? I still could tell there were these emotions, it felt very heavy. And I also had a checklist of all these things I needed to do that we had just talked about. And it was kind of like, okay, let's get to work.

And my logical brain is great at taking over and saying, oh, ignore the heaviness. Let's just move on, we have stuff to do, right? We don't have time for that. That's one of my favorite thoughts of when heavy things come up, we don't have time for that.

And one thing that I have learned over years through coaching is to not always follow that voice that says we don't have time for that, but to really pause and check in and process some of those emotions. And so I don't know, honestly, how this thought came to me in the moment and how I actually captured it, because I didn't want to really interrupt the processing of an emotion.

But I thought, what if I captured this on camera? What if I filmed myself just sitting here at my desk in real time processing this emotion? I quickly just grabbed my camera, pointed it at myself, set it on my desk, and hit record. Now, if you see the reel, the angle is not great, right? It's not great cinematography, obviously, because I really didn't want to interrupt the moment. And I wasn't really sure at the time what I would even use it for or if you would even be able to see what's going to happen, right?

But I did capture it. And what I captured is myself really processing some disappointment and really sitting with it, taking deep breaths, allowing the emotion to just flow through me, lots of tears, some sobbing, which happened, I think, I don't know that you can really see that well in the

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video, but you can definitely see that I'm crying. And I let that happen for about 10 minutes.

And I really just let the emotion move through me. Just let the disappointment, I allowed it, I just let it be there, right? And I just closed my eyes. I kept taking deep breaths, breathing all the way into my body, into my belly, right? Like deep, really belly breathing, not just surface level. Because I think, for me, what I have learned is that one way to not feel my feelings is to breathe very shallowly, right?

Anyone listening, you can probably think of a time when you have felt that kind of catch in your throat and heaviness like maybe you could cry, but for whatever reason, either you're not in a place where you feel like it's appropriate, or it's just a situation where you're around a lot of people and you don't want to cry. Or just maybe in general you just don't like to cry, you don't like to feel your feelings. That used to be me, by the way. And, you know, that feeling of like choking it back, right? Just like, nope, not right now.

And two ways to do that are to be in your logical brain, right? To let your logical brain take over and run the show and cut it off below the neck, none of the feels in the body happening. And then another way is to breathe very shallowly, right? So next time you're in that situation, you might just notice, now that I've pointed it out, that those two things might be happening, right? You might be distracting yourself thinking of something else, telling yourself all the reasons you shouldn't feel upset right now, just holding it in, right?

And when you breathe deeply, and really breathe into whatever is coming up and just allow it with no tightness, no blocking it, no stifling it, normally it doesn't really feel as bad as you anticipate. And even sometimes it feels good, right, to just have that release and like, okay, just like, let it go. And so that's what I did and I caught it on video.

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And then I made a reel where in the beginning, I'm explaining what I'm doing and then I play part of the video of myself processing that feeling, and just sitting with it. And so I got some questions. And let's see, as I'm recording this, it is May 20th. And today is the day that I posted it. I'm recording this in real time, just kind of off the cuff. So if you want to go find the reel, that's the day it's posted, May 20th, 2024, if you're really listening from the future.

So I posted the reel and then I got a lot of questions. And I'm just going to go through the questions here and answer them. Some of them I took out some specific details, I just made them general, because some people were asking me questions like for their certain situations and I don't want to expose anyone's, you know, I don't want you to be able to know who anyone is, not that I think you would be. But just in case, keeping it totally confidential.

But so I just generalized some of the questions, but I just think they'll be so useful because I get this question a lot from some of my clients. And sometimes when I'm doing, you know, workshops or webinars, I'll get this question, which is, what is processing an emotion? And how do you do it with a client? And what does it look like in real time?

So first, if you go watch the reel, you will actually see what it looks like in real time, whether you're doing it with yourself or with a client. And obviously, the example I share is just me sitting with myself processing an emotion. But what you see in this video is just me processing it by myself. And at the end of this podcast, one thing I will answer, or throughout this podcast one thing I will answer is what it might look like also to do this with a client, because that would be a little different, right?

So first of all, what is processing an emotion? I just want to answer that first. No one actually asked me this, but I'm just going to answer that. And the way I would describe it is just really allowing it. It's like the opposite of resisting it. It's allowing it to be there. It's not stopping it or cutting it off or

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saying like, okay, that's enough. You have felt like we're done feeling this. It's just really allowing it to work all the way through.

And it kind of feels like a wave, right? When I process emotions, one thing that happens sometimes is it might intensify. So when you see at the very end of the video that I posted, I start to cry pretty hard. And that just lasts a few minutes or less than a few minutes, really, right? And you don't see it in the video, but it lasted less than a few minutes. And in this example, I cry for a little bit, and then it just kind of washes over me, washes through, and I end up on the other side, right?

But I have done this in the past where it can intensify a little bit, and then it will kind of calm down a bit, but I can still feel that there's really something big still under there. And then it just kind of comes again in another wave, right? With like, again, more intensified, and then settled back down a little bit.

And when I think about processing an emotion, it really is sitting there until that is all the way complete. Whatever, like you are not, kind of thinking about it like you are not in charge. You're just experiencing whatever your body needs to experience.

I also think a piece of it is really just honoring the emotion, getting, you know, sometimes on the other side of it you can say like, okay, what is it here to tell me, right? You can ask questions about it. But in the moment, it is really just allowing it to be there and not doing anything about it besides just being with it, right?

My favorite way to do it, and this is just a very simple way. You can use this with any of your clients, I don't think this part requires any special training. Now, of course, there are many different coach trainings, therapy trainings, like all the different ways to learn to help clients really process emotion and what to do with it and all of that.

But to me, this is just the most simple way for yourself or with a client, to put your hand on your heart, maybe both. I like to put both of my hands on

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my heart or on my chest, one on top of the other. It really helps me ground in my breathing. I usually close my eyes and then I just take deep breaths.

And normally I'm doing this when it's already there, right? When it's bubbling up. When I feel like I'm at that fork in the road where the choice is, I can ignore it and shove it down and move on, or I can listen to it and honor it and take that minute to let it process.

Now, this will lead me to the next question, which is why would you do it? Like, what's the point? And some people would say the point is to get to the other side so that you can go on about your day, right? Or so that you can do whatever you were going to do before it started coming up. Now, yes and, right? Yes, that is something you can do. But I would actually say why I do it, a couple different reasons.

One, I have learned over years of practicing this, over creating awareness and self-awareness. I have learned that the more I follow my body, the more I listen to those things happening inside, the more I trust myself and the more safety I create for myself, right?

So think about this. If you were in the presence of another person, or if you think of yourself, maybe even like as a little kid, right? And you have big emotions coming up, you're feeling all the feels. And think about the difference between someone saying to you, oh, we don't have time for that, or, you know, stop crying, or stop, like don't do that, or don't act like that, whatever. A lot of us probably heard, at some point in our lives probably heard words like that, right?

Versus someone saying, it's okay. Like, giving you a hug, right? Just being with you through whatever it is that you're feeling, saying it's okay to feel what you're feeling, get it out, right? Like, creating that safety while you feel the emotion. This is like what you're doing for yourself. That's how I think about it. That is what I'm doing for myself. I do not tell myself, don't feel that, move on.

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I mean, sometimes I do. But when I catch it, I take the other choice as often as I can. Because first of all, when you just push them down, push them down, push them down, at some point, they're going to bubble over, right? It's going to be too much. You can only push it down so much.

And what I've learned over the years is that as you continue to push them down, let's say today I picked the other fork, right? I felt this disappointment coming up. I felt very overwhelmed. I noticed that under the overwhelm was a lot of disappointment. And then I just told myself, we don't have time to feel that right now. We have to move on.

What would happen in my experience is that the disappointment would still be there. It would be like a nagging kind of itch in the back of my brain that's like, pay attention to me, pay attention to me, pay attention to me. And then anything I did today, so let's say I was writing emails to my list, or what I was actually doing is preparing a masterclass for tomorrow. Just doing some last minute edits and going over it and looking at the emails that are going to be sent after, right? I was doing more editing.

But let's say I was doing that with huge, big amounts of disappointment on board, there's a chance that would affect what I do, right? That it's going to make its way into all the little cracks, all the little ways that you can see, you know, sometimes when you read someone's email or listen to them teach or talk, you can tell they have sometimes certain thoughts happening, like playing in the background.

And I think that that's what happens when you ignore your body, when you ignore that sound of like, hey, something's coming up, I need to work through this. And you're just like, nope, no time for that, and you do the work anyway. All those little insecurities and the disappointment, the embarrassment, like whatever it is, is going to bubble up and spill over into your content, your copy, your podcasts, your coaching, your like any of it, right?

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So for me, I don't want that to happen. I would rather process it in the moment. I would rather take that extra 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 20 minutes, whatever it is, and process through it and just show myself like it's okay to feel disappointed. This is part of it.

First of all, it's just part of life, right? It's part of the human experience. It's also part of signing up to be an entrepreneur. If you find me an entrepreneur that has never been disappointed ever, and is hitting their goals, like doing the things they want to do in the world, I mean, I don't know, I'll give you a million dollars. I just don't think it's possible, right?

And I think creating safety for yourself, as an entrepreneur, part of that is really honoring this is just where we are today. This disappointment is part of the journey. And also, I'm not going to ignore it and just allow it to be there. I'm going to work through it.

Okay, what does it feel like? This is a question that I, some form of this is a question that I got. What does it feel like? How do you know that you're doing it, I think is the question they were really asking. Like how do you know you're doing it right? And the answer to that is it totally depends.

So sometimes it depends on what you're processing, right? I think different things that are coming up are going to feel different. But for me, specifically today for what I was kind of working through, it felt very heavy. My chest felt very tight. And I just had that catch in my throat, right? Like, that was like if anybody looked at me –

Now, I was home by myself, or in my office by myself, so there was no one here to look at me and the meeting had ended. But if anyone looked at me the wrong way, right, you know that feeling of like, don't look at me or don't ask me what's wrong, I'll just start crying? That's what it felt like inside.

And then as I was processing it, it really felt like a release. It felt like if you think about it like if you have your eyes closed and let's say you're standing in the ocean, and there are some light waves. Like not the big heavy ones

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that knock you over, but just the water is moving, right? And if you close your eyes, you could kind of sway back and forth with it.

You'll only know what I'm talking about if you like to be in water like that. If you don't, I don't know, think of a different example. Maybe you could create this in like a float tank or a bath or something like that where you're just like floating in the water. It's just moving a little bit, right? That's what it feels like to me while I'm processing it.

And sometimes I can feel the emotions kind of getting bigger. And then like a wave kind of just washing over me, and then being on the other side of it.

And then the next question that I had, which I thought was interesting, is do you always cry like that? And I think what they meant to say is, maybe not, but this feels like the more useful question. Do you always cry when you process an emotion or like, is that how you know it's working? And my answer is no, although usually the ones that I personally find I need to process do tend to be ones that bring up tears for me for whatever reason.

But no, certainly not. I don't think that you always have to cry. One thing I've been working on recently is because, if you've been around a while you know that I used to feel quite a bit of anxiety often. And for me, when I get really excited or really, like if I'm anticipating something, it feels in my body very much like anxiety.

So actually, I have been recently not processing excitement, but just learning to sit with it and explore it in my body without thinking like, oh, I have to get rid of it. I need to get it to go away, which I know is really weird because you think like, oh, I mean, obviously, like excitement is a good thing. But when it's too much in my body, it feels so similar to anxiety that I just practice feeling it.

I also heard this tip recently, because I think this might already be done by the time you hear this podcast. But coming up I've been asked to do a training in front of a bunch of people and speak on a stage. And so I've been kind of watching these videos with tips on how to do that. And one

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thing, I think it was Simon Sinek that said it, like a video of his that I watched. And he said when you feel really nervous, practice telling yourself that you're excited. And I totally understand this.

I relate because, like I just said, when I feel very anxious it feels like in my body it's the same feeling as excitement. So if I can take that and shift it, and this is the same idea, right? Like feeling really nervous and just telling yourself almost like convincing your brain, I'm not nervous, I'm excited. It makes sense. I haven't tried it yet. I'll let you know. But it makes sense because it is the same, it's kind of like the same waves happening in your body.

So the short answer is no, you don't always have to cry like that. But I tend to when it is emotion like that, that I'm processing.

Okay, and then another question, sometimes I see coaches talking about how it feels in your body, what color it is, does it move, et cetera. Did you do that too in this process? Like while you were processing this emotion in this video, were you doing that? And here my answer for that is no. To me, that is something a little different.

So I have done this, but what I find is that when I am really processing an emotion on my own and I'm just allowing it and I'm just sitting with it, I'm just letting it come over me like waves. When I start asking myself those questions, it takes me right into my logical brain, right? It takes me out of feeling the emotion.

Like if I start thinking about like, what color is this? What does it feel like in my body? Is it moving around? Does it have a temperature? Like all of those things that sometimes coaches ask, that for me personally, takes me right into my logical brain. If I am experiencing heavy emotion, if I'm crying, if I'm kind of having that release, and then I start asking myself these questions, I'll be right out of it. Now I'm like, okay, let me think, what does it feel like, tight? And all of a sudden, it's like, I'm just having a different experience.

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Now, I do think doing those things can sometimes be super effective. I just use them a little differently. So if you are going to use questions like that, right, if you're going to just kind of think about like, what does this emotion feel like in my body? Let me identify it. I think there are two great ways, two great times to do that.

One could be you process the emotion, like what I did today. And then after you could explore that. You could ask those questions. But another time that I have used this is when I first was working with a coach, right? And at that time, I had been going to therapy. I had had several different therapists, and I've always been a big proponent of, you know, a huge proponent of therapy, I think it's great.

And one thing that I learned in therapy is that when I was experiencing a lot of anxiety I learned some methods to calm my mind, right? Some breathing techniques, some meditation, I did some hypnosis and therapy, just all the things.

But when I started coaching, when I started working with a coach, this was before I was a coach. When I started working with a coach, I was still having pretty frequent panic attacks, because now I have the words to say, what I was actually doing, I was feeling anxious quite a lot. But I was also resisting feeling anxious quite a bit.

And that is where, like the holding it in and not just feeling it is where a lot of my anxiety attacks were coming from. Because I would start to feel it and then I would start to talk to myself in my mind and say like, oh no, not that. Don't feel it. This is bad, right? I would start working myself up, which would just go in circle, circle, circle until eventually I'm having a panic attack.

What I learned through coaching, one thing, I mean I will never forget this. One time my coach asked me, we were just talking about anxiety. And I said, I'm just feeling particularly anxious. Also, looking back now, I can say that at the time, like I learned to differentiate the anxiety that was just coming from my body, right? Like hormones and whatnot, the chemistry in

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my body was just creating a buzz that felt like anxiety. And then I was adding on to it by all the spinning thoughts and all the things.

And one thing my coach said to me when we were exploring it one time is, why are you scared of it? Right? Because I was telling her like, I just don't want to feel it. It's just too much. I can't feel like this all the time. And she said something like, well, why are you scared of it? You know how to feel it. You're really good at feeling anxiety, you do it all the time. And I was like, wait, what? Okay.

And then she kind of explained to me the difference between just feeling it, like just being a person that is feeling anxious right now and then carrying on with whatever I was doing, versus resisting it and letting it be in the background and workup, workup, workup. It changed my life, right?

Then one thing we started doing was just exploring the anxiety. So like on days that I would sometimes feel anxious, we might go through some of these questions. Describe what it feels like in your body. Right? So this wasn't processing it. I think processing is really great for certain emotions and sometimes not the best for others. Like for me, if I just sit and feel anxious, I don't know. I don't really know what that would do.

But if I sit and feel it and I'm like, okay, describe what it feels like in my body, and maybe this is just a different way of processing it. Maybe you process it like this for certain emotions. But just describing like, okay, what does it feel like in my body? Where can I feel it? Describing it, right? Like the goal for me would just be to show myself I can feel this and I'm okay. Nothing bad is happening just because I'm feeling some anxiety right now, right? So to me, those are the two different things.

Now, the last question that I got, which I want to spend a minute talking about, is how do you do this with your clients? Like, do you do this exact same thing? So if you go watch the reel, I think it will be helpful to know, to like see what I'm doing. And my answer is yes and no.

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So I have a couple thoughts about this. One, you can't ever force a client to process an emotion, right? That's a very bad idea and it won't really work. If you're like, okay, well, I know what we need to do now, we need to process this. So I need you to just conjure it up and feel the feeling. And then we're going to work through it, right? That doesn't usually work.

When it is great to do this with a client is when the emotion is just bubbling up and you can see that they can't really move on without experiencing it. Or that they are trying to hide it or that it's like, you can see it, it's on the surface. You can see a change in their demeanor. You can see a shift in how they're acting. And you can tell that maybe they don't want you to see them upset or they don't know it's allowed in a coaching session, right?

Sometimes I think some of us are just, you know, it's ingrained in us like, oh, you don't act that way in a certain space. And maybe they're thinking like, oh, a coaching session isn't the space for this. So sometimes just letting your clients know, like, this is a safe space. Do you want to sit with this?

I would always ask for consent before doing this, right? Like, do you want to just sit with this for a minute? I can talk you through it. And you can literally just have them put their hand on their chest, maybe put both of their hands on their chest and guide them through some deep breaths. And don't force them out of it, right?

So if they're just sitting with it for a minute and it's taking a minute, it's going to feel maybe like a painfully long few minutes on your end and you're probably going to be questioning – I have this come up sometimes in The Coach Lab. People ask me this, like, what do I do? I'm like, you do nothing. You just allow them to be in it. You don't have to like, snap them out of it. You don't have to say, okay, now let's move on. You just help them breathe through it.

Now, if it goes on for a long, long, long time and you're like, okay, oh no, I think that's the part where you might step in and say, you know, how are

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you feeling or what's coming up for you now? But usually the emotion, like I said, will kind of work through them and it will subside.

You can also, not all clients will feel comfortable doing this in a session with you. So one thing you could do is just give them some kind of homework. You might call it something different, right? Just say like, here's something you can practice this week. When you're feeling that heaviness, when you feel disappointed, maybe just put your hand on your heart and just take some deep breaths, right?

Like just starting there for some people, like you have to remember, some people are really starting with not knowing how to feel feelings at all. And sometimes you just start there. Like that's the only assignment, taking deep breaths. Then maybe the next thing is showing them the difference of what it feels like, like telling them to think of a time when you're like holding it in, right? Think about what that feels like. You're trying not to cry or whatever.

Most people can think of an example like that in their head and think about what that feels like in their body. And then you could show them the difference between that versus just allowing it, right? Allowing the tears, allowing the crying, whatever they need to allow, and showing them how different that would feel.

So you could have them practice that, right? If you have a client who's really going through something, who's really in the feels right now, you could just say like, here's what I want you to practice. Notice every time that this starts to bubble up and notice what you do with it. Do you tell it not right now?

Like maybe say, notice how you talk to yourself. Do you tell that emotion, do you say like, not right now, we don't have time for this? Like, what are the thoughts that come up? And then what do you do with it? And could you practice, instead of telling yourself those things, could you just sit with it and take those deep breaths and just allow it as long as you need to? Let

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the tears come if you are safe and in a place that's okay. Like let the tears come and see what it feels like on the other side.

Some clients, you might have to teach them, like this literally might be a skill that they have never learned. If they've never been to therapy or haven't had a coach or any of those things, they've probably never learned it in these terms that I'm telling you right now. But they also really, truly may have never learned to just be in the experience of the emotion, right?

They may have been told all the time growing up like, oh, we don't have time for that right now. Or I don't even know what else people say, man up, or don't feel that or don't cry. Or maybe being shamed for having too many feels or whatever. You're so sensitive, right? Like whatever the things are, there could be so many different versions of that. So it might be just like working up to it.

All right, I hope that this was super useful for you. If you want to see what I'm talking about, find me on Instagram @LindsayDotzlaf. Go find the reel it's on – Actually, you know what I'll do? I'm going to make a note for myself. The day this comes out, I will repost the reel to my stories.

So if you're listening like the day this podcast comes out, I will repost the reel to my stories. If you are not, I will repost it that day just in general. So you can look for it on May 20th, that's the day I'm recording, that's the day I posted it. Or you can look for it in the future. I don't know exactly what the date is when this will come out. But the beginning of, very end of May, very beginning of June 2024.

All right, have an amazing day and I will talk to you next week. 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.