

Ep #190: Thought Interruption: Taking Control of Your Default Brain



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With Your Host

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Hey, this is Lindsay Dotzlaf and you are listening to *Mastering Coaching Skills* episode 190.

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.

Getting close to 200, so fun. Hey coach, I am so glad you're here today, as always. And today is going to be short and sweet, hopefully very powerful for you. I'm going to give you a coaching trick that you may have heard this in other ways, but I'm just going to really simplify it and give you a kind of tool or trick that you can use with yourself in your own self-coaching, your own self-awareness, and with your clients. And I'll teach it to you and then I'll give you a specific example and that's going to be the episode.

And I call this, when I think about what this I just call it thought interruption. I'm sure there might be a more technical term for this, but this is just a very simple technique that you might specifically use when you have a thought that you just think automatically in certain situations. It may even be so ingrained that you don't notice that you're thinking it or that it just feels like the truth of the universe, right? It doesn't feel like a thought. It feels like the truth.

And I do think this, because this is so simple, there are many ways you can use it, but I think it's specifically pretty powerful when it is a thought that doesn't bring up lots of heavy emotion, lots of like heavy things. It just is attached to something that's creating a result that you don't want.

I'm going to give you an example, but basically the technique is noticing that you have the thought, interrupting it. So noticing when it comes up, pausing, creating that awareness, right? It takes awareness in the moment to just notice the thought like, oh, there it is again. Okay.

And then just even thinking to yourself as the coach, obviously this is when you're using it with yourself not with your clients, although you could

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explain it to your clients too, but just noticing it and like, oh, okay. This is just a thought that I've practiced over and over and over. It's just a very well-worn pathway in my brain. An easy one, right? Like an efficient place for my brain to go in certain situations. And it's so easy, in fact, that I don't even notice I'm thinking it, it just all happens so quickly.

And so you want to notice it. Oh, okay, there's that thought again. Pause, interrupt it, right? Like, okay, what I know about this thought is that it's not useful. I've seen that over and over. I've seen it play out. It's creating a result that I don't like and so I'm going to question it in this moment, right? Is it true? Is it actually true? Like, where is this coming from? Why am I thinking this?

There are so many different questions you can ask, but I actually think the most powerful piece of it is noticing it in the moment and interrupting it. Every time it happens, just kind of pausing and saying, no, like that's really something we want to believe anymore. I say, we like me and my brain, right? It's not really something we want to believe anymore. We're going to interrupt it and just maybe change it.

And you might not even need to actually change the thought, but I do think you can replace it with something that feels more useful. And I don't think you have to go into using tons of tools and like big thought models and all the things, but just a simple redirection.

I almost think of it as if you think of your brain sometimes as like a toddler, right? It's like, it just does what it wants. And sometimes toddlers, I have kids, right? If you have kids, you'll resonate with this. If you don't, I'm sure you've seen kids act like this where they just want what they want, right? Or they just are like, no, I'm right, you're wrong. This is the truth of the universe, leave me alone. And sometimes that's how our brain acts, right?

So sometimes in the moment when something happens that is, you know, in this situation that I'm describing it's probably when something is happening that is normal. Like that happens often in your life. You just have

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this thought that you've practiced over and over and over. It happens so quickly, maybe you don't even notice it and then often you don't question it.

But what I'm asking you to do is to stop it like a two-year-old and say, okay, wait, let's question this. Is it true? Let me distract you, right? Like with a toddler, you can't really argue with a toddler, you just have to distract them, right? Redirect their attention. Like, let's not think about this anymore. Look over here, this thing's happening. And it's pretty easy to do with a little kid, right? Like their brain just isn't fully developed in a way that ours are as adults.

So of course we're not actually thinking of our brains like toddlers, but it is a good analogy, I think, to think about it like that, where it's like just redirecting is sometimes super useful. Not always. Sometimes if you've been around two-year-olds, they really get stuck on something, right? And sometimes our brains do that too, they can be a lot more stubborn, but sometimes it can be easy to just redirect.

So I'm going to give you an example. The other day I was coaching in my colleague's program, which was so fun. I love guest coaching because, and I think you'll understand this if you've been coaching for a while.

Sometimes if you've been coaching for a while and you coach on the same thing over and over and over, it's super fun to go into a different situation where you're coaching on something that's not usually what you do. I love it.

Anyway, I was coaching in this program and I'm going to very much simplify what happened and leave out lots of details. But basically I was coaching a woman who runs an art business. And she was saying, she was giving me an example of when she creates art for herself, it feels amazing. She loves it. It's easy.

And then when someone commissions art from her, immediately she, I mean, she says yes and she's excited and all of that happens. But every time she goes to work on that art, immediately she feels pressure. And so

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we explored that, right? I was like, well, what's happening when you feel that pressure? And she said it's before she even starts working on the piece, right? She just immediately is like, oh, all this pressure.

So we explored it and explored the thoughts and noticed what they were. And they were things like, well, because someone paid a lot of money for this or paid money for this, it has to be perfect, right? Like some perfectionism kind of creeping in. Some thoughts of like, I don't get to do what I want to do. I have to kind of, this wasn't exactly how she said it, but some form of like, kind of, I have to perform for money, right? Like it's now like I have to do this instead of I get to do this.

And so as we explored it, what I noticed is just every single time – So I explored like, well, what is it like when you're just creating your own thing, right? And so she told me all about that. It was just totally different. Her thoughts were different. I get to do whatever I want. I don't have to finish it if I don't want to. Just so much like looseness around it, right? Kind of like I get to do what I want. Like whatever I could stop at any moment if I wanted to.

And so then when we explored, okay, now someone has commissioned you to do a piece, they're paying you to do it. Like what's different, right? What are the thoughts? And they were pretty much opposite. But then I started asking her questions around, you know, kind of exploring are these thoughts true?

Is it true that you don't get to do what you want? And she was like, well, actually, right, and she started describing all the things. And I said, do you have parts of it that you do love? And she was like, actually, yeah, like I love this part and I love this part.

And so while we were explaining it, it was just very obvious that she actually doesn't dislike doing it at all. There are small chunks of it that aren't her favorite parts, but it was just her brain's very natural habit to go to I

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don't get to do what I want. This has to be perfect. I kind of have to perform to earn money as an artist. And it just immediately caused all this pressure.

And then when that was happening, then she would be like, okay, well, I have to do it anyway. So then she would do the art, make the art while feeling pressure, while feeling kind of bad the whole time.

And so if you think about that and if you think about like, if you're doing that over and over and over, and that's always your process, right? That every time you make a piece of art, we're just going to pretend at this point you are the artist, right? Every time you make a piece of art, when it's for you, you're telling yourself one thing. When it's for someone else, you're telling yourself something different every time.

What happens is that after however long of doing that, your brain is just like, this is just what we do, right? When it's for me, I think this. When it's for someone else, I think this. I don't question it. It just is like, this is what we do. I've trained myself to work feeling pressure every time I'm making art for someone else.

So my recommendation for her, she was like, well, she got it, right? She saw it and she was like, oh my gosh, yes, this is really powerful. And then she asked me, okay, I get it. Like I see it. This feels like a huge shift. And then she said, but I don't know, like what do I do with it? How do I stop this when it's just me by myself making the art?

And so what I told her, I was like, okay, here's your homework. Every time you sit down to make art, when it's for you, you have certain thoughts. When it's for someone else, you have different thoughts. First step, be super aware in that moment. Like don't just keep moving forward and pretending like you're not having thoughts that are making you feel certain things in scenarios, be very aware of it and keep track. Okay, here's what I'm thinking right now.

And then when you sit down to do work for someone else, oh, here's what I'm thinking now. This is so different. What is the difference here? Right?

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Like just really noticing it. I think the first and most important step is just complete awareness around it. Instead of letting your brain just wander off and run away with the thoughts without questioning them.

And this really is kind of just like basic coaching, right? This isn't anything revolutionary, but it's so simple that I think sometimes we want to make it way more complicated than this, but it truly is. In that moment interrupting the thought, pausing, noticing it, having awareness around it. Okay, great. I have awareness. Then what?

Then you just question it. Is it true? Do I want to believe this? Is it, you know, like the questions I asked when I was coaching her, right? In this moment, is it true that I hate doing this art or have I just told myself that every time I'm in this situation that it just feels true?

So interrupting it, changing it, possibly replacing it, right? Or saying what else is true? Not just that one single thing is true in the moment, so what else could be true? You could continue to feel pressure as the artist, right? You could be like, okay, I do feel a little pressure because someone's paying me money for this. I can see that, I can notice it. Because I want to do a good job, I'm going to feel a little pressure.

Okay, that doesn't actually have to go away. You could say, but what else is true? You might come to, well, I really love making art, period, right? Like that could be true at the same time. I am so impressed with myself that this is my job. Like I get to make art for a living. Okay, that might feel different, right? Just finding things that are also true.

And that's really it. And just noticing every single time it happens. And then over time, you're just creating those new neural pathways, right? You are going to notice it sooner. You're going to question it every time. It's going to get easier and easier. At some point, you might have the thought because it's just that worn down place in your brain, right? The neural pathway that's just the easiest one, the most efficient for your brain. It might go there

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automatically and you can get to the point where you're just like, oh yeah, I don't believe that anymore, period. Like that's a thing, right?

I'm sure even if you haven't thought of it like that, you have experienced that before. I would think as a coach, if you've been coached before and had a thought like really changed, you could get to that point where you're like, oh, I see that. That's just one of my favorite things to think and I don't actually believe it anymore, at least not in this case. Or I still kind of believe it. It still creates a little pressure, but it's also really fun. I love making art. It's so fun that I get paid for it, right?

Like finding the ones that, okay, that thought, it's kind of that idea of like that thought can be in the car, but there are other ones also in the car. Like the car is full, that's just one of the passengers. The other ones are things like, this is really fun. Or who cares if I mess up, I can start over. Or I'm in charge here, I don't have to be on a deadline if I don't want to be or whatever, right? Like just finding all the things that are also true.

Hopefully this feels helpful. It's very simple. Try it. Try practicing this on your own. We all have these thoughts too, by the way, right? We all have thoughts that we've practiced. They're just so practiced. Like I used to dance when I was younger and there are routines that I would do that I can still, I don't know if I can do them, but I can imagine what the steps are.

Like they're just so ingrained in my brain because I practiced them for competitions and whatever. I practiced over and over and over and over and over so many times that there are a couple of them that I could probably still do or imagine doing some of the moves, right? It's kind of similar to that. You just have to interrupt it.

It's like if I remember the moves, but I'm like, I don't do that dance anymore, like here's this other thing that I learned. It seems kind of silly when you think about it like that, but it's a really similar concept, right? I learned this thought a long time ago and I'm just choosing to keep it instead of questioning it. So that's it, just interrupting the thought. Practice this for

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yourself. The better you are at it, the better you're going to be at helping your clients with it.

You can do it with them in a session when you're using this with your clients, but even more powerfully, and like side note, sometimes I do talk about the difference between actually coaching your client versus teaching your client how to coach themselves because I think sometimes coaches get that confused. Our job is to just coach our clients, we don't necessarily have to teach them how to coach themselves. But in this case, you're not teaching them how to coach themselves, but teaching them awareness, right?

Teaching them how in the moment, because you're not going to be with them all the time and this is something that's really powerful in the moment when it's happening. So the homework for your client could be, okay, here's what I want you to do. Like when you find a thought like this, right? One that's just like on repeat. Here's what I want you to do, every time you have that thought, I want you to just take a moment. Take a breath, notice it, notice how it feels, notice what it's creating for you. You don't even have to change it.

Like that could be the homework at first, right? Just having them notice it. I've had this homework before. One of my favorite thoughts is that I'm so far behind. I still think it sometimes. And then I'm like, wait, what? I'm to the place now where I can usually be like, no I'm not, that's silly. That's an old thought. And then every once in a while it pops up and I'm like, ooh, but it feels true right now.

And so one time, this was years, years ago, but I think before I was a coach, I just was, I had a coach. I'd hired a life coach. And she was like, I just want you to notice how many times you tell yourself that every day. And she said, at one point she was like, just get out a notebook and keep a tally every day. And I was like, that is the silliest assignment ever.

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It was so powerful because I noticed, oh my gosh, how often am I repeating this to myself? It was wild. It was like so many times every day, of course it felt so true, right? It's like if you walk around telling yourself every day, if you're like I'm a terrible person, I'm a terrible person. And it's like on repeat, like everything that happens in your life your go-to thought is just like, I'm a terrible person. Guess what that's going to create, right? Like not a lot of good.

So this is a similar concept. The first homework could be just to notice it. How many times are you telling yourself this? How many times are you saying, I hate creating art for other people, right? If that's happening every single time you're working on it, all right, you've just worn down that path.

And then maybe the next step, like the next week is like, okay, let's find a thought. We don't even have to get rid of that one, but let's find another one that also feels true. And then maybe the next week it is, okay, we found this one that also feels true. The next step is just, what if you just didn't believe the original one anymore? What if every time you thought it, it was just like, nope, that's fake news. That's a lie. Stop lying to yourself.

You can use this however you want. You can spread it out over weeks like that. It kind of depends on who you're working with, right? Sometimes you have clients who are very self-aware. Sometimes you have clients who've had lots of therapy, lots of coaching, lots of stuff like this. But when you have clients who are brand new to this type of work, sometimes you do start with the teensiest little step of just noticing.

All right, friends, I hope this was super helpful. Let me know how it goes for you, what you think about it. Try it with your clients and I will be back 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 lindsaydotzlafoaching.com. That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. See you next week.