

Ep #296: 8 Coaching Strategies for Working Through Core Beliefs



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 296.

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.

Welcome, coach. This episode is for every single coach. I don't care what your niche is, who you coach, what you coach, where you coach, how you coach, any of the things. This episode is for you, and probably for you to share with some friends.

Why? Because you are human. We're all human, and so are your clients. And we're all living with the condition of being human and having those human responses to outside stimulus. And in this episode, I'm going to give you some strategies to help you move closer to whatever it is you are trying to create, even when your strongly held beliefs get in the way.

First, I want you to take a second and consider. You could even pause this podcast for 30 seconds if you need to, and ask yourself, what are those core beliefs that pop up repeatedly when you least expect them? You know the ones, the ones that when you're really working towards something you're excited about and that you know you want to create, what are those beliefs that constantly get in the way?

They're kind of the beliefs that if you gave your internal dialogue over to an editor, like it was a script or a manuscript, where would they highlight a bunch of things? What might they flag and then write in the margin, used too often or be more creative, or come up with other terms for this? Right? The things that you just say on repeat, a little bit unconsciously, although, of course, then they become conscious, which is where sometimes the problems arise.

I'll give you some examples. For me, one of my very favorite, favorite, deeply held beliefs is, I'm so far behind. It just pops up all the time when I

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least expect it, and sometimes can cause some real damage in my life. Before coaching and before my awareness around this thought or belief, I would say this core belief is really responsible for years of anxiety and even panic attacks because, imagine the actions that come from, I'm so far behind. Most of them create a lot of hustle, a lot of quick movement, a lot of trying to catch up to some pretend finish line, right?

But for some of you, it may sound more like, I'm not worthy, I'm not smart enough, or even things like money is evil, the world is bad, or any other thought that just is loud and dramatic and that can sometimes take over.

And by the way, these beliefs don't always have to be negative. Sometimes they are positive, which is amazing. Those are what help you create amazing things in your life. But what I mean by this is sometimes they can be beneficial to your current circumstances, or sometimes they can be detrimental and really keep you stuck or spinning or overperforming, like in the case of, I'm so far behind.

Today, specifically, I'm addressing the ones that hold you back, those core beliefs that we, as humans, all have. And I'm going to give you eight strategies to use when you have a core belief really creating a roadblock for you. And everything I'm sharing today works in two ways, as I often do. One, you can use these strategies on your own stubborn thoughts, but two, you can bring them directly into your coaching sessions.

So, you're probably going to want to take notes or save this episode for later. And one additional note before we dive in, this is part one of two. Today is all about working with the thought or the belief itself and giving you some strategies to help you work through it. Next week, we're going to go a layer deeper into what to do when you understand the lesson I'm teaching you today. You understand it intellectually or logically, but you can't figure out how to create actual, real change for yourself or again, for your clients.

Now, before I get into the strategies, I want to set some context starting with language. So let's get nerdy for just a minute. Today, I'm going to

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reference core beliefs, but technically, sometimes there is a better term. Core beliefs are the fundamental, deeply held convictions that you might have about yourself, others, and the world that often form outside of conscious awareness and operate as an automatic filter through which you interpret everything. Can you tell I was reading that? They feel like facts, those things that just kind of settle in. They feel like just the truth of the universe, which is exactly what makes them so hard to shift for yourself and your clients.

Core beliefs often form early in life, usually when we lack the cognitive development to evaluate what is actually being taught to us. But they can also form or solidify through sustained adult experiences, things like toxic relationships, years in a high controlled environment, or a career full of fails and dismissals. But whether they form early in life or over years as an adult, the idea is still the same. Repetition and emotional intensity over time instill a belief in you so deeply that it stops feeling like a belief and starts feeling more like reality.

Now, a different term is schema. Schema is a broader, more technical term which encompasses not just the belief itself, but also includes the emotional and behavioral patterns that develop around it, which is actually what I will be talking about a little bit today. But for our purposes, because your clients do not need to know anything about schema, I'm just going to call them core beliefs, because you know what that means, your clients know what that means.

But technically, some of what I'm referring to today can be called schema. So for those of you that are therapists or have a clinical background, I just want you to know I see you and there is a real difference, but because we are coaches, no one here needs to know the deep, deep science of it all. And everyone probably knows what a core belief is. Your clients will know that, you will know that. So that's just the term I'm going to use.

Now, here's something worth noting. The way that you or your clients experience these core beliefs and how they show up. First, they usually

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show up without a clear prompt. Often, no obvious trigger. They just kind of arrive. And depending on how your brain and body work, they may sound kind of like a ticker tape going across the news, just like reporting the news, or a background announcement like over a loudspeaker that just is dropping in to let you know like, hey, here's the truth of what's happening right now.

This unprompted quality matters for what I'm talking about today because for most of you, you might assume, or your clients might assume that a thought that kind of came out of nowhere might be your gut talking or it's just like the truth of the world. Like your brain is just reporting the facts rather than running old programming. And that's not usually what's happening.

It really is just running a very old, very worn-in program. And that is how these core beliefs differ from just ordinary thoughts. Regular thoughts are more responsive and relatively easier to redirect, whereas core beliefs are worn in. They're like the really comfortable sweatshirt that you've had for 20 years that you reach for every time even though it's like kind of tattered and like not great, and you know the other ones are better, but you just can't help yourself.

They have been rehearsed and worn hundreds, sometimes even thousands of times, sometimes even for decades. Think about how old you are. Some of these core beliefs developed when you were quite young. You've had your entire lifetime to repeat them, and that repetition is what makes them feel like truth rather than interpretation of an outside circumstance.

Something very important to remember as we move on. These core beliefs are not true. They are just more practiced than other beliefs. And we know they're not true because if we took a sample of 100 humans around the world, everyone's core beliefs, there might be some similarities, but for the most part, everyone would have very different core beliefs. And that's how we just know that they're not true.

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Some of them may serve you really well. Some of them may even have served you really well in the past and now no longer do. But that's what we're going to dig into today. And if you are a coach, which most of you are listening, just know this isn't about your own personal development work. The core beliefs you have that you're bringing with you, that we all have, every single one of us, even me, they show up in your coaching sessions, and they show up in the way you talk to yourself about your coaching, about your business, about your life, about everything.

So, let me give you some examples. What do these actually sound like? Here are some common ones that I hear sometimes in my own head, but also from my clients. Some of them are very personal. They sound like, I'm not good enough. Who even am I to do this, teach this, charge this, etc.? I'm a fraud. I'm not smart enough. I don't deserve success. Some of them are about kind of capability, like I'm not ready yet. I need to know more before I start. I'm not as good as fill in the blank, some person you follow on TikTok.

Some of them might be about the external world around you. Things like it's too late. I'm too old. I've missed my window for this. The market is too saturated. People don't like coaches. People like me don't succeed. And some of them might be more about kind of your effort or sustainability, like my favorite, I'm so far behind, or I have to work harder than everyone else just to keep up, or if it were going to work, it would have worked by now. And one that shows up constantly for coaches building businesses specifically around visibility, if I put myself out there and fail, everyone will see it.

So, do any of those land? Because now I'm going to give you eight specific strategies about what to do with them. If none of my examples landed for you, go back to the question I asked you in the beginning of this episode. What are your specific beliefs that pop up at the most inconvenient times? When you're least expecting it, the ones that feel like the truth. And you are a coach, so you may have awareness around this and you may have

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awareness around knowing that you can shift them, but maybe you haven't been able to.

So let's dig into eight strategies and a quick note before I do that. These strategies are actually quite simple. And they can be, but they don't have to be used on their own. You might actually combine some of them to create the perfect potency for your core beliefs to get on the other side of them, or to help your clients do the same, or you may also notice that some of these might work really well for your brand of core beliefs that you're bringing to the table or for your clients, and some of them might not work as well.

Which is why I'm giving you eight. You don't need to master all of them. You just need to pick the ones and try them that might feel useful for you. Also, remember, you've had a lifetime to develop these core beliefs. So, trying these strategies once or twice may not magically unlock them. It may take some practice and some commitment and a little bit of time to get on the other side of them. Okay, are you ready?

Strategy number one, distance yourself from the belief. What I mean by this is instead of pushing back hard on it or trying to solve it or spending time arguing with it, just notice it and move on. The goal in this strategy is to see it as somewhat neutral, something your brain is just doing, something that doesn't require a response at all. This is like, oh, my brain is just saying this thing again and I don't have to entertain it.

If you have kids or if you've been around kids and you've ever experienced two-year-olds, this is the mental equivalent of a two-year-old throwing a tantrum and you knowing that they are safe, there's nothing actually that they need. They're maybe just tired, overstimulated, whatever, and the best course sometimes can be to pick them up, to give them a hug, and to keep going with whatever it is you're doing, right?

Maybe you're trying to get them in the car, you just know you need to get home, and they want to lay on the pavement and throw a temper tantrum, and you just know like, hey, the best course here is for me to just actually

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buckle you in your car seat and to get going. This is like the equivalent of that. Or if you need a mental picture, you may have heard me say this before. This is kind of like if you think of yourself as you're the one driving the car, and all your thoughts and beliefs and all the things like they are in the car with you, but you're the one in charge.

This strategy would be like seeing this belief, acknowledging it, letting it in the car, but making it sit in the back and telling it, you don't get to drive, you're not in charge, I'm in charge, I know what I'm doing. So you can come along, but you have to sit back there and be quiet. The goal here is sometimes just that tiny shift can create just enough distance to stop treating that belief as real or as reality or the truth of the universe. And yes, this is quite simple, but sometimes it can be really powerful and effective, especially when used over time. Alright?

Strategy number two, trace the origin of the core belief. Ask yourself when you notice it pop up, ask, where did this belief come from? Sometimes it's something maybe you've learned gradually over time, a pattern that has repeated until it became kind of a final conclusion. Sometimes it's really specific. Maybe you actually hear someone else's voice when you hear the core belief or it's a specific experience that you had over and over, or a message from maybe your culture, your religion, or your family.

But no matter where it came from, the question is, who or what gave this belief its authority, and do you still want that to be in place? So kind of once you've removed the authority and you've distinguished the source, you can decide consciously whether this is a belief you want to continue carrying forward. It could be something you have repeated over and over to yourself over your lifetime, or that someone else even repeated to you or that you interpreted from your experiences or from your culture or the world around you over and over and over until it just started feeling true.

Sometimes just really giving it an examination and saying, do I want that voice to still be an authority? And is it helping me with where I want to go? Can help you just release your grip on it a little bit. That way, maybe when it

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pops up, you can circle back to strategy one and say, okay, you're coming, but get in the back. You no longer are driving.

Strategy number three, ask yourself what you would have to risk if the core belief was not true, or in another way, what is this belief protecting you from? Because these beliefs that you've learned over your lifetime, they almost always have a function. They have helped you in some way. They've created safety or they have helped you avoid something that you didn't like previously.

So for example, I'm not worthy of success isn't just like a random belief that just pops into your head and then you just start believing it. If you believe, for example, that you are unworthy of success, it protects you from a lot of things. You don't have to do the hard work. You don't have to be vulnerable. You don't have to be putting yourself out there, risking public failure as a coach, building a business, right? It keeps you honestly quite safe from a very specific pain.

And understanding what that pain is doesn't make the belief actually true, but it does explain why it's sticky and why changing it takes real effort and focus. It is not a character flaw that it keeps coming back. I need you to hear me say that. It's your nervous system doing its job.

My belief, I'm so far behind, was developed at a really young age. I can understand exactly where it comes from. As a human with undiagnosed ADHD most of my life and a person who leans into extreme levels of perfectionism when unchecked, the thought I'm so far behind was one, keeping me actually more on time for most things, sometimes out of real necessity, but it also helped me overcompensate for my tendency to procrastinate.

So I would procrastinate, tell myself I'm so far behind, which honestly at that point, sometimes I was, and then I would overproduce and deliver A plus, plus, plus work, no matter the situation and no matter the cost to my person. And I'm just imagining how many of you are nodding along as I say

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that, because I tend to attract a certain type of client and this does describe a specific portion of you listening.

And so if I think about what I might have to risk if I just completely let go of that core belief, it could be I would risk ruining relationships or being late often or not creating the type of success I want to create or not living up to a certain standard that I completely made up in my mind. And whatever your core beliefs are, they also come with some specific risk of you letting them go. And sometimes just seeing that and removing the power from it can help create real change.

Okay, strategy number four is noticing your tells. So, every core belief you have that pops up like that ticker tape or like the stadium announcement, there's some kind of sequence that happens before it fully arrives, even if it happens unconsciously. So maybe it's a slight tension or a micro situation or a specific type of moment. And the earlier you catch the chain, the less momentum it will have. So get curious about what comes just before the belief, before it shows up at full volume. That's the point where you can start to interrupt it. You can start to catch it before it happens.

It's kind of like if you know that every time you're on stage, let's say you're on a public stage, and you're used to it, but every time you make eye contact with someone you know, you get really nervous or you start to sweat or you totally lose your place. You could make a plan for that, right? You could think, I'm not making eye contact with anyone, or I'm going to look around ahead of time and make sure I know where the people that came here with me, like where they're sitting so that I can not look in their direction, right? You could just create a full plan.

It's not foolproof. It doesn't mean that it will never happen. It just means you're going to be more prepared. So if you can start to notice like what leads up to these really strong core beliefs popping up in the instances, especially where they feel quite heavy, then you can start to interrupt them before they happen and kind of deflate them, take the power out of them.

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Strategy number five, change your state physically instead of mentally. So this strategy works more at the body level, not just in your mind, which of course, it's all connected all the time, but I'm talking about what you're experiencing at the body level, not the thought that's passing through your head. So when that conditioned belief fires, your nervous system is already typically in a stress response, at least in the times where it's landing with a thud, right? Where it's feeling heavy.

And sometimes those purely cognitive strategies don't work as a great entry point to getting on the other side of the thought. So this one is going to work with that physiology underneath what's happening that you are aware of. This is going to look like noticing your breath, your posture, your movement. Maybe it means changing your state, standing up and stretching, getting outside, going for a walk, eating something if you're running on empty. Shifting that physical state first can sometimes shift the belief in a way that thinking through it simply can't.

So I know sometimes as coaches, especially when we're working with clients, you're on Zoom, you want to like talk through the things, which is really powerful. But sometimes, the thing that can be just as powerful, I talk about this all the time in my membership, is, you know, if you're sitting at your desk, focused, these beliefs really are weighing on you, you're having such a hard time, get up, go for a walk, move around, do some stretches, lay on your office floor, stretch your body, like whatever you need to do, listen to music, that's another thing that can shift your state, right?

Whatever you need to do to physically shift out of that heavy state that you're in. This can have such a huge impact because you are actively intervening at the physical level.

Strategy number six, which is related to the last one, use that core belief popping up as data. So before you do anything with it, right, when you just notice it, ask what else it could be signaling. Are you maybe sick? Are you really tired? Do you need a nap? Are you hungry or, as we like to call it at my house, hangry? Are you overwhelmed? Sometimes the belief is less

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about really like the underlying thing, whatever the wound is, and more about just your current physical state.

That reframe alone can take the weight off of that belief significantly. If you're a client in my world, I'm sure you've heard me say in the past, never make any important decisions, I'm usually talking about business, but here I will say, never make any important decisions when you're sick. And that's because I think the feelings are contagious, right? So if you physically are feeling awful or your body is sore or you're really hungry or you are really sad or experiencing a lot of grief, that can be contagious to everything else that's going on.

My clients often report, and I have experienced this too, in times of being sick or even, you know, a year and a half or so ago after having a big surgery, for like a week after I was like, I should quit my business. Now, it was just because my body was so tired and recovering and healing and doing what it was supposed to be doing. Luckily, I was prepared. I had taken plenty of time off work because I knew that was probably going to happen. So, instead of just leaning into the belief and thinking about it as facts, sometimes looking under the hood and saying like, what else might be going on right now that could be creating this? Can be really beneficial.

Strategy number seven. This you have definitely heard me talk about before, building a new neural pathway. So this is the reframe or the replacement belief or the new thought that you're deliberately practicing. But I have to say, when you're doing this, timing matters. You want to be sure, as often as you can, to do it right at the same moment that the old belief fires, not just as like a morning journaling exercise or a gratitude practice or a manifestation practice, but really noticing when that core belief pops up, paying attention to it, and actively shifting it in the moment.

You may have heard me say before, I think about this, like if you've ever been hiking, you might see these paths through the woods where you can tell they aren't human paths, but they're very clearly paths. Those are because animals or deer or whatever, usually deer where I am, have forged

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away, and that's just the way they run every time because the path is the most broken down. They can create a new path, right? They could run through the woods in any way. Those old beliefs that you have, those are just like the well-worn paths.

And creating that new path is like the deer choosing to create a new path. It takes a little more effort, but it sometimes is totally worth it if you're wanting to go a different place than you have before. And when you do this, I don't recommend just picking the opposite of whatever your belief is. So for example, if we go with mine, I'm so far behind. I don't recommend just flipping it and trying to believe that. So, for example, I'm not trying to believe I'm just right on time, right? Like that's very generic. Even though my original belief is also quite generic, but just trying to believe I'm right on time always would be silly, right?

Because this core belief that I'm carrying around, it's not really provable or not provable. I could find evidence of places I'm behind. I could find evidence of places I'm ahead. I could find evidence of places I'm right on time. It's just so arbitrary. And so just always believing I'm right on time instead isn't really going to do it for me. But recently, I have made some changes to my team and so I've had the opportunity to have this core belief pop up over and over and over because I currently have less support.

So in my business, I'm so far behind is a thought that's constantly popping up. And instead, instead, a much more useful thought that I have been practicing is, this is an amazing opportunity because I'm learning my limits and where I need support, right? That doesn't make it like my flaw, it doesn't make it something that deep down I need to like improve about myself. It's just like, oh, I need maybe to refine some processes. I'm also learning my limits of what I can do as a human, and it's really pointing out where I need support.

Now, that I can get behind. It feels a lot more believable. And so now when that core belief just pops up on its own, like it's just announcing the news throughout my day, I remind myself of this. And I don't necessarily think that

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you need to like find the new belief and just like wake up every day and practice it over and over. But one thing I have found to be super helpful for myself that you can use if you like is to maybe make sticky notes or even on the background of your phone or on your computer that just encompass this new thing that you're really wanting to believe so that your subconscious is just encountering it multiple times throughout the day.

And maybe you look at it every once in a while. You consider it, you think about it. You find all the evidence where the new belief is true. Because no matter what it is, whether it's a belief about yourself, about the world, about your clients, about whoever, you will always find some evidence that the opposite or that something different than what you're currently believing is also true when you're looking for it.

Okay, and then the very last one. This is the one that you use when nothing else works, when you've tried all the other things, you can't really seem to get on the other side of it, and it just feels like this belief is just there to stay. Especially when it's something similar to mine that you can't necessarily prove or disprove. You know, like, I'm so far behind. Behind what, exactly? Right? What does that even mean? I could argue and argue with this thought, I could argue it into the ground, that would be such a waste of energy because it's an argument that I can't even win with myself because I can find truth on both sides.

So instead, if yours feels like this, if it feels tricky, one thing you could try, accept it. Accept that your brain is telling you this thing and ask what to do given that circumstance. This will decouple the action from the belief. Right? So you don't have to resolve the thought before moving forward. Sometimes you just take it with you and do the thing anyway. Okay, I'm so far behind. Facts. Now what? Right?

So what is yours? Money is evil. Okay, well, you're building a business that requires money to run it. So now what? Right? Instead of like spending all the energy disproving it, you could just tell yourself, yep, this is true. What am I going to do about it? How am I moving forward anyway? If you have a

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client that just believes to the depths of their soul that they're unworthy of love, okay. Well, they hired you. They want whatever they want anyway. So, now what? What are they going to do about it?

If it's just true that they're unworthy of love, which of course, I would never want, actually want anyone to believe that. But if they did, and if it feels like it's impossible to pry it out of their hands, and you've tried some of the other things that we've gone through here, okay, you're unworthy of love. Now, how are you going to create what you want anyway, in spite of this belief that you have? This is a really useful strategy, especially for people with kind of rebellious brains that really like to, you know, argue or hold on to this thing that they're believing, no matter what you do as the coach, no matter what you try.

Sometimes just even going here, just even acknowledging that, okay, maybe you're right. Now, what are we going to do? Will make them kind of back up a little or like loosen the grip on the belief in a weird way. That they're like, wait, I was like really committed to holding on to this, but now that you're just letting go, it's kind of like, if you're playing, what is it called? Tug of War with someone and you just let go, right? And then the other person would have to be like, whoa, okay. Thanks, I guess. Like, thanks for the giving me the rope. Now what?

Okay. Now, as I said in the beginning, these are all quite simple, but they may take time and lots of practice to really get on the other side of these core beliefs. And in my experience, I'm going to say, I don't know that many of my core beliefs really just completely go away or disappear. To me, it often feels, and this is just again, this is really just my personal experience. To me, it often feels like they're still there. Like I can recognize them, I can see them. They do pop up in times of heightened emotion, definitely, but the awareness around them is what removes all of the power.

And then having these strategies, these eight strategies that I just laid out, is what helps you move forward anyway, despite these beliefs that have really been ingrained. And or I can sometimes recognize them, but also see

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that there is another path to choose. So it's like, yes, there is this well-worn path, but there's also these couple of other paths that are pretty well-worn at this point too. So when it comes time for that core belief to pop up, my brain offers me more of a menu instead of just, here's the one truth of the world, which is really powerful.

So, like I said in the beginning, this is part one of two, eight strategies for working with the belief itself, understanding where it came from, how it's protecting you, and how to start loosening its grip. And next week, we're going to talk about something specific that I hear constantly from so many clients. I understand all of this conceptually, or I get it logically. I get it. I know it isn't true logically. I've tried the strategies, but why am I still stuck? Why is it not working? So that's part two.

Stay tuned, because that deserves its whole own conversation. I'll see you there next week. And this episode did come to life because of content I am currently creating for my membership, *The Complete Coach*. If you love this type of content where I'm teaching coaching strategies that you can use on yourself and with your clients, get on the waitlist for *The Complete Coach*. I will put the link in the show notes. And I can't wait to see 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 lindsaydotzlafoaching.com. That's Lindsay with an A, D-O-T-Z-L-A-F.com. See you next week.