

Ep #7: Questions to Ask Yourself



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With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

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Welcome to The Life Coach School podcast, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hi, everybody. It's Brooke Castillo. Thank you so much for listening to my podcast. I am so stoked that we have been featured in 'New and Noteworthy' on iTunes. That's super cool. I spent a lot of time preparing and creating this podcast and to having them recognized and to have you all listening to them. It means so much to me, so thank you so much for your time and for figuring out how to download them and listening to them and for giving me reviews.

I really appreciate it. I know that going to iTunes and writing a review is time-consuming and it takes some effort from you, and I just really appreciate you taking the time to do that. It means so much to me. Here's to 'New and Noteworthy' and to many, many more weeks and months and years of doing this podcast.

This podcast today, what I'm going to talk about is the power of questions and the title of it is 'Questions to Ask Yourself'. I've written about questions pretty extensively. I wrote about them in my first book which is *If I'm so Smart, Why Can't I Lose Weight?: Tools To Get It Done*. That's my first book I wrote close to 10 years ago, but it's still a book I teach out of and that many of my students read and teach out of as well.

I would like to start with reading a little bit from that book and then talking about questions and how powerful they are to use as tools in your life, and if you're a coach, how they are your best tools to use with your clients. I'm going to start *If I'm So Smart, Why Can't I Lose Weight?* From that book, I'm going to start on page 199. This is from the section in that book called, 'Self-care', and this is tool number nine.

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The tool says, “Ask a great question every day.” We all ask ourselves questions all day long. “How can I get this done? What am I going to eat today? When will I be skinny? Why is my life so hard?” In coaching, questions are the tools we use to change our lives. By asking high quality, empowering questions, we get creative and inspiring answers.

It’s like your brain goes to work, searching for the answers to what you are presenting. If you ask, “How can I be happier?” your brain comes back with wonderful ideas. If you don’t close the door with answering, I don’t know. You will find the source of wisdom within you that you might not know existed.

The higher quality the question, the higher quality the answer will be. I just want to make a little side note here. I know I’ve mentioned this before, but it’s really important. When you tell yourself, “I don’t know” and “I’m confused”, or “I can’t make a decision”, you’re blocking yourself from your own wisdom. Open up your mind. Know that even if it’s something you don’t know the exact answer to right now, saying “I don’t know” will block that answer from coming.

Instead, say “I’m learning”, “I’m figuring it out”, “I’m asking myself”. If you ask yourself why you can’t lose weight, you will come back with a slew, a very negative self-defeating answer. You have incorporated a negative belief into the question and your brain will be sent to task to prove the negative belief correct.

Your brain is a very powerful tool that’s able to do just that. It may come back with you don’t have will power, you don’t have enough time, you don’t care enough. If you change the question to incorporate an empowering belief, you will come up with answers that are just as empowering. For example, it could change to “How can I lose weight permanently and have fun at the same time?” You will likely come up with a much more creative and wonderful idea that will move you closer to your goal.

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Think about this right now. Take a moment and see if you can identify the questions you ask yourself on a regular basis. You might even have one main question about your weight that you want to evaluate. My question for a long time was why it is keeping my weight down have to be such a struggle for the rest of my life? One day, my brain came back with “It doesn’t.” I changed my question to “How can I end the struggle permanently and without deprivation or pain?”

Suddenly, I began to get the answers that are found throughout this book. Whatever your question is, decide if it’s empowering, and if it isn’t changing immediately. Write it on a post-it and put it everywhere in your house. Your brain will go to work for you and most likely come up with a wonderful solution.

My current question is, “How can I be an example of what is possible?” Pick one question to ask yourself every day. Here are some ideas if you need help. “How can I get the housework down and have fun at the same time?”, “What can I do to laugh a lot today?”, “How will I make today better than yesterday?”, “How can I make my future more exciting than my past?”, “How can I make myself a priority so I have more to give others?”, “What do I love about myself?”, “What am I grateful for?”, “How can I honor my body today?”, “What can I do to feel my emotions instead of eating them today?”, “How can I come more connected to my internal joy?”, “How can I make choices that benefit me and everyone around me at the same time?”, “How can I live my best life?”

If you want great answers, ask great questions. Like I said, I wrote that almost 10 years ago, and that book is still available on ‘Amazon.com’. It is still as relevant today as it was when I wrote it then, and I’m still using all of those same tools now.

When you ask a great question, you come up with thoughts to think. That’s basically how it works. When you are inquisitive about yourself, you can find ways to focus your brain and tell it what to think. Remember, it’s just a piece of machinery. It is just there to serve you basically. It doesn’t really care what it thinks. It just wants to be efficient at what it thinks.

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If you think about something that you really want to create more of in your life, think of a great question, and then put your brain to work thinking about it. I always think the first question anyone should start with that's new to life coaching, that's new to coaching themselves is, "What am I thinking?"

Awareness is everything. If you aren't aware of the 60,000 thoughts that are going through your head every day, it's like your brain is a toddler with a knife running through there. There is nothing more frightening for a life than an unsupervised mind.

The first question we always want to start with is, "What am I thinking? Do you even know what you're thinking on a regular basis?" Let me tell you, especially when I work with weight clients ... No, I run a school with my friend and colleague, Susan Hyatt, and we ... that's called 'The Weight School', not to be confused with 'The Life Coach School' where we train coaches, but The Weight School is where we train our clients on how to think about their weight and how to lose weight.

One of the first things that we want them to discover is what they're thinking. What are they thinking when they're overeating? What are they thinking right before they overeat? What are they thinking after they overeat? ... We really want to have a look into their brain to understand.

What is amazing about this process is that so many of us have no idea what we're thinking, so we start discovering what we're thinking and we're blown away and disappointed and overwhelmed with what the heck is going on inside of our brain. A lot of it is very negative. Sometimes, when you're going in there for the first time, it's like a house you haven't cleaned in three years. It's alarming of what's going on in there.

It's not a reason to stop asking the question because if you remember from previous episodes, what you think is going to determine how you feel, and what you feel is going to determine what action you take, and ultimately, the results you get. If you want to know what results you're going to be getting in your life, look at your thoughts. Look at what's going on in

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there. The best way to do that is throughout your day, ask yourself, “What am I thinking?”

The answer to that question will tell you not only how you’re feeling, but it will also tell you why you’re inspired to take action or not take action, and ultimately, it will tell you what your results will be. Let me give you an example.

If you’re asking yourself, “Why can’t I lose weight?”, your answer may be, “Because I don’t have the ability. I’m totally out of control.” If you have a belief that you’re totally out of control, you’re going to feel hopeless. You’re going to feel out of control, and then you’re going to act that out by eating out of control, and the result will be probably that you’ll gain weight which will of course prove that you’re out of control of your weight.

Now, if you ask yourself a better question like: “How can I eat only when I’m hungry today?”, or “How can I manage my emotions without eating?”, then your brain will go to work finding answers that will serve you. One of the main issues with overeating is the inability to tolerate emotion and negative emotion especially. It also includes positive emotion.

If I have a client who is struggling with constantly reacting to her thoughts by overeating, a really powerful question could be, “How can I feel my feelings in that moment?” “What can I do to tap into my feelings and feel them all the way through instead of eating?” Now, the brain will love to go to work to solve that issue, and it will look for evidence, and it will look for solutions for you if you’re asking it that question. That’s the number one question that we start everybody with. If you’re brand new to my podcast, that is the question you should be asking yourself, “What am I thinking?”

Now, there’s a process we follow that’s called ‘A thought down mode’. When you ask yourself that question, you write it right at the top of the page, “What am I thinking?”. What you will come up with is a slew of thoughts. Then, the way that we recommend you do with thought down mode in response to that question is just write without stopping. Go, go, go, go, go, go. Don’t think about what you’re writing, don’t worry about it, don’t try

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and fix it, just get it out of your brain so you can have a look at it. “What am I thinking?” That is your thought down mode.

Now, that in and of itself will reveal so much of you to yourself and that is a very powerful thing to have a look at your own mind. Many of my clients are like, “No wonder I’m overeating. No wonder I’m so stressed out all the time. Look at what’s going on in my brain.”

Now, the second question which we call ‘The coaching ninja question’, because what this question does is gives you back responsibility for what you’re thinking. Here’s the thing that’s really important. Most of us do not take responsibility for what we think. We do not direct our minds; we do not deliberately control our thought patterns and choose what we want our brain to focus on. Most of us are living through default.

If you are living through default, meaning you’re just letting your brain go wild, you’re not taking responsibility for your feelings, then this will be very powerful for you to ask yourself the question. Once you’ve done the thought down mode, ask yourself, “Why am I choosing to think this?” Once you’ve had a look at all those negative thoughts, ask yourself, “Why am I choosing to think this?”

The way that question is worded, puts that responsibility and reminds you that every thought is a choice. If you’re thinking really negative things about yourself, about your body, about the people in your house with you, about your job, about anything, then you ask yourself, “Why am I choosing to think this thought?” What that will do is it will remind you that your circumstances aren’t causing your feelings your thoughts are. If your thoughts are choices, you’re responsible for what you’re thinking, what you’re feeling and what you’re doing.

Many times, we have misguided reasons for why we think what we think. They’re illogical reasons. When we bring them to our own awareness as adults and we can really have a look at our thoughts, when we ask ourself that question, we realize that it’s not a thought that we want to

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choose to think. From there, we can change it or we can at least explore why we are thinking it.

The second question I really want you to practice is, “Why am I choosing to think this?” The first one is, “What am I thinking?” The second one is, “Why am I choosing to think this?” Now, the third question that will really serve you here is, “How does this thought feel?”

When you ask yourself what you’re thinking and the thought comes up, and you ask yourself why you’re choosing to think the thought, the next question is “How does it feel?”, because you want to know how everyone of the thoughts that you’re thinking feels, because if it doesn’t feel great, you might want to consider not thinking it.

Now, there are times when we don’t want to feel great, right? That’s totally fine. When we are not feeling great and we’re not taking responsibility for it, this can really help, “How does this thought feel? What am I thinking? Why am I choosing to think it? How does this thought feel?” That will really show you.

Now remember, when you ask yourself that question, the answer needs to be a one word emotion, “It makes me feel bad”, “It makes me feel great”, “It makes me feel sad”, “It makes me feel happy” ... Come up with what is the emotion that it’s causing you to feel.

If for example your thought is the one that we brought up earlier, I am out of control with my eating. Now, think about that. You think you’re just stating some observation, but really, that’s a thought you’re choosing to think. When you ask yourself, “Why are you choosing to think that? Why are you choosing to think I’m out of control with my eating?”

Your answer may be, “If I look into my past, I can see evidence where I felt out of control.” Okay, but why are you choosing to think it now? Is it serving you? The best way to find out if it’s serving you is ask yourself “how does that thought feel?” When you think the thought, “I’m out of control with

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my eating”, how do you feel? Most people come back with hopeless, out of control, frustrated. Okay?

The other piece, the other direction that you can go from is if you're not currently thinking about what you're thinking, you may just notice that you don't feel great. You're having some kind of negative emotion, or maybe you're having a positive emotion. One of the really good questions for self-awareness is, “What is the thought that's causing the way I feel right now?”

I do this often. I mentioned this in a series that we have over at ‘The Life Coach School’ called ‘Become a Coach’. It's a video series. It's a four-part video series that's absolutely free. You can get it by going to ‘Thelifecoachschool.com’, and clicking on the tab that says, “Watch this”. It's just a short little video series.

Within there, I talk about how feelings can be signals. They signal to us that it is time to ask ourselves, “What am I thinking? What is the thought that's causing this feeling?” If you're feeling anxious, you can ask yourself, “What is the thought causing this feeling?” If you're feeling sad, what is the thought causing this feeling? It's kind of another way into your mind another way getting to know yourself and discovering what's going on with you. Okay?

What is the thought causing this feeling? If you want to practice with this, you can do it right now. Ask yourself how you're feeling right now. Once you get the answer to that, remember, it's a one word description of an emotion, feeling happy and feeling sad and feeling upset, and feeling frustrated, then ask yourself, “What thought is causing the way I feel right now?”

That in and of itself, those questions will open up an awareness to you and give you so much of your power and your responsibility back that you will be able to move forward in a way that you may not have ever done before, just becoming aware of your mind, that in and of itself. I'm going to

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repeat those four questions. Please write them down. If you're on a hike or something, you can check them out at the show notes we have.

At The Life Coach School, I have show notes for this episode. It will be at Thelifecoachschool.com/7, and you'll be able to see these questions in writing. We have the entire podcast transcribed so you're able to see it all in written form, and a lot of people like to print that out and do the notes, and that's awesome. Here are the four questions again, "What am I thinking?", "Why am I choosing to think this?", "How does this thought feel?", and then if you want to come out at the other way is, "What thought is causing the way I feel right now?"

Now, if you're a coach, these are all so brilliant, brilliant questions that you can ask your clients any time. Now, towards the end here, I just want to talk a little bit to you, coaches. Now, if you're not a coach, it's totally fine because you can use the same information to apply it to yourself and coach yourself, but I also want to talk to you if you're a coach some of the really powerful questions that you can use with your clients and use on yourself sound like this. These are just questions that you can ask any time during any session. Here they go, "What is perfect about this?" I love that question. "How do I want to feel?"

Now, when you ask yourself how you want to feel and you remind yourself that you're in charge of how you feel by what you think, knowing how you want to feel can really spur on some action that you can take even just mental action to get yourself into that feeling state. "What are they thinking that makes them do that?" That's a game changer you guys.

If you're able to look at other people with fascination and ask yourself, "What are they thinking? What might they be thinking that's making them act that way?", that will give you a really good perspective, because most of the time, what we do is when someone acts a certain way, we have a thought about it that determines how we feel, and we may not understand what's driving their action. By understanding it, by asking yourself this awesome question which is, "What are they thinking that makes them do that?", you immediately shift your perspective away from yourself.

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Another great question is, “What is funny about this?” “How can we make this more fun?” “What can I give?” “What can I learn from this?” “What is the solution to this problem?” “What is the good news?”

I have a girlfriend that I love her so much because she’s so positive. One of the things that she always says no matter what she’s talking about is, “Okay. Here’s the good news.” Even if she’s telling me a horrible story, she goes, “Yes, but here’s the good news.” I love that. You can ask that to other people too, “What’s the good news? Tell me what’s good. What’s going on that’s great in your life?”

Okay? Those are some really powerful questions. Notice, I really want you to go through and notice your negative questions. When I was reading that piece from my book, what did you notice are your negative questions? Here are some that come from our clients often.

“What is wrong with me? How am I going to get through this? Why did they do that to me? What did I do to deserve this? What will they think of me? When is it going to get better? Why is it taking so long? Why is this happening to me? Why do I keep doing this to myself? Why am I so fat? Why am I so dumb? Why am I so broke? Why can’t I get it together?”, and then, some version of “Why can’t she or he do this, that or the other thing?”

Notice how those questions are dead-end questions. They do not serve us. They definitely don’t serve our clients. Helping your clients find themselves better questions to ask themselves and finding yourself better questions to ask yourself is really, really powerful.

One of the things that questions really do to help serve us in our coaching practice is they help us treat the cause and not the symptom of the problem. One of the most powerful questions you can use as a coach is to ask why. It seems like such an innocent little question, but it really can increase the consciousness of the entire planet one client at a time, when we ask why our clients have to go into their mind and find the meaning and the intention that drives them.

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Many of our clients will have never done this before, and many of you may have never done this before. It's one more step on the journey to consciousness and emotional adulthood. Don't ever underestimate how many of us are on automatic pilot, playing out the programming of our childhood without question. We do what we think we should do based on what we were told as children and we've never evaluated whether it still applies or even make sense.

Your clients will come to you miserable and have no idea why they're miserable, and maybe you don't know why you're miserable, so ask yourself why. It's such an obvious question. Why are you miserable? Do you know the thoughts you're thinking that are causing you to feel miserable? Why are you upset? Do you really know the reason what you're thinking that's causing you to feel upset? Why are you overweight? Why are you broke? Why are you in any situation that you are? Make sure that you're asking the question in a way that serves up awareness to you and helps you understand you're thinking behind it.

Your clients are going to come to you with external reasons why they don't have what they want in their lives. They're going to blame the environment, the culture, their family, their boss ... Coaching shows your clients by asking why that they are the reason why they have what they have in their life, and that's very good news because they can change it.

Again, our favorite question as coaching is why. Okay? When your client, when they present with something and they offer you with reasons and explanations for everything and you ask them why, remember, that will reveal they're thinking behind it. That will reveal what's going on in their mind, and that's why that question is so, so powerful.

Asking questions is such an awesome tool. Look into your mind and see the questions that you're asking every single day. Notice if you like the question or if you even like the answer, and then decide what do you want your brain to be working on. It will work on anything you give it to work on. Give it a question and send it to work for you.

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I am really happy to have shared this with you. I think this is the best stuff ever. I think that these questions, learning how to ask really powerful questions to yourself, when you're coaching yourself and to your clients, when you're coaching your clients is the huge game changer.

I want to end by asking you a question, "Are you taking responsibility for your life?" I want you to know that that is a yes or a no question. If you can find areas in your life where you're not taking responsibility for how you feel and for how you think and for what you do, then you have to answer that question no, and you have to get to work on taking full responsibility for yourself. A great way to start doing that is by asking yourself, "How can I take more responsibility for what I think, for what I feel and for what I do?"

It's been a pleasure talking to you all. I can't wait to talk to you next week. Have a great one. Bye-bye.

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