

Ep #11: The Manual



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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.

Hey everybody what's up? So glad you're here. Going to rock your world today with a topic that so many of my students and clients love because of the way it gives them perspective on other people in their lives. We call this topic the Manual. It's because most of us have operating manuals that we've written for the other people in our lives. I noticed this really early on in my coaching career as I was coaching people. People have very thick and very long manuals for other people, myself included.

I started laughing and talking to my clients about this saying, this very thick manual that you've written for your husband. Have you even let him read this manual? Does he know what he's supposed to do in order to operate properly? Most of them would say no. Then they would use that as a reason for being very upset about so many things in their life. This manual is like this rule book on how the other person should behave.

A manual is basically an instruction book that we've written for somebody else. We've tied all of our emotional life to whether or not they follow it. Even though it may seem very justified to have expectations of other people it is also quite damaging and frustrating for ourselves to do so. We have these belief systems that if other people would just behave themselves the way that we would like them to behave, then we could be happy.

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The problem is we don't even realize that we're doing this. We think that we have reasonable expectations of people in our life and that they should behave in a way that is reasonable. But what we think is reasonable and what other people think is reasonable is often times very different. One of the first things that I think is really important to remember is that adult people have the ability and freedom to behave however they would like. That includes you.

There is nothing you have to ever do and there is nothing that anyone else has to do for you. One of the, I think, the challenges with some of modern therapy is that therapists will sit down- this has happened with some of my clients, and say what are your needs. Let's make a list of what all of your needs are and then you need to tell those needs, what your needs are to this other person. Then, that person can try and meet your needs.

I think that's manual that is set up for disaster. I think we are responsible for meeting our own needs. When we're in a relationship with someone who expects us to fulfill their needs. We've all of a sudden gotten into this situation where not only do we have to take care of ourselves, but we have to take care of somebody else. If we're unfortunate enough to be in a relationship where I'm feeling like I'm responsible for someone else's needs and they're feeling responsible for my needs. Then you're in a real tight manipulating situation because I'm going to be constantly trying to control that other person so I can be happy. They're going to be constantly trying to control me and no one is ever going to win.

The truth is, first of all, you can't control another person. Second of all, there's nothing they could possibly do to make you as happy as you

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want to be. My suggestion is first of all, we acknowledge and realize that we do have these manuals for other people and we back that up and start taking responsibility for our own rules and our own operating manuals for ourselves. The truth is, most of us can't control or manage ourselves, and yet we want to control and manage other people. Which is somewhat ridiculous.

If we can't even control our own behaviors, how do we think we're going to be able to control someone else. Any of you who have tried to control someone else, and all of you have, you find yourself wanting, you find yourself frustrated. The first step is to have a look at the people in your life that you have manuals for. What is it you want them to do differently than what they're doing and why do you want them to behave that way.

I'm going to give you the answer. The reason why you ever want someone else to change the way that they're behaving is because of how you think you will feel because of their changed behavior. But remember, if we back up to the beginning of this when I first started this podcast, we have to remember that it's our thinking that causes our feelings, not another person's behavior. So what is actually happening is when they're following our manual then we decide to think they respect me, they like me, they care about me, then we get to feel good.

When they don't follow our manual, we make it mean something quite negative and then we feel bad about that. We're not taking responsibility for how we're feeling because we're giving all of that away to that other person based on their behavior. Which we've gotten very confused. Whenever we think someone else's behavior causes our emotions, we have not only set ourselves up to feel negative emotion, but we've also set ourselves up to be completely powerless because the only way that we can then feel better is if this other person changes.

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If you guys are anything like me, I've acted crazy trying to get other people to behave the way that I want them to behave. When I remind myself, the only way I'm trying to get this person to behave this way is because I think I'll feel better when they do it and I can remind myself that that's not even possible. Someone else's behavior can not determine how I feel; it's only what I think about their behavior.

Then I can take a deep breath and stop trying to control them so much.

Think about the people in your life that you have manuals for. Think about whom you really want to change and what you want them to do on a regular basis. It's a little bit different if you have children because your job is to help them write their operation manual for chores around the house and stuff like that. If you're a boss, there are some things you need to do in terms of your expectations of them being an employee. This is very different than a manual. Because the manual says if you don't behave this way, I'm going to feel something. It's like, I'm going to be very upset if you don't behave this way, or I'm going to be very angry.

That's very different than saying to a child, for example. If you don't clean your room, there will be a consequence for you, that's very different than, you hurt my feelings because you didn't make your bed and that makes mommy feel very upset. That's emotional blackmail, is what we call it. It's really important to separate those 2 things out and to remember that making requests of people and not tying your emotional life to them is very expected in a normal part of life.

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Clients will come to me all the time, you're telling me I shouldn't tell my husband that he shouldn't take out the garbage or I shouldn't tell my husband that he should be home on time, or I shouldn't tell my husband that he needs to show up for family outings. I say, absolutely. You can make all the requests you want for as many people as you want. But when you tie your emotional happiness to whether they respond or not, that's when you get yourself into big trouble. When you start banging your head against the wall and trying to manipulate them so they'll behave in the way you want them to behave so you can feel better. That's when you're going to get yourself into a spiral of negativity. That's the manual.

That's this heavy book of rules that you have and what you make it mean when someone doesn't follow them.

The alternative is, you make a request and if they don't honor the request, you take responsibility for how you feel about that. This also doesn't mean that you stay with people who don't have values in line with your values or don't live in the way that you want to live and are constantly doing things that are against your values. I'm not suggesting that at all. But what I am saying is that trying to change them to be more like you want them to be, rarely ever works. In fact, makes you into a crazy person.

You get to decide what you're going to do with your time and how you're going to respond and when you are thinking about making changes in your life. You need to make sure you're thinking about those changes and what you want based on what you have control over. And you do not, I promise you, have control over anybody else in your life and how they behave. Let's talk about an example with friends.

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Let's say you're friends with someone and you want them to call you once a week. You say, good friends should call me once a week and they should especially call me back when I call them and they should absolutely call me on my birthday. Maybe this is the manual you have for friendship and often, more times than not, you won't tell this person this is your request, this is your expectation. You'll just expect them to know it. Then, when they don't honor it you get upset because you have this manual for them then you maybe will tell them it hurt your feelings when they didn't call you or when they did.

It sets you up for such frustration. The other alternative is that you have a friend and you let them be who they are. If they want to call you, they call you, if they want to call you back, they do, there are no rules set up. You could just love on this person and enjoy this person and not have any kind of manual for them. You could make requests of them just to let them know, I would love this and that and this and that. But knowing that whether they decide to honor those requests or not has nothing to do with you, it has everything to do with them. And you can enjoy them as a person anyway.

I have found that this sets people up to have very enjoyable, long lasting, conflict free relationships. I have many relationships like this in my life where I will tell someone, we had plans, you didn't show up, I was bummed out about that, I would really appreciate it if next time you would give me more notice. It doesn't mean that I'm then going to blame them on going for how they behaved. It may mean that I won't expect them to show up on time next time. I'll just work around that. But I'm not going to hold them to the fire and expect them-

For example, if being on time is really important to me, that doesn't mean that it's really important to someone else. It also doesn't mean that

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they don't respect me or my time; it means that they have a hard time managing their schedule. If I have someone that I know is consistently late, I can say to them, we're all going to meet up at 4:30- I actually do have a friend that I do this with. I say we're going to meet up at 4:30, you're pretty consistently late and I'm going to expect you there around 5:00 but if you're not there at 5:00 we're going to leave.

I just wanted to let you know that I love you and we're meeting at 4:30 and if you're not there by 5:00 we're going to leave. That doesn't tell her that she has to be there on time. It lets her know what I'm going to do if she doesn't show up on that time. In another podcast I'm going to talk about boundaries some more and we're going to go through them. But in this situation, it's I'm going to make a request, but I'm only going to take responsibility for me.

Versus, saying to her, listen, you have to be on time. It is really important to me. And if you're not on time I'm going to be very upset with you. That's a very different story right. I'm going to allow my girlfriend, if she wants to be late, that's up to her, I'm not going to try and control her behavior. But I'm also not going to set my own expectation that she's going to be on time knowing that she's not going to be on time.

There are a lot of other people in our life that we have manuals for. There are- mainly I would say our most significant other. We have ideas on how we would like them to behave and who we would like them to be. It comes from this idea that if they were more like we wanted them to be, that we would somehow be happier. This is true for bosses and coworkers and people in our life that we think, God if we have a better boss or a better husband, we would be so much happier.

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I think it's important to remember that your happiness comes from you and it doesn't matter who your husband is or what he does when it comes to your own emotional happiness. Husbands that are compatible with us are going to make it easier for us to have positive thoughts around them but it doesn't mean that they have to change in order for that to be true. I really want to give you this suggestion that it is possible to let go of all your rules and all your regulations and all your control attempts on everyone in your life, on the people that you have manuals for in your life.

Consider letting them go and making requests of these people if you want to but with no strings attached and genuinely noticing what people do when you don't try to control them. If you only focus on trying to control yourself and your response to how other people behave, what do you imagine your life would be like?

If you're a boss at a job or you have someone that works for you. You can set very clear expectations and you can provide feedback to them. If they don't honor your request and they don't follow through on what you have asked them to do, then you get to decide whether to keep them working for you or you put them on some kind of probation or whether you just let it go. But the truth is that you don't have to be upset about it. You don't have to be angry about it. That's totally up to you.

In fact, you can manage people from a space of nonviolence towards yourself. You don't have to get so angry with people don't comply with what you want. In our personal relationships, it's much easier to let go of the manuals because when we start letting people, quote unquote, letting, people be who they are and we notice what they do without us controlling them, without us trying to change who they are. First of all, we'll notice that we're a lot calmer if we don't make their end action mean something negative.

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But we can also really hear them out. We can get their perspective on things and hear their side of the story and why do or don't do what they want to do. Versus pounding our own fist on the manual of how we would like them to behave. I have done this in my own life. An example that I use often was when I first got married to my husband I had this image of how it was supposed to be at night time. I felt like, we're married now, we should go to bed at the same time, we should both get in bed, we should read books or cuddle or snuggle or watch TV together. That should be our time to be together.

I would go to bed and I'd ask him, husband, Chris, come to bed with me. He would be like, I don't really want to. I would make it mean all of these things like he didn't love me and he wish he hadn't married me and he doesn't want to do what I want to do and he doesn't care and he knows how important this is to me and he doesn't want to be cuddling at night. I would go to bed in such a rage and so frustrated all of the time.

I was constantly berating him and sometimes he would come to bed, unwillingly just to not have to hear me and my wrath about it. One day I decided, instead of being so demanding and making it mean all these horrible things, I asked him, why don't you want to come to bed with me at night when I want to go to bed and have a cuddle. He said, that's my only time in my entire day that I have to be with myself. It's really important that I have that time to unwind that I can chill out and just be with me.

As soon as I understood that from his perspective, I realized it had nothing to do with me. It wasn't like he didn't want to spend time with me; he didn't want to come to bed with me. He just wanted to be with himself.

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That changed everything for me. Just getting his perspective. It sounds so obvious now when I say it but I will tell you, it was not obvious then.

It was this huge source of contention. I've worked with so many clients on this with silly things like turning out the lights or taking out the garbage or being on time. When we release all of those rules and expectations, and we listen to the other person and hear what's going on for them and let go of what we want them to do, our relationships can change with them. We can start understanding them from a different perspective that isn't clouded by our own thinking and what we want to have them do.

Think about that person in your life and think of three things that you want them to do. Think that it would be so awesome if they would do this. I wish my husband were more romantic, it would be so awesome if he would write me love notes or he would bring me flowers all the time or if he would plan vacations and surprise me and whisk me off to wonderful enchanted places. Or maybe it's your friends. Like I wish my friends would call me more often, I wish they were more available to me. Or maybe it's your relationship with your mother or your father. I wish they would offer help or I wish they were more interested in the kids, or I wish they were less interested in the kids and less interested in me. Whatever it is.

Think about those requests that you have of a person in your life. Try and write down things you think it would be awesome if this person would do. Then take the time to think about, what would you feel, what do you imagine you would feel if they voluntarily did all these things with so much pleasure. What would you be thinking? Remember all of your feelings come from your thinking. What would you be thinking if this person behaved in this way that you want them to behave? Think about that. Do

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you have that thought available to you now? Can you think that about this person without them having to do all those things?

If the answer is yes, you scored. You don't have to go around changing other people in order to feel better. What you can do is feel better on your own accord. You can decide that I'm not going to make my life about what I believe I'm entitled to from other people and their behavior. In fact, I'm going to start believing that I'm not entitled to have anyone behave any other way than the way they behave. The only thing I'm entitled to is taking care of my own emotional life and my own brain to make sure I'm thinking thoughts that serve me.

If I really want something done and it's really important to me to make sure that it's done. Asking myself why I'm not willing to do it. And do I really want someone else to do something that they don't want to do? I can hear one of my clients right now talking to me in my ear. She's like, I don't want to clean up the dog poo and neither does he, so why should I have to do it? The truth is, and this is what I told her. You don't have to do it. The truth is, you want to do it because you don't want dog poo in the backyard. But expecting your husband to do it when he doesn't want to do it either and he doesn't care if there's dog poo in the backyard has gotten you into this really stressful situation with your husband that you've made mean that he doesn't care about you and he doesn't want to contribute and he's not an equal partner.

You've made this all mean something so much more. Now, instead of having a problem with dog poo in the backyard. You have this problem with being frustrated and aggravated with your husband. Which of course is compounded the problem. Now you have 2 crappy things in your life instead of just one. I asked her, how often does it work out that he cleans it up when you ask him over and over again. And even when he does clean it

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up do you feel better or are you frustrated and mad that he didn't do it automatically?

How could you approach this problem differently without affecting your marriage in such a negative way without having this manual? Again, it doesn't mean that you don't make that request of your husband, but if he doesn't do it are you going to make it mean something so horrible that then you can't even enjoy your relationship with him or the backyard. Because now the dog poo is all over the backyard and it's all over your relationship with your husband. Really think about the things you want to have done and how you want other people to behave.

Think about how you think it will feel if they do those things for you. Then you decide to feel that way anyway. You get to feel however you want no matter what anyone else does or doesn't do. If you throw away your manual you may end up doing things that you don't want to do but your relationships will improve dramatically. The truth is, you just like other people in your life, don't have to follow your manual. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do either.

Take some time to consider this idea. Are you willing to give up your manuals? Are you willing to let go of your expectations that are based on what you want in your life and focus all that time and energy on yourself and creating the best life that you can, for yourself, that isn't dependent on anyone else's behavior and in fact is only enhanced by being around people who genuinely are only doing things they want to do. Not doing things because you are emotionally manipulating them or requiring them to behave in a certain way.

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I promise you, it's a game changer. Try it out. Until next time, I'll talk to you all later. Peace.

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