

Ep #202: Confirmation Bias



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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.

Well hello, my friends. How are you? I'm so good today. We just finished up doing what we call a Model-thon, which is basically a program for Self-Coaching Scholars who have been in Scholars six months or more, so they are a VIP. Once you have VIP status in Scholars, then you can come to a live event we call the Model-thon. It's an entire day of me coaching and doing models and demonstrating the power of The Model. It's absolutely free once you're a VIP.

So this time was super fun because we had what we call Diamond members there, and if you've been in Scholars for an entire year, you become Diamond. And many of the people who have done Scholars the first year and had such huge results are doing it again this year with a whole new goal and a whole new focus.

So we took all the Diamonds out to lunch and then five of the people we brought back to the house and did kind of a success story day retreat, hung out at the house, had some lunch, did some videos, got our hair and makeup done. Oh my god, it was so much fun. And then we all went out to dinner.

So I've just had such an amazing time, and I am back in the office today and just pumped and ready. We had so many people coming up to us during the model-thon telling us the most outrageous success stories of what they've been able to accomplish within a year, which of course, is so amazing for them and we're so stoked for them and we're so proud of ourselves to create a program that really invites that kind of accomplishment.

So I'm just stoked. I'm just super happy right now. I also have a whole new list of topics that I want to cover with you guys over the next few months.

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I've been reading a lot and I've been reading two types of books. I've been reading a lot of books on management and leadership and running organizations, and I've been reading a lot of books on the mind and thought work and the science of mind management.

So I'm excited to share actually, both of my findings in both of those areas. One of the reasons why I really like to share my own personal growth here as a CEO building my business, trying to hire a CEO to come in and be able to take over my business is because so much of that is mind management and self-coaching.

There is knowledge I need to learn and there are skillsets I need to develop, but more than anything, it's really just me managing my mind and seeing how in an organization when you manage your mind, you really can manage other people so much better. And I'm going to share some stories about how I was mismanaging people because I wasn't managing my mind, and I'll just give you a hint. If you are managing from any kind of negative emotion, you are not going to be effective, and I really struggled over the past few months taking the time to back up and coach myself before I manage my people. And they seem to really appreciate me doing that, and it's much more effective.

So I want to share that in some upcoming podcasts, and especially in the entrepreneur course within Scholars. So those of you who have your own business who are managing people can use these tools to really be more effective. I also really want to do some work on how to be a great employee. I have way too many of you complaining about your jobs, and not being able to enjoy your jobs, and that's totally unnecessary. No matter what job you're in, I know you think your job is terrible, but I want to help you enjoy your job by just being able to show up as you, in a way that maybe you aren't doing now. So, coming attractions, my friends.

Today though, we are going to talk about the concept of confirmation bias. And this is a psychological term, I learned it 20 years ago when I went through my psychology degree at Santa Clara. And I have been seeing it clearly in my students and in my clients ever since. And I think it's important

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to remember that confirmation bias is actually something that all human beings have naturally. It is part of the way we have evolved to actually keep us evolving, to help us survive.

I've talked about before about how the brain is designed is we didn't get a brand new brain when we evolved, we just kind of kept adding, and when I say we, I mean as the human species. We have kind of a higher level brain over a more primitive brain. And so we actually need to use that higher level brain to manage our survival brain that still thinks that we're in imminent danger every five minutes.

So I want to define that confirmation bias is the human reflex - and it's important that you know that it's a reflex, to interpret new information as being supportive of the opinions we already hold. We actually search for things in the world that support our beliefs that we already have. And there are examples of this everywhere. And when you become familiar with The Model, you can see how not only do we eliminate things that prove our beliefs wrong and search for things that prove our beliefs right, but in that process, we actually create more evidence that proves our beliefs right.

Most of us do not go out in the world trying to prove ourselves wrong. It feels terrible to be proven wrong. It feels amazing to be proven right. It makes us feel smart, it makes us feel confirmed, it makes us feel confident, makes us feel in control. So in my work as a coach, what I'm doing pretty much all day long is helping my clients question their current belief systems and be willing to prove themselves wrong, even though it feels terrible in the short term, so they can enjoy the benefit of having the changed belief in the long run.

So you can see confirmation bias when you see two people who experience the exact same event and use it to prove a conflicting belief true. So if you go into an event and you see a person talking, and you believe that this person is a terrible person, everything they say, everything they do, you will use as evidence to confirm that they're a terrible person. If another person comes to the same event and thinks that person is

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wonderful, they will use everything they do and everything they say to prove that they're wonderful.

And in fact, if they do something in the exact contrast to what you believe about them, you will make up a story to justify it so you can maintain your belief system. The only time we really shift our belief systems is when there is something glaring that we are willing to believe and feel terrible about in order to change our belief system.

So for example, if you are in love with your mate and you think they're the most amazing mate in the whole world, and you think they're the love of your life and you devoted your whole life to them, and you find out that maybe they lied to you about something, you are going to want to explain that away. You are going to want to justify it. You are not going to want to explore that lie and reveal that lie and talk about that lie in a way that would require you to change your belief that they are the love of your life.

This is why so many of us can be blind to things happening right in front of us, and it's not that we're dumb at all, and it's not that we're not aware. It's that our brain is always in a state of confirmation bias. So if we are looking for proof that someone's amazing, we are going to find it. And by the way, this is a beautiful thing. This is a great thing when whatever it is we are proving true feels great and serves us in our lives. It is not a good thing when we're confirming something that is negative and that is hurting us in our lives.

So for example, if I have a belief that I'm amazing and great, I can find and look for lots of evidence that I am amazing and great, and I will find it everywhere. I can also have a belief system that I'm worthless and that I'm not good. And I can find evidence for that as well, and I can make up stories about the things that I do or don't do that will prove that true.

So why is this important for us to understand? It is important because whatever it is we believe is what we are cementing. It is what we are looking for to prove true. And in my first part of work with people, one of the

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things that they don't realize is what it is they believe that they're constantly proving true.

So when I get clients that have never thought about what they think about, they don't even know the reoccurring thoughts that are driving their confirmation bias. They just think it's the way the world is, or the way they are. They don't recognize that really what's happening is they have an underlying thought that they may not be aware of that they are constantly proving true, and that's why a lot of my students and clients will say to me, "But it feels true." And I'll say to them, "Of course it feels true. You've been thinking it your whole life, you've been proving it true your whole life to yourself, but that doesn't mean you have to keep doing that."

If you believe that there's something wrong with you and that you are damaged, and you can look at your life and find lots of evidence for that being true, you can look in your day and find lots of evidence for that being true, you can look at what other people say. That doesn't make it true. That just makes it a confirmation bias that you have been constantly searching to prove true.

So that is why many of us can see different realities based on the same set of facts. I've had clients who have been molested and abused as children that see themselves as heroes for having survived it. They see their selves as stronger because of the way that they dealt with it and they use that in their life to be more powerful in the world.

I have same clients who have gone through that same experience, you know, traumatic experience that identify as victims, that don't even recognize that they're identifying as victims, and therefore showing up disempowered in their life, in a way that isn't even necessary, and in a way that's causing them such undue suffering.

Exact same situations, childhoods, torment, horrible things happening to them, but interpreted different because of the beliefs that they took and the evidence they have been searching for ever since.

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Here's the craziest thing to acknowledge and know, is that facts don't necessarily change your confirmation bias. So sometimes you will get so many facts in your life, so many things to prove your belief wrong, and that doesn't make you change your mind. Confirmation bias is that you believe something so deeply that you don't even let the facts change your mind about it.

So for example, your husband could tell you, "I genuinely love you. I genuinely want to be with you. Will you marry me?" And you could still hold on to the belief, "He doesn't love me, he doesn't really want to marry me", even though the facts in front of you are really clear and very different. The only thing that changes a belief, and therefore the confirmation bias that goes along with it, is a decision to change the belief. That is it.

There are so many examples, and all of the books I've been reading through, there are so many examples where people believe in something so deeply that even when the evidence comes out to prove that it's not true, they're unwilling to change their belief about it because it would require them changing their identity. It would require them changing their experience of themselves, which is so challenging, right? That makes us feel very discombobulated, like we are wrong, and we don't ever want to feel wrong because we feel like that threatens the very core of who we are.

Reinterpreting reality is exhausting. If we had been interpreting reality in a certain way our entire life, we have gotten very good at interpreting reality that way. Our underlying current of thought has become habitual in a way that takes very little energy from us. So if we look at the world as a horrible place, it's actually very easy to continue to look at the world as a horrible place.

If we've always seen the world as a beautiful place, it's very easy to continue to believe that. Reinterpreting it, changing those core beliefs takes a lot of effort. And it's much easier just to stick with our current belief systems. I've seen this really be true in the weight loss and in the drinking and in the money. We have such engrained beliefs, things that we just find so effortless to believe, and it takes so much effort to change them that we

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often just give up and fall back into the comfort of believing what we've already believed.

A lot of times we think that what happened to us in our past is factual. And I want you to remember that what happened in our past is actually our interpretation of what happened in our past, and whatever it is we are believing about our past, we will remember to support that belief. That's why I have a podcast about how to change your past, because what happened to me and what happens to many of my clients is that when you change your belief systems about yourself and about the world, and about other people, you have to reinterpret the past differently in order to support your new belief systems.

So you start remembering things differently and you start thinking about things differently that literally helps you change the past and your interpretation of the way that you experienced it. If we don't question what we believe, we become prisoners of our assumptions. We become prisoners of our confirmation bias. It's such an automatic reflexive thing to do that we just continue to support what we already believe.

It's exactly the same information that I've taught you guys when I teach you about the motivational triad. This idea that our brains like to be efficient, seek pleasure, and avoid pain. Changing belief systems is the exact opposite of what our brain would like to naturally do. Our brain would naturally like to continue to confirm and be right about what we already know.

So I want you to think about this. Are you willing to be wrong about everything? How committed are you to not liking that person? How committed are you to not believing that about yourself? How committed are you to the beliefs that you were taught when you were young and never stopped believing? Because you have to be super committed because when you start changing belief systems, your brain, which is always anticipating a threat, will see it as a threat.

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Being proven wrong - have you noticed that like, when someone says, "You're wrong" about something, that you feel immediately defensive? It doesn't even matter what it's about. Like, I feel this way when I'm playing board games. Like, we have some brawls over whether someone wrote the score down right. Like, it's almost like this instinctual need to protect ourselves against the threat, against the threat of being wrong.

So when you are trying to change your belief system, when you are trying to change your belief from, "I can't lose weight" to "I can lose weight", you would think that would be easy, right? You'd think, "Oh, this new belief is so much better, it feels so much better, I want to believe in it. Why can't I believe in it?" The reason why is because your brain literally sees it as a threat to all of the knowledge its already accumulated and proven true and is very efficient at.

So knowing that I think is really important because you could have some compassion with yourself when you're trying to change. You can actually understand that being proven wrong and changing your identity is seen as a threat to your survival to your brain. It's literally seen as a threat to your survival.

So as you're going through your life, if you're able to observe yourself thinking, you will notice this pattern. You will notice yourself sinking confirming evidence and ignoring disconfirming evidence. We genuinely enjoy confirmation, and here's what's crazy. We genuinely enjoy confirmation even if the belief feels terrible and hurts. Isn't that crazy?

So if we believe that we can't lose weight - I've seen this happen with so many of my clients. They believe they can't lose weight, they come into my program with your arms crossed going, "Uh huh, sure, I'm very committed to believing I can't lose weight", and I tell them, "Listen, you can. I promise you, you can lose weight." And they're like, "I don't believe you." Right? They're totally in their confirmation bias. They want to be right about something that they really don't want to be right about. Isn't that crazy?

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It's like they don't believe me because they're so in belief about what they already believe, and in order to believe me, they have to feel as if they were wrong. They have to feel threatened, they have to, you know, really change their identity and change those belief systems, which takes a lot of effort, and it's actually very humbling.

Have you ever had something in your life that you thought was so true and you were 100% right about it, and then someone proved you wrong? And they're like, "No, look, you're totally wrong about that", you're like, "What? No, I'm not, there's no way I could be wrong about this. There's no way." And yet the evidence is right there in front of you? It just feels terrible. This happens to me and like afterwards, I'm like, "Who cares that I was wrong about that?" But your brain does, right? Because it sees it as that threat.

So even if I prove to you that you are wrong about losing weight and that you definitely can lose weight, there's still a sense of that identity shift. There's still a sense of being wrong about something that is part of the challenge of creating new belief systems. We are not motivated to consider alternatives. We are motivated to be right.

Think about this. If you believe in God, if you're someone that really believes in God, are you out there actively looking for evidence against there being a God? No. You're actively looking for evidence that there is one. If there's a certain politician that you really love, you want to talk to other people that love that politician. You want to talk to other people that have great information and proof and evidence so you can be confirmed right. You're not out there looking for evidence against that person because you don't want to be proven wrong. Isn't that wild?

So when you understand that the brain feels threatened when certainty is questioned, and long held beliefs, and you know that you would rather be right and in pain than wrong and vulnerable, you can approach your coaching sessions, you can approach your work with me - if you're someone in Scholars, you can approach your work in Scholars from that knowing.

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What human beings are best at doing is interpreting all new information so that their prior conclusions remain intact. That's from Warren Buffet. I'm going to read it to you again. What human beings are best at doing is interpreting all new information so that their prior conclusions remain intact. This is very good if your prior conclusions are awesome. This is terrible if your prior conclusions are terrible. So just be aware of that.

Being wrong is difficult for our brains, but that's okay. Be willing to be wrong about you. Be willing to be wrong about how much money you can make, be willing to be wrong about how much weight you can lose, be willing to be wrong about how you can feel. Contradicting information is something that we normally turn away from, but you can start turning towards as it applies to your belief system.

You have to have compassion with your brain. It thinks it's in danger, it thinks something scary is going on when it has to change your belief system. There's literally a grieving process even when it comes to a negative belief system, about being damaged, about being not good enough, about having horrible parents, about being a victim. Any of those things that aren't serving you that you are attached to are going to be painful to let go of. They're going to feel like the wubby. They're going to feel like the thing that's being comfortable because it's familiar.

So confirmation bias is a natural reflex that will constantly prove your prior belief systems true. Every day you go out in the world looking for evidence to prove it true. You will feel comfortable, you will feel right, and you will feel efficient. If you want to change, you need to understand this confirmation bias and you need to actually put effort into changing what your default thinking is.

Your default thinking is easy and practiced. Your new focused thinking, it will take more effort, and it won't feel as good. But eventually, your new focused thought, your deliberate thought will become your new belief system, and then my friends, your confirmation bias will serve you because you will believe that you are amazing and awesome and successful, and thin, and capable, and in control. And everything you see in the world will

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be confirming that because of confirmation bias and because of what your brain is looking for.

So use this natural tendency and this natural reflex to get exactly what it is you want in your life. Have an amazing week, my friends, I will talk to you next week. Take care. Bye-bye.

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