

Ep #204: Cognitive Dissonance



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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.

What is up, my beautiful friends? Okay, it's finally warm in Dallas. I thought Texas was warm all the time. I was wrong. It gets cold here. I've been coaching myself a lot on it. Everyone told me it was hot in the summer, no one told me it's freezing in the winter. So my husband told me I have to stop talking about the weather so much.

He's like, "People from California are obsessed with the weather." So anyway, today's gorgeous, I had a gorgeous walk with the dogs, super amazing day so far. Stoked to be here with you. Today I'm going to talk to you about cognitive dissonance, which sounds very formal, and very sophisticated. And I just want to make sure that I define it for you as feeling like ass.

That's how we're going to sum up what cognitive dissonance is. Feeling like ass. Here's what cognitive dissonance is. Now, cognitive refers to the mind, right? Dissonance is basically the dissonance between two thoughts that you're holding simultaneously. And when you have two thoughts that contradict each other in your brain, you are going to have mental discomfort.

So two contradictory thoughts in your brain are going to cause mental discomfort. Well, this is a problem because remember, your thoughts create your reality. So anytime you want to create a new reality or get a new result, you have to create a new thought, which means what, my friends?

Mental discomfort. Cognitive dissonance. You have one thought that says, "I can make this much money", you have a new thought that says, "I can make more money." Boom. Cognitive dissonance. You have a thought, "I

Ep #204: Cognitive Dissonance

currently can't lose any weight", you have another thought, "I think I might be able to lose weight." Boom. Cognitive dissonance.

So this is the reason why most people don't want to set goals. Because as soon as you set a goal, it requires you to change your belief system about yourself, which immediately creates what, my friends? Cognitive dissonance. Mental discomfort. So it's easier just not to set goals, and then we don't ever have to be uncomfortable or disappointed.

And you know if that's you, because what happens is as soon as you start feeling that mental discomfort, your brain tells you, "Hey, you don't have to be uncomfortable about this. Just give up on that goal, and then you'll be back to homeostasis, everything will be the same. We'll keep believing all the old thoughts that we've always believed, and that's more efficient anyway, and then we can settle into some comfort."

Unfortunately, for most of us, our dreams keep tapping at us, and so cognitive dissonance is something that is actually required in order for us to live the best version of our own lives. So I want to talk to you about the idea that new beliefs that contradict old beliefs are actually very confronting and seemingly dangerous to the brain.

The brain, remember, wants to be right. It has that confirmation bias. It's always wanting to prove what it already knows true. That's what gives us a lot of security and certainty and comfort and efficiency. And when we go to prove ourselves wrong, which is ultimately what we're doing, when we want to create new versions of our own life is we have to be willing to be confronted by our own selves, by our own belief systems.

And that is a hard sell. I want to tell you guys that. That is what I've been selling my clients for a long time. I'm like, "Hey, guys, you want to feel mentally uncomfortable for a while? That will be super fun. Do you want to be confronted and proven wrong? Come on, join The Life Coach School. It'll be a blast."

Ep #204: Cognitive Dissonance

But that's truly what you have to do. That's truly what you've done every single time you've grown to that next level. When you have given up negative belief systems about yourself, thoughts that have been proving negative things true and creating results that you don't want, you've had to confront those beliefs and be willing to be uncomfortable for a significant period of time.

So let me summarize how this looks visually. I want you to visualize The Model in your mind. So there's C, T, F, A, R. Circumstances, thoughts, feelings, actions, results. And that is one model that you have, and then I want you to picture another model in your mind's eye, next to this model. So there's The Model that you currently have, that's giving you the result that you currently are getting, and then there's the model that you want to have and that will give you the result that you want to have. Those are side by side.

Now, to bridge the gap in between those two models to let go of believing the one that you currently believe, and to believe the one that you want to believe, you have to go through what I call, the River of Misery, which really is the mental discomfort of cognitive dissonance, holding two contradictory beliefs at the same time.

Your brain will always encourage you to prove the new model wrong, and to prove your old model right. So you're already working against your primitive brain that is always looking for danger. And remember, new things, new beliefs, new thoughts, new actions, new results are always going to be perceived as dangerous to the primitive mind.

So knowing that going in is super important, because that mental discomfort is part of the process. It doesn't mean danger, run away. So one of the things that I've talked a lot about in Scholars, not as much on the podcast, is this idea of bridging thoughts between the two models. Sometimes I call it laddering thoughts.

So a lot of times when we come up with our new model, let's go back to that new model that we want to create, which is a new thought that creates

Ep #204: Cognitive Dissonance

a new feeling, that creates new actions and new results, we can't quite believe it yet. So I have a lot of clients that want to make \$100,000 but they don't believe they can make that much in a year.

So one of the things that I encourage my students to do is to bridge the gap between those two models with a model right in the middle, with a believable thought that is more neutral, that is more factual. So the example that I've used a lot is if you have a current model, where the thought is, "I hate my body", and the model that you want to get to is - the thought would be, "I love my body", and therefore I feel connected to it, and I eat only what it requires for fuel, and the result is I lose weight and I maintain my natural weight, where you might not be able to get to is, "I love my body."

Because when you hold, "I hate my body" and "I love my body" at the same time, it causes mental discomfort because they're contradictory. So one of the ladder thoughts, or bridge thoughts that you can put there is, "I have a body." Right? It's just as believable, it feels better than, "I hate my body", and it helps you get rid of the thought, "I hate my body", which is in such contradiction to "I love my body."

And so now we've kind of bridged the gap with a thought in between. So the River of Misery between "I hate my body" and "I have a body" is much less lengthy and kind of bridges you over to eventually getting to "I love my body."

This is how I do all of my work as it applies to what I want in my life. I think about a goal that I want to create in my goal, and what is the thought that I need to believe in order to achieve that result, and what do I believe now. And then I understand exactly how I need to get from where I am to where I need to be, and I sign up. I put my chips down for being uncomfortable. I am willing to be uncomfortable emotionally in order to bridge that gap, in order to get to that place where I want to be, which is on the other side of that River of Misery.

Ep #204: Cognitive Dissonance

So the question is, what is the process to doing this? And I'm going to break it down for you so you can do the same process that I do all of the time. And of course, we do this every single day in Scholars. This is actually the homework, a lot of what the homework is that I send out workbooks to create.

The first thing that everybody has to do is become aware of what it is you want. And you can't accept, "I don't know", because when you accept "I don't know", it's your brain basically telling you that the discomfort isn't worth it. As long as you're confused, you don't have to deal with the mental anguish of cognitive dissonance. It is a protective mechanism.

As soon as you know what you want, then all of a sudden, you are faced with having to deal with the new thought and the contradictory current thought, which is cognitive dissonance, okay? So decide what it is that you want, and what you need to think, feel, and do in order to create it. That is step one.

Now, as you begin to practice this new model, you will be uncomfortable. Your brain will tell you that it's dumb, your brain will produce and sabotage you to create evidence to prove that you will never be able to make \$100,000, or lose weight, or public speak, or quit your job, or find the man of your dreams, or get pregnant.

Whatever it is you're trying to do with that new model, your brain will immediately tell you why it's impossible, and you will try something to prove it true, and you will not be able to produce that result at first, and you will feel so uncomfortable, that the ultimate answer will be to give up and go back to your current model, which feels tried and true. It feels like an old pair of jeans that you can just slip right back on and say, "Yep, you were right brain, I can't do that thing."

So decide what you want, and practice believing it, even though it's super uncomfortable, even though you're experiencing cognitive dissonance. Allow it to be there. Plan on it being there.

Ep #204: Cognitive Dissonance

The next step, what you want to do is you want to start disproving that old belief system. So the belief system that you currently have we're going to call the old one. So if you're someone that wants to lose 50 pounds, let's say, and you have a belief system that it's impossible to lose weight, that there's something physically wrong with you, you're going to have to face the reality that as long as you keep believing that, and you believe that you can lose weight, you're going to be in a lot of mental anguish.

And I've even seen people be in mental anguish hold both of those beliefs true, lose the 50 pounds, and then gain it all back so they can go back to their old belief system. It's crazy. But if you're aware of it ahead of time, and you recognize that your brain will always want to keep proving its original belief true, then you can circumvent it.

So you have to start disproving that. You have to be willing to be wrong. So one of the ways that you can do that is by backing away from your own mind and recognizing that what you believe now is simply a sentence in your mind. All beliefs are just simply sentences. So if you back up and you look at this sentence, "I can't lose weight", and you see that that's optional, it's not a fact, it's not something you have to believe, then you can decide ahead of time that you don't want to believe that anymore.

And you are going to go about and prove it wrong. And that my friends, is what's crazy about this. So if you think about this belief, "I can't lose weight", you would think, "Eww, that's a gross belief, I want to get rid of it. I don't want to keep thinking that." But that is not true. Your brain really likes that thought because you've been thinking that for so long, and you've proven it so true, and your brain is very efficient at it, and it feels protective, right?

It doesn't want you to go out there and try and lose weight and fail at losing weight. It wants to keep you in the comfort of the cave. So you have to know that that's what's coming whenever you set out on some big goal, and you have to start proving it untrue with everything that you have.

Ep #204: Cognitive Dissonance

Then you start proving the new belief true. Now, if that seems too extreme, if it seems like you just can't wrap your mind around it, if there's so much mental anguish that you can't even get there, that's when it's appropriate to create a bridge thought. That's when it's appropriate for you to create a ladder thought between the two thoughts. "I hate my body", "I have a body", "I love my body."

Or maybe it's, "I can't lose weight", "I am losing weight", "I can lose 50 pounds." "Losing weight is possible", or one of the bridge thoughts that's really powerful is "I am willing to consider that I can lose weight."

For those of you who are in Scholars, and especially if you are a VIP member, there is a course in the podcast live, where one of our master coach instructors teaches ladder thoughts. So you want to make sure you go in there and check that out if that's something you want to dive into deeper.

It's a more advanced concept, and we give lots of ideas about how to do that, but for the rest of you, what I really want you to think about is just find a middle neutral thought to land on, to let your brain believe. Going from, "I can't lose weight" to, "Losing weight is a possibility." That is true. Losing weight is a possibility. You may not be able to get to, "I can lose weight" or, "I can lose 50 pounds", but "losing weight is a possibility" is a nice middle landing thought.

"Making more money is a possibility." "It's likely that someone like me could make more money." See what I'm saying? It's like you're gently easing yourself into that River of Misery so you can let go of the shore of that old belief system and kind of let it float away, and move towards the new belief system that's coming up for you.

And I think understanding cognitive dissonance is one of the most powerful things that you can know because otherwise, you're not understanding why going after your dreams feels so terrible, and why giving up feels so good. And now you know, because your brain doesn't like it. Your brain doesn't like change, it doesn't like striving, it doesn't like new things.

Ep #204: Cognitive Dissonance

Now, what your brain does love is accomplishment, right? It's a total contradiction. It doesn't want you to get started, it doesn't want you to set these big goals, it doesn't want to experience the cognitive dissonance, but as soon as you traverse that River of Misery and you accept and embrace that new model, then your brain gives you that accomplishment dopamine hit.

So there is a reward waiting on the other side of it. You just have to be willing to go through the process of holding those two contradictory thoughts at the same time until you can let go of the old one and truly embrace the new one.

Here's what I want to teach you. When you embrace a new belief system, it becomes as efficient and easy as the old one was. I used to spend hours actively hating myself and my body. The self-loathing was a habit literally, that my brain was tuned into, locked into, and very efficient at. And I spent a lot of time traversing those waters to get to the belief system that I love my body, my body is my human vessel, and I appreciate everything about it. That comes so easily and naturally to me now.

When I have any kind of negative thought about my body, or any kind of negative experience, it's so contradictory that that's what causes the cognitive dissonance now. You see what I'm saying?

Like, what used to cause me cognitive dissonance were the positive thoughts that now I've gotten myself on this subject, that what causes me anguish is the cognitive dissonance if I have a negative thought. And when you get to that point, then you can release all the negative thinking around that one area, and your brain can be utilized to process and encourage positive thinking. And that, ultimately, is our goal.

Alright my friends, heavy topic today, but really useful. Have an amazing, wonderful week, and I'll talk to you next week. Bye-bye.

Hey, if you enjoy listening to this podcast, you have to come check out Self-Coaching Scholars. It's my monthly coaching program where we take all

[The Life Coach School Podcast](#) with Brooke Castillo

Ep #204: Cognitive Dissonance

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