

Ep #304: Being Selfish



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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.

Well, hello, my friends. I am still in Grand Cayman. I'm looking out at the beautiful water, and I want to talk to you all about selfishness. I've been here for the past week, training master coaches.

And it has been such an amazing dream, such a surreal experience that this is my life and that I get to be here with all these coaches and enjoying such an amazing experience while I'm giving them everything that I know about coaching so they can go out in the world and apply it to their lives and to their clients' lives. And it feels like such an honor and a privilege.

And I feel like a lot of the themes that come up, often, with this type of experience, is the idea of selfishness. And when I talk to people outside of my industry, I often get, "Well isn't all this self-care, self-importance movement kind of narcissistic? Isn't it kind of selfish? Isn't it just all about me, me, me, me, me?"

And I look at people that ask me this question puzzled. And I think it's because they say that as if it's a bad thing, as if when we focus on ourselves, that somehow, we're doing it wrong, that we should be focused on other people only and not on ourselves. And there's something, to me, that is so illogical about that theory and about that question that I wanted to do a podcast and just address it.

Now, for some of you, this will seem super basic, but I think it's a concept that is worth diving into because of this idea that it's not okay or it's not good to focus on ourselves, that we call that selfish as if it is a bad thing.

So, I want to kind of set this up in a way where it's really easy to understand. And so, I looked up the definition of selfish, which is a

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derogatory term. But really, when you look it up, it says, “You put your needs and your desires before other people’s.” And I kind of laughed when I read that definition because I feel like that’s really the only way to show up in the world in any kind of way to contribute.

You have to show up for yourself first. You have to know yourself. You have to understand your brain. And then, from there, you have so much more to contribute.

I believe that, within most of us as humans, there is an intrinsic desire to give and contribute. And I think that that’s impossible to do if you don’t have a well from which to draw from. And I’ve seen this happen especially in women where this idea has gotten into their brain that it’s very important not to be selfish and to give at our own expense, which is, I guess, the opposite of selfishness, which is we go and we give and we give and we give with no regard to what we need or what we want.

And even when I say that out loud, that makes absolutely zero sense. And the reason why is not only does that sound terrible and that’s not the purpose of our life. But it also is impossible to sustain because you’re constantly depleting yourself got other people at your own expense.

At the other end of that spectrum is only thinking about yourself and taking from other people at their expense in order to satisfy your own whims. Now, that’s what I think being selfish is; taking for yourself with no regard for others. But the way that it is defined and the way that many of us have been taught is that, if we don’t put others first, then we’re somehow being selfish.

And I’d like to teach that there is a place right in the middle where we fill ourselves up first, we take care of ourselves first, we understand our own brains first, we spend the time we need to get to know ourselves and love ourselves. And from that space, we can give way more than we can than trying to pour from an empty pitcher. We fill up our own pitcher and then we can fill so many more glasses from that place.

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I was thinking about my own life, especially here as I am doing this training. I was thinking about my own life and how I had to focus on myself at the expense of the rest of my own life literally. I had to dive into my own brain and my own emotional life. I had to study. I had to take care of myself. I had to isolate myself in a way where I could really be alone with my own thoughts to reconcile what was going on for me and why I was acting out.

Now, at that point, I could have told myself, the only thing I need to do is just go give to others. But I didn't have anything to give. I couldn't even function, basically. And for me to try and go and give my life away when I was so full of negative energy and pain would have been terrible for me. It would have been at my own expense.

Now, someone else would say, "Oh look, she's so selfless. She's so self-sacrificing. That's a really positive quality" And I would disagree with that because I would think that my ability at that level would have depleted me and would have been very limited. But because I took that time to really get to know myself and take care of myself and listen to my own desires and honor my own wishes, then I was so full of abundance and understanding and self-care and self-love that the amount that I have been able to give since then has been huge. And the ripple effect of that has been, like, immeasurable.

We were just talking about how, because I studied all this material and learned it and then turned around and taught it, not only did I learn it more, but then someone else learned it and taught it to someone else and then taught it to someone else and then taught it to someone else. And so, the ripple effect of everyone being able to learn it and fill themselves up and then contribute even more to the world became compounded.

And so I think back to those days, if someone would have told me I was being selfish when I was really working on myself and focusing on myself, I might have believed them and then ended up ultimately not being able to contribute and really being a burden at someone else's expense because I couldn't function.

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And so I want to offer this idea to those of you who may be feeling like, is this self-help journey really something that is going to make my life bigger in terms of my contribution to the world, or is it going to make it smaller because all I'm doing is focusing on me?

I'll give you an example of maybe a mother who is taking care of children and working a job and taking care of her home and having a relationship with her husband and trying to show up for all the things and all the people and for everyone else's needs who isn't taking care of her own needs.

These are women that come into my world and tell me they're exhausted and they hate their life and they show up with resentment and they feel depleted constantly. And when I try to introduce them to the idea of really taking care of themselves and understanding themselves and honoring their own needs and even their own desires for just the little things in their life, it feels selfish to them. It feels like they're doing it wrong.

And when I tell them to do it anyway, I say, "Please do this anyway and trust me that this is actually the biggest contribution you can make to the world is by taking care of yourself so you do have more to give, so you're showing up for your kids not out of resentment and self-sacrifice, but out of love and excitement and energy, then you will notice that giving can be something that energizes you instead of something that depletes you.

And this has been my experience. When I take care of myself first, when I set proper boundaries and tell the truth and I'm really clear about what I want to do and what I don't want to do and I show up from authenticity instead of obligation, I have twice as much energy.

And when I do those things out of authenticity and truth, they energize me so I have even more to give. I even have more to offer. And then I notice that my circle of giving, my ability to contribute becomes bigger and bigger and compounded and fun. There's not resentment in the giving because I have plenty to give because I've taken care of myself first.

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One of the areas where this really shows up, and one of the things that we're talking about in Scholars is in our decisions. So, our point of power being in the decisions that we make. And a lot of times, we won't make a decision if we have judged it to be selfish or self-serving because we think, "Oh this decision that I'm making will upset other people."

And one of the things that I want you to consider is that sometimes people will be upset by the actions that you take because you're withdrawing some giving that you had been giving. So, for example, if you'd always made lunches for everyone and you've always been the one to clean the house and you've always been the one to put the fresh flowers in and make all the beds and you're always the one that's cleaning up the office for everyone and so you're giving all those things. And then you stop doing all those things that people have come to expect, and it feels like you're taking from them.

So, I want to be clear; when you have been giving something and contributing something at your own expense, when you withdraw that giving, that is not at someone else's expense. When you take back something that you had been giving, that's not at their expense.

Now, if you expect them to do something for you at their expense, which is different than withdrawing your own giving but you're asking them to do something for you at their own expense, that is very different. And this is a huge distinction that you have to be clear about.

Withdrawing some kind of contribution that you have been making is not selfish. That is not at your own peril because it's not asking someone to do something they don't want to do. It's not at their expense.

So, if you would say, "I want you to give me your time. I expect you to give me your time because I want it and I need it," that's at someone else's expense. But if you say, "I'm no longer going to give you my time," and they're upset about it, that is not at their expense. You're not making a withdrawal from their life. You're just taking part of your life back.

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And so, when you're sitting down to make decisions and you feel this sense that you might be being selfish, where you're asking someone to give up something in their life for you that will deplete them that's something to really consider.

Maybe that is something that is unrealistic and will wear them out and will exhaust them and won't serve the world. So, you should really consider that if you want someone to give up something just so you could have it. But that's very different than you kind of bringing back your own energy for yourself first before you go back out into the world and offer it as a gift or as a contribution.

Self-regard is something that a lot of us are unfortunately missing, a regard for ourselves. We're trying to go out and get approval from people outside of us. We're trying to get regard from people outside of us by giving up ourselves to them in so many ways; people-pleasing and trying to make them like us, and in many instances, lying and doing stuff we don't want to do and being full of resentment just so other people will like us, so we can feel like we have some sense of being part of a group that likes us because we don't have any self-regard for ourselves.

What I want to recommend is that it's so much more effective for everyone when you have the regard for yourself first and then you offer from that place. You take actions out into the world based on your own self-respect and your own self-regard, not in an attempt to get it from someone else because you're so empty.

And the reason why that doesn't work is because of the resentment. It's exhausting. So, if I go do something, like, let's say my friend says, "Will you come to this bake sale with me? Will you bake some baked goods and come to this bake sale with me and sell some cupcakes for my son's school?"

And let's say I don't want to do that at all, that's not something I feel like is true for me or authentic to me, that I say yes because I want her to like me.

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And so, I go, and the whole time I'm there, I don't want to be there and I'm pretending I want to be there and I'm saying nice things and I'm being lovely to people and being lovely to my friend and she's super happy that I'm there. So, it feels like, on the outside, that it's a good thing.

But on the inside, I don't really want to be there, so it's really just a lie. It's, really, I'm a little bit resentful about it. And so that wears me down. That wears me out. I don't get energized by that contribution. I get depleted by it.

But on the other hand, if my friend were to say, "Hey, will you come to my kid's school and talk to them about the self-coaching mode? I'd love for them to learn it. We have it all set up. You just need to show up and teach us about the model, teach the kids about the model." That feels authentic to me. That feels exciting to me. That's a yes.

So, from that place, I look forward to it. I'm excited about it. I go and I work with the kids and I'm energized and engaged with it. Now, it's still a contribution, but it's a contribution that fulfills me and fills me up, which gives me more energy to give more, versus being in a situation where I feel resentful.

Now, let's say I say to my friend, "I don't want to come to the bake sale. I don't want to bake goods and I don't want to sell baked goods at your son's bake sale." Am I being selfish because I'm putting my needs and my desires and my wants ahead of hers? Some people would say yes. And maybe she would say, "Well what are you going to do instead?" And I say, "I'm going to stay home and read a book."

"It's very selfish. You should want to help me versus doing what it is you want to do." And that's tricky, because you could see how someone could convince you that that's a valid argument. But what I want to say, and it's kind of what I want to give permission to all of us to do, is to say no when yes is a lie. It's not selfish to tell the truth. In fact, it's so much harder to tell the truth sometimes because we want to control what other people think about us.

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Why are we so worried about people thinking we're selfish? Because, on some level, we think there's something wrong with us, there's something bad about us and that we need to go prove something to the world, that we're good people, that we're not bad people.

And I think the truth is, and when we really are able to drop into this, is we can be selfish. We can put our needs first. And we can be selfless when it's true on a much bigger scale. And people will think what people will think about us based on their belief systems. And when we give into other people's belief systems, we compound them and the way that you'll know that you're doing this is you'll feel resentful and exhausted.

In order to give, you have to give to yourself first. You have to learn the skill of giving and filling yourself up, so then you can go out in the world and give.

Now, here's the thing; I spend a lot of my time thinking about other people and how to help them in a way that feels authentic to me. I think about you all a lot of the time and how I can give to you and how I can contribute to you and how I can give you ideas. And I do that by first filling myself up, by first helping myself and looking at my own problems and solving them and then being able to go out and give them.

Now, this comes up a lot when we're talking about money too. And if you earn a certain amount of money, how much do you give that money away? How much do you use that money to contribute? And how selfish is it when you buy yourself something? Or how selfish is it when you spend it on like a luxury item? And what should you be doing with that money?

And I want to offer, and I think this is really important for you to know, is first of all, it's your money that you get to decide what you want to do. No one else's opinion needs to be taken into consideration. It's your money. So, your opinion is the opinion that matters.

But you often may not know what your opinion is because of all those voices going on out there. And so, one of the things that I like to do when I

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am spending money or giving money or saving money or any things that we can do with money, is to check in and see how does this feel and why?

And I never give out of obligation because that doesn't feel true to me. And I want to have pure integrity with my money. And so, I take a pause when someone asks for money or asks for a donation or asks me to contribute to something. I take a pause and check in, is this a true contribution? Am I doing this because I want to affect how this person is thinking about me? Am I trying to manipulate the way I think about me? Or is this a true honest contribution that energizes me, that fills me with abundance and truth and integrity?

And because someone else doesn't see that is okay. I'm the one that needs to see it. It's not selfish to live form your truth, even if someone else thinks you should be doing something else for them or for their cause. And a lot of people who are self-sacrificing get upset when other people aren't.

So, there's two ways you can approach this. You can decide that the word selfish is actually not a negative thing. It's the first step in being selfless. We have to be selfish and take care of ourselves and put our needs first, then we can be selfless in a much bigger way.

Or, we need to eliminate that word from and replace it with self-care, instead of calling ourselves selfish, if that doesn't feel good to you, you can call it your own self-care and make that the priority. And we don't give until we've filled ourselves up. We don't give until we've told ourselves the truth and made that happen.

And when people come to us and say, "You're spending all this time working on yourself." You can say, "Yes, I am. I'm thinking about myself; I'm finding out what I want, I'm figuring all that out because I know that within me there is a desire to give and I can't give if I don't have anything to give. And I want to fulfill that desire that I have to be able to contribute because that's a human need I think most of us have."

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And when we try to give and deplete ourselves from that empty pitcher, we never can give enough to ourselves or to others. Step one, be selfish, fill yourself up from that full place, start giving, and notice the momentum. Notice the energy that comes from that.

And the final thing I want to add is there's some of us who do try to take at other people's expense. We do want other people to change so we can have what we want. And that is truly a negative thing. That is truly something that won't serve you or the other person, asking other people to sacrifice at their expense so you can have your needs met, so you can have something you want.

It's trying to control other people so you can get all your check boxes checked. People will do that to you and you need to recognize it, or they'll try to do it and they will be well-intended because they're trying to get their needs met, and that's an important thing for you to recognize that, if you don't follow through on that, does not mean that you are selfish.

But also, noticing that when you want other people to change who they are or lie about it or do stuff they don't want to do, that is not going to serve you or the world, or the other person. So, it does go both ways.

And the way that I like to think about it is I need to live from my truth, even when that's challenging and I need to allow other people to be who they are, even when that's challenging. And when they can fulfil their own needs and I can fulfil my own needs and we can be completely full, then from that place, we can make a contribution that is bigger than anything that we could do when we were feeling depleted or pulling from each other.

If that person is giving up their truth in order to satisfy my needs, I'm never going to get my needs met because they can't satisfy what I need. And I'm always going to be dependent on what they are able to give me, and so I'm always going to have that nervousness that they can take it away.

But when I take care of all of those things, when I'm, quote unquote selfish, for myself first and not selfish in the way where I expect other people to do

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it, but just for me to do it, from that place, I can show up and give more to the world.

So, here's to being selfish first so you can then be selfless. And the next time someone calls you selfish, you can simply say thank you. Have a great week, everybody. Talk to you soon.

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