

Ep #120: Lessons Learned from Tom Sterner



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

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

120. Wow my friends. Time is a-flying. How are you? How are you guys doing? Hi Stacy and Nicole. Stacy and Nicole are like my super fans. Love the podcast. I gave them a shout-out like a year ago and they were so excited about it and then I just saw them at Mastermind and they asked for another shout-out, so there you go my friends, there's your shout-out. I love you guys so much. They're killing it in their businesses. I'm so proud of them.

Here's what happened. We have once a year a mastermind where everybody who goes through my coach training for weight coaching or for life coaching certification or both get to come to my Mastermind event, which is held once a year and at no extra charge, they come. What we did this year is we had an evening where many of the coaches spoke. I will have those videos available on the website very soon. They were amazing! We had like a good dessert reception.

Then we had an amazing day of coaching with me and everybody breaking up into groups and masterminding. Then we had a guest speaker day. I usually don't tell my students who the guest speaker was, but...I always have them read a book for Mastermind that we usually discuss. The book that I had them read was called "The Practicing Mind" by Tom Sterner. It's such a fantastic book. I had them read that and then I had Tom come and speak, which of course they absolutely loved, loved, loved. Then I had my CFO, Mark Butler come and speak in the afternoon, which was fantastic and hilarious and great. We had a lot of banter, he and I, back and forth.

This podcast is about Tom. Tom's amazing! One of the things that I love about Tom is that, first of all, he spoke at my event and then took my son golfing. He trains junior golfers and works with them on their mental game. Tom is an absolute pro when it comes to helping people figure out the power of practice and how when you learn to love practicing you can achieve excellence in any area of your life.

I think that that is something that I've said in so many of my podcasts and so many of my emails that it's so important that you know what

you're practicing, what you're repeating, because you are what you repeatedly do. You are creating that model for yourself. We are such a culture of wanting to get to the end of things, wanting to arrive at things, that we really forget the practice that it requires to get us there.

One of the things that I think is so important when it comes to the work that I'm doing on this podcast and what I'm teaching you, is that it's so important to understand that learning the model is not the same as doing the model. When you learn the concepts and you learn intellectually, what's happening, that is not the same thing as applying it to your life and practicing it in your practice. I think that the lessons that Tom teaches us are so important when it comes to mastering something and having something become automatic in your life. The way that you have something become automatic in your life is by doing it over and over and over again.

When we do something so many times our brain gets really comfortable with it, our brain likes to be efficient, and it files it away so that we can then do it without having to have a lot of conscious thought around it. But what I have found is that with most of my students and with myself doing something enough times so it becomes automatic is very challenging, because especially in the beginning when we're learning something we aren't very good at it. So doing something over and over and over again that we're not very good at is incredibly challenging in our quick fix culture.

One of the stories that he tells in the book that really resonated with me, I think because my son has now become a golfer, for those of you who have been listening to this podcast for a while, you've seen his transition from soccer player into a golfer...one of the examples Tom uses in his book is how he learned how to play golf and how we went to the classes and once a week they would meet, but he would always do what the teacher told him to do. The teacher gave him some things to practice at home, and he actually went home and did them. Like what a concept. He practiced everything, and so he would come back every week and be better and better and better at it. Whereas the other people in the class, they just simply wanted to play the game. They wanted to be at the end game. They wanted to be scoring and be on the course.

It just hit me really hard that swinging a golf club with a half swing 100 times in a row is not the end game, but it makes the end game so much more enjoyable. If you can enjoy the practice of something, then ultimately you will enjoy the end game so much more.

When somebody says to me about the model, “I really like the model, but it’s cumbersome and challenging for me to use it,” I know that they haven’t been practicing. The question becomes, how do we get ourselves to practice? How do we practice the goal, and how do we develop the meta skill of being a good practitioner? When Tom was speaking to us, he was talking about all these things that he does, like all these sports and musical instruments and skills that he has. I think if you’re a good practitioner, you will want to do more and new things because you will be willing to practice and then get good at them.

Most of us don’t want to do new things, we don’t want to learn new languages or learn new skills, because we have no tolerance for not being good at something, we have no enjoyment of the practicing of something. One of the things that I think had the biggest impact on me that he talked about during our Mastermind session was the idea of meditation. So many of my colleagues and students and friends have issues with meditation because they feel like they’re not doing it right. People look at other people in low disposition meditating and it looks like they’re so peaceful, it looks like they’re so Zen.

I’ve said for years like just, “Because you look, someone looks peaceful while they’re meditating, doesn’t mean they are.” That’s something that he really agreed with and basically said, “Look, if you can sit down and watch yourself think for 10 minutes, you’re doing it right. And if you get pulled away from your mind and you feel agitated and frustrated, you’re doing it right. That is meditation. Meditation isn’t sitting there and being Zen and not grappling with your mind. Meditation is sitting there and being aware of your mind and watching your mind grapple with itself basically. And so if you can sit there for 10 minutes, you’re an expert already.”

So many of us love the way he said that because it felt like something that we could continuously do and not have to be better at it than we

are. I think that kind of sums up everything that he's talking about when he refers to practicing something, is being able to do something repeatedly without judging yourself.

One of the things that he talks about is practicing your golf swing without a golf ball. I think that's a great metaphor because when you're practicing your swing and you're getting the feel for your swing, it can be challenging to not see where the ball went, to not see was that a good hit, was that a bad hit, would that have done well in a game. So when you swing your club without a ball, then it's much harder to judge yourself. Where in your life could you be practicing something where you're not keeping score and so you don't judge yourself is I think really powerful.

He talks about everything in life is practice in one form or the other. Good practice is not stressful, it's free flowing. Actively practicing something is very different from passively learning something. This is something I teach my students all the time, I teach them the difference between massive action and intellectual action. I think practice then, and I think we should add in there practice without judgment.

One of the examples that would apply to one of my coach students would be just writing blog posts without judging them, just writing them and posting them, writing them and posting them, writing them and posting them. For the act of writing, not for the judgment of whether it was a good post or not, but for the actual practice of writing and finding your voice. I had a student who went through my master coach training last year and she wrote a post every week. What she said was in the doing of that she didn't get 1,000 clients or whatever, but she found her voice and became very clear in what she's teaching. I think that's so important.

He talks about how we are basically trained to appreciate results and not the process. The way that we're raised in school, it's not how much are you learning, how much you are enjoying this, are you understanding the art of this? It's what is my grade? What do I have to do to get an A? What do I need to do to get a B? That's what matters, looking at the score card. That's exactly what we are programmed or have programmed ourselves to do. He says, "Your

goals are a compass, not the buried treasure. The goal is not the destination or where you end up, but rather the compass that guides the journey.” Oh my God, it’s so beautiful.

So instead of thinking about the goal as being where you need to be right now and you aren’t there yet, the goal is simply the direction that you’re heading, and the goal simply tells you when you’re off course. It’s not to be used as a way to punish yourself because you’re not there yet. It’s not to be used as a way of judging your progress. But rather just to know if you’re on course or if you need to make certain adjustments.

There is no point of performance you can achieve where you will feel done. Done and done. There’s no point where you’d be like, “I’ve arrived.” What’s so interesting watching my son do this with golf and watching him how every time he plays he gets a little bit better, but it’s still not good enough, because as soon as he’s knocked a stroke off his score then he wants to knock another one off. It’s no longer acceptable where he is right now. He wants to get better and better and better. Which I think is okay if you’re not constantly judging and being negative in the experience that you are, so you miss the process and you miss enjoying it. Because there’s this idea in our mind that we will get to the point that we will arrive and then we will enjoy it, but then that horizon keeps moving and we never do get to enjoy it.

Another thing that he talks about is he asked a question. I’m reading now from my notes that I took during his speech, and one of the things I wrote down is I said, “Are you in control of how you’re processing your life?” I love, love, love that. He talked a little bit about like what is your brain doing without your permission. Oh my gosh, it’s so good.

He had us do this process where we basically had to try to multitask something where he had us where instead of writing the sentence multitasking is worse. Then he had us write numbers underneath it. So basically we could write the sentence and then we could write the numbers underneath it, or we could write one letter one number, one letter one number, one letter one number. He just really showed us how multitasking takes so much longer than just doing one task at a

time, and how multitasking it really requires so much more mental energy and that no one actually does it well.

That was really powerful experience to switch our tasks back and forth. Then basically talking about what I talk about all the time is that our brain needs supervision and that question is, what is your mind doing without your permission, and if you don't give it a problem to solve it will go looking for one.

The way that he talks about practice is so ... He talks about like going to practice golf as something that gives his mind something to do, something to focus on, in a way that's very relaxing for him, that gives him a break from all of that negativity, all the negative thoughts that go on in our brain. 60% of our thoughts he says are negative and limited. When we put the brain on the task of practicing something we get a break from them, which I think is a beautiful thing and we improve at whatever it is we're doing.

He talks about simplifying things and slowing things down and shortening things. I think that we're the opposite of that. We're always trying to speed everything up and get it done faster and get it accomplished and move on and get the grade, get to the product, get to the product. The process isn't lucrative, is kind of how we will both, how we tend to think about things.

When we create the habits that we desire, when we create the unconscious habits that we really want to have so then we don't have to think about them, we have to be willing to practice, we have to be willing to do things over and over and over again. By making things like he says short and slow and simple and small, we can approach our life in a way that's much more enjoyable versus always trying to attack that huge hill and slay the dragon immediately so we can get that sense of accomplishment. Instead he talks about getting the daily sense of smaller accomplishments that add up to that big sustained accomplishment.

I have noticed this in my own life. I was actually just teaching a class today on pleasure and how we want that fast burst of pleasure that we get from false pleasures that are available to us in food, really sugary food, or in drugs, or in manmade experiences that aren't

natural, that give us that huge shot of dopamine and then it's gone. Versus kind of really practicing those natural pleasures in our life that give us the slow and steady hit of dopamine instead of all the ups and downs. I think that that's what he's talking about when he talks about just being willing to rinse and repeat, rinse and repeat.

One of the questions that he asks is what is your expectation of where you should be at this point? He had been coaching someone and they had asked. She had said to him, "I'm not where I should be," and he turned around and said, "Where should you be?" I wrote down that question, "Where is your expectation of where you should be at this point?" For me this is much more challenging to evaluate on myself than it is when I look at my son.

My son expects to improve his golf game without practicing. I see so many things in my life that I expected to improve without putting that time and that energy into doing. I expect myself to keep continually having a better and better attitude, but if I don't sit down and do my thought work that doesn't happen.

Ask yourself, where would you expect yourself to be right now, and what do you base that on? I think that's a really powerful question, what have you done? Don't look at time. Well, I've been doing this for a year. What have you been doing for a year? What have you been practicing? What have you been doing regularly? I like to talk about this with my weight loss clients, like what have you been practicing doing? Have you been practicing giving into urges? Have you been practicing giving yourself false pleasures? Or have you really been practicing the skills that you are going to need when you're not using those false pleasures in your life. Are you really processing your emotion and paying attention and meditating and looking at your mind? Because if you're not then, why would you make that expectation further down the road?

Because when you have an expectation that doesn't match what you have been practicing, you are always going to be miserable and you're not going to then create the things that you want to in your life because you will have so much judgment over how much further you have to go and the lack of action that you've taken so far. Again, remember, it needs to be the action that you've taken to practice the

thing that it is you want to do.

I highly recommend that you pick up a copy of his book, "The Practicing Mind." Master any skill or challenge by learning to love the process, developing focus and discipline in your life. I think that it's a very small book, a very easy read, but a huge life-changing read. I'm looking at it now and it's just every word is underlined.

"When we suddenly shift toward both focusing on and finding joy in the process of achieving instead of having the goal, we have gained a new skill. And once mastered, is a magical and incredibly empowering. We describe those who demonstrate this skill as possessing such qualities of self-discipline, focus, patience, self-awareness, and we recognize that these all-important virtues are interwoven threads in the fabric of true inner peace and contentment in life. With this skill, we are masters of the energy we expend in life, and without it, we are victims of our own unfocused and constantly changing efforts, desires, and directions."

Wow, that is so amazing. It is a skill. It's a skill that we develop. He says, "In our overpaced and overstressed world today, we use the word skill to define a personal asset; for example, we might say, 'That's not part of my skillset.' At the same time, our recognition of the value of possessing many diverse skills is expanding. Ironically, though, we miss the point that the ability to develop any skill as swiftly as possible, with the least amount of effort, and even to experience inner peace and joy in the process, is in fact a skill in itself, and one that requires constant practice to become an effortless part of who we are." I think this sums up that entire book, that entire process.

I told my students, I said, "If you really listen to what Tom is teaching you here, this can change your life." He's talking about the meta skill of developing a skill. He's talking about the meta skill of practicing, the ability to develop any skill as swiftly as possible with the least amount of effort. Even to experience inner peace and joy in the process is in fact a skill in itself.

That is what this book will teach you. It will teach you the skill of practicing. It will teach you the skill of having that focus and that determination and that discipline, the ability to repeat an activity with

purposeful awareness and intention of accomplishing a goal while you are present. You're not judging and frustrating at yourself because you're not at the goal yet. You're willing to be patient in that process. I highly, highly recommend that you pick up a copy of "The Practicing Mind."

I am also going to be teaching a class with Tom. I asked him if he would join me starting in July and teach a 6-part course on practicing. We're going to apply it to the model and coaching and developing the ability, the skill to practice and apply it to anything we want in our lives. If you're interested in joining me and Tom in that class, I would love to have you. Just go to thelifecoachschool.com, go under podcast, or go to thelifecoachschool.com/120. There'll be a link there where you'll be able to sign up for that class. We're going to run on Zoom, which is a video conferencing software if you want to join us for that class. I'd love to see you there. Have a wonderful and most amazing week and I'll talk to you guys next week. Take care, bye-bye.

Thank you for listening to The Life Coach School Podcast. It is my honor to show up here every week and connect with people that are like-minded, wanting to take their life to a deeper level with more awareness and more consciousness. If you are interested in taking this work to the next level, I highly encourage you to go to thelifecoachschool.com/howtofeelbetteronline. It is there that I have a class that will take all of this to a deeper application, where you'll be able to really feel and experience how all of these concepts can start showing up in your life. It's one thing to learn it intellectually. It's another thing to truly apply it to your life. I will see you there. Thanks again for listening.