

Ep #137: The Case For Pain



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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.

Hello, my friends. How are you guys? There's 150,000 of you. Isn't that crazy? 150,000 people. I'm like trying to wrap my mind around that and it's crazy. It's crazy that that's ... The possibility of that many people listening to this and that includes not just those of you who are listening to this on a Thursday because you couldn't wait for it to come out and you're listening to it and you've told me that, which is super fun, but the fact that this will probably be in iTunes for the next 15 years and people will be able to listen to it between now and then. What? It's so crazy. I love technology in the sense that it connects us and connects our ideas in a way that hasn't been available before.

When I think about so many people listening to just this stuff that I try and teach myself so I can have a better life, I feel so privileged and honored and excited about it. Today I'm talking to you all about pain. I wonder how many people didn't listen to this one because they're like, "No, thanks. I don't want to listen to pain," and the day will come back when they are in pain to listen to it. I know that that's what I do. I listen to stuff that's relevant. When I'm in a super good mood and everything is going great, the last thing I want to listen to is about someone else being in pain and the case for pain. It's one of the things that I have been talking so much about lately because I've been working so intensely with my Stop Overeating and my Stop Overdrinking clients.

The reason why we overeat and the reason why overdrink is to avoid pain. Now I want you to know that if you're one of these people like we are, the reason why we avoid pain is because that is how our brain is wired. It's not because we're wimps. It's not because we can't handle it. It's because our brain is wired to avoid pain. For so many years that kept us alive and it still serves us in so many ways to avoid pain. Pain is and has been an indicator that something's going wrong and that something needs our attention. I believe that that is still true in most cases. The way that we solve for pain is not necessarily to avoid it. If you think about the thousands of years that we've been evolving, avoiding pain has been one of our survival mechanisms.

If we touch something that's painful, if we experience something that's painful, we don't do it again. That usually keeps us alive. If there is pain in our body somewhere, it usually indicates that something's gone wrong and that we need to fix it. As we have evolved into a higher brain wave so to speak and having a higher level of brain capacity and activity. As humans, we have created a life that is pretty devoid of survival pain. For example, we're not spending a lot of time shivering and freezing all night because we're in physical pain. We're not spending a lot of time watching our loved ones get eaten by animals starving to death. We're not having to experience a lot of the survival pain that many of our ancestors did.

It's not to say that there aren't people on the planet that are experiencing that. For the most part, we have eliminated that. We have created and evolved in a way where we protect ourselves and have increased tremendously our experience of comfort and decreased our experience of discomfort as it comes to survival and physical pain and many of the emotional pains that were severe and intense and completely uncontrollable. I've said this often that what evolved us, what helped us evolve to the point where we are now is not going to keep us moving. In fact, I believe it's the exact opposite when it comes to emotional pain. Our evolution and practice of avoiding emotional pain is now causing us complete unnecessary suffering. It is devolving us in many ways.

If you think about the obesity epidemic and how we needed to always move towards pleasure when it came to getting food to survive is now the opposite of what we need to do. We need to not always move towards the pleasure of eating in order to survive. We actually need to do the opposite. We need to move away from the pleasure of eating in order to survive. I think that's true with emotional pain as well. Many of the things that I read in order to prepare for this podcast relate to physical pain and physical pain being worth it. You've heard the terminology "no pain, no gain." No physical pain of working out, you don't get the benefit of experiencing the gains, muscular gains that you would get from working out or the feel after a great workout.

I think it's also true when you think about losing someone that you've loved. Many of us know that we will experience losing someone and the more we love them, the more that pain will be. We're all in and it's

totally worth it. We know most of us will experience our parents dying and loving them will have been absolutely worth it and we will embrace the pain that we experienced when they die hopefully as a natural occurrence. If somebody dies and we feel a lot of grief, that feels normal and we're willing to experience. Most people embrace grief as part of the natural experience of being alive and having loved someone and losing someone. Many other areas of our life we do not have the same philosophy. We do not have the same approach to pain.

We spend a tremendous amount of time trying to avoid pain and think that pain is bad. I'm trying to change as many people's perspective on that as possible because I think when we avoid emotional pain because we don't know how to cope with it, we create ourselves even more pain and tremendous suffering that is compounding on natural pain. I want you to imagine ... I was thinking about this idea earlier and I've talked about this on the podcast before about the idea of heaven and how everything there is perfect and you always win the lottery and get your love of your life and you're perfect looking and there is no contrast, so you don't even know that all those things are great. I want you to imagine, who I'll call the perfect princess.

I came up with this concept because so many of us have this idea that we don't want our kids to ever experience pain. I was thinking about my son and I was thinking about how it would be so great for me if he never experienced pain because every time he's in pain, either one of my sons is in pain, I feel pain because of the way that I think about it. I'm always fantasizing about a world and a life where my children don't have to experience disappointment or grief or frustration or shame or guilt or anything. I want their lives to be perfect. It's just this natural inclination. I think a lot of you parents can probably relate to me. I was picturing him as someone that had never experienced pain. I was picturing his friends coming over and being like, "Hey," talking to him about something they've experienced like, "Hey, I broke my arm and it hurt or my girlfriend broke up with me."

If my son had never experienced pain, he would be like, "Oh, what's that like? That's weird. I don't ever experience that." It would be like he isn't even a human being if he didn't ever experience pain. He wouldn't be able to relate. He wouldn't be able to have compassion or

understanding. He wouldn't really be able to appreciate the good feelings. Because if all you have are good feelings all of the time and there's nothing to contrast them with, you can't, I don't think, appreciate them in the same way.

I came up with this idea of the perfect princess and I was trying to imagine my life as the perfect princess. Born to the perfect parents who always give me just the exact right amount of love and the exact right amount of encouragement and they love each other perfectly.

Then I have the perfect number of friends and I'm perfectly smart and I'm perfectly beautiful and I'm perfectly energized. My body is perfect. I eat the perfect amount of food. I have all these great friends and I win all the awards and I get straight A's and I'm voted "best of" for everything. I'm always featured as the perfect everything. Then I graduate as the perfect valedictorian and homecoming queen and most likely to succeed. Then I meet the perfect man and then I marry him and I have the perfect children. Of course, those children never experience any pain. I just have this perfect life.

Now this is funny to think about, but how many of us look at someone else's life on Facebook or even friends of ours and we're just convinced that they do have the perfect life? That they haven't had to go through any of the same things that we've had to. They have great families and great experiences. They're smart and they're successful.

Then I was imagining that this perfect princess had a friend who was kind of in the same life circumstances and they were both these princesses. They're both in their 40s now. They had the same life circumstances, so they were living in the same house. They had the same type of husband and children and all those sorts of things. Yet, the friend of the princess had been through horrific experiences. Had been through the pain of death and divorce and child abuse and getting her heart broken and her children suffering and just all of the things that are possible in the human experience, all the possibilities of pain in the human experience and was in the same place as the perfect princess.

I started thinking about who would genuinely be happier? Someone who had had all of those painful experiences and was really able to

appreciate where they were in their life or someone who had never had any contrasting painful experiences? Being the perfect princess would be kind of like on the edge of not even human because could you relate to someone that had never experienced any negative thing in their life? I always say like I love working with people that are just as crazy as I am, that have had as much pain and had been through hell and back. Those are the most interesting people to me and they're also usually the most compassionate because they usually understand what it's like when someone else is going through pain.

Now I'm not talking about victim pain and I think this is really important too. I think a lot of times when ... I should say I'm not talking only about victim pain. There is the pain that we experience because of things that have happened to us. Then there is also the pain that we experience because of things that we've happened to and things that we've done in our lives to ourselves, to other people by accident, on purpose, all of those things that have created pain for us. I think it's so fascinating to think about.

I was recently reading about this concept called the "blameless guilt" which I think is fascinating. There's the guilt that we experience because of making a mistake on accident and then there's the guilt that we experience because we did something on purpose.

For example, if you accidentally run over someone's dog or you're in a car accident and somebody dies in the accident, it wasn't your fault, or you mistakenly run into someone on the ... I'm trying to make up crazy stuff. You run into someone on the sidewalk and they fall and hit their head and die or whatever. Total accident. You're still going to most likely feel guilt about that experience. If I hadn't been there, if I hadn't done that, that person wouldn't have died. They call it "blameless guilt." I'm reading about a woman who had the 8 year old little girl run out in front of her car and her car struck the little girl and the little girl died. This woman was doing nothing wrong. She was just driving down the street.

She was obeying all the traffic laws and it completely ended her life because of her emotional experience of having been in this accident with this little girl. I think about all of those experiences that so many of us have to deal with. Many of us have to live our lives ... I think

about people that do really stupid things when they're young and when they're not thinking clearly. Drunk driving accidents or they get in a fight with someone and the person dies or they end up getting arrested for doing something stupid and spending time in jail and costing themselves so much of their lives. How do we live with that pain afterwards and that being the human experience for so many of us humans dealing with such tragic experiences? That's not even to mention all the pain that we experience from losing people to cancer and losing people to other illnesses and children dying.

There's all of the experiences that human beings have to endure. Most of my work is done with people who create self-induced suffering. There's this outer realm of suffering of things that happened to us, tragic things that happen to us and the way that we interpret them and apply them to our lives will really determine if we're able to go on, if we're able to survive, if we're able to keep going in a way that serves the world and ourselves. Then there's this self-induced tragedy. There's the self-loathing. There's the avoidance that creates addictions and creates so much pain and dysfunction in our lives. I believe that when we approach our lives with the understanding that pain is an inevitable part of the experience and not something that means that something has gone terribly wrong and is not something that we should avoid.

Because of where we are in evolution and because of our brains and our ability to understand our emotions and think about what we think about, we are at that place in life where we have to make conscious decisions to move towards pain in many areas of our life. I think we are at that stage in human development where that we have to evolve pass that being counterintuitive. It's a hard sell. I've talked about this before in my overdrinking podcast that to choose between the pleasure of drinking a glass of Chardonnay and the inevitable restlessness that you will feel emotionally if you don't is a ridiculously hard sell. Let me tell you. First of all, just obviously, you're choosing pain over pleasure. That in and of itself doesn't seem logical.

It seems like a very bad idea. Even with that being said just from the logical argument, then your brain is completely wired to seek pleasure. Then you take something like Chardonnay, which is a man-made substance that has artificially intensified the pleasure that our

bodies are designed to experience. It's almost you can see the impossibility of it. Not only am I having to choose pain over pleasure, but I'm having to go against my evolution and go against an artificial product that has created artificial pleasure within my brain. It'd be one thing to just overcome a regular non-artificial pleasure and choose pain over pleasure, but this is like, "No. Not only is this pleasure, but it's an artificial pleasure that's so intense and so good that to just deny yourself that in order to experience pain, it's the most illogical thing in the world."

That is why so many of us can't ever lose weight. It's like 1% of people that will lose a significant amount of weight and keep it off because you're constantly having to embrace and choose pain over pleasure when you're losing weight. Many of us think that means something has gone terribly wrong. If you think about pain being worth it and the experience of pain being part of our humanness and overcoming pain, which is something that we have done all throughout our evolution because it's been forced upon us, part of evolving has been overcoming our pain that one of the things that is so challenging now for us as humans is we're not being forced to experience pain. We have no reason to compel ourselves to evolve because we're not being forced to make that choice.

I was saying to one of my students the other day, I said, "Here's what I'm selling you. Learn how to be in pain in order to get what you want. Move towards the pain and away from the pleasure. Move against everything that your body is telling you to do instinctually." I'll tell you those of my students who practice this and do this, I feel like they are able to take their life by its tail. They are able to really then create what they want in their lives. I think that's what's being asked of us. Whereas before, our ... in a more primitive state of our evolution, we were only "being asked." This is all metaphorically being asked to survive. That's all we could possibly use our brain to do. Now I think what is being asked of us and what we are asking of ourselves is to move beyond that.

Many of us are caught into the past programming of seek pleasure and avoid pain in this environment that is artificially filled with so much pleasure that the more we seek pleasure, the more we destroy ourselves. We have to make a case for pain and the case for pain

originally is going to have to be giving up all the artificial pleasures in order to recalibrate what our body is designed to experience. Then from that place, be willing to embrace the pain of being alive. I've talked a lot about this. What that means is that 50% of the time we can anticipate and be ready for and actually embrace the pain of being human. One of the best ways I know of how to do this is to remind ourselves that we are designed to process pain.

Pain is a normal experience of a human being. If you met a human that said they had never experienced emotional pain, you would not think that that was normal. Yet, every time we experience pain we think something isn't normal. We think it's normal to be happy and then when pain and problems come, that's not normal. That needs to be fixed immediately. What if you were able to change that and say, "No. When there's pain, that's normal. When there's pleasure, that's normal. Life is supposed to be a mix of both of those and I am designed to process pain. I'm designed to be able to manage pain. I'm designed to be able to be in pain and to evolve myself beyond it." One of the ways to think about pain is that it's a bio-feedback system indicating what we're thinking about.

If you've been with me a while and you've been following this journey of these hundreds of episodes and you understand this idea, that the best way for us to actualize ourselves is to think about what we think about and then to think on purpose and deliberately and consciously. The best way that I know to be alarmed and to be messaged when we're thinking something is pain, is the emotional pain and that covers a lot of different emotions. When you're experiencing shame, something's going on in your brain. When you're experiencing frustration, something's going on in your brain. It's an indicator. It's that vibration through your body that's letting you know something's going on in the brain.

That's true when we experience tragedy in our life. Our thoughts creates our feelings based on how we think about that tragedy. How we interpret the experiences of our lives will determine what emotions we have. When you experience an emotional pain, any type of emotional pain, you can see that as an opportunity to look into your brain and see what's going on in there. What are the thoughts that I'm having and become aware of that. Now once you've increased your

consciousness to that level where you're spending time in that watcher space thinking about what you're thinking about, then you are already increasing your ability to process pain because the best way to process pain is to be able to disassociate with it enough to identify as the watcher and to watch yourself be in pain instead of just being at the effect of that pain.

At that point, understanding it provides a tremendous amount of relief when you understand that the pain is coming from what's going on in your mind. Most pain is intolerable because we resist it or we avoid it, which compounds it. If you're able to approach your life with a willingness to feel pain, a willingness to embrace it, then you will actually prevent compounding your pain and you will reduce the amount of total suffering that you'll have in your life. I don't think that you will ever reduce the overall pain in your life because I think pain is part of the human experience, but I think the way that you cope with it will either compound it or allow yourself to be present with it, which will make it much less painful. We get into trouble when we avoid and compound it and increase our suffering and give us other reasons to be upset.

For example, if when I'm feeling pain, I immediately go get something to eat and then I overeat and then I gain weight and then I feel sick to my stomach and then I feel heavy. Now, of course, I have pain about my pain. I have pain about the food that I've eaten, the weight that I'm in and also the original pain has not been processed. That's how we compound everything and make it worst. Then we think our pain is about our weight, but really it's about that other thing that we were thinking about that we can't even remember because we've been avoiding it for so long. When I say to my students, "Choose misery. Choose pain. Choose suffering," what I'm meaning by that is bring it on in a way that comes from the deepest, strongest, knowing part of you that it's normal and it's part of it and that you can handle it.

You don't want to eliminate it. You don't need to be in a hurry to get out of it. You don't need to hate it or resist it. You can see it as, "Ah, this is part of the deal. This is part of the plan. This is part of what it means to be a human being, a fully evolved human being. A human being that is present." That's what the case for pain is. That's what I want to sell you on. When you notice that you're feeling let's say

stressed, you notice that you're feeling anxious, instead of being like, "Oh, God. I feel anxious. I need to fix something. Oh, my gosh. I need to change my life. I need to change this thing," you go, "Oh, anxiety. That's part of the human experience. Oh, frustration. That's one of the emotions that human's feel. That's what it means to be alive."

Now your primitive brain will tell you something's gone terribly wrong and you're probably going to die immediately. That's what our primitive brain does, but thank goodness that we have our higher level prefrontal that can tell us, "No. You're anxious about your work. There isn't a tiger about to eat you. Being anxious about work is perfectly normal. It's part of being a human being and you can look at it and decide to change it if you want." When you start moving towards yourself, towards your humanness, towards your pain in a really confident willing space, what you do is create space around your pain.

Then the biggest thing you do is you eliminate your fear of pain. The fear of pain is what causes us to try to avoid it which what's causes us to resist it and hate it and push away from it. When we do that, we're pushing away the experience of being a human being, the experience of being alive. The example that I've used before is when you go into a place of numbness, let's say it's through medication, let's say you've taken a lot of medication that's given you to help you prevent feeling anxious or depressed or upset, you've taken all this medication and any of you who have taken antidepressants ... I've heard this from ... I haven't taken antidepressants before, but I've heard this from many of my clients, is that it reduces their depression, it reduces their anxiety, but it also reduces all of their emotions in some instances.

I'm not saying that antidepressants aren't a beautiful thing. I've seen them work magically for a lot of people. I will say that if they're not taken properly or you're medicating in a way that isn't actually serving you, you will notice that you don't feel pain as deeply, but you also don't feel your other pains as good. All your good emotions are also somehow doled. If you are willing to experience the deepest amount of pain ... I think the greatest example of this is love. The deeper you love someone, the more fiercely you love them, the more fierce it's going to feel if you lose them. The more grief you're going to have.

The more fear you're going to have of losing them. It's the best emotions that you could ever have are always balanced out with the most negative and that's the experience of being alive.

You can try and hide from both of them, but you will deny yourself the experience of that humanness especially living a courageous life where you're able to really put your life to use for yourself and for other people and make that contribution which is very important to me. I think that using pain in a way to motivate your own evolution is a really good idea. It also increases your empathy and your compassion. It helps you understand too, and this is one of the biggest points of the model, is that our circumstances do not cause our pain. You can have 2 people in the exact same circumstance and they will be in different levels of pain. I've heard stories about people going to third world countries where they have nothing and they are happier than we are.

Things that would cause us tremendous pain and tremendous discomfort, they are thrilled with and happy with because of the way that they interpret their circumstance and we interpret our circumstance. I think knowing that is very important. It doesn't mean just because our thinking causes our emotional pain doesn't mean that we shouldn't be in emotional pain. I think that's a huge misperception that people have when they think about the self-help industry and positive thinking. I think a lot of people think that what we're teaching is that you should be happy and positive all of the time. That is not what we're teaching. In fact, I'm teaching that half of the time you're not going to be. You can still take full responsibility for it either way. Just because you take responsibility for your pain doesn't mean that you should try and get out of it.

Sometimes pain is something that we want to be experiencing and for me, sometimes I'm able to ... If I'm in unnecessary pain over something I don't want to be in pain over, something silly and of course, that happens to a lot of us, something someone said unintentionally that we allow to become a big thing in our mind, that's something that I'll spend some time trying to change my mind about so I don't have to be in pain. When I'm in pain about something more significant for me, I allow myself to be in that pain as part of the experience. When you allow yourself to be part of this pain, it feels

clean. It feels processing. It feels part of it. It's kind of like that really intense workout that hurts. It's part of the deal. It's something that we don't freak out or try to resist or runaway from.

It's something that we move towards and create in order to make ourselves stronger, to make ourselves better. There is an upside to every negative emotion. There's an upside to shame. It means you're not psychopath. There's an upside to feeling guilty because it means you care about your actions in the world and how they affect other people. There's an upside to grief. There's an upside to frustration. It means that you're out there in the world trying to create something and that you're not perfect at it yet and that's okay. You don't need to be the perfect princess. You need to be a human being working to evolve pass your current state of evolution wherever that is for you. I just want to remind you the reason to do that is because that is the ultimate pleasure that any of us I think have available to us as human beings, that deep connection to ourselves and to other people.

I heard a Maya Angelou quote the other day that I thought was totally fascinating. She said, "I don't trust anyone who says they love me if they don't love themselves." I think a lot of times people think that the effort to love ourselves, the effort to take care of ourselves will somehow takeaway from loving other people. If you think about that quote, I think it's so true. The more you love yourself, the more love you have to give away to other people. One of the best ways that you're able to tap into that emotional reservoir is being willing to be fully alive and fully present on the planet. The best way that I know how to do that is to not be afraid of any of it, not be afraid of any emotion that may come your way, not be afraid of the terror, not be afraid of the humiliation, but to move towards it and be willing to embrace it.

Be willing to embrace all of the emotions that come from being alive. That is my sales job on pain. I want you to buy it. I want you to sign up for it. I want you to benefit from the experience of moving towards pain and seeing that there is a huge tremendous benefit to being willing to embrace and process and move past pain. The benefit is I think the ultimate in well-being. I do not know anyone that has a solid confident state of well-being that isn't willing to experience the pain of being alive.

All right you guys. Have an amazing week. Be in a lot of pain. I'll talk to you next week. 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 the LifeCoachSchool.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.