

Ep #166: Difficult Conversations



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host
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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.

Hey there, my friends. Hi. How are you? I'm great! It's hot today. Hot today. I had to take the dogs on a hike at like 7:30. It was crazy, but it's gorgeous. It's like when you're in your air-conditioned house looking outside, it just looks beautiful and then you walk out there and it's like crazy hot.

Today, we're talking about difficult conversations. I created this podcast to give you an outline on how to have a difficult conversation with somebody, and it's very unusual what I recommend, but I want to tell you that it's very, very effective.

For those of you in Scholars who have been working on this a lot this month in relationships, and a lot of you guys have made incredible progress as it applies to being able to show up in relationships differently...one of the things that we've been learning that's so fun to see happen is that you can take a difficult relationship and make it not difficult by just changing one person. You don't have to change both people. That's good news, because the only person you can change is you.

In this podcast, we are going to talk about how to manage a difficult conversation when there's something that you need to talk about and there's a lot of negative emotion involved. It's really important to remember that communication in relationship is the second most important thing. The first most important thing is managing your own thinking and making sure that your thinking is clear and that it is coached before it is reacted to.

Most of us have no idea how to communicate without blame, frustration, defensiveness, or justification. We have this primal need to be right, at all costs. We need to be right and yet our need to be right costs us so much. If you really think about it, what does being right about something really get you? Nothing. It gets you indulgence.

If I'm with my husband and I'm having to prove that I'm right about something, which I'm just saying hypothetically I might do sometimes,

not necessarily all of the time, but if I have to be right about something, I'm like, "No. I'm right. You're wrong. I'm right. You're wrong," and I convince him that I'm right, then I walk away with a sense of indulgent satisfaction that has cost me intimacy in my relationship.

That's the only thing that it's done to benefit me is an indulgence, like eating an Oreo. It hasn't given me anything of substance. It's a false sense of power to be right about something. Now, our brains are programmed to do this. It doesn't mean we have a moral character flaw. A lot of people think, "They have to be right about everything. There's something wrong with them. I don't like them. They have to be right about everything." There's nothing wrong with them. People that need to be right about everything are humans. Back to being human, right?

The best way to find peace in relationships is to give up right and wrong. No one has to be right and no one has to be wrong. No one wins in a difficult conversation. Most of the time, you end up with two losing parties. Even if someone feels like they're right, they usually walk away with a sense of disconnection and the person who was proven "wrong" feels like the loser in the relationship but really you've both lost.

The first thing you have to agree on is that you don't need to be right about anything. This immediately removes the need for defense. Without defense, there's no need for offense, and the war is over. Think about this, you guys. If you give up the need to be right about something, you remove the need for defense, and without defense, there is no need for offense, and the war is over.

You start the conversation by being willing to be wrong. Take a deep breath of peace. If you're immediately getting defensive when I make this suggestion, you are one of those people that indulges in being right and it costs you a lot of your relationship, so if you're saying, "But I am right," that's what most people say. "But I did tell the truth." "But I did know what that conversation was." "But I did get the answer right. I'm right." Who cares? Why do you care so much about being right? What is that giving you? What is that about? "I need to be right and you need to be wrong. I need to win."

You want to start with this when you go into a difficult situation. "Tell me why you are right." If you and I are in a difficult situation, instead of me coming at you with why I am right, which is what most of us do: "You be quiet. Let me talk. Let me tell you why I'm right." Even if we let them talk first, the whole time we're waiting for our turn to talk and tell them they're wrong and we're right. The way you're going to approach this difficult conversation is you're going to say, "Tell me why you are right about this." Then let the person tell you.

It may not be a conflict of right and wrong. You may just say, "Tell me what you're feeling. Tell me what you're thinking. Tell me what you want to do. What do you want me to know?" However you want to approach it, let the other person speak. "Tell me why this is so for you," and then you want to put yourself in their shoes really. You can't be defensive if you're truly considering their side. See it from their eyes and their thoughts and their model. Where are they really coming from? Can you understand it? Does it make sense if you were them? Keep releasing your defensiveness and disagreement the whole time they're talking.

Make sure you fully hear them. Make a true effort to understand their every thought, feeling, and action, and result. Note that I did not suggest that you will be getting the same luxury. It's not useful. You get to be the one who hears. When you understand how this works, you will get that you being heard for your whole story isn't necessary. You get to have your one sentence. Here's the thing. You're going to take full responsibility for this. You do not say, "Listen. I'm doing this new way of communicating, and you get to tell me why you're right, and then I get to tell you why I'm right." That's not how this works, okay?

You're the one. You're going to manage the difficult conversation. All you're going to do, and you won't have any pushback because all you're going to say is, "Tell me why you're right. Tell me what your thoughts are. Tell me what you're thinking and feeling. I want to hear you out." Then you want to simplify it down to the facts. Once you have heard them out, then identify the facts and make sure that you can agree on the facts.

Now, remember that facts are neutral and that everybody agrees on them. The sky is blue. The grass is green. There's a truck in the driveway. I'm speaking to you in a microphone. Right? You're a man. I'm a woman. What are the facts about the situation? The whole first part was them telling you their thoughts, their feelings, their actions, their results, but within all that story that they're telling you, there are some facts that you can find a common ground on. Facts always stand alone. They're always neutral, and everyone can agree on them because they don't mean anything. They don't make anyone right or wrong. Facts are the common ground.

The first step is you let them speak. You let them tell their story. You let them tell you why they're right. Next, you simplify it down to the facts. Then, you each get a sentence. You both are going to look at the facts, and you know what the other person is making the facts mean because they've just told you a story, so you say, "You are making these facts mean," and then you say what it is, "And I am making these facts mean," then you say what it is. This is why we disagree. No one is right or wrong. We just have different sentences in our brain.

Let me give you an example. Your husband comes home late from work, when he said that he would be home at 5:00. He comes home at 5:30. When he gets home, you say, "Tell me everything." He's like, "Well there was a lot of traffic," or, "I left late," or, "This is what happened," or whatever. "I didn't know you wanted me home on time," whatever the story is, right? Then you sit down and you say, "Here are the facts. I asked you to be home at 5:00. Can we agree on that?" Yes or no? Is that a fact or not? Only things that you can both agree on. "And you came home at 5:30. We can agree on that. I'm making that mean," you get your one sentence. "I'm making it mean that you don't respect me, and you're making it mean that I don't have any flexibility. That's why we're having an argument, right? This is why we disagree, because we both have conflicting sentences in our mind. Who's right and who's wrong? It doesn't matter. We just have different sentences in our minds." Then finally what you're going to do is talk only in solutions.

It's very easy to get caught up in problems and to talk about problems for three hours and argue about who is right. Then, not only do we

argue about who is right, but then we start arguing about things that happened three years ago. We start arguing about things that are going to happen in the future, and then we start attacking each other. So you come home late, I'm like, "Hey why are you late?" "I'm not late," or, "Sorry I didn't know you wanted me home on time," or whatever, and then you hear the other person out, you agree on the facts, you each get a sentence, and then you focus on solutions.

Find a solution you both agree to. At this point, you're no longer allowed to talk about the problem. You can only brainstorm solutions. You can talk about your husband coming home late for three hours. What's the upside of that? Nothing. There is no upside to that. That solves nothing. You're just criticizing each other. Right? What's a solution that you can both agree to? How are we going to solve the problem of the husband coming home late? If you've given up the need to be right about it, what does that change and how does that make you feel so much relief and so much happier? You focus on a solution. You brainstorm solutions that you both can agree on. The goal is to find a solution that makes life better than before you had the problem. Be willing to take some time with this.

Okay, I'm going to do one last review and then I want you, next time you're having any kind of difficult conversation, any kind of argument, anything where you're raising your voice, any disagreement about the kids, any disagreement about anything, this is what you're going to do. You're going to give up the need to be right.

You're going to hear the other person's story about why they are right. You're going to find out what they're feeling, what they're thinking. You're going to really put yourself in their shoes. You're going to both agree on the facts of the situation only. Then you're going to notice the reason why you're disagreeing is because you each have a different sentence in your mind about what those facts mean, and once you have that base of understanding, then you're going to brainstorm solutions. You are no longer allowed to talk about the problem at that point.

This will be very, very powerful. Here's the other piece I want to offer you. You can have this conversation and share this process with someone that you really know well, or you don't ever have to bring

this up to anyone. You just do all the work. You ask them, "Please tell me your side of the story." Now, you've gone into the situation being willing to give up being right. They're going to tell you their story and why they're right and why it matters to them and why everything needs to change or why you need to do it differently or whatever it is.

Then you're going to repeat back to them what the facts are. "Hey can we at least agree on this?" You don't have to tell them, "Hey, here are the facts of the situation." You would say, "Hey, we agree that you got home at 5:30. We can agree that dinner was ready at 5:00, right? Those are the things that we agree on." At that point, you know what their sentence is in your mind and you know what the sentence is in their mind, right? So you have a sense about it. You don't even have to talk about that out loud. Then at that point, you can brainstorm solutions. They don't even have to be in on this whole deal.

You are welcome, you guys. This changes everything. It takes a lot to be a person who doesn't have to be right. It takes a lot to be a person who takes full responsibility for this. Now, if you're in Scholars, you for sure want to go through this process with someone and fill out the form and share it with me and let's discuss. Super, super awesome. That's all I have for you today. It's short. It's simple, life-changing. Have a wonderful, awesome, awesome day, and I'll see you guys next week. Bye.

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