

Ep #23: Challenging Relationships



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.

Hey, what's happening everybody. Welcome back to the podcast. Hey, before I get started. I just want to give you a heads up. At the Life Coach School, I have started to do some free webinars on Wednesdays. We're calling it webinar Wednesdays over there. If you're interested in getting to more in depth work, seeing the work that I do and seeing what my offerings are, please check it out over there. You can go over to thelifecoachschool.com and just look under class schedule. You will see all the free webinars that are currently on the books. That's right on my mind right now because after this podcast, I'm about to jump on to one called how to solve any problem. It's an hour-long webinar. It's absolutely free.

By the time you listen to it, it will already be over. I'll have the replay out there. Go check it out. Okay. Today, we are talking about challenging relationships. This was another request that I had from one of my listeners who is struggling in her marriage. I often get questions about teenage kids which I can totally relate to. I have two teenage boys myself and also friendships. I thought I would do an entire podcast on challenging relationships and talk about my take on them and give you some ways to think about relationships and ways to be in relationships. At the very least, some food for thought.

Let's start with just the term challenging. We're talking about challenging relationships. What makes something challenging? Now, if you've been with me for a while you know the answer to this question. What makes something a problem? What makes something challenging is our judgment about it, is our thinking about it. You could have two exact same relationships with the exact same dynamics. Someone can think it's a problem and that it's challenging and someone can think that it's fantastic and wonderful. The only difference is how we decide to think about something.

First and foremost, that is a really powerful question that we ask our clients at the school all the time. Think about your relationship. If you have a challenging relationship, maybe it's with your boss. Maybe it's with your husband or your wife, maybe it's with a coworker or a friend.

Pick a relationship right now and think about it. Now, notice what you think about when you think about that relationship. What thoughts come out for you? Are they all negative? Now, be careful here because you may think that you're just describing the relationship factually. You think, "Oh, no. These aren't thoughts. This is just how it is. This is just how this person is." This is something that's really challenging to see when you're doing it yourself. When you're looking at your own mind, when you're watching mind with your mind.

It's hard to see that what you're thinking is really just a thought. It's not factual. Factual means every single person would agree in detail. Look at your thinking about this challenging relationship and notice what you're thinking. If you notice a lot of negative thoughts, you probably feel pretty crappy about the relationship. If you notice a lot of positive thoughts, it's probably not a challenging relationship. That's really the most important thing to look out first and then ask yourself this question. Why are you choosing to think this way about this relationship?

Now, your head might go, "What the what?" When they say that because we don't really see it as a choice. We see this person's difficult. This person's challenging and therefore, that's why my thoughts are the way they are. Thoughts aren't defaults. We get to choose what we want to think. What we decide to think will determine how we feel. Most of us, what we do with all things like this is we have our thoughts on default and then we blame the other person for how we feel. We say, "No, the reason I'm stressed, the reason I'm frustrated, the reason I'm angry is because of this other person." I want to promise you something, the other person cannot control your feelings, cannot.

You have to think about that person in a certain way. Think about something they've done in a certain way in order to feel. You need to grab a hold and take responsibility of those thoughts first and foremost. Okay. Think about the negative person. Think about what you think about when you think about them. Then ask yourself the question why do you choose to think that way about that person especially if it makes you feel horrible. That's 101. Just that practice alone can open your eyes and increase your awareness to how much of a role you have in your relationships and how much your thinking affects how you feel in a relationship.

I'm going to go over what I normally see. I've been at this for a long time working with lots of clients on their relationships. I've done some relationship coaching where I've had couples on the phone but I have found that you can really work on relationships by just working with one person. Because we have so much more control within our own mind than we realized. Here's what I see on a pretty regular basis. The first type of relationship that I see is where the client I'm working with is pretending. They're burying their head in the sand. They're being indifferent and they're neglecting.

What that means is they're just not dealing with the relationship. They're going through the motions. They're pretending they're happy. They're not really acknowledging a lot of any of the issues that are going on. Just trying to like sneak around the person and nod and wave. That's the first way that I've seen people try and deal. What happens is it completely blocks any kind of connection. Of course, it blocks any kind of intimacy. It blocks any real interaction that could enhance the lives of both of the people involved.

It creates a lot of seething under the surface issues. Think about your relationship. Are you indifferent? Have you gotten to the point where you just don't even bother anymore. I think about with a lot of my clients, they have these kind of relationships with their siblings. They just go through the motions when they're with them and that's all they want to do and that's fine. Now, I'm not saying that you should or shouldn't do this. Just acknowledge where you are in your difficult relationship, in your challenging relationship. Are you in the space where you're just in indifference and you're not making any effort for yourself? What is that like for you?

The next kind of relationship issues I see are when people feel like they have to stick up for themselves. I hear this a lot from my clients where they're like, "Hi. I'm finally sticking up for myself." They're usually coming from a place of anger and frustration and blame. I think that's misconstrued. I think sticking up for ourselves from a place of courage and compassion and love, and honest communications is a very different thing. Most people when they say they're sticking up for themselves, what they're meaning by that is that they're thrashing and lashing out.

There's a lot of shouting, yelling, demanding, controlling, and shaming in the relationship. This is really when someone hasn't owned their responsibility in a relationship and they haven't taken control over their own mind and their own emotions. They're really trying to change the other person in a very aggressive way so they can feel better. I'm sure you've all seen relationships like this that are full of shouting, and yelling, and demanding, and sticking up for myself, and controlling, and shaming.

The first issues I see, first types of relationship, a lot of pretending, a lot of indifference, a lot of burying the head in the sand. Second kind is a lot of yelling, and screaming, and shouting, and controlling, and shaming. The third type of issues that I see in a relationships are when there's a lot of complying, pleasing, and denying of themselves. I work with clients that just are really trying to get the person's approval, and they're just complying with them but really underneath their seething, they're so frustrated. They're so hateful underneath but they're going through this just pleasing and complying, denying process to keep the peace and the relationship. I always say to them, there is no peace in this relationship because you're not having any peace.

You're not feeling peace so how can you say that relationship is peaceful when you're so filled with resentment and frustration and hate. That's a really important thing to think about. If you're spending a lot of time keeping the peace, what does that mean? What does that mean? Does that mean you're feeling peaceful? Most of the time, the answer is no.

Then the last type of issue I see in relationship are where people are lying, deceiving, defying each other, lots of back talking, cheating, that sort of thing. Where the relationship has gone to the level of I'm just going to tell this person lies and I'm going to do things behind their back. I'm going to just smile to their face but really I'm going to be having an affair or cheating, or doing ... If it's a boss, I'm going to be looking for another job and working on my other business while I'm at work. Stealing from the time that I'm getting paid for. Lots of stuff happens like that.

In relationships when they aren't being managed because the person's mind isn't being managed. When I describe these issues and

relationship, I'm describing one person in the relationship. Think about your relationship and think about how are you handling your relationship. Are you handling it the first way? Are you just pretending and burying your head in the sand and being indifferent to it. Are you handling it the second way? Are you shouting, and yelling, and sticking up for yourself and controlling, and shaming the other person? Are you complying, and pleasing, and denying yourself, and really seething underneath the surface?

Have you gotten to the point where you started lying, defying, cheating, and talking behind the other person's back. Gossiping about them and if maybe it's a friendship and you're talking to another friend. Really negatively about this person but not talking to the person directly. Where are you in your relationship? Now, here's the temptation. The temptation here is to want to describe the other person, "Oh, no." My clients say all the time, "Let me tell you about them and what they do." I'm not interested in what they do. You have no power in what they do. I don't want to know how they act. I don't want to know what they're doing.

In the beginning, I really just want to know what you're thinking, what you're feeling, and what you're doing. Because that's where all your power is. That's what you can change. Most of my clients come to me having had tried to change the other person for years and it never works. You can't change another person. You can create a relationship where they're the one that is complying and pleasing you and seething underneath. That can happen. That dynamic can happen but you really can't control the other person.

What I want to know is what's going on with you? What's going on in your head, in your body, in your actions? Here is how I believe we can all have better relationships without even having couple's therapy and without even having a conversation about how the other person should be behaving. Let me go through my steps for managing challenging relationships. The first step and always the first step is to do your own work first. Notice how much you want to change that other person. Notice how much you want to blame them and notice how powerless that leaves you.

The first thing you need to do is take responsibility. I love the word responsibility because it means you have the ability to respond however

you want. Take responsibility for how you think and how you feel in all of your relationships. If you feel frustrated, you need to own that you are the one choosing frustration. The other person cannot frustrate you without you participating. Take responsibility. What are you thinking? What are you feeling in this relationship that is causing you to be challenged. I get it. I hear you. You want to tell me about this other person. You want to tell me but, but, but, you wouldn't believe it.

Everybody agrees. Everybody agrees this person is terrible but it doesn't matter if this person is terrible in your mind. What matters is how you feel when you think that. You have a choice on how you want to think and feel. First, you have to own that you're the one. When I teach thought work, a lot of times people will say, "Okay so now, I just want to change the way I'm thinking about this person." You can't really do that until you understand where you are now. Really understand it. When you think your teenager is very difficult, how do you feel?

When you think your boss is a total jerk, how do you feel? I know you have evidence. I know you do but that's not relevant. What's relevant is when you choose to think they're a jerk, how do you feel? When you choose to think that you hate working for them, how do you feel? When you feel that way, how do then you act? What do you do? Do you pretend? Do you lie? Do you stick up for yourself, and yell, and shout, and scream? Or do you go talk to your coworker about your boss behind their back.

Do you behave in a way you want to behave? You want them to change their behavior but are you behaving in a way you want to behave? Are you feeling the way you want to feel? Remembering that they can cause you to feel anything that's on you? Then once you've really taken responsibility and I will say that is a big leap for most of us, to get to the place where we take responsibility for every single feeling and every single thought we have. As soon as we do that, it takes us out of any kind of victim role that we may have put ourselves into with that other person.

Then you need to deliberately decide who you want to be in relationship with this person. Who do you want to be? I'm really clear that you know how you want them to behave and who you want them to be. My question is how do you want to be? How do you want to behave? What

do you want to think when it comes to this person? How will that make you feel and then how do you want to act? There's nothing more powerful than deciding that you want to be a certain way no matter how someone else acts. That has been the most powerful experience for me to be able to stand in my truth and be who I want to be and not blame someone else for my bad behavior but owning it. Deciding, "I don't want to act that way. Here's how I want to act. I want to act kind. I want to act calm. I want to act peaceful."

It doesn't mean I'm always going to be able to be able to get there. That's what I'm choosing. I am not helpless. I am not this person's victim. I get to decide who I want to be in this relationship. Step one is always doing your own work. Taking responsibility for how you are currently thinking and feeling in the relationship. The next thing is to deliberately decide how do you want to think, and feel, and be in this relationship. You have a choice and you get to decide how is it you want to be.

Then and this is a biggie. You have to know that other people have the freedom to be who they are and do what they want to do at all times. You cannot control them. You can try and you can threaten them. You can try and control them but ultimately, whether they decide to comply or not is up to them. That is their choice. There is freedom in knowing that you can't control another person because it's exhausting to try. It's exhausting trying to control other people. If you allow yourself to know that they're going to do what they get to do but none of it has any effect on you until you allow it to. They don't have any power over you either. You don't have power over how they act and control and you control them but they can't do the same either.

I don't tell you that so you get in some defiant cross your arms. Well, you can't control me. Not like that at all. It's more that listen, you have the freedom to be exactly who you are and I have the freedom to respond and be exactly how I am. That actually can be a really beautiful thing when two people aren't trying to control each other all the time. Take responsibility for your feelings, and your thinking, and your actions. Then give them responsibility for theirs and not in a blaming way but in a releasing way, and in an allowing way.

Now remember, their behavior doesn't mean anything until we make it mean something. We get to decide what we make everything they do mean. Here's an example. To stay on the example of the boss okay. Let's say a boss comes into your office and tells you that he thinks you're doing a terrible job and wants you to get your act together or you're going to get fired. This is actually not too far off of a situation that I just dealt with a client. In that moment, you can hear what he says and you can respond exactly how you want to respond. What will best serve you in that moment. You don't have to react. You don't have to freak out. You get to decide how would you respond in that moment.

If you're being the best version of yourself and then when he leaves, you get to decide what it means. You can sit there and think which a lot of people would do. What a jerk. He doesn't appreciate me. I hate working here. I hate him. I got to get out of here. All that negative thinking can just spin you and spin you and spin you or you can decide to think something differently. You can decide to make it mean something different. One of the things that really helps me is try to understand where people are coming from. Why in the world would someone come in and act like that?

What's going on in his head that he's acting that way and knowing that has nothing really ultimately to do with me until I decide it does. Nobody is going to determine my faith but me. Nobody is going to decide whether I will be successful or not but me. Then I asked myself, what is true about what's been said here? Is there any truth? Usually, you can find that there is. That's your power moment right there. That's where you can really take responsibility for are you delivering the most in your job? Are you doing the best you can?

I'm going to offer that if you're if you're in a really negative state of hating your boss and feeling negative emotions, the answer is probably no. The answer is probably no. It doesn't mean you stay in that job. It just means that you don't leave because you want to change how you feel. Because you don't have to leave to change how you feel. This person has no power over you and how you feel. They may be able to fire you. They may be able to affect your career in some ways but that doesn't mean that they can determine how you feel and they certainly can't determine how you behave. That's power.

When you blame them for how you feel, you're giving that person all of your emotional currency. You're giving them the ability to determine how you'll feel if you're miserable or not. Typically, the people that we do this to are people we don't really think are capable. It's the last person. Our horrible boss is the last person we want to delegate our emotional life to. We want to take responsibility for that. Their behavior doesn't mean anything until we make it mean something. We can decide how things will affect us. In that situation, I would want that to fuel me. I would want to make it mean something that could fuel me and make me feel motivated, make me feel inspired.

Is that possible? Absolutely. Because I am responsible for how I think, feel, and behave. Now, when we do this work, then and only then do we involve the other person. People will say, "Well, I'm pissed off. I'm going to go talk to my husband." Okay. Well, you can talk to your husband from a place of really negative emotion and really negative thoughts but how do you think ... Let's play that out. How will that serve you ultimately. You're going to be blaming, and blaming, and blaming, and blaming. Your husband will probably be defensive and blaming back. Let's play that out.

I always say let's get you into place where you want to be, where you want to feel, where you feel effective, and you feel clear, and you feel clean. Then and only then do we have a conversation where we're not reactive or we're not inactive. Now, if you're thinking about having a conversation with someone which of course, I recommend but only after you've gotten yourself into a really clean space and into positive emotion for yourself. Then the communication can be honest. It can be kind and there can be boundaries set if necessary. I have a whole podcast on boundaries if you want to listen to that one.

That's only appropriate when there has been a boundary violation. You can sit down with someone and have a conversation with them and you can make request of them. You can tell them what your preferences are but it's a very fine line between, "Hey, this is what I would love to see in our relationship." This is what I want to start doing. I would love it if you would want to start doing the same thing. You can't hang your hat and your happiness on whether they do it or not because remember, they have the freedom to be however they want to be in their life and in their relationship.

You can't control that. It doesn't mean you don't make request but what happens to a lot of my clients is they make request. Then if the person doesn't comply, they make it mean a bunch of ugly negative horrible things. Again, they release all of their emotional power to the other person. They say, "I will only be happy if you do A, B, C," which is never true. You're responsible for your happiness, not this other person. Talking to someone because a lot of times, like in my relationship with my husband, I'll sit down and talk to him and say, "Hey, I would love it if we went out more. I would love it if we had more time just the two of us to sit outside and sit in the yard and just talk for 10 minutes in the evening or whatever."

He would be like, "Yeah, totally. That sounds great." We're both totally on the same page. That's really important for us to talk about that communication and communicate in that way. There's other times where I sit down, "My God, it would be really great if you would always make the bed," or something like that. He may not agree that that would be really great. I can make the request but if he doesn't do that, I'm not going to say, "Wow. He really doesn't care about me. He really doesn't care do what I want him to do." A lot of times, I'll say to my clients. Do you really want someone that you love to do a bunch of stuff that they don't want to do? Really?

Do you want them to do stuff that isn't authentic to them, that isn't true to them? That's something to really consider. I have a client who really wants her husband to be more romantic but it doesn't come naturally to him. It's not something he really enjoys doing. He'll go through the motions for her because he knows that she likes it but it's only for her benefit. He doesn't get any joy out of doing it. It's just the truth. We talked about this a lot. She said that, "I want him to get joy out of it," but he doesn't.

That's not something he does. What he gets joy out of is something different. How do you reconcile those things? You can't demand that someone enjoys something they don't enjoy. That's a really powerful thing to consider. Now, when it comes to doing chores around the house and stuff like that then that's more of a give and take agreement thing. Most people what they do is they set it up for so much conflict because they make it mean when someone doesn't come home on time or when

someone doesn't do the laundry or someone doesn't take out the trash. They make it mean something that it doesn't mean.

They make it mean something you don't care about me. You don't care about the family which is so far apart from just not wanting to take out the garbage. That's really important to sit down and really talk to each other. Why are you doing this? What's important to you? Why are you upset about this? Tell me your thoughts about it. From that place, you can usually find solutions and when couple sit down and focus on finding solutions in a win-win solutions. They're usually available. When you sit down with someone and you're blaming and shaming them, they're very defensive and there's really usually no clear creativity in terms of finding solutions.

When you're in a relationship, it's important to remember the difference between vulnerable and being a victim. Just because you're in a conversation with someone and you're crying doesn't mean you're being vulnerable. In fact, a lot of times, we are in relationships and we're crying because we're manipulating the other person. We're trying to make them feel bad about how we are making ourselves feel. Just be onto yourself about that. Being vulnerable takes a lot of courage. Being vulnerable means you're open. You're telling the truth. You're sharing your fears. You're owning your piece of what's not working in your relationship. That's vulnerability.

Being a victim in a relationship is creating a situation where you're blaming the other person. You're giving them responsibility for how you're feeling. At relationships where you act as a victim become powerless and very manipulative. Just be aware. Are you being open and honest when you're communicating or are you blaming and being a victim? Ongoing connection to someone requires honesty. It requires vulnerability.

It requires a lot of self-coaching. A lot of self-work. One of the things I love Marianne Williamson says that she just says, "You know, it only takes one sane person in a relationship to make it better. If one person works on themselves and they work on their mind, and they work on taking responsibility for their side of the street, the relationship will improve. Even if the other person doesn't change. Now a lot of people

get pissed off when I said justice because they're like, "Why should I have to change and they don't have to change. Then it's that conflict."

What happens when you recognize that you're responsible for how you feel and that you can take care of yourself and that they don't have to fulfill your needs? You have the ability to fulfill every need you have. Then the relationship becomes much more enjoyable because there's much less of a demand on the other person to take care of you emotionally. That's a much better place to be for both people in the relationship. It opens up a lot of communication. It opens up a lot of kindness and compassion which most human beings respond to much better than they do to blaming, and shaming, and controlling.

Relationships are a beautiful opportunity for us to evolve ourselves. For us to become a better version of ourselves. For us to take responsibility for ourselves. A lot of times challenging relationships seemed too challenging and so we want to delete them from our lives. Many times that is appropriate. I'm not saying it isn't but I think a lot of times we just want to remove the person so we don't have to face ourselves. We don't have to work on ourselves. I've been there. I know what that's like. I will say the relationships that have been the most challenging for me have also taught me the most about myself.

One of the ideas that I think makes relationships and being in relationships so much easier is make room for everything. Don't just make room for the good stuff and reject any of the challenging pieces. Make room in the house for the pain. Make room in the house for the anger. Make room in the house for the judgment. Make room for in your relationship with anybody for their full humanness. They're going to judge you sometimes. They're going to get mad at you sometimes. They're going to make mistakes. They're going to do things that are just not pretty sometimes.

Make room for all of it. Don't try and create perfect relationships where there's no room for anything challenging because the challenging parts of the relationship are the parts that make us grow. If we can stay connected to the other person, you can actually grow together and grow more than you would had you not been in this relationship. Those types of relationships are the ones that make us grow the most, make all of our other relationships even better. I really want to encourage you to ... I

hope you really paid attention to these steps and you're really committed.

I'm not going to say that it's easy especially if you're in a pattern of being a victim or you're in a pattern of yelling, and screaming, or pretending, or being indifferent. I want to invite you to just explore the idea that you can change the relationship without changing the other person. The only person you need to change and the only thing you really need to change is your own brain. I've seen it happen thousands of times for people. If you are willing to do the work on yourself, everything in your life can improve. I promise you that. Until next time. I'll talk to you all next week. Have a wonderful, beautiful week. See you soon bye.

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