

## Ep #53: Ambition



## **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.

Hi everyone. How are you all doing? It feels like a long time since I've talked to you. I'm really happy that I'm back with the mic and talking to you all. I just finished the most amazing 25 person, in-person week with everyone that was going through Life Coach training. It was awesome. It was beyond anything that I could have expected.

Everyone that came I fell in love with of course, everyone was so smart and awesome and contributing. We all worked through a lot of our own stuff by using the tools that I had provided. It was great. I had a wonderful time. I know that many of them are listening to this, and I just want to tell you guys that I miss you all ready. I miss laughing with you. I'm going to include some fun bonuses in some upcoming Friday Coach Likes where you'll see Stacy jumping out of plane and you'll hear Nicole singing. Make sure you're on Friday Coach Likes so you can enjoy some of those added bonuses that only people on my email list will get.

Today I'm going to talk about ambition. Now this is a topic that has been coming up quite a bit lately for me, and so I decided I wanted to talk to you all about it and hopefully get some of your input in the comments. Ambition is not really talked about a lot as a word. It's not a word that used a lot. A couple of times I was talking to one of my girlfriends on the side of the soccer field who has a job that she loves, and she told me "I'm not very ambitious, that's not something that's really important to me." I thought, great you know that you're not ambitious and that's totally fine. I just thought she was describing herself, I didn't see it as positive or a negative, she was just acknowledging that that's how she is.

Then at another dinner with another friend she was talking about how she doesn't really want to have job, she really doesn't want to have her own business, she's not really interested in that. I said to her, "you're not very ambitious?" I didn't mean it in a negative way or positive way or anything, I just asked her that. My other girlfriend was like, "that was so rude." I was like, "what do you mean that was rude, I don't think it's rude. I just think it's descriptive." It really got me

thinking about what this word ambition means and how it's interpreted by people; is it a good thing or a bad thing?

As I was doing some research on this word and what it means I discovered so much information both ways. A lot of people, if you call them ambitious they think that that is a put down, they think that it's almost like a slur, something that's very rude to say. Whereas my girlfriend thought that telling someone they didn't have ambition was rude. I don't know, is it rude if you don't have it, is it rude if you have it? What does it even mean? I looked it up and I love the definition because I've always thought about my self as ambitious. The way that it's defined is " strong desire to do or achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work." I did start thinking about the people in my life and I started thinking, who would I describe in my life as ambitious and who would I describe having no ambition, and do I look at those people differently and do I think it's a compliment or do I think it's a put down?

For me, I don't think is either. I think it's just a descriptive word. I think there are people who don't have that burning desire to achieve something, but I also think ... one of my girlfriends would say that she doesn't have any ambition, we actually did one of those tests with her and it came out that she was ambitious and she said "I don't think I'm ambitious at all." It was the Fascination Test by the way, I know you guys are going to email me and ask me what that test was. Sally Hogshead - Fascination Test. One of the words that was used to describe her was ambitious. She said, "no, I'm not ambitious at all, I have no desire to work on my career. I have no desire to get ahead. I have no desire to be the boss." I said, "you're very ambitious when it comes to raising your family." I think that that's not a word that people would use typically to describe a strong desire to achieve a healthy and wonderful family because I think that a lot us don't see that as an achievement. I absolutely do. I see that my girlfriend is very ambitious when it comes to her family and she's willing to work very hard with determination in order to achieve that result for herself.

Ultimately, when I think of someone who is ambitious or someone that has ambition, I think of them being full of energy and drive, and being goal oriented. I think they thrive on being driven towards something. The question is, and this is where I think this whole

debate comes in, is it good thing or a bad thing? Many people would argue that it is a very bad thing because ambitious people, they're ruthless, and they're arrogant, and they're abrasive, and they're a bit too much, and they're bossy, and they're too strong, and they need to relax. Especially when I was doing research on women being called ambitious, they might as well be called unattractive and masculine, which I thought was very interesting.

I started thinking about this, what does it mean for anyone to be ambitious, and more specifically what does it mean for a woman to be ambitious and how is that viewed? Of course I think it depends on who's viewing it, of course. I think some people can be inspired by ambitious people and I think some people can be turned off by them. What I think is the most important question to ask when it comes to ambition is, why is there person ambitious? That's going to solve everything. I think ambition when it's fueled by compassion, when it's fueled by ambition, is very different than ambition that's fueled by greed.

What I mean by that is I think some people, and I think this is something that's given ambition a bad name, is their desire to achieve something is at the expense of other people and is at the expense of the rest of their life. I think that's one way to be ambitious. I think the other way to be ambitious is you have a strong desire to achieve something, but not because you think it's going to make your life so much better, not because you're coming from place of scarcity, not because you're coming from a place of need, but because you're coming from a place of excitement and compassion and desire to make a contribution to the world.

If you asked someone with ambition and you tell them "what if you don't achieve that goal" and they say, "I will be absolutely devastated beyond my wildest dreams." I think that's ambition from a place of scarcity and from a place of lack. I think that that's when we get into trouble. When we think that achieving something is going to leave us better, than we are now, in terms of what we will have, either the recognition that we'll get or the money that we'll get, if it's tied up with that I can see how being ambitious can turn back because you're going to be coming from a negative emotion and you can do things that maybe don't serve your highest purpose. Being able to overcome

obstacles and be determined in order to achieve something and that being the reason that you're ambitious, I think can be a very positive, wonderful thing.

In fact, I was thinking about what if there wasn't any ambitious people? What if none of us had a strong desire to do or achieve something? What if none of us were determined and none of us really wanted to work hard? I'm just going off the definition that I pulled.

What would that mean for all of us? I was thinking about my girlfriend who had said, "I'm not really ambitious. I really like my job. I just like working part time." She's a receptionist and she files the papers and she takes care of the customers and she loves it. Is a perfectly awesome job for her. I was thinking about the person that started that business, I was wondering, would they be described as ambitious? I was thinking about Steve Jobs and if he hadn't been ambitious, or Edison, or Lincoln, or Virginia Wolfe, or Oprah. What would we have missed out on in the world had they not been ambitious?

Remember, I'm describing ambitious as a strong desire to do or achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work. I'm really thankful that those people, and many, many, more were ambitious because of what they created and contributed to the world, literally. When I meet someone that is different than me ... I do think that people that are ambitious feel different than people who aren't, and I think that that's normal. I love to sit around and talk about what I'm creating, what I want to create, and the contribution that I want to make and the challenges that I'm facing. I've always loved doing that. There are people in my family that are just rolling their eyes at me like, "can we just relax? Can we just be here and enjoy this moment?" I think the assumption is that I'm not enjoying the moment if I'm talking about what do I want to achieve in my life.

It's a really valid question: does ambition take us out of enjoying what we have? I don't think that that's necessarily true. I think that ambition for ambitions sake, and ambition for the sake of acquiring something that you think will make you happier than you are in this moment, is very different than ambition for the sake of wanting to make a contribution, wanting to evolve. The way that I like to think about it is I want to keep growing and keep moving, not because I think it will

make me happier - in fact, it usually won't make me happier because I'm going to face all these obstacles. Just because to me that's what being alive is, is growing. That's when I feel the most alive.

One of the things that I found when I was doing this research is some people who are ambitious thinking that everybody should be ambitious and everybody should have a strong desire to do or achieve something. I think this gets us into a lot of trouble. I think it gets people who don't have this strong desire into a feeling that there's something wrong with them because they don't. A lot of people come to me and say something like, "I just want to achieve my purpose in life. I just want to find my purpose because then I will be ambitious, then I'll be motivated, then I'll be determined and excited." They're looking for something outside of them to create that purpose for them and then turn them, miraculously I guess, into an ambitious person.

First of all, I don't think that everybody should be ambitious and I don't think it's something that if you're not, if you don't have a strong desire to achieve something, that there's something wrong with you at all. I do think that it's something to consider to ask yourself why you aren't. Just as important as it is to ask our self why you are, because whatever it is in your mind that's driving you, that's creating that for you, is going to determine the quality of your days, literally. If the reason you're not ambitious, if the reasons you don't have a strong desire to do something is because you believe you will fail, because you believe that you're not good enough, because you believe that everything good has already been done, because you believe that you don't have anything to contribute, that is, I think, a terrible shame. I think that that is not a reason to not want to desire something, you know what I'm saying? I think that you should ask yourself that question and just make sure you like your answer.

Alternatively, if you are ambitious and you're really - there's a lot of people that are obsessively ambitious - asking yourself, "why is that?" Is it because you don't believe you're good enough, is it because you believe you have something to prove, is it because you feel like your life doesn't matter unless you achieve something wonderful? That's going to be the other side of that very painful coin. If you ask yourself the question, "why am I not ambitious" and the answer is because I'm

perfectly content, I don't feel I need to achieve anything additional in my life, I'm very happy in this present moment. In fact, by being in this present moment I'm achieving exactly what I want to do, I think that's a very powerful, very strong place to live.

I also think if you ask yourself, why are you ambitious" and the answer is, "because I feel a strong desire to create something, I feel a strong desire to be the person that I'm most capable of being for my own sake, not because I have something to prove", I think that's a very positive thing too. You will notice the difference because you will notice how you feel when you think about it.

One of the things that came up also in the research when I was looking at it, is the difference between an overachiever - which I think is such an interesting term - and an underachiever. It's as if there is this baseline of achievement that we should all expect of each other. If you pass that line then you're an overachiever, and if you don't hit that mark then somehow you're an underachiever. I don't think that those are useful, I don't think those terms are useful because I think they're arbitrary. Who decides what the achievement line should be?

I think a lot of people will argue, and I think this gets into some political debates, is that people who lack complete ambition will tend to want to live off the work of others and that that's somehow unfair and that doesn't contribute to society, means something very negative. I think on the other hand people will say that overachievers are greedy and they're fueled by greed and they just want to get everything they can for themselves and not share it with anybody else. I think those are two extreme examples and people use those extreme examples to either justify their lack of ambition and complain about other people who are ambitious.

How can we use this term in a way that really serves us? In a way that if we are ambitious and we're feeling that way, it really helps fuel that in a positive light. If we're not, it helps us accept that and be in that present moment. Some people want more, and I think certain people will argue that we shouldn't want for more, we should accept what we have. I can't quite wrap my mind around it personally, because I don't think wanting more, wanting to contribute more, wanting to achieve more, wanting to have more has led to negativity

in most situations. I think that desire for more has contributed to many of the greatest people that have ever lived in terms of their contribution for other people.

When I was researching I found a Ted Talk by Dame Stephanie Shirley. I will put the link to the Ted Talk in the show notes, and you can get to the show notes by going to [thelifecoachschool.com/53](http://thelifecoachschool.com/53).

Gosh, what a beautiful Ted Talk, you guys should absolutely ... I highly recommend you go and listen to it. It's a woman from the '60s who started a software company when really women weren't even really "allowed" to start anything, and certainly not encouraged to be successful. One of the things that she said in there that I thought was so brilliant was, "we fought for the right to work. There is a desire in some many of us to work, and we want the right to work." I love, love, love that, because, I don't know where it's coming from, but I think there's this movement that we should all just be at ease all the time and we should all be in a state of zen and peace all the time. If we aren't then somehow something's gone wrong.

Yet, when I think about us fighting for the right to be able to work ... I don't think working is always in a place of ease and zen and it's something that we desire, that just makes me happy to think about that. This desire to work, to be out there, to be contributing, to be earning our own money. She also says, "success isn't easy", which I think is exactly point. Just because it isn't easy doesn't mean that it's something that maybe we shouldn't go after. Unless it's not important to us and we like our reason for why it's not important to us.

By the way, I've heard people tell me that they aren't interested in success because they don't want to take away from their families or they don't want to take way from their relationships. I would just challenge you to explore it, is that really necessary? Can you have fulfilling relationships and be willing to work hard and be successful, if that's what you desire to do? The other thing that she said in there that I thought was so great is she says, "ideas are easy, and making it happen requires a lot more then that." She said, "it requires courage, it requires a belief in oneself, it requires determination, and it requires energy." I love that she says, "I believe in the beauty of work."

You'll also notice that she describes herself as a workaholic, which I think is so fascinating. She doesn't apologize for that. When she was building her business she had a young son who had autism and she speaks about it in there. How important that was to her and how her hard work has now made it so she's able to contribute to many, many charities. Her hard work, by having a business that employed only women back in the '60s, she was able to create many many millionaires that worked for her. It's just very a inspiring story. The reason that I found it is because the title of the talk is "why do ambitious women have flat heads?" You'll have to watch the video to see the answer to that, I find it very very interesting.

Here's what I think the whole point for me is in exploring this: I think it's not useful to think that if someone isn't ambitious that it means that they're lazy. I've seen that happen with some of my friends and some of my people that I've worked with that are very ambitious. They think people who aren't like them are lazy or don't care. I absolutely do not think that is true. I think that ambition is something, and for me specifically ... this is an interesting question. For me I've always been ambitious, I've always had a desire to succeed, a desire to be the best version of myself, and what that looked like for me what through achieving and through being successful.

I wonder sometimes if ambition can be cultivated, because I've had many clients and many students who want to be ambitious and I think they want to be ambitious for the right reasons. I've questioned whether is something we can cultivate in someone, and I absolutely think it is. I think step one is we have to evaluate why you aren't ambitious, why don't you have a desire, a deep desire to achieve something, and notice when you have. You look at certain examples of even just my clients, they weren't ambitious and then something happened in their life where maybe they got a divorce or maybe they lost their job or something significant happened and then all of sudden they had an intense ambition in a certain area.

I had girlfriend whose son got a diagnosis and she wouldn't have considered herself very ambitious in her career, but she became extremely ambitious when it came to figuring out what was going on with her son and how she could help solve that and help the issues that he was dealing with. She became a woman on fire, which I

thought was fascinating. I questioned a little bit, when someone does have ambition if the reason is because they don't have confidence and they're not feeling confident, then I think that's something that's really a powerful experience of work to do. Think about it, if the reason you don't have desire to do or achieve something is because you believe that you can't, then I think that's a tragedy because I think that if you can believe that you can achieve something, if you allow yourself that belief, and the desire is there, then I think the ambition will be present, because the desire to do it will be strong enough to encourage the determination and the hard work that goes behind it.

I do want to say, on the other side of that, I think that ambition can turn to a dark place if it comes from that space of scarcity. If you want to be more ambitious in your life, step one is to really figure out why you aren't, what is the reason, what are the underlying thoughts that you are having? The second thing you need to do is really tap into what it is you want. If you believed that it was possible, would you be willing to have the determination and the hard work to achieve it? That's the step. First step, why don't you have it? Step two, if you could believe that it was possible would you be willing to work hard, would you be willing to cultivate the determination that would be required? Why? You have to ask yourself why you want to achieve it and make sure you really like your reason, make sure it's being fueled by compassion and contribution and love, and not being fueled from a place of lack.

For me, when I believe in something, when I have a desire to achieve something and I believe that I can achieve it, there is no better motivator. I have to make sure that I do my work to get myself there first. If I want something and I don't believe I can have it, I don't have the determination and I'm not willing to work hard. You need to make sure that when you get to the place where you have the strong desire, that you believe relentlessly in yourself and you believe that you can have it. When you do that's when the hard work and the determination will come. I think that is ambition in its purest, most wonderful form.

I like to think about ambition as a very positive wonderful thing. Even if you don't think you are ambitious, I want you to look at all the areas in your life. It is not only for your career, it's for how you take care of

your body and your health, it's for how you are in your relationships, it's for how you are in your home. All the areas in our life we can see where we are. I would like to hear your alls take on the word ambition, how you've used it or not used it in your own life, what you're feelings are, if you agree with my take on it or if you have and other take, I would be fascinated to know. Head on over to [thelifecoachschool.com/53](http://thelifecoachschool.com/53) and let me know what you think. Talk to you guys soon. Bye.

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