

Ep #57: Interview with Kelly McCormick



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 y'all. Check it out. This is my first podcast that's an interview, where I have someone else on with me. Let's round of fun applause there. Here's who I have on today. I'm so excited because one of the most popular episodes that we have is the one we did on anxiety. One of the reasons why I did that episode was because I had been working very closely with Kelly who is an expert when it comes to anxiety. That is the focus of her practice and that's basically who she works with is people suffering from anxiety. She's also an amazing yoga teacher, which of course correlates beautifully with that. She is an instructor and believes in all things yoga, which you guys know I do too.

Kelly Hanlin McCormick is my guest today. I can't wait. We don't spend a lot of time talking about her history and we just basically talk about anxiety and how it applies to our and how she does work. If you want to learn more about her make sure that you go check out her website; I'll put it in the show notes. It is KellyHanlinMcCormick.com. You can go there. She has a great blog with lots of beautiful pins that I love to look at.

Go check her out and reach out to her. She does consult calls, free calls. You can see if you'd be a good fit. For those of you who are thinking about getting coached I highly recommend Kelly, she's fantastic. She's one of my students from Client Concierge and I've spent a lot of time working with there very closely. I'm excited to offer this wonderful first interview up with Kelly. Please enjoy.

Brooke: Kelly?

Kelly: Yes.

Brooke: Hello there.

Kelly: Hello.

Brooke: You are my very first guest on my podcast.

Kelly: I know, I'm excited.

Brooke: I thought what would be the most fantastic ... we're going not go for about a half hour. Whenever I listen to podcasts they spend so much time introducing the person and messing around. I just don't want to do that.

Kelly: Yeah no, I agree.

Brooke: I want you to send two minutes just telling people who you are and then we're going to jump right into the content.

Kelly: Perfect.

Brooke: Who the heck are you?

Kelly: I am a life coach and yoga teacher in Kansas City. I work with people who are experiencing all levels of anxiety, from that low level hum of anxiety in their life, to full blown panic attacks. I teach yoga and incorporate all of this into my yoga practice as well. I think yoga is one of the best ways to get into our bodies and understand how our minds and our bodies connect. Trained with Brooke at the Life Coach school a few years back and have been practicing as a life coach ever since.

Brooke: Love that. I'm excited to have you on the show because I feel like so much of the coaching that I do and so many of the questions that I get are around anxiety and people not knowing how to manage it and people indulging in it. One of the topics that I've been talking about a lot on the podcast and in my trainings is this idea that we indulge in these emotions. Anxiety doesn't seem like one that we would indulge in, it seems like one that happens to us. It's like all of a sudden we wake up and notice that we're in anxiety.

What I've noticed personally, especially after really learning about your work and what you're doing and thinking about this for myself, is I notice that sometimes I

wake up with anxiety. I wake up and I feel anxious and that doesn't make sense because all of our feelings are coming from our mind. As soon as I feel the anxiety I'm like, "Wow, what is my mind already up to this morning? I just woke up, what's already going on in there?"

My practice has been to wake up and just watch my mind rattle off these thoughts that create this anxiety. What it's done for me is it's taken me out of this indulgence it, in just saying, "Well, today I'm going to feel anxious. Today I guess I have anxiety." Because as soon as I separate my mind and I see my mind is creating these thoughts that are creating the anxiety, immediately I go to that watcher space and I no longer feel it. I know that you're working with a lot of clients that have it, and I want to get your take on what you think about my morning practice.

Kelly: I think, just like what you're talking about with the morning practice, I think anxiety is something else that we practice when we get really good at disconnecting from what we're feeling, disconnecting from what's really going on in our mind. Wake up with this anxiety already showing up. "I just woke up five minutes ago, I haven't even got started yet, why's it already showing up?" Because you're practicing, because you're good at it. It's a habit.

Think of the habit like you wake up and brush your teeth, you don't even really think about that. It's just the same way with anxiety. We are that good at anxiety, and stress, and worry are the same thing, that it's like you wake up, you brush your teeth, and you're an anxious because you got really good at it. It's not even something that you consciously have to think of when our wake up, you don't even have to notice what going on with yourself because it's like, boom there it is.

Brooke: Yeah. I think that the thoughts are always the same thoughts, just in another flavor of them. Many years ago it used to be I'd wake up in the morning and think about how much I weighed. I thought about how much I

weighed, how much I ate the day before, and what I was going to eat the day coming up. Immediately my brain would go to that, it was programmed to think that. Immediately I would be on the defensive in terms of feeling anxious.

Now what I notice is I wake up and they're thoughts about the evening before, if I went out with some friends or if I talked to someone at soccer practice, or something that I had said to the kids. It doesn't matter what it is, immediately my brain is seeking those thoughts. It's crazy. It's like you said, even unconscious. What it is for me now is that anxiety is now a cue to look into my brain.

Kelly: That's what I talk about with so many of my clients: treat anxiety as your super power. This is the red flag that's showing you up to say, "hey, look something else is going on." For you, do I need to check back into something that I did last night. Did I say something? Did I act in a way that isn't quite aligned with who I am? Or, is this something that I'm just practicing and so, guess what you woke up and now you're anxious because you've practiced waking up and being anxious.

Brooke: Right, I think that's interesting...it's almost like we've practiced anxiety and so we've gotten good at it. I know, it sounds crazy, but I think that's what you're saying. It's the default to go there.

Kelly: The thing is, it's familiar. It's not comfortable, it doesn't feel good, but at least you know how that's going to go down. The alternative is something that even if logically you and I talk about it, you know that maybe it would feel better if you didn't wake up and feel anxiety. The thing is you don't know what that looks like because it's something you haven't experienced before. It's something new that you have to practice. You have to practice waking up and feeling something other than anxiety. That's a new practice.

Brooke: What's interesting about it is I think that I've gotten really good now, because I'm able to catch it soon enough, then I don't experience much of it for the rest of the day. It so interesting, someone was just telling me this story about how they got a phone call from someone that they had pitched a contract to for a large sum of money, a contract for coaching. The person had come back to them and said, "Hey, I have some feedback for you on your contract."

This wasn't even my contract, it wasn't even my issue, but the minute she said that I felt that twinge of anxiety in my stomach. It was almost like the thought happened so fast in my own head that I couldn't acknowledge it before I felt the feeling of anxiety. As soon as I felt it, I went, "Oh, I must be thinking something that's gone terrible wrong here, or that the feedback is going to be negative or something." Immediately that's what my brain did. "Oh my gosh, she got negative feedback on her contract." The truth was she got really positive feedback on it. I think that's an interesting thing too, is using it as that signal when you can't be aware of it.

Kelly: Yeah. There's a lot of clients that I talk to it's always this mind bendy thing to think, can you think of that feeling, because it leap frogs way over the thought that you're having and happens so quickly that pretty soon you're feeling anxiety before you notice even what's going on in your mind. If you can treat the feeling of anxiety as that super power, here's what's coming up for me, is it because I started practicing something and I've gotten really good at it, is it because there's something real that's showing up here?

For you, when you hear about this contract, do you have a contract in the works, is it something that relates to you, do you really love her do you really care for her, it's something that you're nervous on her behalf? What's going on there? Anxiety can show up and remind you, "Hey, there's a vibration going through your body to show

you something, to tell you something, can you pay attention to it, or are you going to run away with this anxiety and let this turn into a panic attack", and like you said control the rest of your day. Are you going to have an anxious day with this?

Brooke: Right. What would you say to clients who say, "How can you say that anxiety is something that I'm creating, that doesn't make any sense. What about anxiety disorders, what about people that are normally anxious people, are you really going to try and blame that on them?" How would you answer that?

Kelly: Sure. I try to remind them, it's not a blame thing. Let's just try to figure out where the responsibility lies. Take power back where you can. I'm not interested in blaming you. I don't want you to blame you because as soon as we head down the route of you blaming yourself, now we're adding pain on top of pain, let's not do that. If you can think of anxiety as a way that you have probably tried to project yourself, you're probably trying to route around something else.

For instance, if you're really scared about something, if you're nervous about something, if you're worried about something, then sometimes it's easier, especially if you've gotten good at it, especially if you've started practicing anxiety and it's something that shows up for you and you're familiar with it, it's easier for you to be anxious and just be like, "I'm just anxious and in my head."

Then pretty soon you just start teaching your family and your friends that you're just an anxious person. It's easier to do that than it is to look at what you're scared of, or to look at what you're nervous about, and say, "I'm really scared about this thing that's coming up", whether it's a real fear or whether it saw presentation you have at work, something that you're nervous and terrified, "I don't want to stand up in front of a group of people and talk."

Then you can start looking at, "Okay, I'm just scared, I'm not actually anxious, I'm distracting myself from feeling fear by choosing anxiety instead because I'm familiar with it. Plus it allows me to disconnect a little bit from the fear and numb myself here. I don't even have to pay attention to the fact that I'm scared. I can just go blame it on, I'm just an anxious person, I just worry, that's just in my DNA, I can't help it." It's so much easier to write it off as, that's just the way I am. Then it would be to say, "I've got this big thing ahead of me and I'm scared, and I'm going to feel fear in my body, I'm going to acknowledge what's coming up in front of me and I'm going to go do it anyway."

Brooke: Yeah. What do you think is the main problem with anxiety? When people ... I've used the word indulge in it, and you've used the word practice it and having it be convenient, which I think we'll probably get a lot of people listening that would say, "How can you possibly say that, people have anxiety disorders, people take medication for it." I want to say that we're not talking about that level of anxiety and we're not even going to address that here. What we are going to address is even just someone like me experiencing that tight anxiety feeling in my stomach. I used to feel it all day. Even though, for me, it wasn't pleasant, it was something I really just got used to feeling all the time. What would you say is the main problem with it? With allowing that to just be there?

Kelly: I think there's two main problems with anxiety. The one problem is when we start identifying with the anxiety. Like what I said, if I believe that I'm an anxious person, this is just the lot I've been dealt, this is just how it is, then I don't see that there's any other option for me. I think that this is how I have to live my life, with that felling in the pit of my stomach, that shallow breathing, the way that I sometimes am just distracted and numb to things, I can't be really present. That's just how it is.

I think a problem with anxiety is when we think anxiety is a problem. Think of this historically and biologically we've evolved into this fight or flight response, it's a survival mechanism, it keeps us safe, it keeps us out of harms way. Think you're on the highway and the person in front of you slams on their breaks, this is the free flowing fear, this is when you really allow fear into your body. You feel that and you slam on your breaks, but you're able to handle it, you're able to save yourself and your car and the people that are in the car with you. You do it. When we start believing that anxiety is the problem, if we go down that path and then it's just like, this is how it's going to be, I can't protect myself, it's not any good for me, and we forget that there's these situations where when anxiety shows up you do need to do something, it's telling you something. It's not always a problem.

It's an emotion that we all experience, that we should expect to experience. You're going to be sad, you're going to be happy, you're going to get angry, sometimes you're going to get anxious and it's okay. If you think that it's a really big, bad problem ... I guess we could argue that people who think that sadness is a really big deal, maybe they get depressed, but if we start identifying with the anxiety as this really big problem then that runs away and turns into something. It's just something you can expect to feel. It's on the emotional spectrum. No biggie if you're ready to handle it, if you can expect it. Don't be surprised by it. Just know it's going to come up sometimes. So does happiness, so does contentment, so does joy.

Brooke: I do think anxiety can be one of those cover emotions like you talked about. I think it can be one of those things that we use in order not to feel. I think you're right, if you look at anxiety as something that's an indicator and not a huge problem to be dealt with ... because I think a lot of times if I wake up feeling anxious I could make that mean that something's wrong with me, then that's going to make me even more anxious. Then we compound our anxiety

unnecessarily. Whereas if we wake up and we're like, "anxiety just means that I'm having some generalized thoughts that aren't serving me that I'm probably not aware of", that's been my personal experience. It's been really helpful to think about it that way. You also talk about anxiety as ... you say "treat it like an ugly suitcase." What do you mean by that?

Kelly: Yeah. Treat anxiety like something, like we just talked about, sometimes anxiety is going to show up for you. If you're a person who's been practicing anxiety, who's gotten good at it, who's gotten familiar with it, anxiety's almost definitely going to show up for you. Just schlep it along for the ride. Is okay. You can still breathe, you can still function, you can still keep watching your thoughts, treat your thoughts as identifying with all of these anxious thoughts. You can just notice, there's another anxious thought, there's another anxious thought. Anybody who was thinking this way would be feeling anxiety. You can keep doing that and just treat it like an ugly suitcase that sometime you have to carry with you. You still get to function, you still get to be who you are in life. You don't always have to be anxious.

Then, I think when you can start carrying the suitcase you start owning it. When you can start owning it, anxiety doesn't have any power over you. You're like, "No, this is just a suitcase I brought with me today. It's ugly, it's cumbersome, but I chose to put my stuff in this today and we're going to take it with us." You don't have to think of it as something that got thrown on you or it's not a part of being of who you are as a person. It's just something that you're carrying, you're choosing it, it's okay, it's all right. We all have ugly accessories from time to time.

Brooke: Yeah, I like that.

Kelly: If you can own it, if you can take responsibility for it, then you can start reminding yourself, this is something you're creating for yourself. You're probably protecting yourself

somehow, somehow and it's just a little messy right now. It's okay. It's all right.

Brooke: Yeah, I like that. Sometimes when we're anxious it's like we start pushing against it and we start not wanting it. That, of course, is the opposite of owning the fact that we're carrying it. I have found I'm anxious and acknowledging it. Not saying, "it's fantastic", but just acknowledging is really that first step for me. Then it doesn't make it any worse. When I'm like, "I don't want to be anxious, I'm going to pretend like I'm not anxious, I'm going to push that way", yeah I've found that really, for me, it just makes it worse. You refer to that also as you say, "give anxiety a welcome mat." It's the same idea. You want to us talk a little bit about that?

Kelly: Yeah. It's that idea of acceptance. Instead of pushing against it, once we accept the idea that there's this whole range of emotions that as human beings we're going to experience, and that sometimes our thinking runs a little wild and sometimes we're not paying as close of attention to our little minds as we should be, and so then these emotions come up for us. As soon as we can started expecting that we stopped being surprised by it. When we can stop being surprised by it you can set out this welcome mat for any emotion, including anxiety, and just say "I know you're going to show up , sometimes and it's okay. Some amount of anxiety in my life is healthy, some amount of anxiety in my life is altering me to something I need to pay attention to or to something that ..."

It could be little things. "This isn't quite aligned with who I am or who I want to be, or what I want to be doing." Any amount of discomfort where you're just maybe not quite conscious or alert or aware enough in your life yet. If you can lay out that welcome mat and let anxiety be the red flag for you, instead of what you're saying, "I don't want to feel this, I'm going to push this away, I'm not going to pay attention to what this might be telling me about myself."

Brooke: Love it, yeah.

Kelly: If you can lay out the welcome mat, pay attention, you're going to find out so much more about yourself and who you are, and how to deal with anxiety. In the process of all this, of course you stop practicing anxiety. You're practicing something new which is called awareness.

Brooke: Love it.

Kelly: So much better.

Brooke: Tell me, when you work with a client who comes to you because they're feeling either a little bit of anxiety or a lot you take them through a process. Can you tell me a little bit about how that works if someone was going to work with you, because I think it's cool to share ... A lot of people have been listening to the podcast, but they don't really understand what it would be like to work with a coach. Can you talk a little bit about your program and your process and how you work with people?

Kelly: Sure. What I typically do with people who contact me, who are experiencing anxiety is I offer them my 6 week program, which walks them through ... Week one we do it's called clarity: they submit pre-work to me, we talk through all of this so that we have a good foundation laid for what they expect to get out of this program, where they are, what the story is. We talk a lot about, in coaching, one of the differences between therapy and coaching is that we're not going to tell the sad story over and over again, I want to get it out so that I know where you are, we're drawing this line in the sand, but now we're going to move forward. That's what week one is about, is here's the line and from here on we're totally future focused and we are taking responsibility and moving forward. That's week one.

Week two we start talking about thought work, where we really understand the model, how your thoughts create all of your feelings, how your feelings create your actions,

how that creates your results. Then how all of your results in your life, of course, are proving you right about what you're thinking. This is, of course, true with anxiety as well, that anything that's creating anxiety for you proves the thought that you're an anxious person. We start unwrapping the idea of how powerful our thinking is, stepping out of identifying with our thoughts, and being our thoughts, but just acknowledge that our minds are thinking machines and noticing the common thoughts.

Like we said, we practice anxiety. We have, what, 60 or 70,000 thoughts a day and however many thousands of those are the same thoughts that we had yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that. Noticing, do you see how you're practicing anxiety, do you see why you would wake up everyday and feel anxious? Start noticing those habits and patterns. That's what we do when we talk about thought work. All of these weeks intermingle together, of course.

The next week we start talking about control. Understanding where you do have control in your life, which I think is a lot more than people think, or assume, or just unconsciously take responsibility for. Obviously there's places where you don't have control in your life.

You can't control what anybody else says to you, you can't control politics, or the weather. You can control how you're thinking about it. If you can control how you're thinking about it, of course you can control how you're feeling about it. We start talking about really drawing this line between ... this happens in relationships and jobs, I mean everything. Can you see how nobody else can hurt your feelings? You hurt your feelings. They're responsible for their feelings. We really start understanding where you've got control, where you don't have control, accepting that, taking responsibility. That's the third week.

Week four we start talking about energy. This is both an inner energy, what energy are you bringing to your life?

What energy do you have around different thoughts, or different actions, or different people, or different circumstances? It's also about moving your body. I think there's this huge, enormous element to all of this that exercise and moving your physical body helps with the thought work.

If you can get out in nature and take a walk, if you can get on your mat and do a yoga practice, then notice what's coming up for you in your physical body and in your inner body, after in you emotional body as a result of doing this work, then that's a whole bringing the inner and the outer together. Understanding that outer energy and the inner energy and taking control of both of those. That's week four.

Week five we start taking about presence. Again, this has an inner and out component. This idea of being present and showing up, not allowing that disconnection or that numbness that anxiety gives us. Figuring out if you were going to feel the fear instead of feeling anxiety, instead of excusing yourself to have a panic attack, what would that be like and feeling that. Being present in that way, but also the presence that you have in your life, which, again, overlaps with the energy. The presence that you have when you walk in a room, the presence that you have with your family, the presence that you have in your job. What presence are you bringing to all of these things? Which of course is directly related to how present you are when you show up with your family or in your job.

Then in the last week we talk about intention, which is where we take all of the work that we've done and we set goals for moving forward. How are you going to talk all of the work that we've done, everything that we've talked about, all of these tools and exercise, and some different ideas, and put them into your life so that it's not a 6 week program that never goes anywhere for you. It's a 6 week program that starts becoming a daily practice for you.

What intentions and goals do you have for yourself where anxiety is concerned, where any other emotions are concerned, where any of your actions are concerned? When you start really looking at the results in your life and you start realizing these results are directly related to how you're thinking. What intention do you want to have around your thoughts and your results and figuring out what would that have to look like for your moving forward, what do you want it to be like, how do you want it to feel? Setting goals around all of that is what we do in our final week.

Brooke: Love it.

Kelly: That's the overview.

Brooke: Your clients that have gone through this program, what do they notice? What are the benefits of doing it, what do they walk away with?

Kelly: Yeah. I think truly, and I know you won't be surprised to hear this at all, I think far and away the thing most people walk away with is awareness. They have so much more awareness around what they're thinking, around what they're feeling, about when anxiety shows up, when fear shows up, when sadness shows up, when anything, even if it's happiness or contentment. We can do it whether it's negative or positive. What's it showing you, what's it telling you, what are you thinking, what's this creating, how is your physical body responding to these emotions?

When you take that week of energy and you notice things in your physical body, how is that responding to what you're feeling in your mind, in your emotional well-being? What does your emotional landscape look like? I think far and away people walk away with more awareness, more consciousness about their thoughts, the fact that they are not their thoughts, that they are outside of their thoughts, they don't have to become that. I think the other thing that people walk away with is how much control they have that

they have not been paying attention to. They just have no idea.

Brooke: Yeah. It's so interesting because I talk about awareness all the time. You, of course, talk about it in yoga, and I take a lot of yoga too, and it's all about awareness. It sounds like this existential thing that's out there that people do that's not necessarily the most powerful thing that you can do in your life. Awareness for some people doesn't seem to equal strength, it doesn't seem to equal success. It does because awareness is everything. What it requires of you to be aware of yourself is to be present. That is your most powerful place.

I think that's the hardest thing to explain to people, is that awareness isn't something you just do on your mat when you're in the zen mode, awareness is what helps you make a million dollars, is what helps you lose all that weight, is what helps you stop feeling anxious all the time. Because a lot of people that feel anxious all the time .. I know you went through your own bout of anxiety and panic attacks and all of that yourself.

Kelly: That's right.

Brooke: I know that you know of what you speak. How debilitating that can be from becoming the person I think you're truly meant to evolve into. That's why I love your work and that's why I wanted to share with everyone that listens to the podcast. Also give them the opportunity, if they want to, I know there's a lot of people that listen to the podcast that want to go in deeper and get some one on one coaching, that I could offer you up.

Kelly: Yeah, that's great.

Brooke: I don't do the one on one coaching anymore, but I know that you do. If people really want to dive in...how can they get ahold of you if they're interested in signing up and going through the process and learning what it's like to be coached for 6 weeks?

Kelly: Yeah. If they would like to email me directly, which would be great, they can get me at kelly@kellyhanlinmccormick.com. I know you'll probably put links in all the show notes and everything. On my website if they are interested in listening to, I've done an anxiety webinar, it's about 25 minutes long or so. If they sign up for my email list, they will get that access to reducing anxiety webinar immediately. They can listen to that, they can hear. I go even more in depth into what causes anxiety, what the problem is, how to fix it, how we try to deal with anxiety. They can get that free access right away. All of my info, of course, is on my website at KellyHanlinMcCormick.com. Twitter, Instagram, all that good stuff. Email me, I would love to hear from people directly.

I love talking to people one on one. Like you said, you don't coach people one on one anymore, but I really love talking with people and hearing their stories and understanding. It's interesting, maybe it was Elizabeth Gilbert, somebody totally profound and evolved like that said...Anyway, we all have these very different lives on the surface. My family looks different than your family, and my house looks different from their house, and all of that good stuff. When you really start digging down into what's going on, it's all very similar. Anxiety is definitely that way.

The more you get into somebody's story and the more open people can be, the more honest they can be about what they're experiencing, the more it's like, yeah we've all been there with the anxiety. I totally get that. There are only so many experiences to have with it. The surface may not look the same, we all have different stories on the surface, but deep down, the good stuff, it's all very same. We're all connected that way. Yeah, I love hearing peoples stories and understanding how everybody works that way.

Brooke: Right. I just want to say too, I think it's one thing to listen to a podcast and read a self help book and to watch a webinar and get the information, it's a whole other thing to have a whole hour once a week devoted to your brain and looking at your brain with someone next to you that has that perspective. That's why I'm in love with life coaching, because there's nothing better than having that space. It's such a luxury I think to have that space to look at your life with a compassionate witness.

If you've ever thought, "Maybe I could dive into this coaching thing and maybe I want to see what it's like to have a coach", I highly recommend everybody has a coach. If you specifically have any problems with anxiety, I absolutely think you should test it out with Kelly. Go find out more information on her website. I just want to thank you so much for joining me as my first guest.

Kelly: Thank you, I know.

Brooke: ... on the Life Coach School podcast.

Kelly: So exciting.

Brooke: Very exciting.

Kelly: I love it.

Brooke: That's awesome.

Kelly: This has been awesome.

Brooke: Like I said, you guys, I'll put everything in the show notes. If you want more information about Kelly you can go to www.thelifecoachschool.com/57 and you can get all of her links and information there. Thank you all very much for joining us, and we will talk to you next week. Bye, Kelly. Thanks.

Kelly: Bye.

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