

Ep #80: Lessons from Stephen Cope



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.

What do you mean, episode number 80? What? So awesome. All right, so you know, every 10 episodes, I bring in one of my teachers and I talk about them and Stephen Cope is one of my teachers, not as deep and long as a lot of other teachers that I've had and some of the previous teachers I've shared with you, I've studied with them for years, but Stephen taught me something that changed my life forever, and you guys will have teachers like this in your own life and they'll say one thing that will change your life forever, and it may be something you read in a book or something they say to you or something that a coach says to you that changes everything. I just had one of my students write a blog post and she said that one of the things that I had said to her changed everything for her when I was coaching her on weight loss.

She was talking about food choices. One of the questions I asked her is "does it feel like love?" When you're making decisions, you can ask yourself which choice most feels like love. That was just one question that I asked her and who knew that that would be the most impactful question I could ask her out of the hundreds of questions that I probably asked her.

Stephen, I read his book, first of all, if you guys don't know this about me, I love yoga. I am obsessed with yoga. I like hot yoga, the hotter, the better. I love working out hardcore hot yoga, really intense vinyasa. That's my favorite. About 3 years ago, a friend of mine and I agreed that we would do yoga for everyday for a year and we were both so excited about it and we really did a lot of yoga. It really changed my life because I really did a deep dive into my own body and the process of being connected to myself. One of the things that really helps and I think is aligned when it comes to the weight loss is really the process of yoga really connects you to your body and holding the poses is very similar to holding an emotion when you're learning how to overcome eating emotionally.

I really loved the idea of yoga being a metaphor and eating being a metaphor. It's so interesting, I go to this yoga studio called Leap Yoga

in my area and one of the women that teaches there, her name is Emily, she's someone that I went to grade school with, and if you guys have heard me talk about grade school, I went to a very small school in Los Gatos, California called Hillbrook and we all went through, there were like 12 of us. We all went through from first to eighth grade pretty much, and Emily was one of the girls at the time in my class and we basically grew up together. I feel like in some ways she's like my sister and we didn't talk to each other at all in between eighth grade, and now we now are both in our 40s and we both live in the same area and she's one of my yoga teachers now and I love her class and it's totally fantastic and we're good friends and one of the things I said to her has led to a retreat where we're doing yoga and working on emotional eating at the same time.

That might be something that we end up doing locally here for our yoga studio. Anyway, I think that yoga is really a powerful practice. I think the mental practice of yoga and also the physical practice of yoga. Now, I am not a scholar when it comes to yoga and studying the tradition of the mental aspect of it. I use yoga for my own recognition in my own body and I've learned so much from my teachers. Three years ago and I was really into this whole thing, I started reading a lot of yoga texts, and when I say texts, I mean people that wrote books about their personal experience in yoga. That's how I found Stephen Cope and he wrote a book called Yoga and he wrote a book called The Quest for the True Self and then he wrote a book called The Great Work of Your Life. The Great Work of Your Life was one of those books that changed everything for me and the distinction that he made that changed how I view my own work changed everything for me. He talks about it extensively in the book but I think it was just I read it in one moment and it changed everything.

The distinction that he made is that there is the work of your life that you do, but the point, and I'm summarizing, the point of the work of your life is not what you accomplish. It's not the body of work. It's not how many people you touch. It's not the books you write or the product you create. It is the effort that you put into it that matters. I said, "What? What do you mean it doesn't matter what you create?" It's the process of the creation that matters. It's the effort that you're putting into it. It's the work, it's the showing up that matters. That

distinction, and I have had that distinction a little bit from Steven Pressfield, and you guys, I've already talked about him being one of my great teachers, but the way that Stephen Cope said it just really impacted me in a different way.

When I read this book, I was stunned by that concept and it really had me shift my focus from what is it that I'm creating to what is the effort I'm bringing forth to the creative process. Can you guys even see the distinction there, the difference between creating something for the end product and the process being the practice of creating. What matters is not so much the end game, although that can help direct us, but what matters is the everyday, is the showing up, is each moment along that way and it's the effort that matters. I love that because there's a lot of times where I'll put a lot of effort into something and the product won't be what I need and I have to scrap it and start something new, and a lot of times I used to believe, "Oh that effort was wasted" or "Oh, that was such a waste of my time."

Now that I have this kind of new philosophy, it's more like, "No, that was my day of effort and that's what matters." The energy that I brought out of me into the world for the purpose of this creation is what matters. I hope you guys are hearing that distinction the way I heard it from him because it was so amazing. I highly recommend that you pick up his book, *The Great Work of Your Life*. It's really an allegory that he's evaluating and a lot of his yoga teachers and Krishna and I won't go too deeply into the book. You can grab it. What I have done is taken the teachings from the book and from Steven that really have the most impact on me and that's what I'm going to share with you.

The first quote is, "The effort to bring forth what is within you is what saves you. The effort to bring forth what is within you is what saves you." He pulls it from the Gospel of Thomas, "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you." It's beautiful, right? I think a lot of people who I speak with tell me that they'd like to bring forth what's within them, except it's not convenient, except they have children, except they have a full time job, and if you think about it this way, no, no, it's not really optional. If you don't bring forth what is within you, it will destroy you. You can't make excuses

for not bringing it forth. It doesn't just kind of matter. It isn't just a luxury. If you don't do it, it will destroy you. I love thinking about it that way.

In the yoga tradition, it insists everybody has a unique vocation and that word vocation is used, translated loosely, don't get dialed into it having to be your job what you do for a living for money. Vocation is your purpose. Your dharma is what they call it. I remember Marianne Williamson talking about this way back in the day and she would have people coming to her that wanted to do their work in the world. They wanted to show up and have their purpose and they felt like they needed an audience like Marianne had. They wanted to know how they can build their audience. She said, "Your work, if it is the same as mine, will be done wherever you are." If you're working at an insurance company, that's where your dharma will be. It may not be on a podium in front of a lot of people. Your work will show up wherever you are. It will come from within you. You don't create it outside of you and then show up to deliver it. You show up and deliver it where you are.

He says, "People feel most happy and fulfilled when meeting their challenge of their dharma." Think about that for a minute. It doesn't say they're feeling most happy and fulfilled when they get the success, when they get the payoff, when they get the applause, when they get everyone telling them how great they are. No, it's not what he's saying here. He's saying, "We are most happy and fulfilled when we're meeting the challenge of it." That's the most important. I can really relate to this when I'm thinking about my process of losing weight and developing the relationship with myself that was required for me to stop eating emotionally. When I look back on that process of learning that, I don't value the day I stood on the scale and with that, my ideal weight. That's not the moment I value the most. The moments I value the most are the moments that I met the challenge, that I overcame the challenge of meeting myself and wanting to look away. That's the most powerful point.

He says, "We are filled up by meeting the challenge." I think that that's a really, really important point. The first point I've made is a lot of people come to me and say, "I'm trying to find my purpose in life. I know what's out there. I want to go get it", but your purpose in your

life is within you right now. The second point is it's not going to feel like rainbows and daisies all the time. There's going to be a challenge that you are going to need to meet in order to deliver it, to find it, to create it. He says, "Doubt is the invisible affliction." Oh my gosh, I love the way he says that, "Doubt is the invisible affliction." I think so many of us can relate to that and having that doubt, right? He quotes Krishna saying, "Inaction is full of action. We are always taking action."

When you are not taking action, he says, "Inaction is full of it." We are turning, when we are not taking action towards our dharma, towards what we're meant to do, towards what is inside of us, we are taking action against it. We are not just sitting still. We are always taking action. We're either taking action for ourselves, making that effort for ourselves or we're taking action resisting it. There is a certain action that leads us towards our fulfillment. It is the action to fulfill our calling, and remember that, calling is not going to feel like rainbows. We are going to be called to the challenge and that's overcoming the challenge and meeting the challenges where we will find our fulfillment.

He says, and this is such a great quote from him, "You cannot be anyone you want to be. You can only find out who you are." I think people that are well intended will say, "You can be anyone you want", but you can't be anyone you want. You can only be you. I think a lot of us want to be like someone else, but you can't be like someone else. You can only be you. It is your only option. How do you be you is you fulfill that calling. You overcome the doubt. You meet the challenge. Not having the desire within yourself to work for the world is the silent tragedy of self betrayal, and what he means by that is your work in the world is to bring forth what is within you to meet that challenge.

A lot of us live our lives based on what we think other people want, what our parents want, what our kids want, what our husband wants, what our wife wants. He says, "At a certain age, it finally dawns on us that no one really cares what we're doing with our life." If you live someone else's dream, it can't ever benefit you or them. If someone has a dream for you, if your parent wants you to be a doctor or a lawyer or your husband wants you to be a stay at home mom or

wants you to work full time, whatever it is, you can't live out a dream for someone else and have it benefit them. The world doesn't work that way. You can only fulfill your own desire. You can't fulfill desire for someone else.

Failure is a part of all dharma stories. Failure is a part of all dharma stories. We only know who we are by trying on various versions of ourselves and failing at them. I think so many of us look at us trying on those different versions of ourselves and failing, meaning something has gone wrong and what he's saying is, "No, that is the process. That is how we find out who we really are." Isn't that such great news? We don't have to look at all those failures as, "Oh gosh, I really didn't know what I was doing." No, it's all part of the process. Every single one of those "failures" were you finding out who you are, whether it's a failed relationship or a failed job or failed business, whatever it is, it's a whole part of you finding out who you are.

Ambivalence, it turns out, is an unavoidable companion for dharma, for fulfilling your purpose, for doing your work in the world. Ambivalence, it turns out, is an unavoidable companion. That second guessing, that questioning, that not being sure, that doubt is all a part of it. Success and failure, and now he's quoting Krishna here, "Success and failure are not your concern. Your task is to bring as much life force as you can muster to the execution of your work." This is the part that just makes my mind explode. "Success and failure are not your concern. Your task is to bring as much life force as you can muster to the execution of your work."

If you can work with abandon, I think this is what they're saying, you can work with abandon without worrying about success or failure. That is what matters. The act of moving forward is what matters. Becoming the midwife of your genius forget, here's what he says, I love it. "Forget yourself. Who is your work an offering to? Focus on them." So powerful, right? Can you imagine showing up and doing your work in the world with no thought of whether it would be a success or failure? Just being able to work with abandon, writing a book, coaching a client, creating even just a podcast, not thinking about whether it's going to be successful, not thinking about how much people will like it, any of that stuff, just focusing on giving the work to the world.

What is mastery? This is fantastic, the way he answers this question. It's almost never the result of mere talent. It's the quality of sustained and intense effort. The challenge is there for you on purpose. The point isn't to be successful. The point isn't to have the creation. The point is to create. The point is the effort. The effort is the point. He says this so eloquently in so many different ways that I think this is why this book had such an impact on me. It's not the fruit of the labor. It's the labor that matters. It's the effort that matters. It's the life force that you bring to it that matters. Could you live your life that way? Could you find mastery by not worrying about the outcome but only focusing on the effort that you bring?

He talks about this concept called Attentional Training, Attentional Training. Even just those two words together I think encapsulates so much of the work that I do with my students, paying attention to themselves, paying attention to their lives, paying attention to their minds and what they're feeling and what they're thinking and what they're doing and the result, so many of us have distracted ourselves from ourselves, distracted ourselves from our lives. I feel like so much of the work that I do is teaching people how to pay attention and I love the way he describes it as attentional training. That is what I do. I feel like I'm an attentional trainer. Pay attention to what you are feeling. Pay attention to what you are thinking. Pay attention to what you're doing. Write that food journal. Look at what you're doing. Pay attention without judging. Be fascinated. Refinement of attention is a central component of mastery. I think one of the best skills that I have is my ability to pay attention to myself, my mind, my feelings. I have enough awareness that I know how to bring attention.

He says, "You love what you know deeply. Get to know yourself deeply." The way that we get to know ourselves deeply is by paying attention to ourselves. How do you get to know another human being deeply? You pay attention to them. You spend time with them. You listen to them. You notice them. Think about your own children. Think about how much attention you pay to them, especially when they're toddlers. We pay such close attention. I feel this way about my puppies. I have an abnormal love for my puppies, Rory and Rocket. Rory is such a wise little guy and he's so funny and I pay such close attention to his expressions and what he does, Chris and I, my husband and I are always pointing out what he's doing. "Look at him

there. Look at him there. Notice this. Notice that." I'm so in love with him. I know every detail of everything he does and every quirk in his personality.

It's the same with my kids. I pay such close attention. I know when they're upset even when they don't say anything. Same with my husband Chris. We just celebrated 18 years together so I've been paying a lot of attention to him for a long time. Even with myself, I can tell when something's not right with me physically. Right away, I can sense it if there's something going on, certain foods in my body. If I take certain medications, anything that happens in my body, I pay close enough attention. I know what's going on in my mind. I know what's going on in my life. I know when I'm experiencing doubt or when I'm heading towards sabotage. I've paid close enough attention. I know myself deeply and I think that's why I love myself, not because I'm so great, not because I'm so amazing but just because I know myself.

Think about the things that you love deeply. I think the way he says this is so clarifying. You think about - I don't love Rory and Rocket because they're such amazing dogs and they're so much more successful and better than everyone else, no. I love them because I have paid such close attention to them, that I see them in all of their ...and I'm able to appreciate it in such a deep way. It's like if you meditate on a certain object for long enough. That's how you develop mastery, by paying close attention to it. He talks about this idea of vain anxiety, which I love, vain, V-A-I-N, anxiety. He calls that the anxiety of asking yourself what will they think? What will they think of me? He talks about that being such a huge interferer with doing our dharma, with creating our work in the world, because we adjust based on what we think other people will think, because we think what other people think about us matters, but the only reason it matters is because what we think about what they think, vain anxiety, such a great way of talking about it.

He also talks about the concept of the pain of pain. It's like the fear of fear, the pain of pain. There's genuine pain that's a part of life, and then there's suffering that we heap on top of pain. There's physical pain and then there's the emotional pain and we add to it. The way he describes it, he says, "The aversion to pain is what adds suffering." I

really like his solution for it too. When difficulty arises, give yourself to it. Go into the heart of the difficulty. Do not declare war on it. Go into it. I love it. It's like instead of resisting, instead of thinking there shouldn't be a challenge or it shouldn't be hard, you go into it and you give yourself to it.

This concept that I think is so amazing, when I was preparing for this podcast, I found it in the book and I had underlined it and started and wrote amazing on the page. This is what it says, "You cannot choose life without also choosing death. There is no life without death." It doesn't exist, life without death. I think that is on the larger scale, if we're choosing to live, we're also choosing death. It's part of it. I think on a smaller scale, when we choose to do our work in the world, we're also choosing the challenge. We're also choosing the difficulty, and if we can see that we're choosing it and we can consciously pay attention and give ourselves to it, we will have a much deeper experience of living our purpose, of living our dharma, of doing our work in the world than if we constantly try to resist or avoid any kind of challenge.

Difficulties are an opportunity for evolution. They destroy us to recreate us. I think after I read this book was when I really got into my mind that I wanted to evolve. I wanted to keep evolving into a deeper, richer experience of myself. Knowing the challenges and growing and setting goals and putting the effort into it is what it means to be alive. It's not distraction and comfort and hiding that brings me the happiest version of myself. The happiest version of myself is someone that's constantly being challenged by my own work in the world. Difficulties are an opportunity for evolution.

The last concept is a concept that he talks about and he references Carl Jung in it and it's so amazing to think about. If instead of resisting conflict and instead of trying to resolve it, we can hold it, this is what they say, "Hold the tension between two opposing forces." If you do that, so the alternative is trying to resolve it right away, fix it or avoid it but if instead you can move towards it and hold that tension between two opposing forces, whether that's an internal conflict or an external conflict between you and someone else or if it's an internal conflict, instead of trying to resolve it or avoid it or move away from it, if you can hold it. Let me give you an example. You want to eat the

cupcake and you also don't want to eat the cupcake. You're like, "I don't want to eat the cupcake because I want to lose weight and I want to eat the cupcake because it's delicious and I want to avoid how I'm feeling and I want pleasure because I want to avoid this negative emotion."

Instead of trying to resolve it and negotiate it and fix it, you just hold it. You be present with that tension between wanting to eat it and not wanting to eat it. You don't have to resolve it. You don't have to eat it or not eat it. You can hold the tension of both of those. Can you see it? Can you guys sense this? If you do that, if you hold the tension between two opposing forces, there will emerge a third way that will transcend the two and make way for an evolution. With the cupcake example, think about it, if you eat the cupcake, you've resolved it. If you insist on not eating the cupcake, you've resolved it but if you don't try and resolve it and you just allow the tension to be there, there will come a third way that you will transcend that tension and find it, and that is exactly what I feel like I have done when it comes to cupcakes. I no longer need to resolve that tension between the two because I feel like I have evolved beyond the argument of whether I'll eat it or not eat it.

One of the ways that I did it is I allowed the tension to be there without having to resolve it immediately. I allowed it. I held the space for it. I think that's a lot of what he's teaching us here. Now I pulled out some notes, it's so interesting. When I was preparing, I went through the whole book and looked through all of my underlined notes that I had in the book. When I read a book, a hardcover book, which is the one I have here, I go through and I write in the book and I underline it and I star and I circle and when I go back through, I love reading what I've pulled out. I also in this book had a piece of binder paper tucked into it where I had written some notes, and that's not normally something that I do, but I pulled the piece of paper out and I just want to share some of the thoughts that I had written on here because I think they're worth discussing.

This one is really powerful. Motivation is an intention, not an impulse. Motivation is an intention, not an impulse. A lot of us wait to be motivated. We want to have that impulse come over us, and what he's saying is it's an intention. Motivation is something we can

cultivate to completion. He says, "Ambition, which is a choice for something greater", right, when you have ambition, I had a whole podcast on this, when you have ambition, you choose something greater, so when you have ambition plus expectancy, which is choosing to believe something can happen, that's when you have motivation.

Can you see that it's an intention over an impulse? It's ambition, which is choosing something greater, plus expectancy, which is choosing to believe it can happen, equals motivation. Ambition plus expectancy equal motivation. Ambition and expectancy are both choices. It takes effort to focus on your desired goal. It takes sustained effort to complete it, but the purpose is not to complete it. The purpose is the sustained effort. Courageous action should be measured, not the result.

I love that. I think we're trained against this. I don't think our effort is measured in school. It is only the grade at the end. We don't get graded on how much time and energy it took us to create it. We only get graded on the end result, which I think is so powerful because if I could be graded on the effort that I put into it, which I think is how we are internally graded, we know what we have put into something and when we put our head on the pillow at night, what matters is are we proud of ourselves and how do we measure that? Do we measure that based on the effort we put in or do we measure it on the result or do we measure it on what other people think about us? If you can, and this is what Stephen taught me to do, this changed my life. He taught me to measure myself based on my effort, not my struggle, not my resistance, not my angst but my effort, my genuine effort.

For me, that looks like deliberate action. That looks like managing my mind. That looks like taking responsibility and cultivating my feelings that will fuel the results I want to create and I take credit for every result in my life, whether it's a wanted result or an unwanted result. The most important thing to me now and what I have really integrated into my life is what matters is that I'm suiting up, I'm showing up and I'm delivering. What the effect of that delivery is is really none of my business. The success that I create isn't in how many dollars I make or how many people I affect. The success is in the effort that I put forth, and I will tell you that since I have switched my mind to that,

that is what has made all the difference in terms of the success that I've created and it's just like icing on the cake, because what matters to me is am I showing up in the best way I know how? Am I delivering what is within me? Am I putting that out into the world? Am I meeting the challenge and holding the difficulty and not worrying that it's not part of the process but using it as a way to create?

I'm absolutely thrilled for those of you who don't know Stephen to read his work and to become more familiar with him. For those of you who have never done yoga, I hope that he will talk you into it because it's a beautiful practice, and it doesn't have to be vinyasa hot yoga, although you should absolutely check it out. It's the best, but yin yoga, which is relaxing. Anything that tunes you into yourself and into your mind and into your body is a beautiful thing. I hope you guys have enjoyed this as much as I have and I will talk to you all next week. Have a beautiful week, everybody. Bye bye.

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