

Ep #90: Lessons from Geneen Roth



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 the what 90? Oh my gosh! I seriously can't believe we've had 90 episodes together. This is so exciting. As you know every 10th episode I share with you a teacher of mine, somebody that's had a huge influence on my life and somebody that I want to share with you. This teacher takes us back to old school, back in the day. I'm so in love with this teacher. First of all let me just start by saying I think she's one of the best writers on the planet and I would read anything and have read anything she writes. I think she is a fantastic, beautiful, amazing writer. Her name is Geneen Roth. I found Geneen Roth back in the day when I was very young actually in the '80s. I was searching for compulsive overeating and I found her book Breaking Free from Compulsive Eating. I inhaled that book. I loved that book. She has written many more books since then. I read them the minute they came out.

I actually think I found Geneen on Oprah. I'm pretty sure that's where I found her, and then every book that came out after that I was so excited about. She's written Women, Food and God, she's written When Food Is Love, Feeding the Hungry Heart, Why Weight?, When You Eat at the Refrigerator Pull Up a Chair, Appetites and Lost and Found. The thing about Geneen that I love so much is her kindness and her voice about how to treat ourselves. I went to one of Geneen's 3 day seminars and really loved everything that she did in that seminar and the work that I did and really trying to find a way to love myself and be kind to myself and to learn how to feel.

I feel like Geneen Roth's work really took me to a place where I could really learn how to feel and really learn how to love myself. I do think that there was some missing pieces of her work that I then learned afterwards that I think really took me to the next level but I don't think I could have gotten there without Geneen. One of the things that Geneen teaches when she teaches compulsive eating and how to overcome it to really allow yourself to eat whatever you want and to give yourself permission to eat whatever you want. If that means you gain weight, then you gain weight but then you will regulate yourself and find yourself at a more natural weight.

I think that that works to a certain extent and I think that the process of that worked really well for me. I remember I was in college and I did allow myself to eat whatever I wanted and I got myself feeling a little bit sick eating too many cookies and too many yogurt pretzels but I also was very enticed by the idea of really, one of the other books that she had written, Feeding the Hungry Heart, I could really relate to feeling hungry and really wanting something in my life and feeling like food could solve it and really learning from her that food couldn't. I highly recommend her books, just for the writing alone and for the message of kindness. Again her philosophy is really about, and one of the things that I learned the most from her is that, the pleasure that we get from food is really a cheap substitute for the real joy of living our lives.

I'm going to share some of her quotes with you and some of her philosophies with you and hopefully you will enjoy them as much as I have enjoyed her. Of course her last book that she wrote is called Lost and Found. It's a book about losing all of her money. She had many, many, many best selling books and was very successful, was featured on Oprah quite a bit, had a very successful company and was giving all of her money for money management to Bernie Madoff. She wrote a book about losing all of her money to him and the whole process that she went through to recover and heal from that. Of course everything's aligned with the connection that we have with ourselves and how that relates to food. I'm assuming most of you who have had emotional eating issues know about Geneen Roth but if you don't please go check out her work.

Most of the quotes that I'm going to share here are from Women, Food and God. "You are not a mistake. You are not a problem to be solved. But you won't discover this until you are willing to stop banging your head against the wall of shaming, caging and fearing yourself. When you believe without knowing you believe that you are damaged at your core, you will also believe that you need to hide that damage for anyone to love you. You walk around ashamed of being yourself. You try hard to make up for the way you look, walk, feel. Decisions are agonizing because if you, the person who makes the decision, is damaged, then how can you trust what you decide? You doubt your own impulses so you become masterful at looking outside yourself for comfort. You become an expert at finding experts and

programs, at striving and trying hard and then harder to change yourself, but this process only reaffirms what you already believe about yourself, that your needs and choices cannot be trusted, and left to your own devices you are out of control."

"Hell is wanting to be somewhere different from where you are. Being one place and wanting to be somewhere else, wanting life to be different from what it is. That's also called leaving without leaving. Dying before you die. It's as if there is a part of you that so rails against being shattered by love that you shatter yourself first." I see this so commonly in my clients in that they fail so they don't have to fail. They fail ahead of time so they don't have to deal with the pain of failure. They quit so they don't have to deal with the pain of quitting. The way that she puts, I love this, "You shatter yourself first".

"Freedom from obsession is not about something you do, it's about knowing who you are. It's about recognizing what sustains you and what exhausts you, what you love and what you think you love because you believe you can't have it. Compulsive eating is basically a refusal to be fully alive. No matter what we weigh, those of us who are compulsive eaters have anorexia of the soul. We refuse to take in what sustains us. We live lives of deprivation. And when we can't stand it any longer we binge. The way we are able to accomplish all of this is by the simple act of bolting of leaving ourselves a hundreds of times a day."

This is what I tell my clients a lot of the time, that we abandon ourselves, we ignore ourselves and we avoid ourselves in ways that we would never do to other people. We would never treat other people and break promises to other people the way that we do it to ourselves. When she says we bolt a hundred times a day, we abandon ourselves, we ignore ourselves, we avoid ourselves, we don't listen. We don't say "Hey what's going on? Why are you feeling this way?" Right? We literally shove food in our mouth instead.

"It's never been true, not anywhere at any time, that the value of a soul, of a human spirit, is dependent on a number on a scale. We are unrepeatable beings of light and space and water who need these physical vehicles to get around. When we start defining ourselves by that which can be measured or weighed, something deep within us

rebels. We don't want to eat hot fudge sundaes as much as we want our lives to be hot fudge sundaes. We want to come home to ourselves." I think this is so true. I love the way that she puts this, it's almost like we are getting that taste of pleasure from food instead of creating that joy in our lives.

"I believe in love and beauty. I believe that every single person has something they find beautiful and that they truly love. The smell of their child's hair, the silence of a forest, their lover's crooked grin, their country, their religion, their family. And I believe that if you follow this love all the way to the end, if you start with the thing you find most beautiful and trace its perfume back to its essence, you will perceive an intangible presence, a swath of stillness that allows the thing you love to be visible like the openness of the sky reveals the presence of the moon." Okay stop it, that's just brilliant writing. It's beautiful writing, I feel like I can literally taste her words. I love everything she writes.

"Weight, too much or too little, is a by-product. Weight is what happens when you use food to flatten your life. Even with aching joints, it's not about food. Even with arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure. It's about your desire to flatten your life. It's about the fact that you've given up without saying so. It's about your belief that it's not possible to live any other way, that you're using food to act that out without ever having to admit it." I love the way she says you use it to flatten your life, whatever emotion you are feeling it dulls it. The example I use with my clients sometimes is if you take a crystal glass that's empty and you vibrate it, very similarly to how emotions vibrate in our body, the vibration will be louder and more significant if there's nothing in the glass. If you fill the glass with food, just as if you feel your body with food, you will flatten that vibration. You will flatten the experience of being alive, whether it's joy that you're feeling or pain that you're feeling, food will flatten or dull that emotion.

"Imagine not being frightened by any feeling. Imagine knowing that nothing will destroy you. That you are beyond any feeling, bigger than, vaster than, there is no reason to use drugs because anything a drug could do would pale in comparison to who you are. To what you can understand, live, be, just by being with that presents itself to you in the form of the feelings you have." I love that. Imagine not being

frightened by any feeling. I talk about this a lot on the podcast. I talk about this idea that the worst that can happen is a feeling and the reason why most of us don't act and don't do what we want to do is because we're afraid of how we'll feel, but what if we weren't afraid of any feeling?

"When you ignore your belly you become homeless. You spend your life trying to erase your own existence. Apologizing for yourself, feeling like a ghost, eating to take up space, eating to give yourself the feeling that you have weight here, you belong here, you are allowed to be yourself but never quite believing it because you don't sense yourself directly. I started teaching a simple belly meditation in which I asked people to become aware of sensations in their bell, numbness and emptiness count as sensations. Every time their mind wandered I asked them to begin counting their breaths so they could anchor their concentration. Starting with the number 1 and saying it on the out breath, they'd count to 7 and begin again. If they were able to stay concentrated on the sensations in their belly centers, they didn't need to use counting as a concentration anchor."

"You begin the process of bringing yourself back to your body, to your belly, to your breath because they, not the mind medleys, are here now. It is only here, only now that you can make a decision to eat or not eat. To occupy your own body or to vacate your arms and your legs while still breathing and go through your days as a walking head. Meditation is a tool to shake yourself awake, a way to discover what you love, a practice to return yourself to your body when the mind medleys threaten to usurp your sanity." I love the way that Geneen brings us back inside of our bodies, brings us back to understanding what's going on, paying attention to what's going on. Not trying to dull it with food and not trying to escape it by avoiding it.

"Treat yourself as if you already are enough. Walk as if you are enough. Eat as if you are enough. See, look, listen as if you are enough. Because it is true. Most of us spend our lives protecting ourselves from losses that have already happened. If you worry that not finishing the food on your plate is a slap in the face of all the hungry people everywhere, you are not living in reality. The truth is that you will either throw the food out or you'll throw it in, but either way it turns to waste. World hunger will not be solved by finishing the

garlic mashed potatoes on your plate. What you pay attention to grows. Pay attention to your loveliness, your magnificent self. Begin now. We eat the way we eat because we are afraid to feel what we feel."

"Most of our suffering comes from resisting what is already here particularly our feelings. All any feeling wants is to be welcomed, touched, allowed. It wants attention. It wants kindness. If you treated your feelings with as much love as you treated your dog or your cat or your child, you'd feel as if you were living in heaven every day of your sweet life." I think this is so amazingly profound if you allow it to really sink. If you aren't afraid to feel, if you allow your feelings, if you see your feelings for what they are and experience your feelings for what they are, you will feel as if you're experiencing heaven on earth. You will be awake to yourself.

"Awareness is learning to keep yourself company." This is so good, "For some reason, we are truly convinced that if we criticize ourselves the criticism will lead to change. If we are harsh we believe we will end up being kind. If we shame ourselves we believe we end up loving ourselves. It has never been true, not for a moment, that shame leads to love. Only love leads to love." That is so good. That is so good, so many of my clients want to beat themselves thin. They want to beat themselves into loving themselves. It's impossible.

"Weight loss does not make people happy or peaceful. Being thin does not address the emptiness that has no shape or weight or name. Even a wildly successful diet is a colossal failure because inside the new body is the same sinking heart. If we think our job here on earth is to fix ourselves, we will keep looking for the broken places. If we believe our job is to be kind, we will keep lavishing love on ourselves. You will never stop wanting more until you allow yourself to have what you already have, to take it in, savor it. Now is a good time to do that. Staying requires being curious about who you actually are when you don't take yourself to be a collection of memories. When you don't infer your existence from replaying what happened to you, when you don't take yourself to be the girl your mother, father, brother, teacher, lover didn't see or adore. When you sense yourself directly, immediately, right now, without preconception, who are you?"

This is so good. This is so brilliant for anyone who's trying to lose weight, but anyone who's even not trying to lose weight this is so important. Because you define yourself by who you are in this moment instead by defining yourself by the collection of memories from your past, from how the people have treated you, from the number of failures you have at losing weight. If you look here now and you define who you are by who you are in this moment not what you've accomplished, not what you've done but just who you are right now and who you most want to be. Think of how your life would change if you redefined that.

"Compulsive eating is only the symptom. Believing that you are not worth your own love is the problem. Go for the love. You will never be sorry. Sometimes people will say, 'But I just like the taste of food. In fact, I love the taste! Why can't it be that simple? I overeat because I like food.' But when you like something, you pay attention to it. When you like something, love something, you take time with it. You want to be present for every moment of the rapture. Overeating does not lead to rapture. It leads to burping and farting and being so sick that you can't think of anything but how full you are. That is not love, that is suffering. Until the hunger of the heart is named and touched, no amount of advice no matter how medically correct, will enable someone to stop eating destructively. If someone is using food to slowly kill herself, giving her an exercise and food plan will not turn her around. We need to recognize that she wants to die. We need to see her eating as a way of expressing what she doesn't know what to say another way. We need to touch the ground of the pain and dissolve its roots."

And finally, "Compulsion is despair at the emotional level. The substances, people or activities that we become compulsive about are those that we believe capable of taking our despair away. Compulsive behavior at its most fundamental is a lack of self-love. It's an expression of a belief that we are not good enough." I love Geneen Roth. I love everything about her, I highly recommend every single thing she has written. I do not know what I would have done without her when I was learning about compulsive eating. I think she's the one that truly taught me how to look within for the answer that I most wanted to find and stop looking outside for the next diet or for the next food plan to solve my issues. It really helped me look

inside for those answers. I will always be grateful to her. I will love listening to her read her books. I will always love reading every single thing she writes. I highly recommend, you can check out her website at geneenroth.com, G-E-N-E-E-N R-O-T-H dot com. Please, please go to Amazon and enjoy all of her books. They are all absolutely worth a read. Have a wonderful beautiful week. I'll talk to you guys next week.

Thank you for listening to The Life Coach School podcast. It would be incredibly awesome if you would take a moment to write a quick review on iTunes. For any questions, comments or coaching issues you would like to hear on the show please visit us as www.thelifecoachschool.com.