

Ep #394: Unproductive Thought Work



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

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You are listening to *The Life Coach School Podcast* with Brooke Castillo, episode number 394.

Welcome to *The Life Coach School Podcast*, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hello, my beautiful friends. Okay, so I live in a high-rise building in downtown Austin, and I share a floor with another penthouse, and they are remodeling. So, it has been quite an adventure to live in my home, and the banging and the drilling and the noise.

So, if you hear some banging and drilling and noise, I would just like to invite you into my home for the pleasure that it is to be in here right now. I apologize if it's disturbing. But the show must go on. We must record and we must continue.

And so, we are now going to talk about unproductive thought work. I just recently got back from watching my son play golf. He's playing for his college. He is playing so well. I'm so proud of him, so excited for all of the progress that he's made and all of the things that he's doing and it was just such an amazing weekend to spend with him.

And one of the things I was thinking about while I was there was – I was thinking about two things. I'm creating a podcast on the negative 50, processing emotion, and then also talking about unproductive thought work; when we actually use the Model against ourselves, when we can use thought work in a way that doesn't serve us.

And for so many of us, thought work has literally saved our lives. It has put us on a trajectory that we wouldn't normally be on and created more success and more accomplishment and more wellbeing than we would have had without it.

But sometimes, we can take that very good thing and use it against ourselves. It's just like any tool can be used for us or against us. And so, when I'm coaching people and they come to me, they tell me that they've

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been doing thought work, but they're not getting the progress that they want or they're not accomplishing their goals the way they want, or something, they seem to be stuck; it's usually because they're doing one of these five things that I'm about to tell you.

Okay, now they're playing music... I love my life right now – one of these five things that create unproductive thought work, where we're actually using the Model and thought work to not be productive, to not move forward, to basically use it against ourselves.

And so, I'm going to go through these five things and I want you to, especially if you're kind of a veteran at thought work and you feel like you've been doing it for a while and you're not making the same kind of progress that maybe you did in the beginning, you may be doing one of these five mistakes.

So, mistake number one is trying to be positive all the time. This is usually a mistake I see with brand-new clients. And they learn the Model and they learn that their thoughts cause their feelings and they misinterpret the tool to be telling them that, "Because you are the cause of your feelings, that you should feel good all of the time. You should never feel bad because you're the one that makes you feel bad, and therefore if you're feeling bad, it's your fault and you should stop."

This is not advised. This is never something I have ever taught. This is not encouraged and won't work. So, the good news is, it won't work. So, it will be a complete waste of your time if you're constantly trying to be positive about everything all of the time and beating yourself up for not being positive all of the time.

So, when you first teach the Model, when you first learn the Model, one of the best ways to teach it is to give an example of an unintentional Model and then an intentional Model. And so, you put these two models next to each other with the same circumstance and you show how your thoughts are creating your feelings by how you choose your thinking.

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And so, it's important to understand that circumstances don't cause your feelings and that you could have a positive emotion, or a negative emotion, about the same circumstance based on your thinking.

This is not to suggest that you should always have a positive emotion and that you shouldn't ever feel a negative emotion. The unintentional model is for awareness. It's for understanding. And so, a lot of times, we'll have kneejerk thoughts, patterned thought, patterned belief systems that we aren't even aware of.

And by becoming aware of them, we can understand why we feel the way we do, because of the way that we think about something. And this does not mean that we shouldn't feel that way. And this doesn't mean that we necessarily want to change our thought.

Sometimes, the unintentional Model is simply written down for our awareness, for our understanding, for our consciousness. And we want to keep the same thought. We want to stay upset about certain things that we want to be upsetting in our lives.

There is never an indication that we should feel good about, quote unquote, bad things. What there is a suggestion, with the work that I do, is that you're just aware of what you're choosing to think. Because a lot of times, we are choosing thoughts unconsciously that we don't want to be believing, thoughts that are based on old programming, negative thoughts that were passed down to us that we don't want to believe, that we don't want to think.

And in those instances, we do have the opportunity to change them. And in many instances, just the awareness that we're thinking unconscious thoughts like that will create change in our lives. We don't even have to try. We just notice, "Hey, we're thinking this. I don't want to be thinking this. I don't want to be believing this. I didn't even know I was believing this," then that change happens naturally.

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But when we have thoughts and we become aware of them and we judge ourselves for those thoughts and we think that we should always try and be positive about everything, we completely lose the plot. And it doesn't work.

So, that's mistake number one. Do not always try to be positive. Do not always try to find positive emotions. Your life will be a combination of negative and positive. It is the way of it. It is the way of balancing out what it's like to be a human and to be alive in the world. I have not experienced anyone who has had genuine positive emotion their entire life being a human being. It's just not how our lives were intended to be.

And so, by understanding our Models and by looking at them and understanding that many of our Models will be negative and they will cause negative emotion and that is part of what we want to have happen in our life, we will release ourselves from judging ourselves and compounding ourselves for not being positive all the time.

Number two is using the Model with an agenda to be happy. And this is similar to number one, but it's a little bit different because, what happens is, you start using the Model and believing that, if you use the Model, you will end up happy all of the time, if you do thought work and you do it well, you will be a happy person all of the time.

This is not the case, my friends. This is not even what I want for you, my friends. This isn't even what you should want for you. A life where you are happy all the time means that you are happy about everything that's going on in your life, everything that's going on in the world. It's just impossible for most humans to be happy all of the time. And to have that be an agenda with thought work is going to cause you problems.

And this is even true when you are trying to create a goal for yourself, trying to create a result for yourself and you feel like you're forcing new thoughts that will make you feel happy so you can create that result for yourself. That kind of agenda and that kind of forcing of trying to force yourself to think new thoughts is not going to help you be happy.

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I mean, even when I say it out loud, it's the opposite of going to make you happy. It's going to make you crazy is what it's going to do. And then you are going to be frustrated that you're not happy, so then you're going to try to do more thought work and more models on why you're not happy.

And I've seen this happen with so many people. You end up in a spiral of, "I'm not doing this right. I'm not right. Something's wrong with me. I can't get this." And I think that this is one of the most detrimental ways of decreasing the opportunity to become aware of what it's like to be you.

And when you use the Model in a way to understand, "Huh, this is why I'm not happy. This is why I am happy. This is how this shows up. This is what's true for me," and you stop trying to have an agenda to always be feeling happy, very similar to always trying to be positive, you are going to, I think, lose the opportunity to really understand what it's like to be you.

And that is the full purpose of the Model, is to show your brain to yourself and not to have an agenda where you're trying to manipulate it all the time but more importantly, you're trying to understand it and be at peace with understanding it.

As you do the Model more, what you will find is that as you discover your unintentional Models, as you understand your unconscious Models and you drop the agenda to be happy, those Models that don't resonate with you once they become conscious, you won't even have to try to change them. You won't even have to try to change the thought. You won't even have to go to the place where you're writing a new Model.

It's almost like that Model will let go of you. You just won't see it as serving you anymore and the awareness can really just dissipate it. So, if you have found yourself really getting frustrated with not being as happy as you want to be and you are trying to use the Model to make yourself happy, I want to encourage you to just let it go.

Just use the Model as an opportunity to uncover what it is that's going on in your mind, what it is that you're feeling and pay attention as the witness to it. You will be motivated without having to force yourself to change in ways

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that will serve you, but not in a way that's contrived and this kind of demanding of yourself to be happy and frustration that the Model isn't making you happy.

The truth is, the Model doesn't make you happy. The Model just reveals your brain and your life to you. It's an awareness tool.

Number three is – the mistake that I see and the unproductive thing that I see is people trying to change their thoughts to feel differently without feeling the original thought from that unintentional Model.

So, what happens is you will discover a thought that's causing a certain amount of pain or a certain amount of negativity or a certain amount of frustration. And you won't want to experience that emotion. You won't want to look at it. You won't want to experience it. So, you will resist it, push it away, or buffer it and try to replace it with a new Model without having felt through that first emotion.

So, for example, let's say that you are feeling unmotivated and you find out that the thought is, "This work is too hard. I don't have time to do it. I'm not good at it." And so, you're feeling unmotivated and then your action line is procrastination.

And you discover that you're feeling unmotivated, and you discover that you're feeling frustrated. And instead of being present with that emotion and kind of opening yourself up to experiencing what that emotion is and processing that emotion through, for as long as it takes – sometimes it's a minute, five minutes, 10 minutes, whatever, just really being in that emotion instead of resisting it or buffering it away – you will be able to release it and then find a new thought, then find a new approach.

But if you are resisting it and trying to work through it and trying to push that emotion away, it will still affect you, just because you're putting it into an unconscious place, into your mind, doesn't mean those vibrations won't still be coursing through your body.

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And you'll notice this happening because the feeling will just keep coming back. The thought and the feeling will just keep coming back if you haven't fully processed the emotion. So, it's kind of like if you've lost something and you need to grieve it, or somebody said something and you felt hurt or disappointed or frustrated, or like we said, unmotivated.

If you don't just give yourself a minute to breathe into that emotion, feel what that is like inside of your body, allow the discomfort to be there, open yourself up to it, walk into the room of that emotion, really be present with it, be unafraid, be courageous with that emotion, see the thought causing it but stay with it long enough for that emotion to process through and then maybe attempt to feel something different and do something different by thinking something different. But don't try and rush that emotion or resist it or buffer that emotion before you've had a chance to fully process it.

One of the superpowers when it comes to thought work is the ability to stay present in your own awareness and to stay connected to your own emotions. When you are willing to feel any emotion and process it and understand it, it will lose its power to control you.

When you try to resist it and push it away from you, it makes it bigger. And that's when we react and that's when we overcompensate and that's when we buffer and that's when we run away from ourselves. We want to be able to stay in, breathe in, be one with ourselves, be mindful about what we're thinking that is causing that emotion, and be with it for as long as it takes, to let it actually process through and let go of you. Don't be in a hurry to get to a new thought until you've processed your first emotion from your unintentional Model.

Number four is feeling bad about feeling bad. And I talk about this a lot. And I think one of the main sources of anxiety and depression and frustration with our lives and shame is feeling bad about feeling bad.

We are sold a bill of goods on social media and in the movies and in fairytales that we should live happily ever after and that we should be happy all the time and we should be grateful for what we have and we

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should appreciate and be in gratitude for all of the privilege and all of the blessings that we have in our lives. And if we aren't, we're ungrateful and there's something wrong with us.

I think this is one of the tragedies of being human, is that we think there's something wrong with us when we have negative human emotion. And especially when we think it's our own fault and we shouldn't have it.

So, I just want to let you know, you have a human brain that is constantly producing negative emotion because of the way that it has evolved and is designed. And I have found that sometimes, the more comfortable that we are, the more successful that we are, the more privileged, the more blessed, the more successful, all of those things, it gives the brain more of a chance to look for danger and freak you out.

And then we feel bad, like, "What do I have to feel bad about? I have everything going for me. I shouldn't feel sorry for myself. I shouldn't feel bad." And then we're mad at ourselves for feeling bad.

This is one of the most unproductive things we can do. And what happens is we start looking at our negative thoughts and we start getting mad about how we're feeling and then we try to push those feelings away and be grateful and be blessed and be happy. And that just does not work. It just does not work and it will end up putting you into a spiral.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we indulge in negative emotion either and then feel sorry for ourselves. I'm just saying we look at it from a very clean perspective and we understand, "Yes, of course I'm going to feel negative emotion. Of course, I'm going to be anxious sometimes. Of course, I'm going to be depressed sometimes. Of course, I'm going to be lonely sometimes, be frustrated sometimes. I'm going to be mad sometimes. This is all part of what it's like to be me and be a human on this planet. And it's okay. And it means that I'm normal and it means that I can love myself through this and I accept myself through this and I don't have to feel bad about being a human being."

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That includes the thoughts that you have. That includes the feelings that you have. And that includes the actions that you take. And that includes negative actions that you take.

If you are buffering, if you are lashing out at people, if you are reacting to things in your life, it doesn't mean there's something wrong with you. It doesn't mean you need to be fixed. It simply means that you're a human being on the planet and feeling bad, feeling negatively is part of the process.

And I just really want to recommend that you don't feel bad about being a human being. You don't feel bad about feeling bad. You allow space, you hold space for yourself for you to have the 50:50 experience of being on this planet.

Number five is trying to figure out why you're thinking the way you are. I see this with so many students who are doing thought downloads and who are doing models with negative thoughts, and especially reoccurring negative thoughts, and they're trying to figure out why they're thinking the way they are, "Why am I having these thoughts?"

And for some reason, this feels productive to try and discover the source of it. And one of the questions that I like to ask is, "Why are you choosing to think this right now?" So, instead of trying to find out, "Where did this thought come from? When did I start believing this? Why is this even happening?" None of that is as important as, "Why am I making this choice today, to think this thought today?"

And sometimes, just asking that question will help reveal that you don't have to make that choice if you don't want to. But beyond that, trying to discover the source of negative thoughts can be very unproductive. Because what I have seen people do is they start trying to find out what is wrong with them that they would think these negative thoughts.

And as soon as you start asking the question, "What is wrong with me? What went wrong with me that I'm thinking these negative thoughts?" is you

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start going down this rabbit hole of negative discovery and trying to find negative evidence against yourself.

And I have just never found this to be a productive way to spend your time, by asking what's wrong. If you ask yourself what's wrong with yourself, "What's wrong with my brain that I'm thinking this?" You're going to find answers. And most of them will be very unproductive.

And so, we're basically rejecting the current thought that we're having, we're mad at ourselves for having it. We're mad about feeling bad. We don't want to feel this way. And so, we're rejecting who we are as the source of this thought and going down a trail of negative discovery.

So, I want to recommend that you don't spend a lot of time trying to figure out why you're thinking a thought, where it came from. You simply ask yourself why you're choosing it now and see that it's optional to choose it now or not. That being said, just noticing, "My brain is having this thought. This is how it feels," processing the emotion, not reacting to it, and then choosing whether you want to let it go or not.

That is the most productive way I know of how to do thought work; trying to get to the meaning behind it. Or some people will say to me, "Well, I want to get to the underlying thought, like the deeper thought." I promise you, the deeper thought is always, "I'm not worthy."

It will always lead you to, "I'm not lovable. I'm unworthy. People don't like me." You're always going to go to these recycled thoughts that all of us seem to have about ourselves. And I find those thoughts to be very challenging to unwind.

I think the more specific thoughts that we're having on a day-to-day basis are the ones that can actually help us make the most progress, if we can hold space for them to be there. So, don't spend a lot of time trying to figure out the why or the source. Just understand, "This is the thought I'm having right now and this is a choice. And I can choose to keep believing this, or I can choose to not believe it. But I don't even have to understand why I originally thought this."

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I know a lot of therapy helps us discover the origins of some of our belief systems. And that can be helpful. And you'll know that it's helpful because you'll feel yourself progressing. You'll feel yourself understanding and moving forward.

What I'm talking about is the constant asking why that doesn't have any answer, that doesn't have any source, that doesn't have any cause, and is always just leading to something being wrong with you. That and then ultimately beating yourself up for feeling that way and then trying to avoid that emotion. That is very unproductive. And so, don't get caught in the trap of trying to figure out why.

And the last one – I guess there are six of them. The last one is pretending. And this is one that I think we are socialized to do, and so oftentimes we don't even know when we're pretending. We don't even know when we're pretending to be making progress because we're taught, if we do this, then we'll feel this way, so therefore we should just act like we feel that way and we should pretend like this is working, even though it's not.

And this goes back to the original source which is, if you're doing thought work right, you should be happy all the time. And so, therefore, then we pretend to be happy. We pretend to be positive.

Listen, this is not working. No one is buying this from you. We all know when someone's pretending to be positive and pretending to be happy. You can feel the energy through the pretense. And I think this does more damage because it prevents us from processing emotion. It prevents us from our own awareness of what we're actually thinking and where we actually are.

So, I'm not saying that we shouldn't attempt to be the version of ourselves that we want to be. And many times, that will be positive and happy. And especially if we do thought work and we clean up lots of negative emotion, there will be more positivity and happiness in our lives.

But that can't be the agenda and that can't be what we're pretending to do. It needs to be a genuine result that we're creating. And when we're

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pretending to do it, we actually miss out on the work that would actually somewhat create it for ourselves. Because we're pretending to be happy instead of actually finding out why we're not.

And sometimes, we find out why we're not happy and we're like, "Oh, this makes sense. This isn't a time for me to be happy right now. This is a time for me to be processing this pain, this grief, this frustration. And when I pretend to be happy, I'm not processing that emotion. I'm not moving through it. The only way out of it is through it, and if I'm pretending, then I can't get there."

So, you will know if you are pretending to be happy literally when you come into presence with yourself and you breathe in and you feel the vibration in your body. You will know deep, like in your gut, what is your truth, what is really going on for you.

And if the truth isn't that you're amazing, the truth isn't that you're positive in that moment, you just want to find the thought. You just want to find the feeling that you need to process; the 50% of your life that you need to work through.

Nobody wants you to pretend to be happy. We want you to get to the place where you can have a good attitude. We want you to get to the place where you're nonreactive. We want you to get to the place where you feel solid and are honoring yourself and you feel worthy.

And what that will mean is that sometimes you're not going to feel amazing. And that's a beautiful thing, to be in the place of processing where you are. That's what makes us human. That's what makes coaching necessary. That's what makes us good students of the Model.

And so, when a student comes to me and they say, "God I've been doing all my thought work and I just can't be happy." I feel like they're missing the point. Or, when they say, "I've been doing a lot of thought work and yea, I'm doing great," and they're smiling but you're like, "You're not doing so great. You look like you're about one minute away from losing your shit here."

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Don't pretend. Nobody needs to be in the presence of someone who isn't being authentic. That's not going to serve us. And so, if you are not happy, if you are not positive, if you are processing emotion, that is a beautiful thing, that's a valid thing, that is where you are right now. And that's okay.

And I will tell you, the less you feel bad about feeling bad, the less you pretend, the more actual authentic joy you will have. But you can't have a pretending agenda to get there. You can't fake it. It won't work for you and it will be very unproductive.

The most productive work that I ever do in my own coaching is being vulnerable with myself, is holding space for myself, is understanding what's true, "This is what we got today."

I've explained to many of you that when I wake up in the morning, I usually have a lot of anxiety. I have that deep pit in my stomach that I have to breathe into and open up to and allow to be there. I'm not going to feel bad about it. I'm not going to pretend it's not there. But I'm also not going to react to it and let it run my life.

I'm going to allow the truth of that to be there. But I'm also going to be honest with you about it and tell you the truth about it. This is a really important lesson for all of us who are doing thought work in the world. There are ways to do it that are unproductive, that are not serving us, that can actually make it worse.

And so, I want to encourage you, if you're doing any of these five, six things that I've talked about today, is that you give yourself permission to not do that. Don't have an agenda. Don't pretend. Don't feel bad about feeling bad. And process those emotions through when that's what's true for you.

That is what will open you up, not to a happy life, but to a human life, to an accepting life, to a life where you understand that you're worthy, no matter what happens, no matter what you feel, and certainly no matter what you think. Have a beautiful week, everyone. I'll talk to you soon. Bye.

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