

## Ep #419: Just Maybe with Erika Royal



### 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 419. Actually, this episode isn't with Brooke Castillo. This episode is with The Life Coach School CEO, Erika Royal.

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.

We recently had our yearly mastermind. Hopefully you saw some of the pictures on Instagram. It was an amazing event. It was truly one of those life pauses for me, where I had to stop and look around and pinch myself for what we have created and the coaches that have come through the School and what they're doing in the world.

One of the highlights of the event for me was Erika's keynote. It was first of all, phenomenal because it started with her children who are amazing dancers performing for all of our student body. And then they introduce their mom in such a beautiful way.

And then Erika told her story of her life and her career and how she came to be the amazing CEO at The Life Coach School. And I loved it so much. I was very emotional the whole time.

It was just a really amazing moment for her. It was amazing a moment for me and for, I think, everyone who was there to witness it. We want you to be included in that. I asked her if I could share her keynote on the podcast, she told me we could.

I am so thrilled to introduce Erika Royal and her most amazing keynote for 2022.

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Erika: Good morning. How's everybody feeling? I don't know if you can tell, but I'm feeling iconic. You know, yesterday, Brooke asked me if I have an outfit as good as yesterday's outfit for today. And I let her know that I was properly pacing myself for this week.

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So, I'm out here today not really to teach you anything, although you might learn something from what I have to say. But my assignment was to talk about myself, "People want to know you, Erika." So, okay, let's do that. And at the end of this, I will have 1500 new best friends.

So, in September of 2019, I was sitting out in the audience, and I distinctly remember having the thought, "I belong on that stage." I had no idea how I would get here.

I want to talk about taking action without knowing the how. Because I kind of looked back and realized that's what I've pretty much been doing my entire life. So, let's talk about it.

So, before any of this, I always knew that I wanted to be a lawyer. Growing up as one of three children of a single mother, there were definitely times where we struggled to make ends meet. And I can remember times where the oil that we needed to heat our house was too expensive. So, we would just do without heat during a New York winter.

And having a sense of security, or really just not feeling that lack of security, was something that was super important to me from a very young age. And so, I thought that getting a job in a profession like the law would make me financially secure. And not just any law, you know; big law. If we're being honest, L.A. Law.

But despite my desire for security and my belief that being a lawyer would help me get it, on the day that I graduated college, I actually had no plan for law school. My parents were like, "What's the next step?" I was like, "Taking me home."

And I think that even though I wanted to be a lawyer, I didn't really believe that I could have a career in the law. First of all, I wasn't sure that I was smart enough to be a lawyer, and I knew for a fact that we could not afford law school.

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And second, I didn't know any lawyers personally. There were none in my family. And I'd really never seen any who looked like me, except maybe one or two on TV. I'm looking at you, Blair Underwood, from L.A. Law.

Being a lawyer just seemed like one of those things that was not for someone like me. So, after graduation, I went home and I got two jobs, because I'm really, really an overachiever.

And my first job was working as a legal secretary. So, a nine to five as a legal secretary. And my second job was working as a salesperson at Macy's, where Macy's and I had apparently agreed that I would trade my nights and weekends for clothes and shoes.

And the law firm where I worked was a small insurance defense firm in Fort Lauderdale with one partner and 10 other lawyers. And when I worked there, there was always one woman, one partner, 10 lawyers, one of them was a woman.

In the year that I would work there, it would be three different women, just one woman at a time though. And I was the only Person of Color, but that sentence, I was the only person of color my whole life.

So, I go to the firm and I think it's going to help me learn to be a lawyer. Contrary to my expectations, it did not. I did not really learn much about the law. But I did learn that being a lawyer was not that hard and nobody in there was any better or smarter than I was.

In fact, I was a secretary who was routinely rewriting and revising the dictated letters and motions that I was just supposed to be typing because those lawyers did not know what the hell they were doing.

And people in the office knew that I wanted to be a lawyer, and so one day the partner invited me to his office. And I was a pretty strong performer at this point, so I thought he's going to want to mentor me. And I was very excited because he had gone to the University of Miami Law School. And that, at that moment, was my dream school.

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I thought, “This guy, he went there. He can tell me the things I need to know. It’s all good.” And I thought that I had good reasons for wanting to go to the University of Miami. But as I look back on it now and the way everything’s played out, I realize that that was just another way of me trying to play small.

Turns out, he did not want to mentor me. Instead, he wanted to let me know that the University of Miami was a very competitive school and it was unlikely that I would be admitted. True story. Then he told me that being a legal secretary is a very noble profession, and that if I worked as a legal secretary for 20 years, I could be making \$50,000.

Now, I had just graduated college and this was the 90s. But even to my young mind, that did not seem like a particularly lofty goal. And before I could stop myself, I asked him, “Really? Is that what you make?”

I left his office understanding that he was not going to mentor me. He was not going to support me. And he did not think that I could do it. And after all, a career in the law wasn’t for somebody like me, right?

But what if it was? I ended up borrowing some money from my brother so I could take a prep course for the Law School Admissions Test, the LSAT. And I took the test and I actually did quite well. I scored in the 93<sup>rd</sup> percentile.

When that happens, a bunch of law schools will invite you to apply for free. The University of Miami is not one of them. And I remember that the deadline for submitting applications was, like, late February or early March and I had my stack of applications ready to go because this was, again, the 90s, when we were doing paper applications that we mailed with stamps.

And so, I had my stack ready to go. I was going to take them to the office with me on Monday. And my mother said to me in a way that only a mother could, “You should apply to Harvard Law School.”

“Umm, no. The application fee for Harvard is \$75 and they have not invited me to apply for free. But more importantly, Harvard Law School definitely

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isn't for me. And I'm not going to pay them \$75 to reject me," which I was sure they would.

But my mother was persuasive, in the way that mothers are. And she ultimately said that she would pay the application fee. To which I replied, "Suit yourself." And that is how I ended up applying to a bunch of law schools for free and paying to apply to two; the University of Miami and Harvard Law School.

So, like I said, I mailed my applications out on a Monday. The following Thursday, three days later, I got a phone call from a professor at the University of Miami Law School. He said, "We would love for you to come in and interview for the President's Scholarship."

I said, "I have not been admitted to the law school yet." He said, "Now listen, come on, you will, but we need to make a decision about this, this week. So, can you come in and talk to us?" I drove down to Miami. I met with two wonderful professors. And at the end of that interview, they offered me the President's Scholarship.

The President's Scholarship was a full ride to the University of Miami, plus a stipend of \$11,000 a year for living expenses. So, this was perfect. My dream school was going to pay me to go there. I could not have been happier.

I gave them a check to hold my housing. I went back to my office, and I gave notice, "I will be leaving in August to go to the University of Miami Law School." I took my acceptance letter and my scholarship offer. I hung them up over my desk just so people got the point.

The other secretaries and a couple of the younger lawyers, one of whom was the woman, were very happy for me. The partner never acknowledged that I had been admitted to his alma mater. He never congratulated me. But that was okay because I didn't need him to.

It was early March. I had said yes to the University of Miami Law School. I was going to be a lawyer, and I knew the how, so life was good.

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Two months later, on the Friday before Mother's Day, I went home from work and I found one of those large red, white, and blue priority mailboxes waiting for me. It was from Harvard Law School.

A friend who was with me looked at the box and said, very astutely, "They wouldn't send you a big box like that to reject you." My mother came outside and she saw me holding the box. "Is it Harvard?" I just nodded. Harvard Law School had said yes to me.

Harvard Law School did not offer me a scholarship or any kind of stipend. But it did not matter. No one in my family had ever gone to graduate school. Nonetheless, an Ivy League, the Ivy League law school.

Being accepted to Harvard Law School was, for me, the epitome of, "You are your ancestors' wildest dreams." So, even though I, once again, did not know the how I was going to pay for that, I was going to Harvard. I was going to be a Harvard-educated lawyer.

So, after law school, it was time for me to go and be the lawyer that I had always dreamt of being. Coming from Harvard, I was able to get a job at a large, regional Florida firm. And at first, the how of being a lawyer was not very complicated.

They literally have what they would call a lockstep system for associates. So, if you just do good work, continue to grow, continue to learn, you should continue to progress through the firm... allegedly.

But in my experience, being an associate in a law firm was much more complicated for women. First-year law firm classes look a lot like the population at law schools. So, 50% men, 50% women. But by the time you get up to the equity partner ranks, the numbers tell a much different story, with women making up only 20% of equity partners at top firms and Black women making up less than 1%.

And over the years, I watched the majority of the women that I worked with leave the firm. And they would do this without anyone saying anything to them, nobody critiquing their performance, nobody asking them, "Are you

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on the mommy track or the partner track?" They would just self-select out. A lot of mind stuff happening up in there.

And I was very lucky, fortunate, to have strong women partners as mentors. And I believe that that is why I was able to remain at the firm through getting married and having three kids, who you all just saw.

And in August of 2008, I had my son, my baby, that giant boy you just saw on the stage. And four months later, I was promoted to partner at my firm. So, I had arrived. I had it. I was a partner at my firm. I had this beautiful family with these three amazing kids.

I was there. I had everything. Everything. But my external reality did not match my internal reality. Making partner at the firm made things much more complicated, not easier. There were so many more requirements and expectations, law-firm politics.

Being a litigator, which I had loved, became the bane of my existence. The gamesmanship and the strategizing that is practicing law at that level, it was wearing me down. And I was also feeling, as I progressed higher and higher, the higher I went, the more of an underperformer I thought I was.

So, for the entirety of the time that I was a partner, I almost always thought I was going to get fired. Just ask Beth. And my secure profession wasn't even giving me security anymore.

I was also dealing with my father's progressively failing health and raising three very small, albeit adorable children. And contrary to what everybody said, by the way, it did not get easier as these little darlings got older. It just was another kind of hard.

But rather than feel happiness and pride at all that I had been able to accomplish, I was perpetually anxious, always waiting for the other shoe to drop. And I had this negative self-talk on an endless loop in my brain. And sometimes, for fun, I would let it out.



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I would verbally berate myself about everything that I had failed to do, everything that I had done poorly, imperfectly. I was never, ever good enough. But I thought that I didn't have a choice.

I had invested so much in my career and I was lucky to be a lawyer, right? Also, I was the breadwinner in my family and my job was supporting us.

We took this picture in Hawaii in 2017. Don't we look happy? I've never been less happy. And I lived like that for many years; miserable inside of that amazing looking life.

Enter life coaching. In the depths of my despair, I turned, as one does, to podcasts. And not just any podcast. And not the one you think. It was a podcast called The Lawyer Stress Solution. Y'all know. And the host was a lawyer turned life coach who talked about all of the unique stresses that lawyers face and how it all had to do with mindset. And she had gone to Harvard Law School too, so she was legit.

But even with that, at first, I was not completely convinced about this whole mindset thing. I was like, "Eh..." but then I would listen to the podcast and she would give these examples of things that had happened to me and people that I knew. And I was like, "Okay, this woman is speaking directly to me, for sure."

A few weeks after I started listening to the podcast, I was driving home one day and I heard her say the first of three things that she would say that would change the course of my life.

She said, "Happiness is available to you right now. Happiness is available to you right now." No, actually girlfriend, it's not. And I know this because I've done all the things. I have all the things. Did you see those kids? I have all the things and I'm not happy. So, that's ridiculous. Happiness is not just available to me right now. Happiness is not for me.

But what if it is? I emailed her when I got home and I was just convinced that she was the one. So, I emailed her and we got on a consult call and we talked about what it would be like to work with her.

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And then she told me the investment. And the investment was, I don't know, a little more than twice what I thought it might be. And by the way, the cheapest it would ever be.

It was more money than I had spent on anything, other than my house. But this woman had the answer. This woman was selling me a Mercedes and that money was, like, a dollar. So, I did something I never thought I would do. I did something a lot of Black people never thought they would do. I hired a life coach.

And my newly hired life coach had just rebranded from The Lawyer Stress Solution to Unf\*ck Your Brain, which hello... and so, I became a member of the first Unf\*ck Your Brain group coaching program. And as everyone in this room knows, it completely changed my life.

I learned that I was creating my own reality, my feelings, and my actions, and my results, with my thoughts. And therefore, I could create my own happiness. Happiness was available to me.

And I worked with her for about eight months. Around the end of our time together, she said this second thing that she would say that would change the course of my life.

At the end of one of our calls, she made kind of a flippant offhand remark, which if you know her, that's about right, that all of us lawyers who had completed this course could easily have a side hustle coaching lawyers.

I'm sorry, ma'am, what? I had been running around telling anybody who would listen that life coaching changed my life. I'm telling everybody, "You need a life coach. You need a life coach." But I never thought I could be a life coach. I was a lawyer. I had to be a lawyer.

Now, granted, my coach had been a lawyer, but I wasn't like her. Being a life coach wasn't something that was for me. But what if it was? I asked for another phone call. And when we talked, she said the third thing that would change the course of my life.

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She recommended that I get certified as a coach at the best life coach school in the world. And so, I did another thing I never thought I would do. I enrolled for certification at The Life Coach School. And that was the summer of 2018.

And I started my certification class in October of 2018 and I was certified in March of 2019. And that's how, in September, I was in this audience thinking about this stage. So, getting back to the stage.

At Mastermind, when I had the thought, "I belong on that stage," I thought that the how must be for me to make \$100,000 as a coach. And even with that, in that moment, it wasn't about the money. Because quite frankly, I had made \$100,000 several times over at that point.

What I was drawn to in that goal was the invitation to do this work at a much deeper level, the opportunity and ability to affect people's lives in a way that, as I sat in that audience, my brain could not comprehend.

So, I told myself, "You can get up on that stage to get a 100K coach award." But that was not it.

In September 2019, sitting in the audience, I did not know Brooke Castillo. A year later in September 2020, I would be working at The Life Coach School doing trial projects to become its CEO.

Now, Brooke and I have talked at length about the circumstances under which we met in episode 349 of the podcast. So, I'm not going to rehash all that right now.

But I do want to say one thing. In the summer of 2020, Brooke invited me to a Zoom call. I had no idea why. And if you had asked me a year or a month or a week or an hour before that call if I thought that I could be the CEO of The Life Coach School, I would have said, "Absolutely not."

I had heard Brooke talking about looking for a CEO on the podcast. At no time did I think that could be me. Even after our call, when Brooke invited

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me to apply, I still believed it would never happen. A role like this, something like this, it's not for me. That can't be for me. But what if it is?

Even when you don't believe that you can do something, there can still be a part of you that wants that thing more than anything. Believing very much that it could never happen and doing everything I could to make it happen is how I lived for about five months. A lot of cognitive dissonance going on in there.

And in this case, I definitely did not know the how. The idea that I would leave my law job, where I had been – at that point – for 22 years, to come and do something I'd never done before didn't make sense to me.

And yet, it was the thing I wanted the most. And ordinarily, that level of fear, being so terrified that, at some point in this vetting process, I was going to fail and it would all just go away and I would be back stuck where I was, that place I could never go back to that I didn't even know I could leave five minutes ago, ordinarily that level of fear and uncertainty would have been enough to just send me back to the cave.

But luckily, at that point, I had been taught and coached by the very best. So, instead of thinking about what it would mean to make this enormous change, changed my entire life.

Instead of sitting around and thinking, "Oh my god, I've got to change my entire life, what do I take? What do I pack? What do I wear?" instead of spinning in uncertainty about the fact that I did not know how, I just focused on taking the next step, and the step after that.

So, the first next step was another conversation with Brooke, "Look at the job description. Do you want it?"

"Yeah, I think so." Then we had a couple more conversations and we decided on a project. And by project, I mean we decided it would be fun to just toss me into the company and see what happened. And while I was working on the project part time, I was a fulltime lawyer. And holding these

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two roles allowed me to maintain both beliefs, “This is never going to happen, but what if it does? Take the next step.”

Through coaching, I had learned how to love my job as a lawyer enough to know that I wanted to leave it. So, the project has really underscored for me how true that was. And so, even if this didn’t work out, I knew I could not stay in that role much longer.

During the project, I was certain every day that I would get a message from Brooke that this was all a horrible mistake, or a very unfunny joke and it wasn’t going to happen. That message never came.

And in the meantime, I’m working at my firm having the best year I’ve had in a while. I was on four pitches and we got the work in three of them. If you had asked my firm, they would have said, “She’s on a roll.”

In October, Brooke invited me to the quarterly meeting. She told the team I’d be coming on in January as the CEO, “This is never going to happen. But what if it does? Take the next step.”

The next step was to tell the people with whom I worked the most that I was going to be leaving. They did not believe me. I did not blame them. I did not believe me. But I was leaving.

The next step was to tell my firm and my clients and start to transition my work. And still, “Erika, you’re going to wake up and this will all be a dream.” But I didn’t. And in December of 2020, I cleaned out my office, I gave back my laptop, and just like that, I lost all connection to the life that I had for 22 years.

This was real. And it was time to get to the work of learning the rules at a place that literally has no rules, where failure is not just expected, but encouraged. It was, and is, a far cry from my life at a corporate law firm, the hardest thing I’ve ever done, and I could not be happier.

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I hope that you take away from this how important it is to keep going, especially when you don't know the how. I have reflected a lot on the fact that my coach, Kara Loewentheil, didn't give up.

She rebranded. She pivoted. She went from coaching lawyers to becoming a feminist confidence coach. She took massive fucking action and figured it out. And because she didn't give up, she changed the course of my life. Before that, Brooke Castillo figured it out and changed the course of hers.

It is now my sincere wish that someone's life has changed because I made it onto this stage. And this is true for all of you sitting in the audience right now, but especially my only ones and one-of-a-fews who are playing small because somebody told you that you couldn't do it or no one ever showed you that you could.

You have the ability to change someone's life with your unique story, with your message. In order to have an impact, you have to take action.

At Mastermind in 2019, I knew that I was drawn to do this work at a deeper level. I knew that there was some spark inside of me. I had no idea what was going to happen, but I just kept moving in the right direction.

If you have a spark inside of you, listen to it. Let it move you in the right direction. Everyone in here, lions. We ain't no goats.

The biggest obstacles come from inside of us. Everything else is just a circumstance. The hardest thing is getting past your own bullshit so you can go out and change the world.

My audacious statement, "I am so lucky and blessed. And I fucking earned this shit."

I stand here as someone who's still figuring it out, still taking the next step, not sure where it's going to lead but not afraid to fail forward. I no longer worry about the how though because even if two-and-a-half years ago I had had the audacity to be sitting in the audience going, "Uh, I could be CEO there," I never could have imagined how it would happen.

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I never could have imagined that I would be on this stage, that I would be here in this role with my teacher as my boss and my partner in this work impacting as many lives as possible.

And even if I could have imagined any of that, I never could have imagined sharing this stage today with my children, sharing my heart with you. The beauty of uncertainty is infinite possibility. You don't even know what you are capable of. And anything is possible, y'all, so let's fucking go.

Hey, if you enjoy listening to this podcast, you have to come check out Self-Coaching Scholars. It's my monthly coaching program where we take all this material and we apply it. We take it to the next level and we study it. Join me over at the [TheLifeCoachSchool.com/join](https://TheLifeCoachSchool.com/join). Make sure you type in the [TheLifeCoachSchool.com/join](https://TheLifeCoachSchool.com/join). I'd love to have you join me in Self-Coaching Scholars. See you there.