

## Ep #441: Dopamine, Desire, and Decisions



### 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 441.

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 friends. Oh my goodness, I am recording this on a Friday afternoon. I have spent the last seven days doing what we call the grind, in the best way. And that's what I'm going to talk about today. I'm going to talk about the pleasure of hard work, the pleasure of accomplishment, the pleasure of ambition.

I came to Coeur d'Alene to have a home on a lake for a while and to get out of the heat and to consider buying a place here. There's nothing for sale here for me to buy, but I have been staying in the most beautiful home.

My friend Kris Plachy came for the first part of the week and then I've had the rest of it literally by myself. And I knew that I wanted to just spend this week having the pleasure of an entire day just to work. Instead of working my work into my life, to just have the pleasure of just getting to work, like waking up.

I usually work three days a week and I'm usually saying, "Oh, I have to work from 12 to five, so we'll have to do life around that." And I wanted to just come and not do that. I wanted my life to be work for a little while, and I just wanted to dive in to some marketing, I wanted to write some sales letters, I wanted to connect with my team and do some meetings, and so that's what I've been doing.

And I'm sitting here after a pretty grueling, but in a good way grueling week, and I feel filled with dopamine and pleasure and reward from having done that. And I had such great conversations with people on my team, and everyone else worked so hard too. Watching everyone grind with me, like Brooke's on fire right now, get ready, and I told them, "I'm coming in hot so get ready, we're going to be doing a lot this week."

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And they all rallied. And I have such an amazing team that just, I don't know, they get stuff done so fast and work so hard, it's such a pleasure. It was such a pleasure working with them. This morning, we were working on something. My employee Laura and Stephen and Cameron, we were all working on something and it was literally like wildfire.

We were like, "Do this, do that, do this, do that," all on Slack, and it was just like, oh my gosh, this is like playing basketball. And it was amazing, and so I appreciate them so much and I appreciate having had this week. And I'm about to go to Orlando. I leave to Orlando on Sunday and I'm going to speak at Funnel Hacking Live in Orlando with Russell Brunson, and I'm going to go and attend his whole amazing conference.

Russell is a hero of mine. He's been such an amazing mentor and friend and I'm really honored to speak at his event. I remember when I was sitting in the back, listening to all the other speakers, it's kind of surreal that I'm going to be one of the speakers and I'm going to be talking about the Model and doing the Model with his audience. So, come on, so cool.

It's an amazing life I'm living right now. It's a very different kind of focus for me and that's what I want to talk about. I want to talk about how my focus has kind of shifted in the past few weeks and how the majority of your focus will determine where you're getting your dopamine, and I think it's an important decision that we all need to make.

Where are we getting our dopamine? And I've done a couple podcasts on this before. I did one around dopamine when I talked about overeating, I did one on dopamine and motivation, I did one on what you do when you're bored, and how when you're bored it's when dopamine is kind of that motivation neurotransmitter. And so what you do when you're bored will really determine the course of your reward center.

So dopamine, desire, and decisions, that's what we're talking about today. And let's dive in. So first of all, remember that dopamine is your motivation neurotransmitter. It's seeking reward and pleasure. It's your reward-seeking neurotransmitter. And when you don't have the dopamine, when you're not

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searching for the reward, you are not going to be feeling that motivation, that drive, that ambition towards pleasure. You're going to probably be feeling anxiety and/or depression.

So it's like this balance that we need to find between dropping too low or overstimulating our dopamine. We want to be able to find that sweet spot where we can utilize our brains to get the results we want.

The thing that I want to speak to a little bit here that is not based on research or scientific data, but I'm pretty sure it's real because of all the people I've talked to about this and my own personal life. So this is anecdotal, but it's useful.

I believe that those of us who had trauma in our childhood, that put our brains into fight or flight more often than they "should" have been, have irregular dopamine. And I think that's why so many of us are prone to addiction, prone to overdoing things in the pursuit of extra dopamine and the pursuit of getting away from anxiety.

We don't want to go back into that fight or flight, so we're constantly seeking the pleasure and the reward that will keep us out of it. So when I talk to a lot of very successful, like über successful entrepreneurs, über successful athletes, über ambitious, driven people, a lot of us can attribute things that we dealt with in our childhood that may have set our brains up to be overly anxious in the pursuit of dopamine

And I find that oddly comforting that there's a reason why I always want more of everything. And I have a tendency towards addiction in terms of food, or not so much addiction, but overeating, overdrinking, over-everything is because of the way that my brain is wired.

But it's also the reason why I'm so ambitious and so driven and so motivated to create the results that I want in my life. So it's almost like one of those double-edged swords. And it's like human seeking dopamine, and I have a lot of friends that just aren't that way. I can think of two of my very best friends, they don't need to be over-ing anything. They're just chill.

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It's almost like they don't have - they're not super ambitious, they're not needing to save the world, they're not needing to make a lot of money, they're not needing to be number one in anything, which I'm like, "What do you mean?"

They have a great life and they have plenty of pleasure and they're very healthy and balanced, but they just don't have the ups and downs that I do in terms of that deeper driven desire for the steady stream, or hey, I'll always take a big dump of dopamine in my brain even if it's unhealthy. So I have to manage all of that and I know that many of you can relate to this.

Many of you who come to me to get help with your overeating or help with your overdrinking, or maybe it is overworking, or maybe it is over-socializing or social media-ing. It could be because you just have that higher need, that higher desire for the dopamine. So the question becomes, where do you want to get your dopamine? Where do you want your brain to be seeking reward?

So here's how to think about this. Our human brains can be rewarded in many ways. And the way that they were designed was to be rewarded initially by things that would keep us alive, which is a brilliant design, my friends. This is a very good idea.

So we are rewarded by accomplishment, we are rewarded by comfort, we're rewarded by food, we're rewarded by sex, we're rewarded by conserving energy and comfort. I already said that, comfort and conserving energy.

And if you think about back in the day when we were just developing as humans, those were the things that drove us to stay alive, versus just staying in the cave and being afraid and not going anywhere. We had this dopamine driving that reward system that we would go and seek it.

And you can also see the effects of how driven we can be, people can be when it comes to the rewards that we get that are superficial, that are concentrated. I talk a lot about this in my overeating work, the overdesire, and the over-hunger work that I talk about in weight loss.

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Because of dopamine, because of those neurotransmitters and the way that our hormones are set up, food designed now, concentrated food, packaged food overstimulates our reward center. And so our dopamine, our desire neurotransmitters are off the hook. This is why you end up eating against your own will.

This is why you are constantly, if you are at all prone to focusing your dopamine on food, constantly thinking about the fridge, and constantly thinking about the grocery store, and constantly thinking about going to Starbucks, or going out to dinner, or something like that.

If you're focused on drinking, your brain will be focused that way. It will have its dopamine kind of set up to get the reward from alcohol or drugs. Maybe you have it set up to get it from work. Maybe you have it set up to get it from sex and dating. Maybe you have it from social media, getting likes and getting followers.

Where are you focusing your brain on getting dopamine? Here's what's real, and this doesn't matter if you have a low dopamine or high dopamine need. Your brain will pick its focus to channel its motivation towards. And you can look at your life and see what are you most motivated to get.

Is it food? Is it rest? Is it TV? Is it social media? Is it play? What is it? Where are you getting it? Exercise? Now, you'll be able to see if you have too much of it in one area because the reward will actually have a net negative consequence to it.

So if you're too focused on food, you're driven, your desire and your dopamine is too focused on food, you will overeat and most likely be overweight. At the very least, uncomfortable with how much food you eat. If it's focused on social media, you will spend too much time and energy and you'll probably feel anxious and depleted from consuming too much social media.

If you're getting it from alcohol, if you're getting it from overworking, you're getting it from overexercising, you will feel tired and depleted and imbalanced in your life because you have too much focus in one area. If

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you don't make this decision consciously and you have a high need for lots of dopamine and you don't channel it and you don't focus it in the right areas, you will be constantly doing stuff against your own will.

And you'll recognize it in your own brain and it's almost like you know you don't want to be doing it, but you can't help yourself. I've seen this happen in dating. And I've talked about this a little bit, but I dated a guy for a while who was super - we were trauma-bonded. Talk about toxicity, toxic thoughts.

And my dopamine channel focus was so crazy. It's like it was ignited. I saw this thing on Instagram and it just said don't hang around people who trigger your trauma, which made me kind of laugh, and I realized that's just a thought. But it really did bring up a lot of thoughts that drove me to do a lot of dopamine-driven crazy things that I never would normally do.

And the key for me was to bring it into my consciousness first. That has to be the first step for all of us. Oh my gosh, I'm overeating, I'm over-relationshiping, I'm over-parenting, I'm too focused on getting my dopamine from my own children. Where is it that maybe you're over-ing? And maybe it's an unconscious focus in that area.

Here's how I find out where I'm really over-focused is when I wake up, I can't stop thinking about it. It's immediate and it's intense. It's like an intense thought immediately. And I know that many of you who are struggling with overeating can relate to this.

It's like you wake up and you're thinking - it's against your own will. You're thinking about food and calories and what you weigh and what you're going to eat and what you're not going to eat and when you're going to exercise and how that's going to be, and it can just become so obsessive.

For some of you it's dating and swiping on those apps. For some of you it's looking up followers, how many people followed me, or liked me, or thumbs upped me, or whatever. I don't know, whatever app you're on. Listen, I haven't ever been on these apps and I'm on Instagram now, and I will tell

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you, I have to direct myself away. I have to very much limit my time on there because it is so dopamine rewarding to be on there.

And I could literally sit there for three hours and just flip through Instagram for three hours. I could sit and watch TV for three hours. I have to stay aware and stay conscious of where I'm driving it. So for me, one of the things that provides me with an amazing flow of constant dopamine is learning.

And I know that this is true but I hadn't really recognized it in the way that I did really paying attention to this week. I get that flow when I'm listening to audiobooks, or classes, or even just YouTubes on education. For me, I love to study. Two major things that I love to study, I love to study anything that has to do with life coaching and self-help. I'll listen to all the books and all the trainings on that. And also, anything on marketing and business and running a team.

And so I have a huge flow of learning information that I can be putting in my brain and I direct my dopamine to that. I do it also while I'm walking on the trail. So it's almost like a double dose of steady dopamine. So when I get up in the morning and I know that I'm going to have a walk and I know that on that walk I'm going to be able to have the reward of listening to books on tape - I know they're not on tape anymore but I still call them that.

Listening to Audible and listening to podcasts and listening to YouTube, educate me, I have that dopamine. And it feels like a reward to do that. And when I apply what I've learned, when I go to work or I'm creating a podcast or I'm writing a sales letter or creating an ad and I'm applying what I've learned, I also get a steady flow of dopamine.

It's so fantastic. And when I redirect my dopamine, say to dating someone who puts me in fight or flight, or I redirect my dopamine to - like I used to do it to overeating, or I do it to overdrinking, or I do it to being on Instagram, it's like I channel my dopamine into that and then I lose it for work and I lose it for learning.

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It's like you only have a limited supply. And so coming here, I don't have really any other dopamine supply. I guess I have my phone and I have the TV, but really, my focus was this week, I'm getting all my dopamine from walking beautiful trails here, from walking, learning, and working.

And one of the things that's so amazing about that is that dopamine, instead of being super high and then losing it, going through a super high reward and then getting depleted of it, and then a super high reward and then getting depleted of it, it's a very steady flow of wellbeing that I get.

And I get the dopamine and the motivation and the reward, and the dopamine and the motivation and the reward. And the reward is the accomplishment, but it also - this is the key, and this is what I've been able to do with my business is the reward is the accomplishment in my business that then makes me money, that then helps my clients, that then grows my business. Three additional sources of ongoing dopamine.

When I was directing my dopamine towards food, I didn't get any ongoing benefit from that. I just got depleted of dopamine because I was eating all that concentrated food, overeating all of it, messing with my own insulin, and then I just kept wanting more and more and more. And the effects of that were very negative.

Now, here's the trick though. When you're doing any sort of concentrated substance, whether it's food, alcohol, drugs, social media, anything designed with the human brain in mind to make it altered in an unnatural way, that dopamine fix, that reward is going to be way more intense.

So here's the problem; the brain will think that that reward is more important. So for example, my brain could think that eating French fries from McDonalds, or eating candy from a box because I get such a fast flood of pleasure in my brain from that sugar, my brain could think, "Oh, that's more important than the steady trickle of dopamine I get from working all week in a healthy way, in a well-rested, functioning way, not in an overworking way, but in a good way."

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So that's where our prefrontal cortex, that's where our higher human brain has to come in with some logic, and we have to really use our intelligence to understand how our primitive brain can override us by using substances that mimic dopamine, that mimic the pleasure that drives that dopamine.

So understanding this for me has been tremendous because what I'm able to do now is direct my brain, even though it's like, "No, you should go do this, and you should look on Instagram, and you should pick up your phone, and you should go play, or you should do whatever," I'm like no, because I don't want an instant high of dopamine and then I'm going to have to deal with the anxiety of losing it.

I want to have that steady, consistent stream. I want to be using myself at the highest level. So the way that we do that is we understand that we are seeking dopamine, and we make a decision of where we're going to get it from on purpose.

Now, I talked last week about quietly quitting. One of the reasons we quietly quit on ourselves is because we would rather have that instant high dose of pleasure right now, instead of that long, consistent flow of it. It's kind of like the difference you feel when you're in a relationship or you're dating.

Think about this for a minute. How does it feel to be in a very serious, loving relationship, and how does it feel when you're dating a lot of amazing people? One is a little bit like candy, one's a little bit like a nourishing meal.

One is kind of shallow and one is kind of deep. Now, a relationship is what will give you that steady flow of comforting dopamine, and dating, especially if you don't remember some of y'all, if you haven't been dating in a while some of y'all, let me remind you. It's crazy. So fun and so high and so low and so awful, it's all over the place.

So you have to decide, what kind of focus do you want? Now, there are times where you're going to want more intense up and down. And listen, do that but just do it consciously. Make that decision consciously. Do not be

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leaving relationships to get that overflow of dopamine and forget that you're also going to have those lows.

It's also the difference between - I had mentioned earlier, eating a lot of candy, eating a lot of food that tastes over-the-top delicious, that has concentrated sugar in it that makes you feel high, that makes you feel all those amazing feelings, but then has that negative consequence, versus eating in a very balanced, chosen, conscious way that makes you feel fit and comfortable and nourished. It's a very different experience.

It's the difference between - I say this to my kids all the time when they like to play video games. I'm like, if you're getting your dopamine fix from your video game, you're going to miss out on getting it in your life. If you're motivated to go play a video game and have all your accomplishment dopamine be poured into your brain on a video game, your result from that is going to be nothing. A high score.

Unless you're doing video games as a living and a career and getting paid for it, you're probably going to be taking away from parts of your other life if you're overdoing it. Everything that you do in terms of seeking dopamine should be conscious.

So it doesn't mean you don't ever have sugar, it doesn't mean you don't ever play video games. It doesn't mean you don't ever go on social media. You just recognize that that is not where you want to be getting your main stream of dopamine. You don't want to be doing it too much that that becomes your source.

And you will know if you're doing that because you will start withdrawing from it. It won't be okay not to have it. Can you just chill and not eat candy or overeat? Can you just chill and not be swiping on your phone or watching porn or drinking?

And if you decide, hey, I'm going to give that up for a week - you want to know if you're overdoing something? You want to know if you're getting too much dopamine from it? Stop doing it for a week. It'll clear it right up. You'll be like, "Oh yeah, I'm definitely getting too much dopamine from that."

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And if you're getting too much dopamine from something that's not giving you a success reward, an accomplishment, an evolvment reward, you may want to use your dopamine differently.

It's almost like this; if I were to put you in a room by yourself for three days and all there was was a bed, and there was a stack of books that you could read and learn everything that you need to know about investing in the stock market, investing your money, for three days, all you could do.

That's the only activity that was available to you was reading about finance, you would probably read about finance. You would probably get your dopamine fix from learning. Now, if I also gave you your phone and the wifi password, you'd probably get your dopamine from your phone, from the instant dopamine we get from, "What's going on in the world? And what's going on on Instagram? And how many followers and likes did I get? And swipe, swipe, swipe."

At the end of the three days, which result would you rather have? Would you rather have a deeper understanding of finances and what's going on financially for you and what you can do to invest and make money, or would you rather just be informed of what's going on on Instagram?

I mean, some of you may prefer to be informed on what's going on on Instagram. Maybe you're an influencer. Maybe that's really important to you. But put any two things in there. What is it you want to do more of that you could channel your dopamine into? That could be the reward. You wouldn't be using it up on other things.

This is why people become so productive when they change their negative habits. Because they have to flow that energy into something else. They have to decide, I'm no longer going to spend the day drinking, I'm no longer going to spend the day playing video games, I'm no longer going to spend the way overworking. I'm now going to spend the day doing these other things that give me the life that I want, the results that I want in my life.

And what I'm saying too is you can overdo work, you can overdo exercise, you can overdo everything. And the way that you know if you're over-ing it

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is because you get withdrawal, dopamine withdrawal if you don't do it. I'm not talking about a subtle urge to go workout. I'm talking about you are non-functioning, you're having a hard time functioning if you don't go workout.

And let's say that is the case for you. Maybe you think, "Yeah, I do workout too much, I do flow too much of my dopamine into that. The reward I get from working out is too much of the reward in my life. I get too much joy from that. The endorphins and the experience and the body that I have, more than I want. Where could I redirect?"

It doesn't have to be all the dopamine. Maybe you want to keep working out. But where do I want to redirect some of that dopamine so I could be motivated to do other things and get rewarded by those things?

Sometimes you won't even realize that you have a need to direct it, that you have a need to have reward out in front of you. Because listen, dopamine isn't the actual reward. It's the motivation towards it. It's the desire for it.

So ultimately, what you're doing is you're deciding what to desire consciously, and what is astounding to me about my own self and my own brain and all my clients is that we don't decide consciously. We decide haphazardly.

We're like, "Oh, I just noticed what I really care about is M&Ms. I just noticed what I really care about is TikTok." No, you get to decide, no, I'm going to put my focus, my energy, and my desire, I'm not going to use it up over there, I'm going to use it here. I'm going to use it on reading these books or hiking this mountain or creating this business.

Because listen, if you aren't getting rewarded, if you aren't using your dopamine to get rewarded, which is how your human brain was designed, you will start feeling very anxious and depressed most likely. And for me, because I have a lot of anxiety, I need to have a dopamine direction because I need to burn that energy off somehow. I need to solve for it.

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I need to be able to get some relief from it, some pleasure from it, so I have to focus on where I'm going to go with it. And if I don't decide consciously, I will for sure pick something that has - and I did for most of my life, pick something that has a net negative consequence in it.

What was fascinating to me, this is kind of a side note about overeating that I didn't realize I was in the cycle of doing was I was getting dopamine, my dopamine hit from the food, from overeating all of the food, but I was also getting the dopamine hit from trying to lose weight. That was where I was focusing my ambition into.

I focused my ambition and my dopamine into making the scale go down. And so I can't even emphasize enough how that was my entire life. How I was able to get anything done other than that was crazy. And I've seen people do this with the internet. I've seen people do this with video games too.

Before you know it, you're in the cycle that you don't even realize you're using up the juice, the dopamine, the motivation of your life on getting things that mean nothing. The overeating-losing weight cycle meant nothing to me. I was going in a circle.

As soon as I stopped doing that, I put all that energy into building a life that I love and creating a life that serves people and serves myself in a way that's healthy and creates a lot of wellbeing. So think about this for yourself, my friends.

Where are you directing your dopamine? Where are you directing your desire? Where are you getting the most rewards? Where do you want to be getting rewards from? And then finally, make a decision consciously.

If you are not getting coached, this is my plug for getting coached. If you go to my website and you look at the navigation on the top, one of the buttons that you can press is called Get Coached. And you can get coached once a week every week for \$297 a month.

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You will not find a better bargain with the best coaches anywhere in the world than that. What you can do with a coach is so profound. Just in 20 minutes a week, you can decide where you're going to get your dopamine, you can make a plan for it, you can commit to it, and then go out into the world and do it.

And just when you start forgetting, just when you start going unconscious, just when you start depleting, you'll get right back, re-motivated and excited about your reward center that you're focused on by meeting with your coach again every seven days. I can't recommend it more.

Every single person in this world needs a life coach. And if you haven't tried it, if you haven't had one, if you haven't been coached weekly, go to [TheLifeCoachSchool.com](http://TheLifeCoachSchool.com), click on Get Coached, and get yourself coached. It will change your life forever, I promise you.

Have a gorgeous week everyone. Focus where you want your desire to be. I'll talk to you next week. Take care. Bye-bye.

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