

Ep #469: Mental Toughness



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 469.

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.

Hello, my beautiful friend. How are you? So the last two episodes were the best of the podcast, and now we're going to talk about some mental toughness. I just got back from a trip that was some work, some play, and it was great. We went to Miami and did Work Hard Play Hard, which was very fun. We went on a yacht, and we had an incredible beach party. Then in the mornings, we worked on our businesses and the teaching components and the content components of our businesses and how to make money and how to serve our clients in the best way. It was really fun.

I had my family there with me too. So my son Connor was there with me and his friends were there and my friends were there. Kind of my chosen family was there, and we all stayed in the same place together. So we had a really amazing time. It was really cool to connect with everyone in kind of a more intimate environment than normal. I was able to hang out and talk to so many of my coaches that I normally don't have that play hard time with.

So it was great. We played lots of games. Pictionary and Taboo and cornhole and Bocce ball. It was great. We had a really good time. So anyway, hats off to my team for pulling off such an amazing week, or end, I guess it was, and making it so fun and so awesome for everyone that came.

Then I left there with the fam, and we went to London. Then we went to Dubai, and then we went to the Maldives and came home and stayed in LA for a little bit, did some work in LA. Then I went and visited my family in Chico, and then I came home. So I was gone for two and a half months.

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So it's really nice to be back in Scottsdale. The weather is gorgeous here. Everything is starting to bloom. Of course, I'm playing pickleball. I had a little injury for pickleball that I've been trying to nurse back to health, and it got me thinking about this idea of mental toughness.

There's a couple of reasons why I wanted to create this podcast, but one of them was because of this injury that I have and how important it is to have a level of mental toughness and know when to balance that with self-care. When should you be tough and when should you not be tough with your own self? For those of you who want to be more tough with yourself, I have some tips. For those of you who are probably too tough with yourself, I have some tips. I have some balance for that.

But I pulled or strained a muscle in my hip. So now I've been doing a ton of yoga and stretching, and I feel actually way better overall now that I'm taking better care of my body to prevent an injury. So the love and obsession for pickleball is real my friends. Everywhere we went on this vacation, we played pickleball.

When we were in the Maldives, we found this court. It was actually a tennis court that they had taped with the pickleball lines in the most beautiful jungle setting close to the beach. It was so gorgeous. Me and Tonya, my best friend, and our partners were there. So we all played pickleball for 5 hours. It was so much fun. I played with this injury because I couldn't help myself, and I wanted to be able to play in the Maldives. Because this particular injury, it's like a muscle pull but it's also like a ligament strain, was not being made worse by playing. So I knew I wasn't further injuring myself.

That being said, Tonya got me involved in this show called Vikings. I'm telling you all this backstory so you kind of see how I came to the topic today. First of all, it's an amazing show, especially if you're a feminist. I think it's a fantastic kind of display of characters. Especially there's one character, if you guys have watched it before, that it's such an amazing feminist back in the day representing women. She's such a hero to me in this show, and I'm really enjoying it.

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So, anyway, I was watching, and there was this one part where the main character kind of went up on a hill and was spending some time alone kind of meditating. When he came back, they said to him wow, you have gotten yourself very mentally strong. Because he was basically preparing himself for battle.

I thought that was such an interesting thing that someone said to him. That you have gotten yourself so mentally strong. You have prepared yourself and made yourself mentally strong. It made me think about is that something that I should think about more consciously and do more consciously? Make my brain, make my mentality stronger and be a stronger person or not?

I kind of like to live in questions for a minute and try the question on and explore the thoughts I have about it and kind of play with how mentally tough I already am. Kind of explore the places where maybe I think mental toughness is misused against ourselves in a way that's harmful, but also how mental toughness can be used for ourselves in a way that's very useful.

One of the things that I've been doing a lot of lately is watching my son, Christian, golf and really looking and admiring his mental toughness on the course. His ability to stay focused, his ability to stay committed, his ability to stay positive, his ability to really kind of have the argument with himself in a way that serves him and doesn't hurt him.

This is what I think it is. I think it is very similar to the relationships we have with the people that we love in our lives is like the relationship we have with our own brain when we love ourselves and we love our own brain. Being able to navigate through the garbage that comes up inside of our own heads and be kind of disciplined and tough about what happens. Not give in to excuses that will harm us or indulgent thoughts that will hurt us or cause us to take actions that we ultimately don't want to take in the long run.

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The other part of mental toughness, I think, is our willingness to allow people to judge us and allow people to be wrong about us and allow ourselves to experience any emotion that will keep us opened up to life instead of closed down from life. So, for me, what that looks like is people can make fun of me. People can say negative things about me, people can be wrong about me, people can tease me. They can say crazy stuff to my face, and I have an ability to not take that on.

I have a barrier where I don't need to allow that to touch me or hurt me. I do think that that's a lot of my own mental toughness because I understand in so many ways that that is about them and not about me. I do think that that mental toughness serves me as it applies to other people say attacking me.

I had this actually crazy experience recently where I was waiting in line to go into a concert, and we were in a very long line. We'd been in this line for maybe 45 minutes already. These women literally just came and cut in front of us in line, right in front of us. I was like, "Oh, excuse me, the line is back there." I pointed to where the line was that we'd been waiting in for 45 minutes.

The women were like, "Oh, really? No one's ever saved a spot in line for you?" I was like, "Did someone save a spot in line? Because you're stepping in front of me, and I didn't save you a spot in line. I'm confused." She was like, "Oh, really?" Then started calling me like all these square names. "Oh, really, b? What the f? What the f?" Like trying to get in with me. I was like, what is going on?

It was really interesting to kind of watch myself in that situation and watch someone come at me and just to be so solid and so kind of unaffected in terms of emotionally being shaken or emotionally being upset about it, but also still really holding my ground and walking in front of them and not letting them cut in front of us in line. Then have them be behind us still kind of ranting and raving about you or have the best seats in there. You think you're so great. It was really the weirdest thing for adults to be talking to each other this way.

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But that's kind of a level of mental toughness, right? So I think there's a lot of friends that I have that are much more, I would call them sensitive. That they would have a much harder time with managing that and being mentally tough in a situation like that. So the question then becomes is one better than the other? Is one good? Is one not good? Should we be more mentally tough? Should we be less mentally tough? Should we be more sensitive? I think for all of us, we get to answer that question for ourselves in what ways we want to be mentally tough and in what ways we don't.

So if you are seeing areas in your life where you want to be mentally tough, here are some of my recommendations. I'm actually, I think, very mentally tough in sports. I'm very mentally tough in business. I'm very mentally tough in people being mean, critical, or making fun of me. These are areas that I want to continue to be mentally tough. I'm also mentally tough with my primitive brain when I know it isn't serving me.

So I'll give you some tips on how to do this. Now, mental toughness can go bad, and I'll talk to you about that a little bit too and how to make sure, because I've done that before, how to make sure you don't get too mentally tough on your own self. So I think there's this idea that in order to be strong, we have to be mean or cruel with ourselves. I do not believe that is true. I think the exact opposite can be true.

So here are some tips to be more mentally tough. One is you need to consciously choose strong thoughts to believe about yourself and about your life. This has to be a conscious decision because your brain is not conditioned to think mentally tough thoughts normally. On the flip side of that, you have to be aware of not indulging in weakening thoughts. Thoughts that you have that weaken you emotionally or even physically when you think them.

Now, if you're not conscious of what you're thinking, you won't even know if you're having weakening thoughts or empowering strengthening thoughts. So the first step is you have to become aware of what you're thinking and what's going on in your brain. That's why we do our thought downloads,

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and that's why we have coaches to help us and we do coaching sessions. So we can kind of reveal our thoughts to ourselves.

Then once we do that, we have the awareness, we have the consciousness, then we actually have to release the power of our own decision in deciding what we want to believe and what we want to think and what we want to practice believing. I do not like making excuses in my life for not getting the things that I want. That, I feel, is emotionally very weakening to me. So I just don't do that.

I don't make excuses. If I have an explanation or a justification for why I'm not doing something, I want to make sure it's an empowering, strengthening commentary in my own brain, or I just don't say it to myself. You will know if an excuse hurts you by the way you feel. You'll know if an excuse hurts you if it pulls you back from what you truly want in your life.

Oh, I couldn't do this because I'd had a really long day. Or I couldn't eat well because I got in a fight with somebody. For me, using circumstances and explaining away my behavior that I don't want to be doing because of a circumstance is weakening to me because it gives all my power away. Versus I chose to eat all of this ice cream, or I chose to eat all of these chips, or I chose to eat all of this bread because I didn't want to feel my feelings.

That's not an excuse. That's an explanation. Even though it's not a great explanation. It doesn't kind of let me off the hook, so to speak. It states the facts of a situation where then I have the power of owning what I did and then the power to change it instead of blaming it on something maybe that I don't have control over. So really keeping an eye on those kind of excuses and those kind of justifications that weaken you and instead using explanations that empower you even with behaviors that you wish you hadn't done.

One of the ways that we can really see this clearly in real time, me and my partner, that when we're playing pickleball is what is the thought that we say to ourselves, what is the thought that we think to ourselves when we

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miss a shot, or when somebody slams a shot on us, or when we don't do as well as we wanted to in a game or whatever? It's watching what my mind makes it mean, watching how I speak to myself, watching what I say. Is it empowering? Does it strengthen me, or does it weaken me?

You can kind of play around with this, especially because in pickleball you have a partner. What are you thinking about your partner? What are you thinking about yourself? Is it making you mentally tougher, mentally stronger?

I just watched the Masters tournament. I know that many of you probably did too. Jon Rahm, who won the Masters tournament, one of the things that he was saying is you should have a brain like a goldfish with a very, very short memory. So if you have a shot that isn't good in golf, you should just move on to the next shot. It's the same with any sport.

It's the same with anything in your life. I'm not going to make that mean that I'm not a good player. I'm not going to make that mean that this won't be a good round. I'm not going to make that mean that I won't win. I'm just going to learn what I can from the mistakes that I made and then move forward with that.

So really looking at what are the thoughts that you think you could believe that would make you mentally tougher, that would make you feel stronger, that would make you less susceptible to unnecessary damage from internal thoughts or even external triggering thoughts that you are provided with from other people, so to speak. Really thinking through what do you want to believe about yourself?

Even some of the thoughts that I've shared with you are so empowering. I allow other people to be wrong about me. I allow people to judge me. Isn't that nice? I give them permission to judge me. I am okay if someone doesn't like me. I'm okay if someone doesn't agree with my life. I'm okay if someone's unhappy with me. It's all fine. I don't have to argue with those things I can't control.

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Notice when you argue with the things you can't control, you are weakening yourself. You're disempowering yourself because you're giving your power away to something that isn't something that is within your control. So then you feel like a victim, and you feel defeated. What can you control in your situation?

What can I control on the pickleball court? I may not be able to control whether someone called the ball in or out. I may not be able to control whether my partner took a shot that they should have or shouldn't have, in my mind, take. That sort of thing. Can I maintain emotional strength? Can I feel strong in those moments by choosing my thoughts really well and making sure that they're strong thoughts? The answer is yes.

So thoughts like I am very strong. I am very capable. I can do hard things. I am getting stronger all the time. This doesn't have power over me. I have so much power within me. I can focus on what I can control. All of those thoughts strengthen me. There's nothing that can defeat me but my own mind. Even if I lose in a game, can I use that to strengthen me? Or do I make excuses that weaken me? Or do I blame things that weaken me? Or do I use it to build my strength up mentally?

Like I was saying, when I watch my son play golf, I really see him building his own mental capacity to handle situations. To not be reactive, to not be emotional, to not give in to emotions that aren't going to serve him on the course.

The last piece of this that I think is a really important part of mental toughness, and this kind of goes back to that show I was watching, the Vikings, where he was saying gosh, I've made myself very mentally strong. I think one of the things that can do that is a willingness to invite fear in and to hold a space for fear so you can be courageous. If you think about having to go into any kind of battle, it will include fear. Your primitive brain will be afraid.

This is a beautiful thing. We want to be afraid of things that are dangerous. We want to be afraid of things that could challenge us, that could put us

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into very deep negative emotion or physical negativity. We want to be aware of that.

But if we can use the fear and our ability to feel it and to feel courageous and to take action anyway, we're going to have so much more mental toughness in our life. We're not going to shy away from experiences that can create scary emotions. The better we are at feeling all those negative emotions, the willingness we have to feel fear, to be willing to put ourselves in harm's way, the more mental toughness we're going to be able to build up.

Now, let me just talk a little bit about the idea of mental toughness gone too far. I think mental toughness gone too far feels different than mental toughness that comes from love. Mental toughness that goes too far puts us in harm's way in a way that doesn't serve us.

So when I say putting us in harm's way in a way that does serve us, what I mean by that is increasing our capacity to feel negative emotion on purpose because we know that we're safe, and we know that we can take care of ourselves. We know that an emotion is just an emotion, and that it can't harm us if we allow ourselves to feel it.

But mental toughness gone too far sounds like I don't care how you feel. It doesn't matter that you're afraid. You are negative, negative, negative, negative, negative. You're not good enough. You should be stronger. You're weak. This kind of coming at ourselves in a demeaning and derogatory way in an effort to push ourselves to action I think is mental toughness gone too far.

So the way that I used to experience this was when I was dieting and exercising, over exercising. I was very mentally tough in the sense that I could stick to a diet, and I could be very hungry, and I could exercise until I felt weak and depleted. It got me the result that I had wanted, but through the process of really demeaning myself and beating myself up and disempowering myself.

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It wasn't sustainable. It was like me working against my own will. Like beating the crap out myself, which I think could be called some form of mental toughness, some form of mental discipline. But if the intention behind it, if the emotion fueling it is insecurity, frustration, anger, disgust, limited thinking, you are going to end up using mental toughness against yourself to harm yourself.

So the easiest way to know is listen to the voice in your head. It's the difference between girl, you can do this right now. You can go on this hike, and you can hike this hill because you're amazing and you're strong. You are going to build up the strength in your legs. I believe in you. That's a form of mental toughness. Do not stop. Keep climbing this hill. Keep going to that next tree. I've got you. You can do this. You're capable of it. You're strong.

Versus you're not stopping until you get to the top of this hill. You can't be weak. You can't let yourself down. You can't let these other people walk faster than you. What is wrong with you? Why don't you walk faster? Why aren't you in better shape? See, I told you. You should have been doing this, that, this, that, this, that. It's the tone.

So when you use that mental toughness in a way to harm yourself, literally harm yourself and your relationship with yourself, it won't be sustainable. It also won't perpetuate itself. Mental toughness that comes from love perpetuates itself. I used to have a teacher who was one of my toughest teachers in school. I've talked about her before, Mrs. Gaubill. She was my algebra teacher.

She pushed us so hard, and she expected us to be so tough. She expected us to study so hard because she believed in us and she wanted us to win. She wanted us to get A's, and she wanted to celebrate our increased knowledge and our ability to do well. That kind of mental strength that I developed by sitting down and studying even though I didn't want to, and doing all the things that I didn't want to do to overcome my own excuses and to overcome my own negative talk was the epitome of mental toughness in my life.

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That is something that I want to definitely teach my children. That they can keep going even when things are hard, but they can do it in a way where they love themselves. They can be tough with themselves because they believe in themselves, not because they don't. There's a huge, huge difference.

I want to be tough on my kids, and I want to be tough on my employees, and I want to be tough on my clients in a way that lets them know how much I expect of them and love them and believe that they can do more great, wonderful things. Versus beating them up, beating myself up, hating on myself in order to try and produce wonderful things. It just doesn't work, and it just continues to weaken.

So hopefully, this conversation that I've had with you here on mental toughness will encourage you to become mentally strong, to build up the muscles in your brain. Because ultimately, I think the benefit of mental toughness is the relationship with yourself and being willing to go to battle with your own brain over the life that you truly, truly want to create for yourself.

If you do it with love, you will continue to evolve, and you will continue to blow your own mind with what you're capable of by using the mental strength that you have developed. Have a beautiful week everyone. I'll talk to you soon. Bye-bye.

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