People Pleasing in Coaching

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**SPEAKERS**

Zoe Hawkins, Jo Wheatley

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:03

The Coaching Crowd podcast is for compassionate courageous leaders, HR professionals and high achievers, people who are passionate about helping others to find alignment in their lives through coaching, and do a thinking of training and developing as a coach.

**Jo Wheatley** 00:20

Hello, and welcome to the kitchen crowd podcast with me, Jo Wheatley, and my friend and co host Zoe Hawkins.

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:26

Hi, everybody. We're here for another episode. This week. I'm really excited to bring you the topic of people pleasing. And coaching is something I certainly hear my clients sharing in coaching sessions around, I'm such a people pleaser, I really struggled to say no, because I like to please people. And also we want to explore what does that then mean for you as the coach like that, because that can sometimes trigger you into a people pleasing approach. We'll talk more about some of the psychodynamics of that as well. So people pleasing in coaching, where do you want to begin Jo?

**Jo Wheatley** 00:59

I think we begin with establishing that this is a concept that is rooted in transactional analysis, which is a theory around our approach to coaching. And so it forms one of the scripts that people might have. So you have try hard, be strong, please others. Hurry up.

**Zoe Hawkins** 01:22

Be perfect.

**Jo Wheatley** 01:24

Yeah, so five different scripts. And so it forms one of those. And what we mean by script is it's an automatic thinking patterns. So it's like a compulsion. And so what transactional analysis will tell us is that there's an inner dialogue, which is I'm only okay, if I please others. So it often is ignited when we are experiencing stress. So that's the theoretical parts of it. And everybody tends to have like one or two of those scripts that can pop up for them when they are stressed. And for me, people pleasing is one of those. So it's something that I'm very familiar with very aware of and have to be conscious and intentional, in order to stay in the kind of I'm okay, you're okay space of that, but healthy safe for me, where I'm in my adult rather than in that script behaviour. So when that script is active for a client, you might find that they come to a coaching session, and they are trying to please you, as their coach and be the best coachee that they can be rather than staying in that space of working through maybe the more challenging stuff being very, very honest, and and really making the progress with their goals.

**Zoe Hawkins** 02:40

There's a lot I think, in what you've said there. And I think I'll chime in around the theory piece, I think what's interesting is it's become everyday language as well, isn't it? Actually, people don't know nothing about transaction analysis, identify with Oh, yeah, I'm a people pleaser, you know, without necessarily really understanding what that might mean for them, or how it shows up for them as you sit there from a theory perspective, typically, that compulsion to please others shows up when we're stressed. So what that means is, when we're not stressed, actually, we can access healthy and helpful behaviours. But I think beyond theory, it's, it probably becomes a habit as well. So in stress, it may be particularly present, that you're people pleasing everybody, but even in those times, where sort of stress is quieter, and you're in your everyday approach, if you know you have those behaviours, they can become habits, that when somebody says, Oh, could you do X, Y, and Zed for me your automatic response without really necessarily grounding yourself in in the adult, as you've described it, that is to say, yes, yeah, sure. And it's out out of your mouth, you know, before you've even been able to catch your breath. And so in coaching, these people pleasing tendencies can show up in other goals. So you may not have a client that comes to coach and says, Hey, I want to work on my people pleasing, typically, you'd have a client come to coach and say, I'd like to be a better time manager, or I need to prioritise better, or, you know, I find myself really, really busy. So I want to get, you know, get to grips with that, or I'm really stressed, I'd like to work on that. So what is at the source of some of those issues? Maybe people pleasing as one of those issues. So we're sort of talking symptom and cause. So you know, we're talking about root cause working with a client on these unhelpful scripts or behaviours, automatic thinking, behaviours, automatic patterns, rather than necessarily just tackling something at a cause, which might be to get out a load of time management tools to help somebody for example, so that's where people pleasing comes in. And you can often hear it in in language around the client self identifying as a people pleaser, or in the examples that they share. You may recognise as the coach that your coachee is Don't necessarily accounting for their own needs or their own once, but is, is experienced in some automatic thinking. And I think it's

**Jo Wheatley** 05:07

important that we acknowledge that it's nice to be able to please other people like that can be a pleasurable experience. And it can be important obviously, when you're part of a team that you work together the same in a family or in friendship groups that you're contributing, and you don't have a role to play. So really, what we do as coaches is help our clients to understand you know, when is that helpful and healthy? So in the green, if you like, and at what point does that become kind of destructive for you and trigger other emotions because when we are people pleasing often what happens is, the kickback is we end up feeling resentful that we've gone the extra mile or we've done all of these things, or we feel unappreciated and, and so on, are sometimes feeling misunderstood, because actually, people don't really know who you are, because you kind of whoever they want you to be. And you adapt. And you can, it's easy to lose yourself. So when you're supporting a client, it's helping them to understand, at what point does that flip over to you? I think also clients can they can sort of, they'll say, oh, yeah, that's my people pleaser. And discount the fact that that might be an issue. So there's a role for us to play as coaches are, are well hang on a minute, come back. Let's just pause here for a moment. We were just talking about that. You said, Tell me more about that. Because they almost have acceptable they've accepted that that is part of their identity and who they are rather than actually considering? Is this how I want to be how is this serving me? Is it supporting me to achieve my goals. And then at that deeper level, I think our role as a coach is about helping a client to understand the stress triggers for us, if we go back to the theory around this, these tend to show up this internal messaging when we are stressed. So yeah, we could deal with that. But what about this deal with or what is it that's causing the stress in the first place,

**Zoe Hawkins** 07:03

and you talk to them around, so the kick back of being misunderstood, and sometimes it's a positive kickback that it feels good, you know, so when somebody is asking you to do something, or you are seeking out ways that you can, please others, it may not be good for you, in a sense that you're already too busy, or you're already have too much on and yet, it feels good for you to do that. It's a somewhat of a values conflict there, it might be that one of your values is about service. And so you want to be of service to others. And yet, at the same time, you're finding that in the way that you are demonstrating that service to others, it's having a negative impact on on you, perhaps the time that you have to something, you know, one one of the things we can look at, in terms of getting that people pleasing in balance is looking at you when you are out there pleasing in this hand, who were you not pleasing in that hand? That's a kind of a reframe, and a way to bring perspective to the client to recognise that not all people pleasing, is good for you. Because there may be the consequence of not pleasing somebody else. So it can help to just shift a client to think about priorities and the ways that they demonstrate their values. So it can still be important to be of service to others. But it may be you need to start demonstrating that in different ways and more helpful ways. So values is a good lens, I suppose to be able to look at, where is the people pleasing coming from, you know, what's the motivation and desire to people, please, in the situations that your clients may be bringing forward?

**Jo Wheatley** 08:36

Yeah. And then, of course, we have our beliefs around people pleasing. So if you imagine a situation where the kitchen clients are making their decisions and taking actions, and it's affecting their thinking, based on wanting to please others, they then have expectations that other people ought to do the same thing. And so then they enter into relationships, you've got this constant people pleasing, none of the people in that situation are actually getting their needs met. And so ultimately, it's likely that that will end up in a conflict situation. So you might find this topic coming up when you're helping your client to explore tensions in a relationship that might exist

**Zoe Hawkins** 09:14

is about emotions as well, isn't it? You know, so there can be a lot of fear in saying no, for example, so in not people pleasing. So that's where that automatic behaviour can come from. Is that that? Yes, it's no problem is out of your mouth before you thought about it as an avoidance of what you might feel if you were to say no. So you can really help a client to explore what are the emotions that are present for you, when you hold a boundary or reinforce a boundary? You know, what, what is it that you want to feel and what is it that you're avoiding, and just really helping the client to find and access the ways in which they can reinforce the boundaries that they may need to hold? I remember a situation where I described it as I got people pleased. So I think in one perspective from a people pleasing is that the other the other person who's on the end of it actually feels good when they're people pleased. It's nice to be able to say yes, that actually the reframe I offer is that it can be quite hard to be on the end of being people pleased. So when someone is saying, yes, it's no problem, when actually, they mean, no, or I'm not going to be able to get that done on time, or, actually, that's not going to be good for me right now. And when you experience like the side effect, if you've like, have that late delivery, perhaps, or tone of passive aggression, when you've said yes, but actually, you mean no, or the person who's asked you to do something, then witnesses your stress, and how quickly and frantically you have to work to get that done. Sometimes it would have been better for the person who you're trying to people pleased to say no up front. And, you know, whilst it's a compulsion, sometimes recognising that people pleasing isn't always well received, can be really helpful. So as a coach, what you can offer are reframes three questions. How do you think your people pleasing is received by perhaps the person who that person is bringing to the coaching? Or what do you think it's like to be on the other side of this conversation, so really starting to help your coachee to access perspectives that are beyond perhaps what is a fixed view for them.

**Jo Wheatley** 11:25

And of course, it can be a learned behaviour from, you know, witnessing, you know, influential people in their lives when they were younger. So it's learned behaviour means it can it can change, it's about raising the client's awareness is step number one, then exploring, you know, where did it come from useful strategies around how to reconnect with themselves who they are now, and what's going to be helpful to them moving forwards, I think often, fear of rejection is a big thing, or fear of loneliness, or people pleaser. So you know, exploring those those things as well. But let's move on to look at how it can show up from the couch perspective. So, as you all know, haven't listened to our podcast before. So you and I have trained lots and lots and lots of coaches. And what we see as a risk is that when coaches do fall into that script behaviour of people pleasing, because that can result in a lack of challenge, you know, like over support, which actually results in collusion, and maybe even keeping the clients stuck. So, contracting that we talk about all the time, what we mean by that is, how are we going to be together as coach and coachee? And how will that be in service of the client achieving their goals, that's sometimes a bit of a conversation that can be missed, because how they want to be together, versus how what they need from the coach. And you know, maybe that's a two step process for the clients. And when do you as the coach, notice people pleasing aspects showing up?

**Zoe Hawkins** 13:03

Yeah, and I think there's that piece as well, where you, as the coach are looking for light bulb moments all the time, or transformation or feedback, like that was a life changing session. And I think as coaches, when you're in that people pleasing mode, you can get hooked on the aha moments and the breakthrough moments. And that isn't meeting your client, where they're at, that is looking for what you need, in order to satisfy I've done a good job here, like, yes, I've pleased my client that yes, I've done, you know, a great thing, where as your client, if they had breakthrough sessions, and every single coaching session they had with you that could be really exhausting, you know, they may not be able to process that or hold that much. So it's not to say you don't want to aim to have great sessions, but be client led, not led by your need to please your client. And I think the difference is checking in with your clients. So you know, where are you right now? What's been useful for you in this conversation? Where do we go next, making sure your client has decision points in your coaching, in order to help them to decide where it is that they want to go. And accept that if the client says, That was a great session, and you didn't see that it was a great session, because you didn't hear the breakthrough moment, intake of breath. Trust in the clients experience, you know that sometimes the smallest shifts can be groundbreaking for a client when they apply them to their life. So making sure that you aren't getting yourself hooked on transformational feedback, I think is an important part of being a coach and keeping that people pleaser out of the space

**Jo Wheatley** 14:45

that you can contract for like the people pleasing aspect as well. If you have a chemistry conversation or you sense some of that, they actually just bring it to the fore and testing out you know, explaining you don't need your client to be a good client, you know But actually you want them to come and bring their whole selves and their authentic selves and contracting for what do you want me to do if I sense that maybe you're trying to please me this is sometimes you know, it's something that can happen.

**Zoe Hawkins** 15:12

I mean, on that point, if your client is in a people pleasing mode, if the topics that they're bringing to coaching, it's about people pleasing, it is very possible that through transference, you pick up the energy of people pleasing, and you become in that space yourself looking to please your client, which will reinforce, you know, the challenge of people pleasing. So, you know, holding yourself in a space where you're able to stay grounded, you're very much in adult, trusting in your clients resourcefulness to be able to solve that, whatever the challenges that they bring. And the ways that you can do that is just looking at your grounding practices as you come into sessions. So making sure you're arriving with a clear head, making sure you're in supervision. So if you're noticing the desire to please your client, taking that to supervision, or if you're noticing your client pleasing, you explore that in supervision. So you can start to pick apart these dynamics between the two of you, and how you can get yourself back to centre with your client.

**Jo Wheatley** 16:18

One of the things that I'm kind of connecting with as we're talking about this is how, when you're when a person's people pleaser, script is active. It's almost like an out of body experience, because you're kind of projecting yourself out into what other people might think, and experience in relation to you. So the part of the coach's role is to support the coachee is to notice that or inquire about it, you know, if they sense it so and then help the clients kind of come back into the present into the here and now into their body and what they're experiencing and what their needs are. Right now. And I think that's often not talked about when we talk about people pleasing, as you said earlier, so like, it's kind of like a throwaway comment. Oh, yeah, I'm a people pleaser out there a people pleaser, or I like to be a people pleaser. For what reason? For what purpose? What is what is that solving?

**Zoe Hawkins** 17:15

When? Because not all the time? Would you like to be a people pleaser? But there can be times but it's really special to prioritise pleasing others. Yeah. So yeah, as you say, got reconnecting into your own needs there.

**Jo Wheatley** 17:27

And burnout is another topic that I think people pleasing is connected to, you know, if you're constantly in analysing and assessing the needs of others, and working really hard to please them, but you've also got your own stuff to work on. And you're juggling all of this stuff to try and keep everybody happy, you've totally forgotten about your own needs, there's a huge risk there of burnout. And that might show up in different ways. So all of the topics that we talk about in these podcasts are interrelated to two other things that we talked about. So that is, that's a risk for your client. And that might be something that's worth inquiring with them around, and that whilst that might be a shock, to them, that might be something that's really important for them to consider.

**Zoe Hawkins** 18:10

As you talk about needs. Obviously, one of the doors to help us to understand our needs are emotions. So we talk about emotions as unmet needs, it's a topic we explore at depth in the emotions coaching practitioner training. And you know, some people are detached from their needs, and not being able to recognise what their needs are, but not everybody is detached from their emotions. So you can help clients to really articulate, understand gain the intelligence from their emotions, which can help them get back in contact with their needs. So when you hear a topic about people pleasing, also think emotions, you know, because there will be a huge amount of emotions attached to those behaviours that you're seeing. It's not always about, you know, changing behaviours, it can also be around other levels of intelligence.

**Jo Wheatley** 19:00

So there's so much more that we could say about this topic. And I'm sure that you've all got experience of this, identify either yourself with this as a as a driver for your behaviour, or it's showing up in your kitchen session. So hopefully, you've got some useful reflection points there. If you're interested in joining our emotions kitchen programme, you can visit our website www.ig company.co.uk. And if you've been enjoying our podcasts, we'd love for you to leave us a review

**Zoe Hawkins** 19:35

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