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**SPEAKERS**

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

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Hi, everybody. Today we're talking to you about coaching anxiety. And the reason that we're covering that is because it was requested when we put out our call for what you'd like us to record as a podcast. And we know that as human beings, we can all experience anxiety, and when our clients express anxiety in a coaching session, that can be triggering for the coach. So we're going to talk a bit about that, as well as what can you do as a coach to support your coachee?

00:58

Yeah, and I think the first thing to recognise is that anxiety is an emotion, like many others, like joy, fulfilment, frustration, boredom, anger, despair, like anxiety is an emotion in a range of emotions. But I think there's something unique about anxiety, when it comes to coaching that it can often feel like that's something we have to get rid of something that our clients need to fix in some way. And, and I think, as you said, it can be triggering for for a coach, like sometimes I think, as a coach, when we hear our clients share that they have desires to overcome anxiety, they can actually trigger anxiety and us as coaches around, I don't know how to do that. And and if you are somebody who experiences anxiety regularly, and you haven't yet got your own strategies together, around how you manage your own anxiety, it can be even more difficult to feel like you can support your client with their emotions of anxiety if you don't have the answers yourself. So for us, we would approach this through the lens of it being an emotional goal. And obviously, we have our emotions coaching practitioner training programme, which is exactly what this would be for that, you know, we can also talk about, you know, anxiety as a as a goal, like any others. So where would you tend to start with this, Jo.

02:25

I think where we've kind of started in the discussion is sharing a belief that we hold, which is that emotions are neither good nor bad. And often, anxiety is thought of, generally as what we might call a getting away from emotion and emotion that we need to get away from. Anxiety is a form of fear. So you can explore with your client, you know, how do they judge that emotion? What are the beliefs that they have attached to that emotion, which might be that it's a bad emotion, or it might be that it's there to protect them? You know, some people feel disempowered in relation to their emotions, you know, that they get flooded, or they have an experience of being flooded by their emotions. And that certainly if I gave back years is always you know, was a fear of mine that I that that an emotion like that could flood me swamp me however you want to describe it. And coaching has enabled me to change my relationship with my emotions and and to see them more healthfully. So you can explore with your client, what their beliefs are around it, what they would like to believe about that emotion to consider what they would need to change in order to have that happen.

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There is a piece I think with anxiety specifically about looking at what what is it that you are dealing with, because I think the one of the reasons why it can be triggering for coaches, because it is connected with mental health. And I think anxiety is one of those emotions, which could also be seen as a condition, something that is more permanent. And of course, there are clients who experience crippling anxiety which they need support with medication for. And you know, you could go through to say that that isn't something that we would then coach. As you know, if a client shows up and they have generalised anxiety disorder or anxiety that is more crippling for them, that that wouldn't be something that we would go near in coaching. And I think what Joe and I are saying here is that it's not necessarily the case, because it can also be scenario based that when I am in this scenario, my anxiety kicks in. And that's where we would start to look at the anxiety as an identity. So when somebody is a is has a condition like anxiety, it can become a part of who they are, and therefore spill into all areas of life. And what we would like to support clients with if this is one of their goals is creating some distance between what is a condition or something they experience and who they are in different scenarios, because the two can become quite blended. So as well as starting with the belief that people are not, you know, emotions are neither good or bad. We also have the belief that people are not their emotions, that you can have a well trodden relationship with anxiety, and also not be anxiety itself. Because if you look at your life as a whole, there will be many times where you actually don't experience anxiety, as well as there being many times where you do experience anxiety. So we would be looking to focus on the times and help to resource the client with the awareness that they are more than their anxiety. And they have times when they are deeply resourceful. And the anxiety actually isn't present, and what can they learn from those particular scenarios that can help them in their coaching outcomes. And perhaps that is to be more confident when presenting, for example, or to be a more assertive and confident leader

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I was thinking about, you know, if a client came to a chemistry conversation, and shared that the reason they were coming to coaching is because they feel anxious all the time, then that might be a flag that coaching may not be the most appropriate intervention, or support for them at that time, possibly, obviously, you're going to explore that a bit more, what tends to happen though, is your client will come to coaching and in the chemistry conversation, they'll explain that they've got this goal that they want to achieve. And then as you go through the coaching sessions, they tend to loop back to anxiety, so they will make progress and then there might identify a goal. And then and then this emotion will pop up. And that emotion might be, as I said earlier, a signal of a belief, or it might be related to a value that isn't currently being fulfilled. So then we might call it a blocker. And there are things that you can do to support your clients to overcome blockers. with emotions, you could encourage them to do a letter to the emotion. So writing through it in the first person, obviously gonna use your observation skills to be able to share with your client, what you think that you're noticing, and ask them what they're noticing. So to see if they identify as a blocker, you could do a constellation with them. So looking at the things that are happening in their lives and look at the emotions attached to it, because it's possible, that anxiety that they're experiencing, in relation to something else in their life might be kind of infiltrating everything and actually doing a constellation or piece of work like that can enable them to see that anxiety doesn't belong to this, that anxiety belongs there. Now, depending on the CPD that you've done as a coach, and what your beliefs are, you know, you may have a belief that emotions can pass down through generations, and that can be very hard for clients to you know, understand what they're, they're working on things they can't identify anything in their life that would you know, trigger this anxiety but it's something that they're experiencing or showing up on now. You can if you're trained in NLP, for example, Neuro Linguistic Programming, there are things that you can work with clients on to support them to, to shift a deeper rooted level of anxiety.

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I think a lot of the time it's about helping the client to not fear the anxiety itself. Yeah. You know, because I think it's that emotion that just snowballs Isn't it because once you start to feel anxious, you're then anxious, we're feeling anxious. And it just snowballs and snowballs and snowballs. And, you know, when you take an emotions coaching approach, what we help to resource the clients with is curiosity. So I think this particular request was there as a client was waking up in the middle of the night and beginning to feel anxious and that anxiety was then keeping them awake and disturbing their sleep, which built more anxiety, and so on and so forth. And the client wanted to bring this to coaching. I think it came up as a bit of a PS when when they were working together. And it's easy in those moments for the fear to kick in. Oh, no, I've woken up again, and I'm feeling anxious. But if you can introduce curiosity, ah, I'm feeling anxiety. What's that about? What's happening right now? What are my thoughts? Are their thoughts that are generating this anxiety? What are my other feelings? Are there any other emotions that are present? And starting to deconstruct what that anxiety is about rather than feeling the anxiety and then feeling more of it? And I think also what you can do there in that moment is start to engage your rational thinking. So if this is a pattern where the client is waking up in The middle of the night with anxiety that curiosity might lead to, well, what do I want to do about this? Coaching might be one thing, but actually what are the what are the things that you want to feel instead? And what are the things that you would need to do in order to feel that, which can take you both down a practical route of Do you know what, I'll go and see my GP, or I will go and talk to a therapist or I will explore menopausal symptoms or whatever it might be. And it might also be, I'll do some journaling, before I go to bed to empty my thoughts, or I'll keep a journal next to my bed, so that if I wake up, and I'm feeling anxious, I can catch the thoughts on the page and go back to sleep. So you can approach it from a motional perspective. And then once you kind of unpack and are able to do that you can move through to the practical, and I think that's what's different about working with emotions in a coaching capacity. Because it isn't all about staying in the emotion and understanding the emotion, it's about being able to extract what is valuable from that emotional experience, and how you can move to a place of moving forward and achieving what you want instead. And in this case, perhaps it's what you might want to feel instead of what is happening at that point in time.

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Yeah, and I think we see that a lot when coaches are developing, don't worry about the tendency to stay in the reality and exploring the reality more than the ideal future space that the client is aiming towards. So you can ask questions, like some thinking about like, when a client might say, like, I don't know, I'm just an anxious person. So that there, there is no distance, as you were mentioning earlier, between themselves, like they see it as part of them. But you can ask questions like, you know, who are you when you're not experiencing that? You know, all of a sudden, that question, or that question is inviting them to do is to is to park themselves and create that distance between themselves and the emotion and, and in that space in between, there is both time opportunity to make a new choice and to explore this idea that what about if anxiety was something that you could visit, and experience that you could visit, and you could also return to your, you know, to your self from? So you were talking earlier, though, about, like the permanency that clients sometimes associate with an emotion and emotion, you know, it took you know, it's the clue is in the name, like actually what emotions are our energy and their information. And so there's also this idea that what if the anxiety wasn't anxiety? What if the anxiety was like something that's trying to get your attention that you're kind of unconscious mind was sort of comfortable with, because you survived with that before, you know what it's like to experience that, but actually underneath the anxiety, which is a representation or flavour of fear, or sadness, or maybe the client is stuck, because they are able to make contact with the authentic emotion that exists for them. So as coaches, we're back to the superpower that we have, which is curiosity, and being able to stay in that curiosity, and to accept the client with their full range of emotional experience.

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We rely on labels, don't we, when we come to emotions. And as you said, yeah, how do you know that what you're experiencing? Is anxiety? Like, what does anxiety feel like? And is it that you don't like the feel of anxiety on your body? Is that what you're? Is that what you're trying to get away from? Is it that you don't like the thoughts that the anxiety is generating? Or is it you don't like the anxiety getting in the way of the behaviours that you're that you want to use, and actually unpicking what what it is about the anxiety that's unsettling? And sort of interrogating it from a more kind of logical and rational perspective can really help to just deconstruct what is the experience that I'm having? And why is it bothering me so much, and once you've deconstructed it, then you're in a place to be able to rebuild and go, Okay, so if that's the full experience that I'm having, then what can I do in order to achieve what I want to achieve? So if I don't like the feel of anxiety on my body, how do I need to move my body or change my energy, such that the anxiety is able to pass through and that for some people might be going for a run? Or journaling or dancing or you know, whatever it might be? If it's that, I don't like the thoughts that I have, when I experience anxiety, then you can practice some more thought based work, which might be thinking about what are the alternative thoughts that you can practice in times when you have anxiety? What mantras or affirmations might be useful for your client there, and that's linked to the belief work that you talked about earlier? Or if it's from a behaviour perspective, that it's good In the way of certain behaviours, are there different routines or practices, or, or goals that you need to set in order to support you with achieving the behaviours that you want to achieve. And I think going back to the beginning, what we said is, sometimes coaches can feel deskilled when working with anxiety, because we sort of see it as that's different. Like, you know, I don't know how to coach that. Whereas actually, it's a goal like any other. And you can support your clients with emotional goals in coaching just as you can with other coaching outcomes on actually, we subscribe to the fact that all goals are actually emotional goals in one shape or another. Because if it's a case of I want to transition career, perhaps you want to transition career, because you feel so anxious in the career that you're in, or you feel so frustrated in the career that you're in. So think when you come across a goal that involves anxiety, as the coach, it can be helpful, how would I approach this if it were frustration, you know, or an emotion that is less bad, which we don't believe there are emotions that are less bad. But if the emotion was a different emotion, how might you approach it and that can help you to bring yourself back as a coach and access all of your resources to be able to work from a place of feeling centred.

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There's all sorts of things you can do on there, you can invite the client to you can explore the colour of it, the shape of it, where does it exist in their body? What if they were to place it on the shelf? Or where would the lights place it in, they might say, actually, I don't even want it in this room, I want it outside in the neighbor's house, or actually, there's a prison down the road, I'd really like it to go in there unique and work metaphorically, with emotions. And that can be super powerful.

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I think there's also that piece, when you're talking there around kind of locking it in, in a jail is the alternative of what would what would it be like if anxiety was your friend? You know, how would you like to build your relationship with anxiety and doing both sides of the coin? You know, in order to help the client to step into that space of it is neither good nor bad. The experience is generating for sure, probably feels bad, but it's not good nor bad. By default. It's it is the way that you are perceiving the emotion and the experience that you're having that that defines whether you're going to have a good or bad or neutral, or otherwise experience with what's going on.

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There's also a balance, I think between acknowledging and well, yes, certainly to acknowledge what the client is sharing with you. So if they're sharing that they feel anxious about something. There's also like partly an honouring, but there's also responsibility for us to challenge as well, and to accept. And, you know, there's a lot of things to manage within it. What if anxiety was a symptom of an internal conflict? And that's all it was, how would you how would you or the client think or feel about it, then, I mean, we've also done stuff in the past around like internal champions and internal saboteurs and putting those things together with it. There's so much that you can do when you free yourself off the fear of the mention of the word, anxiety. And our response as coaches to our coaches, when they share those things will influence the way that the client feels about it certain might have, you know, if we respond in a way where we move immediately into rescue mode, which obviously is not our responsibility or role as coaches, but if that happens, it can affirm to the coachee, the client, that that anxiety is bad. And what also can happen with emotions is shame. So they can feel a shame become ashamed of the emotion. It might also be that anxiety is almost like a learned emotion. If that if we grow up, you know, when we're younger, and our parents are particularly anxious, it may be all that we know. And the client may not see anything wrong with the anxiety but if your belief system as a coach is that anxiety is bad, it's not something you want to experience. You want your clients to experience it, you can see the like the intricacy and the sort of the domino effect of it. So I think take a breath as the coach, really check in with your own belief system. Remind yourself of what the client's goals are, remind yourself of how you've contracted to work together, you know, just take that time without rushing into responding. When a client talks about an emotion

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and just have your ethics, front and centre of mind, you know, as we said at the beginning Looking like there may be times where it isn't appropriate for you to coach the anxiety and you know and signpost somewhere else. There are many times where it will be appropriate for you to be able to catch the anxiety and doing a programme like our emotions coaching practitioner training, we'll cover all of those ethical considerations and help you to work, you know confidently and competently, in a safe coaching space with emotions. If that's something that interests you, you need to be a coach in order to access that programme and you can find details of that on our website at IG company.co.uk.

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