Over Identifying final edit

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**SPEAKERS**

Zoe Hawkins, Jo Wheatley

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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 who are thinking of training and developing as a coach. Hello, and welcome to the coaching crowd podcast with me Zoe Hawkins and my friend and co host, Jo Wheatley.

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Hi, everybody. Great to be here. Today we're talking to you about over identifying with your coachee. And the reason we're talking about this today is it's something that coaches often bring to supervision where they're concerned that they're over identifying with their coachee. And that they then may be doing a disservice to their coachee in the relationship. So we're going to explore where that comes from, what to do about it, and anything else that comes to our mind on the topic over the next 15 minutes or so.

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Absolutely. And I think probably the first thing that comes to my mind about this topic is that when you first come to coaching, and you're a trainee, and you are coming from a place of being able to build rapport with people, you know, and you've been told that you're a good listener, and people tend to gravitate to you for advice and guidance, that's often what brings people to coaching in the first place. And I think when you're when you're new to coaching, familiarity is what almost gives you confidence in building a relationship of being able to find common ground, being able to identify with different experiences that people bring, if you think about the conversations you have with your friends, when they're explaining different challenges that they're facing, or things that they're finding hard in their lives, often the things that come out of our mouth. Absolutely, I know exactly what you mean, I've had a similar situation before, or when you're hearing somebody talk about challenge it takes you to when you have had a challenge in your life that at a similar time. And so that familiarity with identity, actually is sometimes what brings you to coaching in the first place. But then as you learn more about coaching, and you learn that being able to coach really well is suspending our own experience and being able to see the client through their eyes and help them to access their resources, like our experiences, and our ideas aren't actually the most relevant thing in the room. It's about our client and how they want to approach things, we become more familiar with the ability to coach without being able to identify with what the client has been through, because we're able to step into that very clean and objective space. So I think you'll go on a journey is what I'm saying around when you identify with, with coaches or with people and how that is useful or not useful in the coaching relationship.

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Yeah, I think in those early stages, when people are training as coaches, they they worry about not building rapport or not being able to identify with their client, and then not being able to connect with questions that could be useful for them. And then as they develop their competence in all those areas that you're just describing, then they start to fear over identifying and what can happen. So what how does this show up in an unhealthy way. So we go from, you know, being able to identify with a client use it to be able to build rapport into over identifying and it becoming unhelpful, and maybe creating a problem in the relationship is where you can collude with your clients. So clients will sometimes use the third person and they'll say things like, you know, when. And they may be doing that, because you might be leaking out body language that suggests that you do know that you have had a similar experience. And you might be doing that through nodding or agreeing or in some way. And so that may either create the impression or it may be real, and so it's leaking out. And so what you do is reinforce their fixed, maybe vision or view that they have of the world and their problem at that time. And so it's not helping to shift them into more of a growth mindset. And where it can also show up in an unhelpful way is where you might be sat as an individual, so not in your role as a coach. But just as a human being outside of that role. You may be facing a challenge in your own life, something that you're currently feeling blocked with, and you haven't yet found a way to overcome it. And now you are in a coaching conversation, and your client has brought the issue that is very similar or they're describing it in a very similar way to the way that you're experiencing it and because you are blocked with it yourself. You can almost feel all your coaching capability drain away inside you because you kind of it can certainly ignite the rescuer. So in just a few seconds, it can ignite the rescuer because you in fact, maybe want to be rescued from your own situation. but also the fact that you experience a block around this can then translate into you being blocked in your role as a coach. And so then what happens is, the conversation can dry up, essentially, because you don't know where to go with that situation you can start to feel well, that's where, you know, the phrase that we don't like. But that's often used imposter syndrome can be ignited because you're thinking Who am I to be a coach. And having stepped out basically, of that coach role and responsibility, which is about being as non judgmental, as, as possible, bringing your curiosity and so on,

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I mean, classic examples of that are when you are working with a client, to help them on a confidence goal. And yet you don't feel confident yourself. And as you've described, they're around the imposter, helping somebody with what they are describing as their imposter syndrome, when you yourself feel like an imposter. And, you know, I think that happens when we forget that we need to be in the client's world rather than in our own world. And it's easily done. Like, I know, if I'm coaching coaches, and they bring business development, I find it very hard to stay in coaching, because I've got 300,000 ideas of how to grow a coaching business spinning around in my brain at any one particular time. And so it is very hard to stay out of that place. But with practice, and with experience, I think you find ways to ground yourself, to leave your own experience at the door and find yourself being able to be fully present with your clients. And I think they're also useful things that you can do in when you're in a coaching relationship. And you notice that happening, which is hand literally hand the reins back to your client, what would be really valuable for you right now? What are you learning and taking away so far? What would be a really challenging question that I could ask you right now that might help to unlock new insight. So really consciously handing back to the client to give yourself breathing space within the coaching to recenter yourself, and just notice what is happening and be able to readjust in the moment. One of the things

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that's coming to my mind is that the the interesting bit, which is around often, when people are coaching as freelance coaches, and they need they choose to niche in a particular area, and it's often something that they've overcome themselves. So when you read the websites, it in fact, tells people I had this problem once, and I overcame it through coaching, and I can now support you to be able to do the same thing. So that when we think about over identification, it's almost setting up that dynamic. And as you were saying, it draws them into mind as to our clients coming for coaching, or are they coming for mentoring? Or are they coming for both? And what have you contracted? In? Which of those have you contracted to work with your client? Or have you agreed that actually, you're going to bring bring both of those things into it? And how are you going to do that? So are you going to support them through a coaching approach. But then as you get towards the end of the conversation, you may bring in some more mentoring once they've exhausted their own ideas. And actually, then they just want to, what did you do? And are you going to be prepared to share that and is that in service of the contract that you have. So for me, that is just so fascinating how these relationships get set up, when we also read so much about, you know, being non judgmental, and leaving all of those things at the door.

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There's a big part of what you're used to, which I sort of alluded to, at the start of the conversation. But I remember when we started working in the tech industry, and we were coaching people in roles that I still to this day do not understand what they do like deep, deep technical roles. And at first I was like, Oh my gosh, like this is this is madness. Like I can't coach in this space. And as an experienced coach, but still that that not knowing really what the client was talking about, was quite uncomfortable. And it took a couple of clients sessions to settle into that and to remember, like, that's actually okay, it's a it's actually a gift to be able to be in a space where you don't know what the client is not talking about. But you can't get drawn into the story. Because you can't get drawn into the the who said this. And then what happened next, and what does that mean for that project and this project, so you stay very much focused on the person. And you talk about the impact that that is having on them and their beliefs and their values and their emotions and their goals, rather than getting drawn into the story. And I think when you over identify with a client, there's just a danger that you're you're coaching the story and not the person. And as you said before, where you're coaching can dry up that's often where It begins to dry up, because you're not focusing on the impact. You're just focusing on the details.

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I think it can also show up with shifting into more closed questions and open questions. Because as you're the client is talking and you're thinking, I kind of know how this where this is going, and what they're going to say next, like this is so similar to my own experience, you can find yourself almost wanting to confirm that. So seeing, and so what happened next, did you, you know, if you're not careful, you've slipped into that, because you're, it's almost like you're watching a movie of your own life rather than actually being in the role of coach. So that's, those are the ways that it could show up in an unhealthy way. And so there is about noticing what's happening in your relationship is critical. That's a key coaching competency, and taking all of that information as information, taking it to supervision, if you find something different in a particular relationship, or any of the things that we've discussed today, again, exploring that, is it really happening? Is it true that you're over identifying? Or is that something that you're telling yourself? And if so, why? Are you telling yourself that? And how is that serving you? How's it serving your client and beyond? If it's happening in the session? And you notice it? What are your options? What do you choose to do with that? Would you share it with your client as information around what's happening? Or would you choose to do something else? So we use suggested, you know, handing the reins back to the client? Maybe you would even choose to just say, almost like break state, if you like in the session and say, Oh, hang on, just need to put my charger in, you know, and really just almost have a word with yourself and kind of just cleanse yourself around this and actually focus on what don't I know. So maybe ask a question, say, What have you not yet shared with me that's important. In this situation,

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I typically name it. I think when it's happening in my sessions, I tend to be like, I've, I veered well off the coaching role. And I can see I'm mentoring now. And I'll check in with the client, like, where are you like, How helpful is this often, here's the strange thing, often the client can find it valuable. You know, so if you're slipping more into that advisory, mentoring, guiding, leading, it's not that it's necessarily helpful to the client, if the client doesn't know what coaching is, then they may be having a great experience, like writing down all your different ideas. It's just not, it's just not coaching. So you know, different things at different times in the relationship can be helpful, but you have to have a contract around what you are and what you aren't doing, and know where you are and where you aren't. So if you're, if you've contracted to coach your client, and you're working towards empowering them, and they're in igniting, they're in a coach to help themselves, you know, sought sought their own kind of challenges through the mentoring is not going to do that. And that's not the contract that you have. So you're not honouring the contract. But as Jo said, if actually the client is coming, and what they're looking for is some, some guidance, and it can be okay. But you have to know what you're doing and when. So typically, when this happens with me, and I name it the clients like, that's really helpful, actually. But then we can have a discussion around appreciate that was helpful. Let's get back to you. Here. What have you taken away from this so far? What thoughts do you have now? How should we move forward together, and that just enables me to free myself from it. And as I said, before, like hand the reins back to the client, there's no shame in it. It's not like, you're a bad person, because this has happened. And I think sometimes new new coaches in particular can put so much pressure on themselves to be the perfect coach, that when these things happen, they panic. And then oh, my gosh, like I'm doing this wrong. And they start to self critique and judge when in reality, like we're all humans, we're all going to have these incidents, the key is being aware of when it's happening, and what to do about it when it does, and to then not keep repeating and repeating and repeating it with every client. But start to notice what are your own personal triggers around when this happens to you? And how can you start to learn different ways when those things come up in conversation?

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I think one of the most tricky ones for me as a coach, I'm a working mum. And, you know, that can be complicated at times, you know, or easy at times, or I'm going from you know, coaching clients or being the CEO KCO of this business, and then I'm collecting children from school or stood at the side of a swimming pool. And when clients come and they are struggling with the work life balance, and they want it to be fixed. They don't want to have guilt for this or guilt for that. And, you know, part of me is like, is that even realistic? Like, am I am I Do I never have that is that a destination? is, you know, can I be in service of my client around that. So that's the one that I personally have to do a lot of inner work on.

15:12

And that's the key, isn't it? It is doing your own inner work. And it's about, I think I said this in supervision, actually, recently that one of the ways to be able to do this is to continue that personal development journey. So if you if you start to recognise, I think the example I gave earlier was that you're working with a client on their confidence goal. But you feel that because of your own confidence challenges, you can't help this client, then continue to work on your confidence challenges, work with your own coach, know, continue to lean into what is challenging and difficult for you go on that kind of self discovery and healing journey, so that you feel that even if your confidence isn't fixed, whatever that looks like, you are on a journey with it. So you're not stuck in it. And I think that frees you to be able to coach because if you are moving through the different things that you identify, there is motion involved, and so you're less likely to present the stuckness into the coaching relationship.

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Yeah, and I think there's another kind of differing aspect here as well, which is sometimes the normalising of, you know, there can be this, putting the coach on a pedestal as well that the coach's life is like, completely perfect. And so therefore, the client aspires to be like their coach, which is not that healthy. In fact, and it's not really a dynamic that, that you want to engage in a coaching relationship is aimed to be equal synergy, and it's synergistic. I can't get my words out today. So if a client is talking about confidence, for example, then and what they are demonstrating to you is that their perception is that everybody else is more confident than them. And they're saying to you, you know, you're really confident doing X, Y, and Zed, and you say, actually, I don't feel confident in all aspects of my life, all of the time. And then the client is like, it's a reality check for them. And so maybe that, you know, maybe they're in there kind of perfection driver. And that helps to just, it's a little reframe, for them to just pause for a moment and think, Is this realistic? Have I told myself a story that this is a problem, and it's not really a problem? So there are, you know, these are the nuances of what actually happens in the conversation, when we're talking about these topics, we're often just picking very, you know, one dimensional aspect of it's hard to really bring to life, the true dynamic of what occurs in a coaching conversation. And it's in those second by second, you know, the way things are presented, what their said calibrating those things, what you know about your client from what they shared before, that you're making those little mini judgement calls around the questions to ask what to share what not to share, always thinking about how could and will that be in service of supporting them with the goal that they've come with?

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Yeah, and so your reflective practice is really key to the sorts of dynamics that we've been discussing today. When you notice it happening, you're going to be reflecting whilst you're there in the sessions, that's reflection in action. And then after the session, if you walk away noticing that something hasn't sat right with you, then reflect, after the session, reflect on that action, and take the learning. So always leaning into it with inquiry and curiosity rather than judgement. What happened there? You know, what was helpful? What was unhelpful? What could I do differently next time? You know, what do I need to learn to be able to be more flexible in my approach, when these topics come up again, that is really the unsung hero of being a great coach is just being able to learn from each and every experience,

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and to recognise that however similar the clients life might appear to you and in comparison to your own, reminding yourself that your life is actually totally different to your clients. And sometimes what can be really helpful in the role of the coach is to actually say that out loud to your client, to acknowledge if they already know have some information about you from your website, or so on. And they're identifying the similarities as well as to be able to say to him, you know, whilst we are both X, Y and Zed obviously, you have your life and your way of experience your life and I have mine and I will be supporting you as you look into yourself and the goals that you want to achieve. So you're putting that kind of marker in the sand so that you're marking the discipline for yourself and your role as coach and also for the client who may have a tendency to lean into wanting more mentoring from you than coaching.

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