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**SPEAKERS**

Jo Wheatley, Zoe Hawkins

**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. Welcome to the coaching cloud podcast with me Zoe Hawkins and my friend and co host, Jo Wheatley.

**Jo Wheatley** 00:27

Hi, everyone. Good to be here today. Today, Zoe and I are going to be talking about or exploring the question, are you taking too much responsibility for your client? quite provocative question there, and one we're excited to talk about today. The reason that we are focusing an episode on this is it is something that often comes up in supervision sessions, we might ask our clients, in this case, the coaches that very question, are you taking too much responsibility for your client? And we think that this is something that we all do as coaches at times to normalise it. So we want to explore how might you be doing that in a coaching session? And what might some of the signs be? So where would you like to start? So

**Zoe Hawkins** 01:14

there are so many indications out there, I think one of the ones that comes to my mind is when you're rescuing your client, is probably where there's an obvious sign of you taking too much responsibility. So what we mean by that is a client will present a particular challenge that they're having. And instead of, you know, going into active listening, or being able to explore and open up with a challenge, you short circuit that too, right? What are we going to do about this and you start, maybe even leading or suggesting to your client veering off down the end of the mentoring continuum, partly because it's too uncomfortable for you to sit in your clients discomfort, and so therefore, you rescue your client from it, and why that is a sign of taking too much responsibility. Because, you know, what would it feel for you to be okay, with your client not resolving that challenge? You know, if that was what was right for them? Or that was where they were at on their particular journey right now? And, and is, what is it that the client wants not? What is it that you want for the client, but what does the client want, they're not always the same thing. And there can be subtle differences between that. So being able to sit in our clients discomfort with them, I think, is a really important part of coaching. And that's where you have a healthy level of responsibility, because your responsibility is to the client, whilst they are experiencing that challenge, not the responsibility for the clients outcomes of the challenge that they're having.

**Jo Wheatley** 02:55

It's a really critical distinction and think, as you're listening to the podcast, we invite you also to reflect on what am I responsible for? And what am I not responsible for in the coaching that I do, because may have explored that early on in your career, but perhaps is a good time to be able to come back and revisit that. And we do have coaches that come to supervision, and will be saying things like, I want my client to x, y, and z. And sometimes the coaches themselves will stop themselves partway through and say, so, I'm just I'm hearing what I'm saying, as I'm sharing that, I wonder if I'm taking too much responsibility for it, or I'm noticing that I am. And then, of course, we can explore where does that come from? What are the beliefs that you're holding about yourself as a coach, about the process of coaching about the client that's in front of you, maybe clients in general, but maybe specific clients, that are leading you into a pattern of behaviour, where you're emotionally feeling responsible, responsible for them, and maybe also having thoughts that are, you know, connected to your thoughts and your feelings and your behaviours that are creating a dynamic in the relationship. So you might find yourself thinking about your client outside of sessions, that could be a telltale sign that you're perhaps taking more responsibility than you need to or is healthy to in terms of the relationship maybe you find yourself researching things for your client, rather than your client being engaged and motivated to research things for themselves. So you know, there may be a difference between you researching how you can support a client with a particular topic or showing up in a particular way or taking them to the to supervision, rather than you getting the answers for your client.

**Zoe Hawkins** 04:53

Yeah, it's that over preparation, isn't it as a sign of that responsibility taking and I think it's where you start about researching solutions and outcomes for your client, as you said, rather than around different approaches that you might be able to take. And I think related to that, sometimes we want to pick our clients up and take them to a destination beyond perhaps the one that they want to have. And what I mean by that is, as coaches when we spend so much time in sessions, and we can see the real transformational power of coaching, when we're working with beliefs, or some of that deeper work, we may be inclined to want to take our clients there, but they may not want to go there, you know, they might come to coaching, wanting to build a career plan and identify some of their strengths and talents. And you might see that there's a belief getting in their way around, I don't know, let's say it's not being good enough. And you can see that and you can hear it in their language, and you play it back to them, but they don't really have an appetite for the belief work, you may latch on to that and keep trying to encourage your client to go there. Because you know, how much value there can be when a client does. And it's that fine line between providing challenge to your client and observations to help them to see where they may have some blind spots, and being able to just let go of that and meet your client where they are at with the journey that they want to go on. And I think if we are sensing a responsibility for our clients, outcomes or results, we can tend to veer more into pushing and doing to our client rather than pacing and doing with our clients. I

**Jo Wheatley** 06:33

think we always have a responsibility as coaches to reflect ourselves on, you know, what we're doing in the sessions. Is it ethical? Is there anything else areas that we can develop more in to be able to support our clients in an even better way, as coaches? There's that subtlety between, like if a client is, is getting stuck in it in a session, you know, they can't answer the question. Are you as the coach then thinking, I didn't ask a very good question there. are you panicking? Are you working really hard to try and think of an amazing question because you feel a pressure for the client to add value, and that could be because the client is paying for the coaching themselves. And they've expressed to you that that is financially challenging for them. And so you have in the real sense of, I need to ensure that they get huge amount of value from this, or is it a situation where you're working as a coach, it's been commissioned by an organisation for an individual or a number of individuals, and you're worried that the clients aren't making or some of the clients aren't making the progress that either they want to make or that you feel that the organisation is expecting the clients to make, or they might not be demonstrating it. And just notice, even things like your breathing or your feelings, and, you know, they're little telltale signs that things are happening for you. So it's being able to kind of notice those things for yourself. And that always obviously goes back to the contract and how you start the relationship with the individual or the organisation and being clear around what you're responsible for, and what they are responsible for, and that we cannot ever guarantee the outcome of a coaching relationship or a coaching session, but that we will do things that we do, like prepare for the sessions and bring our coaching toolkit. And the individual is responsible for coming to the sessions, and bringing topics and content to the sessions and you know, reflecting on the questions and K creating it with the coach. And if they're committing to actions, then they're taking responsibility either for completing those actions, or not completing the actions and exploring what was behind that. And how is that relevant towards in terms of them achieving they their larger goals? So if they don't take the action? Are you then feeling responsible as the coach and thinking, How come they didn't do it? What have I done wrong? So if you're judging yourself wondering if you're good enough, it's not to say that you are taking too much responsibility, because maybe there is more development for you to do with your kitchen skills. But it might be that you are taking too much responsibility.

**Zoe Hawkins** 09:23

I think that's the piece I was gonna shine the light on, is it your clients and their journey and their progress or lack of can trigger in you that am I good enough? You know, am I actually doing a great job? And as you've said that Joe like, maybe and maybe not, you know, you have to be able to look at that with a reflective practitioner lens rather than an internal critic lens. You know, there are learning opportunities for all of us when we work with clients, particularly those that may not be getting the results that they're desiring to get to look at our own coaching and look at where where does the responsibility I for me, because I don't think we can sit here as coaches and be like, Oh, it's not my it's not my responsibility at all, there is a responsibility and coaches, we do play a part in our clients results. And it needs to be the healthy part in our clients results, we cannot get the client results for them, we cannot lead and suggest them to outcomes that are actually probably more suited to us than themselves. We need to do that through our skills as facilitators have as active listeners, as observers as challenges and holding the mirror up, those are all the ways that we can serve our clients and things that we can be responsible for. So if we've here and fear ourselves, wondering if we're good enough, how do we get ourselves back into adult back into reflective practice to be able to genuinely explore? How can I be a better service here? You know, where are my levers that I can pull in order to support my client in achieving their results, rather than, you know, spending the time maybe beating ourselves up a little bit and feeling a bit bruised around what we think we should or shouldn't be doing? As a coach, I

**Jo Wheatley** 11:15

think there's a really important systemic lens on the work that we do as well as coaches and what what do we have a responsibility for there? So I'm reading a book at the moment by Peter Hawkins. And I think it's Eve Turner on systemic coaching. And he gives the example which I've heard before, which is when the banks were collapsing. And he asked the question around, you know, where were all the coaches when the banks were collapsing? You know, because a lot of individuals in the industry would have had been having coaching and somebody responded and said, getting their invoices in. And obviously, when we think about the climate, and, you know, the the environment, the health about of this world that that sustains us? Do we have a responsibility as coaches to bring that lens into the coaching relationship? Do we have a responsibility to do that? Well, if the client has mentioned that that's important to them in the pre coaching questionnaire or their in the conversations they're having, what about if they don't bring that in? Do we still have a responsibility to be asking those questions as a global citizen? Is that ethical for us as coaches? And I think, you know, questions like that are important questions for us, as coaches to ask ourselves to explore ourselves, in our own reflections in our supervision sessions, maybe in peer conversations.

**Zoe Hawkins** 12:44

And that's the role of reflective practice and supervision, isn't it is that's the that is the space that we can go to, to be able to chew over those questions. Because there's no right or wrong is there, you know, that's the thing. Those are conclusions that we need to reach to ourselves. We've touched on this earlier in the conversation, but it was because you mentioned banks and getting invoices in that it's popped into my head, which is this piece around fees. And the fees that you charge can really influence the responsibility that you feel for your clients. So you may start at a particular level, and each time you hike your fees up, you may notice yourself doing more and more for your client or adding on more bits to your package to justify the fee increase or, you know, whatever it might be. And I think that's an important piece to notice, when you are doing your reflective practice, like, is there any connection between the sense of responsibility you have for your clients, what they pay your fees, the package that you may be serving them in, and the experience then that your client has with you as a coach, it's something I've noticed myself in the early days of my coaching, and I think it's something that can creep in for commercial coaches, as they, you know, change up their different packages and fee structures. I think there's

**Jo Wheatley** 14:06

an interesting piece around accountability as well. And you know, you have like accountability coaches, so marketing as that's what you're going to support clients with. And we often talk about, you know, like, how does the client want you to be with them as a coach? And they might ask you, I want you to be my accountability partner. And do you meet your client? Were your clients that at the beginning, so at the beginning, do you take a responsibility for that, but actually, the longer term aim contracted with the client is that they will develop that self accountability piece, you know, over time. So I think another interesting question to consider is, does our responsibility to a client vary over time? That might be a useful thing you know, to ponder on and how does the responsibility relates to meeting our client That's where our clients are at.

**Zoe Hawkins** 15:00

And I guess that's where we're starting to lean into, like, you know, there, there may be elements of the responsibility that you're taking are helpful. And there may be elements of the responsibility that you're taking as unhelpful. And I think distinguishing between where you're at in that continuum, why you may be doing the things that you're doing and how that's influencing your coaching, which is right farming, ground for supervision, you know, so I guess what we're also saying through this podcast, as you can probably tell now is that supervision is a really important element. If this is something you're noticing, if you're noticing yourself taking responsibility for your clients, thinking about your clients, beyond the coaching sessions, over preparing, leading, coming up with solutions to your client's problems, all of the sorts of things that we've mentioned today, then how might you engage in supervision to support you?

**Jo Wheatley** 15:54

Yeah, and, you know, if we deconstruct the word, responsibility, you've got response, and able or ability. So it's the ability to choose a response. And I think that's important to be able to sort of discuss with the clients because coaching ultimately is about the client being able to identify different options and choices and being able to, to make choices. And if we take, as coaches take more responsibility, than is healthy for us to do so to take responsibility in areas that are not our error, you know, our role to take responsibility. And then potentially what we're doing there is colluding with the client's belief system, which is that they are not able to do that themselves, and can inadvertently create a parent child type dynamic in the relationship or obviously, coaching is a is an adult adults relationship. Well, that's, that's the aim

**Zoe Hawkins** 16:54

resource about our self care, isn't it because you burn out as a coach, or there's a risk of burning out as a coach, if you're taking responsibility for your clients, you just in most coaches have enough going on in their own lives, they don't need to take their clients home with them as well. And I think that where you have good boundaries, and you're able to not leave your client in the session, like all coaches care about their clients, but it's caring about them in a way which is sustainable, and a way that is professional. And so your self care as a coach is about the boundaries that you hold, and those boundaries of responsibility, which ultimately goes full circle back to you, you co create what those look like with your client in the contracting, so that you can both lean into that coaching relationship with clarity around how you each need to be, and who is taking responsibility for what

**Jo Wheatley** 17:49

Yeah, and maybe like I've just had an image of a, you know, a pie in my mind that if that was the responsibility pie, it had different topics, and you take some areas as a coach, the client takes others who are the other who do the other pieces belong to, you know, because maybe there are things that the client is, is wrestling with or carrying in their life in terms of responsibility that isn't really theirs to be responsible for. And that might be something that comes out of it. So even exploring just the very topic or words of responsibility with your clients may lead to new insights and new options for them in terms of their own behaviour.

**Zoe Hawkins** 18:29

It's a great way to role model, isn't it. So if you can role model, the responsibility that you take in the coaching relationship, it almost gives permission for the client to be able to put down some of the things that they don't need to be responsible for as well as you've kind of highlighted there.

**Jo Wheatley** 18:46

And how liberating is that? So we hope you've enjoyed the discussion today and I hope it's been a good stimulus for you thinking about your own coaching practice and your relationship to responsibility. If you are interested in joining us on any of our courses, whether they are kind of entry point coaching qualifications, or CPD for coaches, come and check our website out at IG company.k.uk.

**Zoe Hawkins** 19:19

Thank you for listening to the coaching crowd podcast with Zoe Hawkins and Joe Wheatley. We'd love for you to join our inclusive community to learn and grow in the coaching space. Go over to Facebook and search for the coaching crowd to be in good company with other aspiring coaches.