

Alison Whitmire: Welcome. I'm Alison Whitmire, and I'm super happy to be here with you today for the Learning in Action Podinar Unlearning Coaching, challenging the rules of coaching to do more of this work that we love to do. I'm joined today by Kris Harty, hi Kris.

Kris Harty: Hi Alison. Hello everyone.

Alison Whitmire: Kris is the director of brand, community and customer care for Learning in Action, and she's going to be handling the Q and A and the chat box behind the scenes for us today, to make sure that we all stay on track, and that we're engaging with you, and I'm still staying present with the content. Thank you, Kris.

Kris Harty: You bet. All right. Thanks everyone.

Alison Whitmire: Okay, so we definitely want to interact with you, and we want to hear all about your thoughts on this content. So if you want to ask a question, type a question in the Q and A box, and that will go to Kris and then to me. I'll be stopping for questions as we go. And if you want to chat, if you want to chat with your neighbor, you want to comment on what I'm saying, or you just want to chat, you can do that in the chat box, and if you want everyone to see it, not just Kris and I, you'll want to change the little arrow so it says all panelists and attendees, then everyone can see it and everyone can enjoy the conversation.

Alison Whitmire: And we'll be doing polls from time to time. You just click on the poll, submit the answer that works for you, and then we'll see what the results are. Before we launch into the content, let's take a quick poll. I'm going to launch this poll on ... that was the wrong poll. I only see one poll there, Kris.

Alison Whitmire: Anyway, we're going to skip the poll on how long have you been coaching, because I'm not seeing it in there. So, we're going to jump right in. Oh, Kris, did you want to come on and launch a poll?

Kris Harty: Yeah. Let me see what I can do here, I do see the poll, so that's odd. Well, let me see if I can get it to work here.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. Why don't you do that in the background and I'll keep going.

Kris Harty: You bet. Okay.

Alison Whitmire: Okay, thank you ma'am.

Kris Harty: You bet. You're welcome.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. So where did this idea on learning the rules of coaching come from? I have been coaching for 15 years. And in the last four or five years, I have felt

more and more like what my clients are wanting from me is something different than what I learned. Kris, if you could mute ... actually I muted you there.

Alison Whitmire: And I've been feeling angst, this tension between what I call the rules that I learned from coaching ... the coaching schools I've been to, and then what my clients were asking for, what I felt's been called for in the moment, in the coaching session, and what I felt called to do. I've begun to unlearn what I think of as the rules of what I learned as a coach, to create a coaching practice I love and to love the coaching practice that I've created.

Alison Whitmire: What I hope to do today is to talk to you about what I've had to unlearn to do that, what I've had to unlearn to thrive as a coach in my coaching practice, and make it all work to become a fuller expression of myself as a coach.

Alison Whitmire: And by the way, I'm not a guru. I am not holding myself out as the expert. I'm not saying this is what you should do. My honest to goodness wish, my hope for you, is that I give you some ideas today that gives you permission to be your unique self as a coach, to embrace the full expression of your unique self as a coach, whatever that looks like. That's really the goal today, it's not to be prescriptive, it's not to tell you what to do, what you should do, or what's right, or what's wrong, or what you should challenge. It's really to invite you to explore what's possible for you as you begin to shape your coaching practice around you.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. So, we're looking at the poll. Let's look at our poll results. Thanks Kris, for helping me figure that out there. Oh, I'm loving this distribution. I'm thrilled that we have so many really senior coaches today, because that plays right in, that plays right in to what we're going to be talking about today.

Alison Whitmire: I'm going to jump right into the next piece. I want to start with this idea of shuhari. Shuhari was a Japanese concept that was initially introduced, was initially introduced in Akito. The idea is, it's a method for learning something, and for unlearning something. I use this idea to talk about this process of learning and unlearning and becoming the coach that we can be.

Alison Whitmire: Here's the idea in its simplest form. Shu is the idea of whenever we start to learn something, we follow the rules. It just makes sense. We learn something by following the rules, learning the rules, going through a certain process. And then we get to the ha, and that's detaching from the rules, breaking from the rules, in fact, learning why the rules exist by breaking them or bending them. But then ultimately, transcending to a place where we create the rules, we are the rules, that we have shaped in this context, our coaching practice so finely around ourselves, our gifts, our intuitions, our own unique style and approach and abilities, that we define our own way.

Alison Whitmire: For those of you, there are a few of you who've just been coaching a year or two, maybe you're in the shu place, and that's okay, following the rules. It's

okay. If you've been coaching a little bit longer, maybe you want to practice breaking, bending a few rules to really experience and understand why they existed, and so for the many of you who've been coaching 10 years or more, if you're not already, you could be in this sweet, sweet place of being ready to transcend the rules and make your own rules that work for you in your coaching practice. That's what's on invitation today. Transcending the rules to be the rule.

Alison Whitmire: We'll talk about the top 10 things I had to unlearn to create a coaching practice I love. Now, it's 10 things, it's an hour. I'm probably only going to just touch on some of them, but I didn't want to leave it completely ... these 10 things, any of them completely untouched, because just a little taste of it might give you an indication of how you can release yourself from some of the binds you felt around coaching.

Alison Whitmire: So if there's any topic at all that you would like me to ... you'd like more information on, just put it in the chat box blog, dash, and the topic, and I will write a blog on it. Or maybe we'll do a podinar on it. We'll figure out how best to do that to get you that content, okay?

Alison Whitmire: And we will have interactivity throughout. I'm going to stop and ask for questions here in just a bit. I want to start with the story of the first thing I learned that I had to unlearn. It started in Jenks, Oklahoma in June of 1978. It was in a conversation with my dad at a restaurant, and that's my dad, a picture of me and my dad. I'm about 18, he's about 48. It's two months before I'm heading off to college. My dad and I had a conversation that became a pivotal moment in my life. And it went like this.

Alison Whitmire: "So honey, what are you going to major in, in college?"

Alison Whitmire: "Gee, I don't know Dad. I'm thinking maybe sociology or psychology. I don't know, I just want to help people."

Alison Whitmire: "That's nice, dear. What do you do after four years with a sociology or a psychology degree?"

Alison Whitmire: "Gee, I don't know Dad, I think you go to more school."

Alison Whitmire: "Well, that's ... okay. Well, four years from now, you're going to be supporting yourself. I recommend a business."

Alison Whitmire: And that's what I did, is I went to college, I got dual degrees in accounting and finance, and four years later, I was supporting myself. Almost four years to the day. In that story, what I learned, is that I couldn't make a living, I couldn't make a living helping other people. I can't and don't blame my dad for that, my dad was just sharing what he'd learned.

- Alison Whitmire: This is a picture of my dad. He was the youngest of six kids. The only boy, the child of sharecroppers. He was born in 1930, just right before the depression. What he learned is that you've got to make a living. The most important thing you can do is make a living. If you're not familiar with sharecroppers, sharecroppers are people that are so poor that they farm land they don't own and they pay for the rent for that land in the crops they raise.
- Alison Whitmire: My dad used to say that his family, when he was growing up, was so poor, they spelled it with three o's. Poor. So he was just teaching me what he learned. He was trying to pass that on. It created the first thing I had to unlearn, was this idea that I can't make a living coaching. I can't make a living helping other people. And I had to get my head out of that space. It's not just story, and it's not just [inaudible 00:11:45], not just my dad said, the majority of coaches actually don't make a thriving living coaching.
- Alison Whitmire: In a global study performed by the ICF in 2016, they found that external professional coaches in North America charged on average \$234 an hour. We know that not everybody charges by the hour, but if you break it down to the hour like all my clients do anyway, no matter how I charge. It's \$234 an hour, and then they ask for every coach, how much time do you spend inclusive of that hour? The drive time, administrative time, the average coach in North America spends over three hours for every coaching hour, which means the effective rate was \$75 and the average coach had a little over 11 clients, earning \$60,800 a year, which is not ... unless you're somewhere in Brady, Texas in the middle of nowhere, that's not a thriving living for most people.
- Alison Whitmire: You could say, "Well, I could just work harder, I could work smarter, I could work better. I work 40 hours a week, and 50 weeks a year. I could make \$150,000. Awesome." Well \$150,000 certainly isn't a bad living, and the number of clients you'd have to have, and the administrative you'd have to have, and the scheduling you'd have to do, and the client schedules that'd have to align would be nearly impossible to make that happen. Just nearly impossible.
- Alison Whitmire: So what I've chosen to do instead, what I realized early on, is if I was going to make a living coaching, I was going to have to target people who could afford to pay me a lot per hour, and I was going to have to figure out how I could do something that was worth it for them to pay me that amount of money, and I was going to have to do it really efficiently.
- Alison Whitmire: So I'm curious, and we'll talk more about exactly who I target and exactly how I make that work in a bit. But I'm curious, what do you want to unlearn or relearn? What's a rule you want to test or break? Go ahead and put your answers in the chat box, and I'll be coming back to Kris in just a minute.
- Alison Whitmire: So while you type your answers in the chat box, or type in your questions, whatever you'd like, I'm going to take this one question from the audience. It's

from Donna Singer, thank you Donna, for your support. We love how engaged you are. What do you consider the greatest challenge for coaches?

Alison Whitmire: To be honest Donna, this is it. I believe the greatest challenge for most coaches is how to thrive as a coach. Not just financially, we talked about that, but also from my experience, is that most coaches are on one end of the spectrum of not having, not thriving as financially as they want to as a coach, or they've been coaching quite some time, they have a good book of business and it's spreading them thin. They may be financially thriving, but not thriving as a human, because they're spreading themselves so thin, supporting their clients, putting themselves second. That's what I think the greatest challenge is.

Alison Whitmire: So Kris, what's going on in the chat box that we should talk about?

Kris Harty: Hey Alison. I was just finishing typing something, so sorry about the delay. Good things. We're hearing from a few different people, and one is Lynn Saab, she's saying that she became a board certified coach from the Center for Credentialing and Education, and she tries to stay away from ICF credentialing because she believes it's too cumbersome and limiting and subjective.

Kris Harty: We also heard from Kevin Blair, he says he works on the side as a mentor for two university based ICF credentialed coaching programs, and that the coaching he teaches in those programs is very different from the coaching he does in practice with leaders and executives. And he brings up a good question. He loves this topic, and he says, "Do you think it is time to train new coaches differently? Or is it still important to learn the rules first, so you have them as a foundation?"

Alison Whitmire: Boy, that's a good one. To be completely honest, I'm obviously biased. I feel like that an awful lot of the rules that the ICF has in place, are really good ones, like the coaching competencies. They're really good ones. Those are really hard to argue with, and they are what delineates coaching from everything else. They delineate coaching from consulting, they delineate coaching from therapy, they delineate coaching from training. I think there's something to be said for honing in on just what the ICF defines as coaching and really learning those rules before we kind of play with the integration of all these different pieces.

Alison Whitmire: I guess that's what I'd have to say, but again, that's how I evolved. So that's my point of view.

Alison Whitmire: You're on mute, Kris.

Kris Harty: I am. Sorry about that, Alison. I didn't want to interrupt. Yeah, we have a number of good comments here, and many are right along the lines of what you've been saying. We've heard from Joseph [Seiler 00:18:03], and he's saying he educates, he hopes to educate his ideal clients of the true value of coaching, which can be a challenge. We also heard from Tom [inaudible 00:18:20], he

says, "Coaching isn't only about listening and asking good questions, it's a place for telling. It's called direct communication."

Alison Whitmire: Yeah. I can't argue with that. I'm loving this variety of perspectives and approaches, because if there's anything I'm all about, whether it comes to religion or yoga or coaching, is that my belief is there's not one right answer. There is not one right answer. There is a right answer for each of us. That's what I think.

Alison Whitmire: So anyway, I think I'm going to need to continue on with the content, Kris, just to keep us on track.

Kris Harty: All right.

Alison Whitmire: Thank you, ma'am. Okay. The second thing I had to unlearn is this idea that I could coach anyone on anything. I don't know if everybody learned that from coaching school, it could just be me. It's what I learned. Because if I buy into this idea that the coach has the content, sorry, the coach has the structure and the process, and the client has the content, well then, I can do structure and process with anybody, right?

Alison Whitmire: Well here's three problems with that, that I see anyway and experienced, is just because I can coach anyone, doesn't mean I should. I can't tell you what felt to me like later, as like coaching malpractice, like when I tried to coach someone around career coaching or sales coaching. I'm like, "Well, I can coach anyone on anything. [inaudible 00:20:07] said that I had the structure and I had the process and they had the content."

Alison Whitmire: You know, I just don't feel like I did those clients a service, and that it took me doing it to realize it. There are people who do that kind of coaching, who are awesome at it, and it just shouldn't be me. It took me doing it to figure that out.

Alison Whitmire: And just because I can coach someone, or coach anyone, doesn't mean I want to. Before I started coaching 15 years ago, I spent 20 years in Fortune 500 companies, and I found that to be soul-sucking. That was just my experience. So I found also that when I worked with people in the corporate setting, I find that often to be soul-sucking, too. When I first started, I worked with, for example, I was in Seattle. I worked with people at Microsoft, and over time what I realized is I just don't want to have another conversation about how can I improve my brand at Microsoft.

Alison Whitmire: It just wasn't joyful for me, and there are other people who could do that work so much better than I could. So I learned that.

Alison Whitmire: And then the last thing is, I learned that if I don't really clearly define who I work with and why they work with me, my prospect clients can't find me. So we all know, coaching, for the most part is a word of mouth business. If I'm not able to

clearly, cleanly articulate exactly who I work with, and why they work with me, and what they get, then how can anyone refer to me? Frankly, that's a problem I had, because now, I refer lots of business and have for years and years and years, to other coaches. My biggest challenge in referring other clients coaches, is I know hundreds of coaches, why should I pick one versus another?

Alison Whitmire: And almost always, I can't ... it's a crapshoot or I give up, because I can't ... most coaches are like, "Well, I work with emerging leaders." Well, doesn't everybody?

Alison Whitmire: "I work with high potentials." Well, doesn't everybody?

Alison Whitmire: "I work with women emerging leaders." Well, that takes care of 50% of the population.

Alison Whitmire: What I learned is that when I'm really crystal clear about who I target, and what they're looking for, and what they get from our work together, then I can attract more of my ideal client and get paid a living rate. So I'm no longer taking on coaching clients because of my Learning in Action business. I still do coach two days a week, I have about 20 clients I coach.

Alison Whitmire: When I used to, when I was wanting more business, what I would say is, I work with CEO owners, typically male, typically 35 to 45 years of age, they work hard, play hard, learn hard and are athletically inclined. They come to me because they've reached a level of success in their career relatively early in age, and they've just run out of what they know to do. They don't want someone telling them what to do. They don't want a consultant to come in and say this is what you should be doing with your business and this is how you should be leading it. They don't want to help someone find their own answers, and someone with experience who's been there and can give them not just access to themselves, but access to what other people have done in their position.

Alison Whitmire: When clients work with me, they get a sense of clarity about what they want from themselves and their business, they gain confidence, and in that confidence, they gain a level of calm.

Alison Whitmire: When I started, identifying my target market that way, every single time I say that, people say, "Oh well, athletically inclined, that's different." Yeah, it is.

Alison Whitmire: "Gee, do you only work with men?" No, of course I don't only work with men. I work with women too. Do I only work with people over 45 or under 45 and over 35? No, of course not. But what happens over and over and over again is people go, "Oh, yeah. You're painting a picture of someone I know exactly who needs you."

Alison Whitmire: And the challenge for most of us coaches, is that we're not painting that picture clearly enough. It doesn't mean that's all we can coach, it just means that we want, need to paint the picture so clearly that someone can come and go in

their mental Rolodex and say, "I know who needs you and why they need you."
So that's my little ...

Alison Whitmire: So, I'm curious about how clear are you about your target and what you're looking for, and what they get from your work together. And if you want to put that in the chat box and share it, we'd love to see it.

Alison Whitmire: While we do that, I'm going to be sharing one more piece, and I call it your coaching sweet spot. I did create this little Venn diagram, although to be honest, I borrowed from other Venn diagrams I've seen in kind of a similar space. So this may be a way for you to think about your coaching. If it's helpful, great. If it's not, sorry.

Alison Whitmire: In the Venn diagrams, the first one is working with people, people you love working with, and I'm sure if you've been coaching any period of time, you have a good sense of the characteristics of the people you love working with, and if you haven't written that down, that's an awesome thing to do.

Alison Whitmire: And then there's people you uniquely can help, in other words, what is ... what do you know? What are you great at? What's your attribute as a coach that makes you uniquely able to help certain people?

Alison Whitmire: And then there's, you know, people who can pay you a living rate, that's always useful. And then there's coaching that makes an impact. So those are just four ways to think of how you can target your coaching, and people you love working with and people you can uniquely help can be like your purpose work.

Alison Whitmire: And then there's people you love working with and maybe it makes an impact, and may or may not pay as well, it can be your passion work. That's great. Then people you can uniquely help means that that's like only you, for me, for instance, a lot of people work with CEO owners, I've never yet met anyone else who's also a partnership coach. I learned from working with CEO owners for many, many years, is that many of them are in 50/50 partnerships, and that creates some unique challenges for the business and for them as people. So I developed a specialty, an expertise in working with partners. In fact, I've never met another coach who did it the way I do it. That's my unique value proposition. And I can target people who will pay for that.

Alison Whitmire: And then there'll be some people who you want to, who can pay you a living rate, that makes an impact, but maybe it's not exactly in your sweet spot. That's okay. We all need some financial ballast, right? We all need some income to support our work from time to time. And if you can find it all together, it's a really awesome sweet spot.

Alison Whitmire: Okay, well I'm going to continue on, and maybe Kris will join me in a minute.

Kris Harty: Hey Alison, I'm here.

Alison Whitmire: So we got a question from Teresa Engel. Okay.

Kris Harty: Sorry, my internet just decided to take a little siesta for a moment.

Alison Whitmire: Oh no.

Kris Harty: Yeah.

Alison Whitmire: Okay.

Kris Harty: So I'm sorry. You had a question?

Alison Whitmire: Yeah. I'll go ahead and then you can read the chat box when I'm done with the questions.

Kris Harty: Sounds good.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. So from Teresa, Teresa says, "I'm re-emerging after four years absent. How do I best align with and choose my perfect client?"

Alison Whitmire: Well Teresa, that sweet spot diagram, if you figure out what your sweet spot is, that could be a great place to start. And by the way, how I created my target market was I started really focusing on what I attracted, the people I attracted and what they needed from me. So that's how I came up with that.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. And then last question from Patricia, "How would you respond if you were asked to coach someone with poor performance? I see this more as performance management involving the manager." Thank you, Patricia.

Alison Whitmire: Oftentimes, I think ... I believe there's a role for coaches in performance management, in that sometimes coaches, clients ... sometimes bosses and their subordinates can't always work it out. There's a conflict at times in the agendas of the two. And yeah, I think coaches can come in and really be beneficial. And the question is, is that work you'd want to do, and would love to do? And does the client, does that direct report or whatever, want to be coached? If you can answer yes to all of those, I would do it. But, that's just me.

Alison Whitmire: Okay Kris, what's going on in chat?

Kris Harty: All right, some good stuff. In answer to your question about what's your sweet spot, Lynn Saab had a good response. She has very specific people she works with. She says, "I coach senior leaders in the federal government and private industry who are facing crisis situations, who have taken on much larger roles, or who have very sensitive positions, like in the intelligence community, DOD, overseas and inspector generals." She also trains in executive presence.

Alison Whitmire: Oh cool. Love that. Yeah, I love that really ... that expertise.

Kris Harty: Yeah.

Alison Whitmire: Yeah.

Kris Harty: Yeah. Let's see here. Patty Hansen says she coaches within a corporation as an extra to her core role as engineering manager, I believe that is. "I'm consistently attracting high grade leaders who need to reconnect with their worth, potential, and get rid of imposter syndrome."

Alison Whitmire: Cool. Okay, I need to just take. If you'll continue reading chat, I need to just break away for one second.

Kris Harty: Yeah, you bet, you bet. Who else has a unique sweet spot that they'd like to share with us? And if I missed one, I apologize. I would love to hear some more here.

Alison Whitmire: Phone call, what do you ...?

Speaker 3: [inaudible 00:31:57] generator ... heater.

Alison Whitmire: Okay.

Speaker 3: [inaudible 00:31:59] generator.

Alison Whitmire: Back up. [inaudible 00:32:01].

Kris Harty: Question from Linda to Patty, nice.

Alison Whitmire: Sorry about that.

Kris Harty: Oh, that's all right. That's all right. We had a few more chat comments just internally, one to another, and we also are hearing from Jane [Richman 00:32:22], she says she's a newly certified coach, an ex-lawyer, and focuses on coaching lawyers. How awesome.

Alison Whitmire: Yeah, yeah. That's great. And even better, if you could say what kind of lawyers and why, and why do you come with you? And what is it ... of course you're an attorney, so you're going to have something really unique to share that, and what are the problems that lawyers come to you for? Yeah. That's a great start.

Alison Whitmire: Okay, so we should continue on, Kris. Just to get through out content. Thank you.

Kris Harty: Yeah. Sounds good. Yeah.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. Another thing that I realized, or I've learned that I needed to unlearn is this idea that I needed to sell. Initially, when I started as a coach, I had this idea

that I need to sell myself, and then everyone said, "Oh Alison, you're not selling yourself, you're selling coaching."

Alison Whitmire: And I'm like, "Okay, I need to sell coaching." That felt altogether wrong to me, and what I eventually came up on for myself, and feels actually really comfortable, because for many of us coaches, selling doesn't feel comfortable. What I do instead, that does feel comfortable, is I just start a relationship. So someone does an email introduction of someone who's referred to me, and I get referred because everyone knows who my target market is, and they know somebody who looks like that and why they need me. So I get the introduction, and I start talking to them right away as if I know them. "Hey Bill, so great to connect. How you doing? Shall we get together for coffee next Tuesday or next Wednesday or next Thursday at 10:00 or whatever that is." And give them three choices, make it really easy like, "Hey, hope we have a great weekend. I'm off to Duck, North Carolina to a beach weekend, think it's going to be awesome. Hope yours is, too."

Alison Whitmire: So I just start, I don't talk about what coaching is, or here's my website, or let me tell you all about me. I just start talking to them like we're already friends, and then when we meet, it's a ... they don't realize it, but what we're having is a coaching conversation. It's, "So Bill, what do you love about your business? What do you hope to achieve with it? What do you want to do? What's getting in the way of the mission of your business? What do you ... what's really feeling like a burden about your business right now?"

Alison Whitmire: When we go through that, it becomes this incredibly cathartic, immersive, unburdening conversation for them, unlike they've probably ever had before. And then at some point, they just sort of the ... it's like the exhale, and they go, they'll say like, "And what do you do? How does this work?"

Alison Whitmire: I'm like, "Actually, this is how this works. This is kind of what coaching's like."

Alison Whitmire: So, I don't try to educate them on what coaching is, not in the early stages. What coaching is, until I've converted them, right? What coaching is, what it isn't, I give them that experience of coaching, and the relationship of coaching, the safety of it, and exploration of it. And then they convert.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. Another thing that I took away from coaching school was this idea that my clients have all their own answers and the corollary, which is, and my clients are creative, resourceful and whole. The challenge that I've had with those notions is one, this assumes that clients know everything there is to know, like clients are Google. It also assumes that clients can see their blind spots, or don't get in their blind spots. Or that somehow we are superfluous to the relationship, like we are just there for questions, and any coach could do the same thing. I don't know about you, but I've had many a client show up to a coaching session, and they're defended, or they're triggered, or they're upset ... and let me tell you, they are not creative, resourceful and whole in that moment. They're not.

Alison Whitmire: So this is what I've come to believe instead. And if it doesn't work for you, that's okay. This is what I've come to believe instead, is that my clients can access, they have the capacity for creativity, resourcefulness and wholeness, and that I can help my clients access their capacity for creativity, resourcefulness and wholeness by accessing my own and bringing it to the coaching. And that working together, my clients can find the answers they seek. That's ... this is how I've rewritten that for me. That retains this idea that there is that capacity in every human to be creative, resourceful and whole and acknowledges that turns out we humans often aren't. That's why coaching exists, I think. Is to help bring us into that wholeness and help us see what's in our blind spots, to help us recognize the need to not defend, to just accept what is, and who is.

Alison Whitmire: You know, I think I'm going to continue on, and then we'll come back to ... so I'll answer questions for now, then I'll go on a little bit and we'll check in with the chat in just a minute.

Alison Whitmire: So, questions from the audience, and thank you so much for presenting these questions in advance. There are four questions, and they're ... you'll hear, they're kind of different versions of the same question, that's one of the reasons we're having so many podinars on this topic, is because I hear us coaches searching around it. So Peter Bopp says, "Like many coaches, I find that my clients expect and value a mix of coaching and advising from me. What do you see as a trend?"

Alison Whitmire: By the way, so I'll talk more to this, but the trend I see, Peter is for coaches coming out of this I only have questions for you box, and expanding more into I'm here for a reason, I am resourceful, I am part of this coaching equation, and I want to share what I have with you.

Alison Whitmire: "How does one stay in coach mode and not consulting?" Thank you, Carla.

Alison Whitmire: "How are you balancing ICF with free-flow coaching?" Question by Lori. Thank you.

Alison Whitmire: "What's your view on where offering advice and choices or sharing our experience and wisdom is of value in coaching?" Thank you, Judy Riege. I appreciate your engagement.

Alison Whitmire: All those are flavors on this same question. I'll tell you my answer. And it's informed by how I started as a coach. I started as a coach running CEO round tables, which I still do. The way I ran CEO round tables, it looks a lot like group coaching. A CEO comes to their round table with an issue, and the process the way I ran it, is that then the members, or the CEO members of the group, would ask that CEO with the issue clarifying questions for their benefit. We ask questions, after questions, after question, after question, after question, and what I experienced, is that when it worked, when the process was followed, that the CEO with the issue went into this really deep, rich territory of exploration,

self-exploration, into territory that he never would have gotten, and they'd get questions from all these different perspectives around the table. It was incredibly valuable.

Alison Whitmire: Then the process, and then we'd ... what would happen, and you know, you see this in your coaching, I'm sure, is the issue they bring actually morphs, and it becomes clear that that was just the presenting issue, that the issue underneath is something else. Then we'd take a look at that as a group and ask clarifying questions. And then when it just felt, it's palpable, that there's no more questions to ask, then we'd ask the CEO with the issue to remain silent and then everyone else in the group could present reflections and observations, and what showed up for them, and their relevant experience. And yes, even advice.

Alison Whitmire: The client wasn't allowed, the person with the issue wasn't allowed to speak during that time, they could only take notes. When it was all over, they could ask clarifying questions and say thank you. That was it. That was the rule.

Alison Whitmire: When it worked, it worked beautifully, and occasionally, CEOs can be an unruly group, the CEO would mix advice with the questions. Well, because I did this for so many years, and I got to experience coaching as an observer over and over and over again, what I saw is when someone would ... when there would be a CEO with an issue, and they would just be in this deep, deep, deep reflective, introspection, and then someone would offer advice, it shut down. I saw the person with the issue just shut down. That the self-introspections, that stopped, and there was no reception, or little reception to the advice.

Alison Whitmire: Alternatively, when the CEO with the issue had fully explored it, whatever it was, and then felt complete with that exploration, and then was accepting of advice and ready for it, and wanting it, then they could take it in. So, there's just palpable energy. That's how I learned from that kind of test tube, of what happens in a one on one coaching session, is that if I'm giving advice when they're in this exploration, then I'm ... that's just my ego at play unleashed. And when I'm really paying attention to the client's energy, I know when and how and if providing thoughts or reflections or insights or even potentially advice, might be helpful or not. It's just staying attuned to energy and flow in the conversation.

Alison Whitmire: Okay, Kris. What is happening in the chat box?

Kris Harty: Yeah, we have all kinds of great conversation going on. One thing that, let's see here, we have one that just came in. Kevin Blair has said regarding group coaching, "So, so true. I have experienced the same thing. Oftentimes if the group does the questions, listening really well, the advice giving isn't really needed, or just confirms what the client came up with from their own a-ha moments, but sometimes listening isn't enough."

Alison Whitmire: Yeah. Totally, same experience. Thanks, Kevin.

Kris Harty: Yeah. And Lynn Saab had another insight too and she said, "You can weave in advice by asking them to do a fieldwork experimenting with what you might suggest between sessions and see whether it works for them."

Alison Whitmire: Absolutely.

Kris Harty: Yeah.

Alison Whitmire: Absolutely.

Kris Harty: Yeah. Good stuff. Yeah, and I think ... I don't think there were too many other questions since we last chatted. Yeah, but good conversations going on in chat. [crosstalk 00:45:16].

Alison Whitmire: Awesome. Okay. Thanks so much.

Kris Harty: You bet. You're welcome.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. I also learned this idea that I shouldn't share myself with my clients. That I'm there to ask questions, I'm not there to do anything else. In fact, early on, my clients would kind of even say, it was so sad, it was like, "Do we ever get to know you?"

Alison Whitmire: And I thought at the time, that the answer should be no, but then I realized over time, that the only way that my clients really connect with themselves, is when I connect with myself with them. So, I'm not ... so what does it look like? It's not like my clients are showing up with issues, and I'm like, "You think that's a problem, wait until you hear ..." I'm not doing that, but if something's going on in my life, and they'll say, "How's it going? What's going on for you?"

Alison Whitmire: I'm like, "Well, I'm going through a rough patch." And if they say, "I'm sorry." And move on, I'm cool with that. But if they say, "Hey, what's going on?" I'll share. Or if I'm ... I just show up as a human. And if I'm having feelings about what they're saying, or something's up for me, or if I'm distracted and need to [inaudible 00:46:51], I just show up as a human, and when I show up as a human, they show up as a human and we can be vulnerable together. That's what I've found.

Alison Whitmire: Also, I had this idea that I've never been very good at to be honest, I always thought I need a coaching plan. Every client needs a coaching plan. And for 15 years, I've shouldered all over myself about having a coaching plan for a client, and I'm terrible at it.

Alison Whitmire: I've given that up. I have totally given up. I don't have a coaching plan for any client every. And it's because life isn't linear, and neither is coaching. Just like when clients come to coaching sessions and they have one issue, and how often does it morph into actually something else? Well, that's how coaching plans are.

You start coaching, you do your discovery, and that's awesome, and you come up with all these goals, which that's fine too. And then you say, "Good, that's my coaching plan."

Alison Whitmire: And if you stick to that, it's so easy to mix. What could really be happening by just showing up. I still do intake and I still ... not scratch intake, I don't use that language. I still do discovery, and I still want to know those things that would ... that are the questions to that would be to create goals, because I want to know what that wanting is, it just doesn't become a coaching plan that we then just stick to. Yeah.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. So, I'll share a few more things, then we'll stop for questions. I also had this idea, this learn that I need to focus my business on what my client wants. What my client wants, okay? That they're the client and they're right, blah, blah, blah. And then, what I had to relearn is that my coaching business has got to fit my life. And for a long time, I was spending all kinds of what I call windshield time, which is I'm ... you know, I lived in Seattle when I first started, I live in DC now. They are two places renowned for their bad traffic. I was spending 30 to 45 minutes in the car getting there, and I didn't ... who likes traffic?

Alison Whitmire: It was killing all this time, and so that was one issue that was making me not love what I was doing. The other thing is, I would regularly have clients just kind of cancel at the last minute, and I'd be, "Okay, sorry. We'll try to reschedule. I won't charge you." And when I realized this has got to work for me, too.

Alison Whitmire: So I made some bold moves, kind of in a row, where I'm like, "I'm not going to see you anymore. We can coach either on the phone or we can coach via Skype or video or zoom. Or you could come to me. We can meet at a coffee shop near my house, or we can meet in an office suite if you prefer an office, rent it by the hour, but you're going to come to me. I'm not going to come to you anymore. And by the way, if you cancel a session last minute, or within 24 hours or 48 hours, you're still going to pay me. Yeah. Because that's what works for me and my business. If you don't want that, that's okay. I've disclosed that to you in advance. This is what it looks like to work with me as a coach."

Alison Whitmire: And I've never lost a single client because of that. Yeah.

Alison Whitmire: Okay, so Kris, let's come on and take some last minute questions or chats, and then we'll hit the home stretch.

Kris Harty: Yeah, that sounds great. We've got two comments I'd really love to share with you. Patty Hansen, I think the last name got cut off, she says, "We're not Stepford coaches, [inaudible 00:51:03], I agree with this wholeheartedly. We are real. Teflon suit isn't going to create connection." So yeah.

Alison Whitmire: Thank you. Yeah.

Kris Harty: Right on. And Kelly [Nell 00:51:17] says, "I think once you are coaching for over 30 years, then you can begin to trust yourself. This doesn't mean that your early training isn't extremely valuable, this is where you learn your discipline."

Alison Whitmire: Yeah. I totally ... yeah. Yeah, I love that. Thank you.

Kris Harty: Yeah. There's a few others, but I know we're short on time, too.

Alison Whitmire: Okay.

Kris Harty: All right.

Alison Whitmire: Okay, I see a question. "I identify with a lot of what you're saying, my concern though is when you're being paid by a corporation. They expect things like a coaching plan, and a process. Do you find that?"

Alison Whitmire: Okay, so here's how I answer ... it's a great question, thank you.

Alison Whitmire: Two things, one is, because I work with CEO owners, like I'm working where the buck stops. So they don't care if there is one. And, that said, I've been in a really formative program this last year with David Drake called Narrative Coaching, and I'll talk a little bit more about that in a minute, but he has put aside this idea of a coaching plan, or if he does it, it's to check the box. I mean, we have to figure out, when we go into a corporation, we have to figure out how do I align the desires and passions of ... and the rights of the corporation with the client, with me? How do I fit how all those align?

Alison Whitmire: And yeah, corporations are going to want a coaching plan, and what the client needs to maybe achieve that, can be something completely different. I think we as coaches have to address that. And figure out how, and I'm not saying this is easy, and figure out how the corporation gets what it needs, too.

Alison Whitmire: And I think we all as coaches believe that if the client is healthy and thriving and engaged and excited, they're going to perform better. Yeah. We all do.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. So number eight. I learned this idea that I needed to stay inside the coaching box. What I mean by that, is like I just have to coach. That's it. I don't train, I don't consult, I don't whatever. Very quickly, very early on, I felt so ... I felt like I was in this straight jacket. I did not feel fully expressed as a coach, as a human. I couldn't do as much as I wanted to for my clients.

Alison Whitmire: So then, in 2009, if anyone who knows who this is, you could put it in the chat box, you can be the first one to say it. In 2009, I became one of the worlds first TedX organizers, and I put on a TedX conference for a small group of my clients and prospects in a little ballroom in south Seattle, Georgetown Ballroom. This guy right here, was my lead off speaker.

Alison Whitmire: This is Simon Sinek, if you didn't know. He gave his talk, Start With Why on my stage in Seattle at TedX Puget Sound. His talk to my clients and prospects has now, it's the fourth, third or fourth most viewed Ted Talk of all time. Now at 40 million views, and that's just on the Ted site. A whole bunch more million views on the YouTube site.

Alison Whitmire: Okay, what's the point of all of this? [inaudible 00:55:03] is this, is that what I've learned is I want to express myself and invite my clients to come along. That's worked really well for me. I mean, that was a ... so there were two prospects I invited to that event, people I wanted to work with and didn't. And 10 years later now, I still work with them. So it was awesome. I do things now, I do dinner workshops, I bring clients together, I do virtual learning for my clients and prospects, I do things that I want to do, and I invite clients and prospects along. It becomes a more fuller expression of me as a coach, but also begins to weave in this question of training. How do you train?

Alison Whitmire: I have never really figured out very effectively personally, how I both coach and bring in training components. What is mindfulness? And why should they care? What is executive presence? I haven't done a good job frankly as a coach, figuring out how to really integrate those into coaching, so what I tend to do is separate them.

Alison Whitmire: I do coaching 101, and it's all coaching, coaching, coaching, then I add optional other training components I invite people to. Yeah.

Alison Whitmire: So there's this question, "How do you distinguish coaching from training and teaching?" Thank you, Michael for your question.

Alison Whitmire: I put pretty hard lines around it. And I respect people who don't. That's just what I do. And then Celia, love your engagement here Celia, thank you. "Do I need to be certified by some kind of assessment to deliver a great coaching?"

Alison Whitmire: No, no, no. I mean, I do think coaching school has been awesome. I've been to like three different coaching programs, I love it so much. And it's been super helpful for me to know what great coaching might look like, feel like, and I don't think you need an assessment to figure that out. That's just what I think.

Alison Whitmire: Okay. Homestretch. I had this idea that if I was going to thrive as a coach, I needed to network. And what I learned instead is to create my own ecosystem. I created my own referral network that ... so I didn't have to eat any more rubber chickens or go to lunches and dinners and breakfasts to meet other people who are networking. It never worked for me.

Alison Whitmire: What did work, is creating my own ecosystem of people, and my own referral network, and bring them together in what I called a community of advocates, so we'd all advocate for each other.

Alison Whitmire: Last piece. A good coach checks all the boxes every time. I went through a period of time where I had zillions of my coaching calls recorded and reviewed by a mentor coach, and looking to check all the ICF boxes, right? And that was gut wrenching. Yeah.

Alison Whitmire: I just wasn't frankly very good at it. Trying to figure out how do I organically, in a way that serves the client and feels good, how do I check every box at an MCC level every time? And this is what I learned. And I learned it in ... through the Narrative coach [program 00:58:31] too, is my belief, is that coaching is the facilitation of a natural, organic process that exists anyway. That all of us all the time are in a state of belonging and becoming, belonging and becoming.

Alison Whitmire: That we are ... there are clients are showing up to coaching sessions, that we are showing up in life with this tension of how do we become? And how do we belong?

Alison Whitmire: If we pay attention to it in our coaching, what we're doing is actually facilitating a natural, organic process that wants to happen anyway. We don't need to put on all this structure on it. This okay, we have the goal, and we're going to be here to here, and why is that important? I'm checking all these boxes, and I'm not saying that it's not awesome if you can check all the boxes. I would love to have that level of facility right now. To know that if I wanted to, I could. And what I think is also true, is that coaching is the facilitation of this natural process that wants to happen, and sometimes stepping back from the structure and not placing all that structure on it, actually ... it's helped me break through on clients where the traditional structure of coaching wasn't.

Alison Whitmire: So anyway, so that is ... that's the last piece. Thank you so much for staying through it. The last thing I'll say, it's a picture of my dad, he was at my last TedX conference. I've done three. And it was the last time he traveled. He passed away in February. What he told me, is that he ... when I told him I was going to become a coach, and I was going to help people, he said that he told me later that he thought he couldn't imagine why I didn't want him to hire me. My dad was a CEO owner, and he couldn't envision why anyone would hire me.

Alison Whitmire: He told me later that he was really proud of me, and really happy that I was making a living helping other people. I wouldn't have done it any other way. It was a 25 year cycle to get back from my first conversation with my dad to becoming a coach, but I wouldn't have it or my dad any other way.

Alison Whitmire: Thank you for joining us. If you'd like to share in our conversations, our Friday conversations, I write a regular blog. If you'd like to be part of that, the link to the blog is in the chat box. If we didn't ... oh, if you want to be at our next podinar, please come. It's going to be about how we coach at capacity. In other words, as coaches, if we're trying to coach for a 40 hour week, we may only have 20 out of those hours accounted for by clients. What do we do with the other 20? What if we could fill the other 20? So that's what we're going to talk

about, creative ways in which coaches can fill that extra capacity with other coaching from non traditional sources.

Alison Whitmire: So that's going to be cool. That's going to be with Chip Carter, who is a senior advisor with the Institute of Coaching, it's a Harvard affiliate, and super excited about that. If you want to register for that, the link to that's going to be in the chat box. That's going to be September 28th.

Alison Whitmire: And then, we didn't talk at all about EQ today, that's what Learning in Action does. If you're interested in emotional intelligence training and assessment, that's what Learning in Action does, that's what we do. Here's information about all the trainings and stuff that we've got coming up, and the link to that's also in the chat box.

Alison Whitmire: And finally, if you're still here, we'd love to ask you ... you're going to have to do the poll, I think. Ah, there it is. How likely ... no, re-launch polling. There we go. Okay. How likely are you to recommend monthly podinars to a colleague? So if you will, let us know how we're doing. We love feedback. Put anything in the chat. We want to do better all the time. We do this for you. We do this because we have a passion around helping coaches make a thriving living coaching.

Alison Whitmire: Anyway, thank you so much, please complete the poll, and see you next time. Thank you. Take care.