



MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

EP #13

“Do I need a life coach?” You’re listening to Episode 13, with Rhiannon Bush

Welcome to the Do I need a life coach? Podcast. We’re here to discuss the ins- and outs- of the life coaching industry and give you tools to use, to see for yourself. I’m your host, Rhiannon Bush. Mother, management consultant and a passionate, certified life coach.

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Damien and I get to move soon. We have an imminent date people! Oh we’re so excited. We’ve had a fantastic team from the get-go, so friendly and professional and everything is coming together so quickly now. I’m so grateful, truly truly grateful. Just to be clear, this reno was a complete gut plus an extension. So it wasn’t miniscule, or just a face-lift. It’s been substantial.

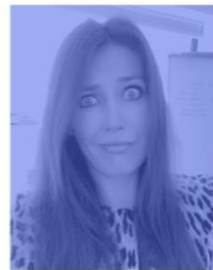
It’s been really interesting, from the start of the build to nearing the end of the build, that now we’re nearing the end how things are starting to materialise and we can see things that we couldn’t earlier in the process.

In the beginning, we were paying attention to things like the floor layout, doors, walls, wardrobes, that type of thing. High-level aesthetics. Now, we’re like ‘oh, why are those tiles going to that point on the wall’ or ‘what happened to that window’... it’s exciting to see it materialise, and also see things that we may not have been able to see early on so we didn’t think about, or couldn’t even imagine how it would come together.

Today we’re talking about managing expectations. And what I’m about to share with you I have found to not only be useful for myself and to keep myself centred with things that are going on in my life but also when being in or observing others in leadership roles or in relationships where the power-dynamic is slightly off. Ultimately, what I’m talking about today is a communication technique. Probably the most important one when getting people on the same page and keeping people with different values, beliefs and rules for their life... aligned and focused to a single outcome. Super important.

If you’re the sort of person who enjoys people-watching and when you observe others interacting and see that something’s interesting is going on or, you can almost predict what’s going on based on body language and facial expressions, or if you enjoy watching drama like reality TV but don’t so much love it in your own life, then this episode will give you insights as to why drama (i.e. heightened and reactive emotional states that sometimes lead to mis-reading situations) occurs. I’ve always loved questioning what’s





really going on for people and why people are behaving the way they are... it really makes me curious. Over time being exposed to a particular person, when you can have that curiosity paired with empathy, you begin to notice patterns and consistency in that person's behaviour, especially around their triggers.

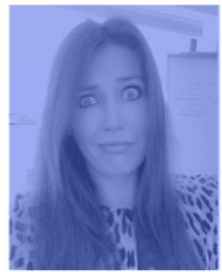
I'll be honest, I've always struggled segregating myself out of that equation. Recognising my biases and whether I'm accurately reading the situation, appreciating the things I'm not privy too, etc. Which in turn enables me to question whether or not I'm reading things correctly. Either way, the dynamics between others is a source of never-ending entertainment to me. And I find that the majority of the time in corporate situations or leadership and management infrastructures, or even in intimate relationships, if people with more power were more transparent and able to communicate more effectively, their subordinates wouldn't feel the need to respond the way they do, or don't.

Some people, when feeling emotionally charged, tend to lash out. This can be in a way that is passive aggressive and underhand, with sly sarcasm or eye-rolling or snappiness and other expressions that may even be unconscious. Others when feeling emotionally charged shut down. These are often the people who leave a situation thinking "why didn't I just say..." or "I wish I'd said...". This is the fight or flight response in action. I've had clients who, when triggered will lash out. They're my fighters. My Dominant and Influencer personality types if you know DISC. I've had clients who, when triggered, shut down - vocally, energetically and physiologically. I can see the metaphorical wall go up between us and most of the time, that's the perfect place for the client to be because it means we've hit an emotional threshold that we now get to work with in a safe space, to overcome and move forward... if that's what the client ultimately wants. These are my flyers. My Steadiness and Compliance profiles.

When it comes to managing expectations, we typically do this with the knowing that emotional volatility is near. Like when people are about to be made redundant. Like when we're about to break up with somebody. Like when we are about to quit our job. Like when we are about to deliver news about having to vacate our premises or have a difficult conversation with somebody. In these conversations, we want to remove the drama and to remove the drama, we want to remove as many unknown variables as we can for that person which will help us get to the outcome we want.

I speak a lot about emotional momentum. It's not something I speak with to my clients about, but a tool I use and manipulate as I need to, to help my clients move from A to B. We want to use emotions strategically conjured up by our conscious thoughts, to drive our behaviour. And, therefore any unwanted or unnecessary information that may blindside our clients or recipients of our information (i.e. as a leader), may derail us from our end goal. For instance, if I'm a leader in a business, and I know there is going to





be a significant redundancy, it will be in my best interest to provide as much information to my team as possible about how and when things will unfold – provided I'm able to share that information. Leaving unknown variables in that scenario will most likely cause huge harm to people's mental state and consequently their emotional state which can be managed well and minimised.

The onus for managing expectations lies with the person delivering the news. Just like in the episode on the Hierarchy of Communication, the person who has the knowledge has the power and therefore drives or dictates the parameters around the conversation – how, when, where and with whom it happens.

The discomfort we feel when making a decision, and something being classified as a “hard” choice is when we're having to sacrifice something we're not willing to sacrifice. From my years working with and as a coach, I'm getting pretty comfortable with making choices that align with my values and so when it comes to making decisions, it's a quick what I call “drop in” to see how I'm feeling about it and whether it is or isn't something I want to do, if there are any other options or what the fall out will be from the actions I take. I recently had to make what I'd call a hard choice. And that choice was hard because it didn't align with what I a) wanted or b) what I thought was the right decision, but to make a different decision meant sacrificing something I wasn't willing to sacrifice. Therefore, there was no win-win outcome and therefore the sacrifice came at a cost that is more than I would've like it to be.

Particularly as a leader, even if you don't stick to timelines it's important to communicate them. When people can't adapt to change, or struggle to adapt to change quickly, it's on a neurological level. The conflict happens between our prefrontal cortex or ‘adult’ brain, and our cerebellum or ‘child’ brain. Our child brain contains our fight or flight, is super reactive and quick to respond, while our adult brain takes time to weigh things up and evaluate options. When feeling blindsided, it's the old case of “snooze you loose” and in this specific case, our child brain wins purely based on speed while our adult brain suffers from paralysis by analysis. Both of these things happen at the same time in our brain when faced with information we couldn't predict or anticipate. Which is why, as I mentioned earlier, removing unknown variables is important.

When there are unknown variables, unfamiliar variables, things we can't control... That's when our cerebellum kicks in into fight or flight and stimulates us trying to go into self-preservation mode. Because our fight or flight response is a survival mechanism, it is substantially faster at firing off neurons, than our pre-frontal cortex. So our pre-frontal cortex cannot regulate our child brain fast enough to calm us down to use our logic or





sensibility to put things in appropriate context. This is when people react. This is when things spiral out of control. This is when drama occurs.

So when communicating about potential change, for instance rolling out a strategy, breaking up with someone, communicating anything that's possibly going to have a negative reaction or trigger fight or flight, it is important to communicate approximate timelines so people can anticipate when the change will come into effect for them. When you can give people the ability to anticipate the WHEN, they will have a better ability to use their pre-frontal cortex to calm their amygdala flight or fight response and respond like an adult. Honestly, even if you don't stick to those time frames, or those time frames change, our ability to regulate our emotions by using our pre-frontal cortex, will help people adapt to change faster and this happens when they can see what's coming and prepare for it. This helps them feel like they have control.

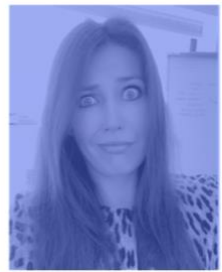
Now, it's not likely you're going to say to your soon-to-be-ex-partner "oh by the way baby, on the 6th we're going to have a conversation and I'm going to be ending things" so please understand there can be bad anticipation too. My grandmother used to do this to my father as a child if he'd misbehaved. She'd say "just you wait until your father gets home" and my dad would spend hours waiting, stressing, anticipating what was going to happen. In this context, when you don't need consensus from the other person, you don't need to prepare. When you don't need to maintain the relationship or need the others' cooperation, you don't need to manage expectations quite so strongly. Please know, you still need to do it kindly and with integrity and with empathy for how they will take the news, okay?

So the warning and information provided to a person so they can anticipate change, comes when you need their cooperation or assistance to make the end-state happen. This comes back to managing expectations. It's not the expectation itself that needs managing, it's when that person is going to have to adapt and what they may need to adapt to... and maybe a bit of the why if you can provide that too. But I think the WHEN is the most important part.

The gap between what you expect and what is, is the unknown variable. It's the unknown that triggers scarcity mindset, fear, uncertainty. So when we can manage expectations by giving ourselves upper and lower thresholds, or a best-case worst-case, medium-case scenario, we have told our pre-frontal cortex ahead of time what may be coming, and therefore preparing in advance, for some of the emotions that we may experience in the future.

My daughter had hip dysplasia and each time I would go into the hospital I would walk out feeling like I had been hit by a truck. I was very very emotional. She was extremely young, in hindsight it really wasn't as bad as it seemed at the time. So the first time she was diagnosed was the worst, because I had no idea that it was going to happen, I had no indication that there was anything wrong, or that there would be a huge rush to get her into a brace - which is how they try to rectify it, because she was so little and so





young. We had no family history, my son was fine, and so I walked out feeling very displaced because I was so blindsided by what had happened in the appointment. It was a huge emotional whirlwind that I couldn't control. Because I was unprepared to deal with the news, what it meant or the actions that we'd have to take soon afterwards, my emotions took over and I felt exhausted for days.

That happened a second time when more information was given after further consultation and again, I felt so emotional about the experience because I think I'd gotten to a place where I thought everything would be fine. Even though it wasn't overly dramatic or terribly bad, I still hadn't anticipated it, I wasn't expecting it, and I couldn't reconcile what had happened.

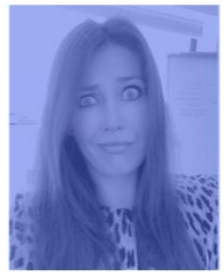
The result of this heightened emotion, was like the fight or flight example above. It felt like my brain went offline while my emotions took over, and that was a problem, because when I was in this highly emotional state in those appointments, I couldn't actually absorb or process what the doctor was telling me. I was too emotional to comprehend information. And his information was important for me to look after my daughter and for her recovery.

I couldn't listen to the instructions or do anything except care for my baby. I had to read information later when I'd calmed down because after the appointment, I couldn't remember anything I needed to – only how emotional we'd both been. Again this is like when someone attacks you and your brain goes offline, and when it's back online you start thinking about all the wonderful, witty things you could've/would've/should've said. Similar thing.

So what I had to start doing before my daughter's medical appointments was considering ahead of time, best case scenario will be X, worst case scenario will be Y, if things stay the same that's my medium case. And what that enabled me to do was go in having my boundaries set my threshold, my expectations managed, and then I would walk out feeling much more emotionally stable and in control. That's still working for me today and I use this threshold technique for many things now – whether it's the number of workouts I want to do in a week, or conversations I have at work, or helping my clients establish new habits. I use thresholds. I borrowed this from my great friend and fellow coach Matilda Wand so shoutout to her.

In a corporate setting when you have a lack of trust, which I'll be honest, most organisations I've worked for have a lack of trust, and a lack of psychological safety, you have no idea what you're going to be thrown in certain circumstances. Or what the expectations are of you. And that uncertainty creates heightened emotions in people because they can't anticipate what is coming next, how it will affect them or what it will mean they have to change. When people can't anticipate what is coming next or when it is coming, they can't regulate their emotions using their prefrontal cortex. Instead they walk around in fight or flight which creates toxicity,





drama and definitely corrodes psychological safety. None of which are good for morale or the bottom line.

So when managing expectations always provide context, as much information as you can, be open for questions and two-way dialogue, and most importantly, communicate the WHEN, even if it's likely to change. That way people can anticipate what's coming and fill in the gaps as they go along. Trust me, it's a game-changer.

See you next week my friends!

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Please note, this transcription may not be exact.

