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TRUST.

WHY IS IT INTRINSIC TO COACHING?

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WHY IS IT INTRINSIC TO COACHING?



We know that trust is fundamental to coaching, but why? What exactly is trust? How does it work? How can we increase trust with our clients? What is the neuroscience of trust? How can we help ourselves and others build trust? How do we build the competency of trust? What are the nuances of trust? Join us as we explore why trust is so vital to coaching.

Self-trust

The overlooked
pillar of
coaching mastery

By Gloria Custodio,
Esq., PCC

During my coach training program, I received feedback from an instructor that my coaching container – the coaching framework taught in my program – was wonky. I was spending too much time in the current situation and desired results before even getting to the coaching agreement.



This feedback rattled me. Was I coaching incorrectly? When I discussed it with my mentor coach, they told me to trust my gut. That was a key moment in developing my self-trust as a coach. I realized that while structure and feedback are important, trusting myself and my intuition in the coaching conversation was equally vital.

It was then that I began to understand that self-trust – a coach’s ability to trust their own instincts, decisions and presence in a session – is an overlooked yet crucial element of coaching mastery.

When a coach cultivates deep self-trust, they create a more stable and confident foundation for their practice, which enhances their ability to hold space for clients with authenticity and clarity.

Trust is often discussed in coaching, but the focus tends to be on building trust with clients. However, much less attention is paid to the coach’s trust in themselves and their abilities. When a coach cultivates deep self-trust, they create a more stable and confident foundation for their practice, which enhances their ability to hold space

for clients with authenticity and clarity.

This article explores what self-trust looks like in coaching, why it matters and how we begin to reclaim it, especially when our confidence has taken a hit. Self-trust isn’t about perfection. It’s not about “faking it till you make it.” It’s the quiet decision not to abandon yourself even in moments of doubt.

WHY DOUBT RUNS DEEPER THAN TRAINING

If you’ve ever thought, “Who am I to be holding space for someone else?,” you’re not alone. For many of us – especially those who’ve been dismissed, underestimated or expected to prove our worth repeatedly – self-doubt travels with us. Mainstream culture has a way of eroding confidence, especially for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) coaches, women reinventing themselves mid-career, and young queer coaches still finding their voice.

Many of us were trained – explicitly or implicitly – to defer to others; to ask for permission before taking up space; to anticipate the needs of others before honoring our own instincts. Even within coaching circles, we’re often taught to look outward for legitimacy, prioritizing models, credentials, rubrics, frameworks. But here’s the truth we don’t say enough: You don’t have to wait to trust yourself. You don’t need to be certain to be trustworthy.

BIPOC coaches often face the unspo-

ken burden of needing to “prove” their professionalism. Women coming into coaching from previous careers may find themselves doubting the very expertise they once stood on with ease. Young queer coaches may question whether their voice carries enough weight to guide others through uncertainty.

REBOOTING SELF-TRUST

After a Confidence Hit

Every coach experiences moments of self-doubt, especially after a challenging session or a negative interaction. It's natural to question yourself at times, but the key is to learn, practice self-compassion and keep going. Here are actionable steps to rebuild your self-trust:

- **Pause and reflect** – Instead of spiraling into self-criticism, take a moment to acknowledge what happened. What specifically shook your confidence? Was it a client's reaction, your own perceived misstep, or an external factor?
- **Reframe the narrative** – Self-doubt often distorts reality. Shift your perspective by asking: "What did I do well in this session? What can I learn from this experience?" Growth comes from imperfection, not from avoiding challenges.
- **Ground yourself in your strengths** – Recall past coaching successes. Keep a "coaching wins" journal where you document breakthroughs, positive client feedback and moments of deep connection. Re-reading these notes can re-anchor you in your capabilities.
- **Practice self-compassion** – Speak to yourself as you would to a client. Instead of saying, "I should have done better," try, "I showed up with presence and did my best in that moment." Self-kindness fosters resilience.
- **Return to the basics** – When confidence is shaken, revisit foundational coaching skills: deep listening, powerful questioning and presence. Trust in the principles that brought you into coaching in the first place.
- **Seek support** – Every great coach needs a coach. Talk with a mentor, supervisor or peer coach about your experience. Their perspective can help normalize your feelings and remind you that even seasoned professionals face doubts.
- **Keep going** – The worst thing self-doubt can do is make you hesitate or pull back from coaching. The only way to regain confidence is to continue practicing. Each session is an opportunity to learn and grow.

Trusting yourself is a practice, not a destination. Doubts will come and go, but what matters most is your commitment to showing up, learning, and believing in your ability to grow.

If you've been taught – whether directly or by omission – that your way of knowing, sensing or holding space isn't legitimate, then self-trust will never feel like a default. It will be a practice. One you reclaim session by session, choice by choice. The goal isn't to erase doubt. It's to stop letting it decide who you get to be in the room.

WHAT SELF-TRUST IS (AND ISN'T)

Self-trust is often misunderstood. It's not constant confidence or the absence of doubt. And it's not a sign that you've

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"arrived" as a coach. Instead, self-trust is your ability to stay grounded and present, even when you're unsure.

Self-trust enables coaches to:

- **Navigate uncertainty** – Coaching sessions are fluid and often unpredictable. A self-trusting coach remains open to the client's process rather than trying to control the direction of the conversation.
- **Listen deeply without second-guessing intuition** – Intuitive insights often surface in coaching conversations, yet doubt can cause coaches to hesitate in sharing them. Coaches who trust themselves allow their instincts to inform their questions and reflections, creating richer dialogue.
- **Hold space for silence and reflection** – Many coaches feel pressure to fill silences with words, fearing that gaps in conversation indicate a lack of direction. However, moments of silence can be where deep reflection happens. A coach who trusts themselves can sit in the discomfort of silence, knowing that it serves a valuable purpose.

- **Make ethical and values-driven decisions** – Self-trust helps coaches uphold their integrity and values even in challenging situations. It prevents them from over-accommodating clients at the expense of their own boundaries or professional standards.
- **Embrace continuous learning** – Self-trust allows coaches to acknowledge that they are always evolving. They do not feel the need to prove themselves or pretend to have all the answers. Instead, they embrace the learning process with humility and

confidence, knowing that mastery is a lifelong journey.

Building self-trust is not about achieving a state of unwavering confidence at all times. Rather, it is about cultivating the ability to remain steady in the face of uncertainty, trust in one's presence and skills, and continuously grow from each coaching experience.

TECHNIQUES FOR STRENGTHENING SELF-TRUST

Self-trust is cultivated through consistent practice, intentional self-reflection, and a commitment to personal and professional growth. The following techniques offer practical ways for coaches to strengthen their self-trust and build resilience in their coaching practice.

1 MINDFULNESS & PRESENCE

Mindfulness helps coaches become more aware of their inner dialogue, emotional triggers and bodily cues. Practicing mindfulness enhances a coach's ability to stay present and make intuitive decisions in coaching conversations.

Rebuilding



Tools for when you're questioning yourself

For coaches who are navigating self-doubt, burnout or a tough session, these tools offer space to reflect, reset and return to what matters.

WHEN YOU'RE QUESTIONING EVERYTHING, START HERE

For those moments when imposter syndrome is loud and clarity is scarce, try this grounding exercise. Write or say your answers aloud. Go slow, be kind to yourself, and remember to breathe.

- What do I know for sure about the way I coach? (A truth, not a boast.)
- What do I trust more today than I did six months ago? (Remember that growth is real, even if you can't always feel it.)
- What do my clients consistently thank me for? (Let their words interrupt your inner critic.)
- What part of me is asking to be reassured right now? (Get tender, not tough.)

You don't need to solve everything. Just reconnect to something steady.

SELF-REFLECTION PROMPTS TO ASSESS SELF-TRUST

The following prompts can provide deeper insight to help you explore your self-trust:

- When do I feel most confident in my coaching? What contributes to that confidence?
- Where is self-doubt showing up in my sessions?
- How do I respond when a client challenges my perspective or approach?
- Do I trust my intuition in coaching conversations? Why or why not?
- What fears arise when I consider taking risks in my coaching practice?
- How do I define success as a coach, and does my self-trust align with that definition?

Reflecting on these questions can help you identify patterns and areas where self-trust may need reinforcement.

IF YOU'VE BEEN TOLD YOU'RE "TOO MUCH"

Too much. Too emotional. Too passionate. Too intense. Too loud. Messages like these shape how we show up ... and how much we hold back. Ask yourself:

- What am I afraid will happen if I bring my full self into this space?
- What part of me did I learn to mute in order to be accepted?
- Who benefits when I stay small?

Self-trust is learning to stop shrinking and to start trusting that your "too much" might be exactly what the work – and the world – needs.

THE "GOOD ENOUGH" SESSION DEBRIEF

After a session that wasn't perfect and/or leaves you doubting yourself, try this quick debrief. Don't aim to analyze everything – just anchor back into clarity.

- One moment I showed up well (even small ones count: presence, a question, a pause).
- One thing I'd do differently next time (framed as learning, not failing).
- What my client needed most today (and how I served that need, even imperfectly).
- What I'm proud of today. (Be honest and kind to yourself.)

Use this regularly – not just after hard sessions – to normalize reflection without rumination.

QUESTIONS FOR COACHES WITH MARGINALIZED IDENTITIES

To explore how identity, experience and external expectations may be shaping your presence as a coach, ask:

- Where am I still code-switching in my coaching relationships?
- What do I instinctively downplay about my background or experience?
- Where am I performing "neutrality" instead of trusting my intuition?
- Whose comfort am I protecting, and at what cost to my authenticity?

Self-trust includes trusting how you move through the world. Your voice, pace and presence all have a place.

A PEP TALK YOU CAN ACTUALLY BELIEVE

If you hate fake affirmations but still need encouragement, try one of these when self-doubt flares up:

- "This is part of becoming a better coach."
- "I don't have to feel confident to be effective."
- "Trust isn't loud; it's steady."
- "My presence matters more than my polish."
- "One hard session doesn't define me."

Choose the one that lands. Say it slowly. Then get back to the work you were made for.

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Ways to Implement:

- **Daily mindfulness practice** – Spend 5 to 10 minutes each day in meditation, focusing on the breath and observing thoughts without judgment.
- **Body awareness check-ins** – Before a coaching session, scan your body for tension and consciously release it.
- **Grounding techniques** – Use grounding exercises like deep breathing or visualization to center yourself before and during a session.

By engaging in these mindfulness strategies, coaches can develop a deeper awareness of their thoughts and emotions without judgment, allowing them to trust their intuition more readily.

2 REFRAMING SELF-DOUBT

Self-doubt is a natural part of growth, but unchecked, it can undermine a coach's confidence and effectiveness. Instead of seeing self-doubt as a weakness, coaches can reframe it as an opportunity for learning and development.

Ways to Implement:

- **Challenge negative thoughts** – When self-doubt arises, ask yourself, “Is this thought objectively true? What evidence do I have to support or contradict it?”
- **Adopt a growth mindset** – View mistakes and setbacks as essential learning experiences rather than personal failures.
- **Create an affirmation practice** – Develop positive affirmations that reinforce your trust in yourself, such as, “I am a capable and present coach” or “I trust my ability to hold space for my clients.”

By shifting how they interpret moments of doubt, coaches can learn to see these

experiences as valuable feedback rather than threats to their competence.

3 EMBRACING IMPERFECTION & AUTHENTICITY

The pressure to be a “perfect” coach can be paralyzing, but authenticity is far more valuable than perfection. Coaches who embrace their imperfections build deeper trust with their clients and model self-compassion.

Ways to Implement:

- **Practice radical acceptance** – Recognize that coaching is an evolving journey, and perfection is neither possible nor necessary.
- **Share selective vulnerability** – Without oversharing, let clients see that you are human, too. This can create deeper trust and connection.
- **Reflect on past growth** – Regularly assess how you've evolved as a coach. Celebrate progress, rather than focusing solely on areas for improvement.

Self-trust is not a luxury; it's an essential pillar of coaching mastery. By shifting the focus from unattainable perfection to authentic presence, coaches can build confidence in their ability to navigate uncertainty and trust their unique coaching style.

Every coach has moments of doubt – about their presence, their choices, or their ability to make an impact. You don't have to feel certain to be steady. You don't have to prove your value to hold space. And you don't have to coach perfectly to coach powerfully.

Trusting yourself is part of the work. It's how we model what we ask our clients to do, and how we build a sustainable practice that doesn't depend on constant validation. •

SELF-TRUST IS A COLLECTIVE ACT

We often talk about self-trust as a solo journey. But for many coaches – especially those pushed to the margins – it's also a collective one.

When you choose to trust your intuition, your presence and your way of coaching, you're not just helping yourself. You're making space for others to do the same. You shift the coaching field toward inclusion – not just in terms of who's in the room, but in how power and presence are embodied within it.

Every time you stop performing and start showing up, you send a quiet message into the field that there is more than one way to lead; more than one way to hold space; more than one kind of wisdom that belongs here. Your inner trust is part of a much bigger transformation.