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This episode of coach to coach is brought to you by my coach training program for academics and higher education professionals. In each training course, we meet weekly to explore how we can hold space for clients. Listen for the things that they care about most and help them to achieve their goals through focused questioning activities and tools.

If you think that becoming a coach might be a fit for your professional development goals, you can learn more about the coach training program. Or sign up for a 30 minute Q and a session with me to ask all of your questions@higheredcoaches.com cohorts begin in January, April, and June. And I'd love to have you join us.

Welcome to coach, to coach a podcast dedicated to showcasing the power of coaching. I'm your host, Dr. Katie Linder, and I offer coaching to academics and higher education professionals to bring more ease to their lives and work this season. I'm excited to share conversations with some of the participants in my coach training program.

I get questions all the time about how people know it's the right time to become a coach. What the various career pathways are that lead to coaching and what people decide to do with their coaching skills. After earning a credential this season, we're tackling all of these topics and more, a huge thanks to each coach in training who offered to come on the show and share about their experiences with learning this new skill set.

Dr. Sarah Schlei is a tenured full professor in a teacher training program, serving future teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students. She is also a director of a research center, focusing on teaching and learning and a director of learning sciences and a biomedical engineering program. She is a former productivity and work-life balance coach from the national center for faculty development and diversity's flagship faculty success program.

Sarah uses a coaching informed consulting approach to work with clients on identifying, designing, and implementing inclusive pedagogy strategies. And she coaches, clients who value social justice and inclusion in using their creativity agency and confidence to approach their careers and lives with clarity.

Hi, Sarah. Thank you so much for joining me on this season of coach to coach. I'm so glad to have you. Hi, Katie. I'm thrilled to be here. This is so exciting. Yeah. Yes. And I, um, I have so enjoyed working with you in this coach training program. I'm hoping you could tell us a little bit about your journey.

What brought you to the program, but I like to start just by finding out, how did you find out about coaching as like a thing in the world that exists? Like when did you first learn about it? I first learned about it because I was a, what I like to refer to as a stalled associate professor di um, got the opportunity to enroll in something called the faculty success program, which is run by the national center for faculty development and diversity.

It's a fabulous program. It's a 12 week. Bootcamp on productivity and work-life balance and you meet weekly. Um, you have a, I guess, sort of a content video that you watch every week, but you also meet, we meet weekly with a small group of four people, you and three other people, plus a small group coach. So I was coached to that program for four weeks and it was.

Transformative. I redirected where I wanted my career to point. I got promoted to full professor. It. Changed my life. So it was an awesome experience. And then short, you know, not long after I completed it, I, they put out a call to hire some new coaches and I applied and I became one. So I became a coach for their program.

Um, and it's a particular form of coaching. It's small group coaching and it follows a specific curriculum. So that was my start. And I did that until about a year ago. Um, That was my start. Yeah, I did that probably for four years. Uh, 2016 to 20. Somewhere around, you know, about four years rough. This is something that we will definitely link to in the show notes, because some people may be familiar with this program, but maybe others are not.

Um, it's definitely popular. People are, you know, it's out in, out in the, um, I follow them on social media. So I see them all over the place, but, uh, we'll definitely post that for people who might want to follow up, you know, it's always an interesting transition. Sarah, when you decide to go from being a client to being a coach, What led you to do that?

Other than the call, you know, like obviously the call came out, it was intriguing to you. Like what made you think this would be potentially a fit for you? You know, for me was, um, it was so powerful to go through that transformation. And I really believe in the, the underlying mission of that program, which is to transform the experience for one that is just.

Traumatic and awful for many, you know, going through tenure and getting tenured and then going through promotion, that whole academic experience is traumatic for so many. And it's so hard for so many. And I'm going through a coaching program where it changed it from being so hard to. I can do this. And by the way, I can do it without going kind of nuts was, you know, it was very powerful for me to see that I wanted to become part of that and I wanted to, um, help shepherd other faculty through that experience.

So. That's what was the big draw was it was a really cool thing to do and to be a part of, and to see happen. Other folks, it seems like coaching for you is really, um, tied to this idea of like change and transformation. Like that was a big part of your introduction. Totally. Yeah, totally. And it wasn't change and transformation from a, you should do it this way.

It was changing change and transformation from a. Perspective of look, here are some options. Well, how do you want to do it? You know, there were the agency from on my end of how I want it to link the ship and direct, correct the pathway. So yeah, very empowering. I love that story. Okay. So you did this for a while, but then you decided you wanted to go through coach training, which I find kind of interesting because like you were in this coaching gig, you know, you were doing this work right.

What led you to think that you might want to go through training? Cause that's always another interesting pivot point of like, how do you know it's the right time to engage in those skills? And tell us more about that, that decision. Um, you know, in some ways it's easier now with hindsight to sort of reflect on why I probably made that decision.

Um, at the time it was, I was in a season where. They were hiring a bunch of new coaches and I didn't get hired back for a period. Um, and I, I didn't take it personally. It was, it's just how the group works. And I also had done it for quite a while and I was like, this is a slice of coaching, but it's a slice of it.

And I wanted to, I wanted to learn more about coaching and to be at. Uh, I wanted to be a better coach, basically. You know, I wanted to do more things than, uh, only talking about this curriculum and with these topics. So I wanted to get a little broader, um, I had been paying attention to you for a couple of years, so I, I knew it was on, on the slate of things that you were offering and a pandemic happens, you know, in the middle of everything else, there was a pandemic, a pandemic happened and I just had this.

It was a way of reclaiming some agency over the pandemic in some ways. And it's like, okay, this is going to be a project. This is going to be one of my pandemic goals, you know, at least to start becoming an official coach and figuring out what that means and, and throwing that. So I kind of left. Yeah. I mean, you were in our second cohort, Sarah, so you, you started midway through 2020, so we were squarely.

In the pandemic at that point, the first cohort started and then the pandemic hit. So like they were already kind of trapped in the program, but you made the choice to come into the program in the middle of this, which I love the way you put that, that it's like, this could be a goal. This could be, you know, you expressing your own agency during a period.

That for a lot of people felt like there weren't a lot of choices and you were able to make a choice. Yeah. So, and it was summertime and I had a little bit of free time and it was just, yeah, it was definitely, you know, the way you, you stated that it was a way of, um, making some choice and inserting some direction over what was a really hard period of life for many.

Are there topics and coaching Sarah that you're particularly drawn to? Like, have you started to niche at all and think about. Your ideal client and kind of what that looks like. Are you still really in an exploration phase? I am exploring in many ways. However, what, what really drives me is, um, figuring out creative ways to respond, to making changes in your life.

We're some may be out of your control. You may not have control over all of this, but there are many places where you do have control and it's about getting clarity on what those places are and what kind of, what out of the box solutions you can come up with in those situations. As far as a niche go. I in particular love working with folks on pedagogy and making, um, classroom spaces, more inclusive for, uh, students with differences.

I've worked a lot with students with disabilities. So a lot of that and a lot with faculty working with students with disabilities. So that's one of my area of expertise, areas of expertise, but it's really about students come to the classroom with different backgrounds and skills and preferences and.

There, what you have in front of you. And so if there are challenges in terms of any of them accessing the material or interact, interacting with the material, it doesn't have to be a disability. It could be lots of things. Um, what, what things can faculty do to make that easier without like making it a huge big deal?

And the upshot is it often makes it a better teaching and learning experience for everybody. So. I haven't done a lot of coaching per se about that. And that's kind of directly give also. So, um, I'm not sure how that's going to land if that's actually it's, it might be more a coaching informed kind of practice where the coaching skills lead to a lot of reflection.

Um, but then there's a specific sort of transformation process happening with pedagogical skills. I'm really curious, Sarah, how this background that you have in working with really diverse populations impacts how you look at coaching, you know, are there certain things from kind of a meta perspective that you're bringing into your coaching skills and your practice of coaching from that background question?

I think so. I think I'm one of those people who is really flexible at nonjudgmental about. Much of what people bring to the table. Um, and when folks come in with all this self judgment, often, like, I don't know enough to teach that, or I don't know enough to work with that kind of student, or I don't know enough to do that.

You know, all this, like this limiting stuff. And there's a real shift that you can make in terms of mindset where none of this has limits. This is just opportunity for creativity, you know, so, um, I mean, in part my background, I grew up in multiple well countries speaking different languages and just, I had to be super flexible about how you communicate and interact.

And that's kind of informed my whole career trajectory. And this is coaching is the current piece that we're, I'm bringing that to it. one. Coaching has such a space for non-judgment having that kind of background in that flexibility, I think is a major plus as a coach, as you're coming into it. Is that something that you're finding to be a skill set that's kind of benefiting your role as a coach, as you're moving forward?

I think it is, um,

I think it really is. And I, a lot of it is about really listening to clients and going where they want to go and where they need to go. Um, and that can. I mean, certainly a lot of what I'm learning and in my coach training process is to not insert myself into not direct stuff. Um, it's can, it's a hard skill, especially coming from academia, you know, where you're the expert you're supposed to direct things and savings.

Um, so I'm not saying that that's not a learning curve for me, but, um, it certainly is. It's a particular thing that I really enjoy where there's a set space for someone to be who they are and, you know, take that forward. So, yeah, we've just brought in the new, the latest cohort that just started. And one of the things that we just talked about the other night was this concept of where is your focus going?

And that in a typical conversation, it kind of comes back and forth. Like you're focused on yourself and what you want to communicate. You're focused on the other person and what they're communicating, and you have this kind of exchange. But in coaching, I was describing to the group that. More of your focus is on the client.

And you're kind of trying to remove yourself in some ways to like open up this bigger space for them to be like operating within in terms of their own reflection and, and how they're kind of engaging, you know, in the coaching space. And that is very different from academia where, you know, many of us are, you know, we're in front of a room we're teaching like attention is on us, you know, or, or even in our writing, you know, like we're, we're trying to communicate in particular kinds of ways, but in the coaching realm, We are kind of fading into the background a little bit, you know, to give that more attention to the client and it's a muscle to, to build up.

I mean, it's a different kind of skill set than what a lot of us have been raised in as academics. Yeah. It's true, but it's so powerful also. It's like so cool. Like, you know, I spent a lot of meta time when I'm coaching. Think not that back to the client, you know, there's just a little crooked on my, on my shoulder saying, this is not about you.

Well, I can see Sarah, just as you're talking about it, how much coaching, I mean, it's such a fit for you. You seem to love it. I'm wondering if there are certain things that are kind of favorite things for you about coaching so far that you're just, you're drawn into that you really love. What's it been like for you to explore?

I love making connections for folks. There's often. At least one, if not two or three things where people say something at the beginning of a session, and then they're talking about something completely different and they, they link, but they haven't made the connection yet. So I love sort of picking those things, making those things for people.

And, um, that can be super powerful for me to watch as a coach. Um, What else do I love, I love working with folks over and over and over again, because there, you can see these threads also that carry across, you know, weeks and months. Um, that's really cool. So you can see people change, you can see people start, you know, we directing where their lives are going and that's really awesome.

Yeah. Being a part of that is like such a huge privilege. I love that part too. Yeah. Are there parts about coaching, Sarah that you feel like. You're still, even despite your past experience of doing this, like you've been doing it for awhile. Are there parts where you're like, yeah, I still need to focus on that.

Like I'm learning there. I'm growing there. Are there parts of it that you're just still really working on actively in terms of growing your skills or where your focus is? So many, you know, I feel like sure, I have experienced doing this other coaching, but that was such a specific, um, focused thing. Um, the coach training that to go through, going through with you, Katie now with the ICF training is so, so much bigger.

Um, yeah. I'm still learning a lot about powerful questions and, you know, a really hard part for me is that very first question I learned to let there be a fair amount of space before I jumped forward with the question. Um, that's a helpful tactic. Other things that I'm still learning are, um, Oh, there's so much.

I feel like such a newbie with it all. Um, I'm working on. Really letting the client lead. I mean, I feel really strongly that that's a crucial part of it. Um, I'm working on that a lot. I'm working on it when to pull tools in and when to just let the coaching session breathe a little bit. You know, rather than feeling like, Oh, I've got to use the tool, you know?

So those are the things that come to mind right away. Sarah, when you're taking on this new skillset, like you said, it feels kind of bigger than some of the things that you've done in the past. Are there approaches that you're taking just to your own learning? You know, like sometimes when we come to learning as adults, you know, we have to.

Help ourselves along to be like open to learning something new. What has that been like for you to come into this new skill set and this new learning experience? I love that. I mean, I, I can't say that I keep adding a lot of that in my, in my life. I've had a, I've had a couple of threads in my life where I've had these activities that, um, are happening.

Kind of all the time and it's not always the same activity, but these things where there's something that you're doing where you're always gaining a new skill. Um, it's an, a bit of a status right now for a long time. It was figure skating and I'm older, I'm in my 57 and I still think your skate and I love it.

I'm not jumping and spinning the way I used to, but there's still always something new to learn. So that learning brain. Yeah. It's not necessarily beginner brain, although for coaching, it's definitely beginner brain. It's, it's, it's always something new brain, you know, there's always something more to layer on top and to add to it, I find that really motivating.

So, um, the things that I use to support that are

I always like a combination of a level of. Good training and also a level of time to reflect sewing, um, practice and reflect really, maybe that's three things. So training, practice, and reflection, having those three, three things happen in co-occur I think are really the best way to, for me to learn. Um, the reflection piece I build in.

Via my own reflection. I also build it in, by, um, networking with other people in the coach training program that we've started a monthly coffee hours lately. And just having some time for us to sort of gather, not in a training space, but in a, Hey I'm having this child, has anybody had to deal with, you know, that kind of like, I don't know what you call it.

It's not supervision. It's not. Mentoring. It's just other people who are learning at the same time and in the same space and talking with each other, you know, it's professional. Networking is the best way I can phrase it. So I do that a lot that I find it useful. I think you brought up this description of figure skating is because it seems like these kinds of things, they're like a craft.

Like when you said there's always something new to learn, we're always kind of honing our craft and I feel like that's so true with coaching that. It doesn't matter how much experience you get in coaching, or there is always something different, you know, there's a new tool or there's a new way to deal with a client and not all clients are no, no client is the same as another client.

So there's always kind of this, you know, um, exploration with that too. But this idea of doing that in community and having colleagues that you can be kind of like trading ideas with asking questions of and being able to do that craft together. I mean, that feels special. The community is really an important part of it.

And you're such a good model of that, Katie, with all the things that you offer with your prolific community and with the community that you build into the training and all that stuff. So that's good. Sarah, I'm wondering if there's anything that you're doing and you've kind of described a few things here that maybe would fall into this category.

Things that you're doing, either in the training itself, outside of the training that are really helping you to build your confidence as a coach and helping you to come into this space and kind of step into this identity of what does it mean for you to. Be a coach, right? For me, it's hard to separate that from spending so much time thinking about what I want to do with this coaching.

So, um, and I have, I have been, this has been building for a couple of years now. I have been sort of picking away at like designing this thing that I want to build, you know, and. It's funny, it's sort of at this point, it's now coming to a point where I can really see what the thing is going to be. You know, I've done these little pieces and I'm utterly confident about it because it's so clear that this is what I have to do.

So as far as coaching skills, go for confidence, what helps is just. Doing it, um, just practice cooking during the practice hours. Um, and you can either build up your first a hundred hours with, um, bartering with other people. So in particular, I'm spending a fair number, a fair amount of time, bartering with other coaches and training.

So, and that's really good for confidence because they know what coaching is all about in, by and large, they kind of self coach themselves pretty well already. But they also come out of the sessions with, or we come out of assessment sessions with each other, getting a lot out of it. So it's not just that we can feel coatrack ourselves through anything.

We're getting a lot from the coaching session, but we also get a lot of reflection from the other person about what really worked in a session. So we get some really great feedback that way. So that helps my confidence. Um,

that's probably the main thing, but then it's just a level of trust in myself that this is going to work. I may not know everything, but I don't have to, you know, it's, it's a process, it's a developmental process. Um, and I'm exactly where I need to be right now. Okay. We need to dive more into that, Tara, because I know there are people listening to this who are like, when you said, like, I know this is exactly what I'm supposed to be doing.

And they're like, how do you know, how, what are the signs? Like, how have you figured this out? Because I think that when you find someone who feels that kind of level of confidence, Maybe not in their abilities or like what they're learning, but in their path, you know, like that this is the right direction.

And like you said, I'm where I'm supposed to be right now. And people are, I can feel people leaning in going, tell us more about this. What are you doing? What, what has gotten you to this place? Like tell us about that, because I think that that's, that's important and that you're kind of building towards something that feels very, um, Like a right fit for you.

Yeah. Um, it's involved a multi-year process of doing regular reflection on what I've done in the last period of time. Say six months or a year what's gone really well. What's been really meaningful and what I want to have happen in the next period of time. So, and then combining that with a lot of work on what are my core values and what is really meaningful to me, um, I have some of these pieces has been, haven't been identified for a long time.

Um, and it's been very clear, but the pieces as a whole really have coalesced in the last six weeks. So, um, that's understating it a little bit. I mean, it's, it's the picture makes sense more bigger than six bigger than for the last six weeks. Um, what I want to do is work with. Anyone by and large faculty who want to make their classrooms a more inclusive space.

Um, I have this, um, framework that I use with folks where we there's reflection time. There's community time. We come together as a group and we, everyone identifies one challenge that they're having right there and then small. That they would like want to make better. And then we spend a lot of time talking with each other and with students about what makes that challenging.

And what is the real goal in that teaching, learning, um, environment. And what are some other ways you can get there to mediate that. So that, that challenge is not such a big challenge. You know, other, other, other assignments that can use, are there other tools you can use? Other things that you can change about the physical setup are there, you know, different questions you could ask, what are it's very coaching informed.

It's like, what else is there that you could do that would still serve the same learning goal, but maybe circumvent some of those challenges and then you try it. And it's a feedback loop, you know? Um, so this, this thing I want to do is going to pull together the community part. It's going to pull together a bit of a curriculum, but not, not written in stone.

It's going to involve a lot of reflection with people involved in the, in the experience. Um, it's going to be all about my main values, which are agency. You know, figuring out your agency points where you can change stuff and where you can't, you know, um, it's going to involve creativity out of the box, thinking it's gonna involve, uh, social justice and inclusion, making classrooms a better place for folks.

Um, clarity being utterly clear that this is what you're trying for now. It doesn't mean it's going to work forever. It may not work even once, but you're going to try it and then you'll get clarity about whether it works and. You'll go from there. And the way this became clear to me is really just through lots of reflection.

Um, it's reflection back through experiences I had as a kid, you know, we we're all a product of our lives before us. Um, but these are my values and these are what really matter. And these are what can make the world a better place for folks. So these things, especially when you're talking about higher education and accessing spaces and.

Everyone getting more just access. So it sounds like, should we say, like you have a real mission behind your words? Yeah. You have like a very clear why. And that to me is adding into this sense of clarity of like, does it contribute to the mission or not? Because if it does then yes, that's where I'm supposed to go.

If it doesn't then no, that's not the right direction. Right. And that really, I mean, the seeds of this were planted in the FSC FSP program. That was all about my academic career, but this is sort of now bigger about me and where I'm going. So, so Sarah, you are also, you happen to be in this little hustle program at the same time that you are in the coach training program.

So hustling, yes, conveniently. So hustle is my business building program. And I'm curious, just like, cause that's also another learning curve of like figuring out the business side of this. And as you're building up this skillset as a coach, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that and just the overlap of those programs for you.

It's early days. I mean, we, we've just been a couple months into this little hustle, but. What has that been like to kind of take on that other kind of learning as you're also working on your coaching skills? It's like more of the same in some ways, but it's more better in other ways. It's like, it's like similar but more, um, it's the same inset in the sense of, yeah, it's new stuff and it's like, Oh my God, what the hell am I doing?

Do I really have time for this, all that stuff? And like what? I don't know what I'm doing. So there's that new beginner part. In there, but it's a community which I love. And it's such a great group of folks. I mean, whether it's self-selection or whether it's the Katy filter, whatever it is, you know, all the people are fabulous and we're all kind of on the same pathway, but we're all doing the same thing with different, different things too.

Yeah. There is something about that. Like people coming in to the same space, When they're at the same point of like, they're asking the same questions, you know, like you're all definitely on different pathways, you have different business ideas, you know, in some of your, even at different stages of like launching your businesses.

But a lot of the questions are the same. So there's this like dovetailing of interest between, and everyone has this kind of common. Goal of figuring out the answers to some of these questions, which include things like what are my professional values that are feeding into my business? Who is my audience?

You know, what are my products and services that serve that audience? You know? So we're all kind of asking these core questions together. Um, and it drives that in a interesting way to kind of do it in community, right? Absolutely. Hmm, Sarah, are there other things you want to share about this journey and what it's been like for you as you've been in coach training and starting to move forward into this mission that you've developed for yourself?

I feel like it's been the, not the final piece. It's been the piece that has helped me start pulling it all together and moving forward. Hmm. You know, this has been rattling around in my head in various shapes and forms for years now. It's been like, okay, well let me figure out how to give a workshop. So I'd give a workshop, like, okay, wait, let me figure out how to change this from like an academic, you know, peer review, whatever, whatever, just some other more accessible context.

Oh. So I'd figured that out, you know, and this has been the thing that really helps pull it all together for me. So. It's been really, really awesome. Well, it is such a privilege to be part of your journey, Sarah, as you're on this pathway. Thanks so much for coming on the show and sharing a little bit about your journey with our coach to coach listeners.

I appreciate you giving us your time. Absolutely. Thanks for listening to this episode of coach to coach for any resources mentioned in the episode, check out the episode. Show notes at Dr. Katie linder.com/coach. If you found this episode to be helpful, please take a moment to rate or review the show in Apple podcasts or recommends episode to a friend, or thanks for listening.