

# Coaching Limiting Beliefs

## [Demonstration]: Episode 259

**Elena:** If you've ever sensed that a client's biggest obstacle wasn't a situation. But a story they were telling themselves. Then this one's for you. Hi, friends, I'm Elena Aguilar and this is the Bright Morning podcast. Every week I'll help you lead conversations that build connection and spark change.

In today's episode, I'm sharing a live coaching demonstration that centers one of the most powerful. Personal coaching moves we can make, exploring and transforming a limiting belief. You'll hear me guide a client through the Exploring Beliefs framework, which is a process that we can use to help someone identify a disempowering belief, reflect on how it's impacting them, and then begin the work of rewriting that story.

Before we jump into the demo, I wanna be clear about one thing, which is that this work is advanced. It's advanced coaching skills, and it requires a foundation of trust. It requires emotional awareness, meaning your own emotional awareness as a coach, and it requires a lot of coaching skills. So if you're new to doing belief work.

Or if you want a deeper understanding of how to use this tool, then be sure to check out our skill session in the Coach Learning Library, which is called Exploring Beliefs. And that skill session walks you through each of the three phases of the framework, and it outlines six essential considerations for using it effectively.

It also includes a video demonstration of this conversation and a debrief where I pull back the curtain on my coaching moves, and you will find a link to that skill session in the show notes. Okay, here's what you need to know about this role play demonstration. If you listened to episode 256. Coaching someone off the drama triangle.

Then you'll be familiar with the coaching client in this episode. So in this episode, I am meeting again with Mike, who is playing a ninth grade English teacher. Now, this is our first year working together, and it's also the first year that coaching has been at this site. Mike has been teaching for 10 years, and while he originally didn't think he needed coaching, he's starting to appreciate our time together and our relationship is solid.

So this is our fourth coaching session together, and the second coaching session was brought to life in episode 256. This episode is happening after Mike has received the



diagnostic data from his classes. And after our first all staff meeting where our new principal shared their big goal for the school year, like most of the role plays on this podcast, we're jumping into the conversation after the beginning part of a coaching conversation in which we would've had some connection time.

So since you are not going to hear that today, I have created a free resource for you that walks you through how to lead that portion of your conversations, and you'll find a link to that in the show notes. Okay, let's jump into this conversation.

**Elena [coach]:** It's good to see you, Mike.

**Mike [client]:** You too,

**Elena [coach]:** I am looking forward to this conversation and to digging into the diagnostic data. Let's just start really broadly. What did that bring up for you?

**Mike [client]:** the diagnostic data.

**Elena [coach]:** Yeah.

**Mike [client]:** Oh. A lot of it's like we've been talking about, I'm trying to stay focused on what's in front of me and what I can control in my room that is helping. And this is one of those things where, again, it's so the diagnostic data shows that a third of my kids are a year or more behind. And, the new admin's goal is that a hundred percent of freshmen will be on or above grade level at the end of the year. Which congratulations on not knowing how to set goals, but whatever. I just, I look at how far behind so many of our kids are, and it's just, it is a defeating moment.

I don't wanna dwell on it. But that's what I'm feeling.

**Elena [coach]:** So actually you told me what you think, but I'm curious if I can just challenge you a little bit.

**Mike [client]:** Definitely like here we go again, frustrated every year it seems like this gets harder and the middle schools keeps sending us kids who are, like, they're all focused on SEL and making sure the kids are happy and engaged and no they don't



know anything about structure or conventions but they can make an Instagram reel in the perspective of Holden Caulfield or whatever.

So I guess that's like frustration or maybe even like a little anger. They keep sending kids who are less and less prepared and saying, oh, a hundred percent of 'em are gonna be ready at the end of the year. Okay, this is 160 days or whatever. How's that supposed to work?

**Elena [coach]:** How does it feel to recognize that you're feeling angry?

**Mike [client]:** Yeah, I don't know. I don't like feeling angry. I don't feel individual anger at specific people. It's more just, I don't know just the way our system keeps going. It's just disappointing and I guess a little defeating is probably, it's just when I feel like I'm getting more focused on how I'm gonna try and influence how I'm using my curriculum in the classroom, then it's, you get these results and it's oh man, more outside things that make this harder yeah.

**Elena [coach]:** Yeah. Yeah, so I'm also hearing, again, tell me if I'm wrong, but I feel like I'm also hearing a little bit of sadness in there. Just that

**Mike [client]:** yeah.

**Elena [coach]:** connected to the defeat. Yeah.

**Mike [client]:** Like we just, as a school district, like we keep getting worse at this. Yeah.

**Elena [coach]:** I am curious You can identify, name the beliefs that you're holding right now about this situation you're in, and you could say, I believe, or I think 'cause think is often synonymous with belief.

**Mike [client]:** I believe that the internet and social media is. Making teaching super hard and this isn't actually all the middle school teacher's fault like it is. as a system have not adapted to new technology. And so I believe that is showing up and we're trying to keep up but falling behind every year.

Yeah,

**Elena [coach]:** What else? What else do you believe about this situation that you're in right now?



**Mike [client]:** I believe that I. That like I said, that the administration does every couple administrations, this is what they do, right? The goal's a hundred percent. It's okay, sure, I hope my baseball team goes 162 and oh, that's not a meaningful goal, but you might as well not have a goal.

But then of course I'm held accountable to that, right? Like they, they stick that on the wall and they're not the ones doing the teaching. And so I believe that we don't have any sort of realistic vision for what we're trying to accomplish. And sure everyone will be ready for Harvard at the end of the year.

Why not? But that falls on us as teachers who are actually, held responsible for that.

**Elena [coach]:** So the belief is,

You've said a couple of times, admin doesn't know how to set goals. The goals that they have set make our life harder.

**Mike [client]:** Yep. Yep.

**Elena [coach]:** We will never be able to meet those goals.

**Mike [client]:** I believe in setting growth goals and we're doing that with each kid. So if you're two years behind no, you're probably not gonna be ahead of grade level at the end of this year. But let's set a growth goal so that you're not just making one year, but a little more.

So we're helping you catch up. And by the time you're outta here you're where you need to be. But that's just a nuance that they have not shown the ability to engage with.

**Elena [coach]:** So would you say this is an accurate belief? Admin doesn't know what they're doing.

**Mike [client]:** Yes, but please don't put that in writing.

**Elena [coach]:** Okay. So I just wanna explore this with you. I just wanna acknowledge, I'm hearing like admin doesn't know what they're doing. And the impact of that is that I am feeling powerless. I'm feeling angry, I'm feeling sad.

**Mike [client]:** Yes.



**Elena [coach]:** So if the belief is admin doesn't know what they're doing, what's possible for you as a teacher, if that's the belief you're holding.

**Mike [client]:** What's possible for me inside my classroom doesn't really change depending on what admin it is.

Like I am who I am and that's what I wanna focus on, and me and my kids is stressful when they set goals. That's really those goals are for them. I don't believe those are actually for kids or maybe they're, so new to this that they don't actually understand that.

Just saying everyone will be great at the end of the year doesn't actually make everyone great at the end of the year. So I guess I am trying to focus on what's possible for my students and me in the classroom. And I guess, just trying to ignore. I think it just threw me when I got that data in the context of that first goal setting meeting, and it's okay, you gotta be kidding.

The kids are further behind than ever and you're setting the highest goals that you know, you literally can't set 'em higher.

**Elena [coach]:** Okay. So I'm hearing you are recognizing and acknowledging you can still work within what is within your influence in your classroom for your students. You've got some ways of thinking about this. I'm just curious, I just wanna throw this out there and you can totally kick it back if you want or just say, no, let's talk about something else. But

are there any negative repercussions for you, even just on the way you think and feel about admin from holding that belief? Admin doesn't know what they're doing.

**Mike [client]:** Yeah. Definitely. And I think that's fair. I think it, it gets me in a negative head space that I don't wanna stay in. So I think that's good. It's just, yes, it is frustrating. And I almost wish I had never had semi competent administrators before, but I have I, when I was in, like my third year, we had a great principal who knew curriculum.

And I always respect the position. They are my boss. I do what I'm supposed to do. I follow my expectations. I also really respected her as a professional leader, and I haven't had that in a while. And again I will always respect the position. I'll always, that they are the boss.

That's how this all works. But yeah, it does, it puts me in a negative head space when only am I not getting help from their leadership, but it's like throwing a wrench in things.



**Elena [coach]:** Really, I hear just the sadness of, I did have competent administrators and I really respected them and I respect the position and that ownership of saying, yeah, this puts me in a negative head space. I am again, I'm just really curious, like if you had a different way to think about admin, a different story to tell, or belief to hold about admin.

I guess I'm just curious like what could that be and what would that mean for you? What would be possible for you?

**Mike [client]:** I'm having a hard time with this admin. Yeah. As I, this year has been particularly challenging for me with that relationship, which has made everything else more challenging. And again, I'm trying not to. Spend too much of my on that. But I don't know what other kind of story is there.

**Elena [coach]:** I mean, there's some thoughts coming to my mind, but I really feel like I would just invite you to keep thinking about that. Like you're an English teacher, you think about narratives and storytelling and beliefs, and if right now the story you're telling is admin doesn't know what they're doing,

**Mike [client]:** Yeah.

**Elena [coach]:** They don't know how to set goals.

**Mike [client]:** Yep.

**Elena [coach]:** I just wanna acknowledge I'm hearing sadness and sarcasm. If you're interested in what it might feel like to have a different story, keep that in your mind and let it float around. See if anything else comes up

And just see how it feels. Even just what would be different if the story was.

These administrators are brand new.

They are in an admin preparation program right now, so they're not even trained. They taught for three years before becoming an administrator. They're new to our city.

Dunno. Our community, the problem is they don't have the knowledge or the skill. The problem is our education system deeply, seriously broken and has been for the entirety of its existence in the United States.

**Mike [client]:** Yes. Yeah.



**Elena [coach]:** I'm just how you would feel if those were some of the beliefs you were holding.

**Mike [client]:** I don't disagree with any of that. I understand they're unprepared and, this is new to them and I can have empathy on a human level. I'm sure that's really hard. I do, I think I could do their job better.

Yes. Do I want their job? No. I don't know. I can see it at a human level and maybe that's more helpful for me to just try and empathize with them as individuals but it does have a real impact on me professionally, and so I guess it's hard to, it maybe it's just trying to hold both of those at the same time.

I can have empathy for them as human beings, and I don't actually don't dislike any of them as humans. I'm just constantly annoyed professionally.

**Elena [coach]:** Yeah. Yeah. You just said something that I think is the definition of wisdom, which is maybe it's holding two things at the same time.

**Mike [client]:** Yeah.

**Elena [coach]:** Like it is really hard. There is an impact on you,

**Mike [client]:** Yep.

**Elena [coach]:** and you shift right there to empathy is more expansive it's like sometimes it feels hard to hold multiple truths and sometimes it's a relief because it feels more human.

**Mike [client]:** Yep. And we talk about that in class all the time. More than one thing can be true at the same time. Yes, I don't know. Maybe it'll help soften me a little bit to focus more on the human empathy. It doesn't really change the professional conditions of our school.

And I know it's not even their fault. They're in their jobs. This is all systemic and they have a boss who hired them and said, oh, this is what we need. And I know there aren't a lot of candidates and yeah, it is a systemic disaster. And here I'm at the bottom of the system in the classroom every day.

So it's hard.



**Elena [coach]:** Yeah, it is. And you're right. You are in the classroom and you are right in front of. The people that you've chosen to serve. And if you're showing up every day with even the emotional residue of anger and frustration and sarcasm and cynicism, we know that just it starts spilling out.

**Mike [client]:** Yeah.

**Elena [coach]:** It's

**Mike [client]:** yeah.

**Elena [coach]:** it's, or it takes so much energy to contain it and then you imagine in passing periods, walking through the halls and passing an administrator and getting activated with all that annoyance and that irritation, it just takes so much energy.

**Mike [client]:** So is the answer to focus more on the human connection and just try to ignore the other stuff?

**Elena [coach]:** Well, I don't know what the answer is, but how would that feel?

**Mike [client]:** Pretty hard I guess. I think I have an obligation to my kids to care about the professional. Systemic situation. Like it would almost feel like giving up to just let go of

Are frustrating about it. So I don't want those to dominate my

Thinking or my brain space.

But I also seen teachers who have just given up and I don't ever wanna get to that place I, I've seen some teachers whatever, and they really don't get bothered by new administrators because they just, they don't care.

**Elena [coach]:** Yeah. This is another multiple truth, right? Like

**Mike [client]:** Hmm.

**Elena [coach]:** I appreciate that you don't wanna be totally dissociated, numb from what's going on. And I'm also hearing you're shifting from blaming the administrators to a broader acknowledgement of the systemic dysfunction.





**Mike [client]:** Yeah. Yeah,

**Elena [coach]:** to fight the battles that we wanna fight.

**Mike [client]:** Yeah. Yeah. I do wanna strike the right balance.

**Elena [coach]:** Yeah. That's wise that, okay. I think we will stop our role play there and we will do our debrief for the Learning Library.

**Elena:** Welcome back, friends. I hope that conversation sparked something for you. As you heard, this work is tender and it's not about forcing someone to change a belief. It's about creating space for reflection. It's about gently surfacing what's been hidden. It's about helping our clients envision a different way of seeing themselves and their world.

So the three steps in the framework are. One, cultivate curiosity, which is where we surface and examine a belief. Two, activate possibility, which is when we explore what might be true without the belief. And then step three is to create new stories in which we develop an empowering alternative. Now, this isn't always a linear process.

And it's not always resolved in one session, but even a small shift can open up powerful change. If you are ready to explore this framework more deeply, then visit our coach Learning Library and look for the skill session called Exploring Beliefs. In that skill session, you will find a full explanation of the three phases.

You'll get considerations for navigating identity, emotion, and resistance, and you'll get a downloadable reflection tool. If you wanna strengthen the foundation for this work, then I recommend the skill sessions, which are around the core emotions and exploring your triggers. Thank you for being brave enough to explore beliefs, both your own and your clients.

If you appreciated today's episode, then please share it with someone you know would benefit from it. And or hop over to Apple Podcast and leave a five star rating and a review to help others discover it. And thank you so much for helping our show. Make some new friends now. If you love the show and you want to watch me record every episode, you are in luck because the podcast is now on YouTube.

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producer and Stacey Goodman does the sound engineering. Take care and be well everyone.

