

Pros and Cons of Health Coaching with Courtney Townley – Insatiable Season 7, Episode 2

[INTRO]

[0:00:08.9] AS: When you're fed up with fighting food and your body, join us here. I'm Ali Shapiro, creator of the Truce with Food® program and your host for Insatiable; where we explore the hidden aspects of fighting our food, our weight and our bodies and dive deep into efficient science and true whole health.

Fair warning, this is not your parents' healthcare. This is a big rebel yell to those who crave meaning, hunger for truth and whose lust for life is truly insatiable. Believe me, freedom awaits.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:47.3] AS: Welcome everybody to Season 7 of Insatiable. This season, **our theme is hunger** and taking a fresh look at different approaches to satisfying our hunger. To be physically and emotionally hungry is to be vulnerable. As Dr. Brené Brown says, "Vulnerability is uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure." To have physical hunger, or to acknowledge our emotional and sole hungers is to choose to be open to the daring risk of being fully satisfied. We will be exploring various diets and approaches to satisfying our holistic hunger.

Before we get to our guest today, who is also a great friend of mine, during our transition episodes to Season 7, I had hinted at something about if you love the conversations we have here and are all about exploring and experimenting to find the

radical truth for every body you have, physical, emotional and soul bodies, I have something exciting to share with you.

Well, drum roll. Introducing the Insatiable membership community. This community is designed to help you take action around the topics we discuss here and support you to find your radical truth. I wrote it out privately last year to clients new and the old and the results have shown me there was a real need for a community, where we can trust ourselves, learn from each other, as well as get healthier, and want to take more daring risks to make our life choices potent killing medicine.

I'm now opening it up to Insatiable listeners. In a nutshell, it's a community where there are no gurus and we learn from each other. Once a month, we will have a mastermind topic that helps you gain clarity and have a group to support and learn from wherever you are in your path. Once a month, there is also a Q&A call with me where I coach attendees to get inspired, unstuck and clear on your next step. For more information, visit alishapiro.com

Okay. Today, I am bringing on my dear friend and coach I admire and respect, Courtney Townley onto the show to discuss the pros and cons of health coaching. We both come in health coaching from very different angles. Courtney as a dancer and fitness background, me from a functional medicine and change background. We have very different styles and approaches, yet similar philosophies.

Courtney isn't just my friend who I trust, she's also in helping women around the world take better care of themselves with more consistency and ease for the past 20 years. She knows her stuff. She is the host of the highly rated podcast Grace & Grit, where she helps women expand the definition of health far beyond the topics of diet and exercise.

She's a level two certified nutrition coach through precision nutrition, which is heavily rooted in behavior change science and she is a certified strength coach via the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

I love Courtney's love for the way the human body can move. Courtney is passionate about a multi-dimensional approach to wellness and deeply believes the right dose of Grace & Grit, anything is possible. Thank you so much for being here today, Courtney.

[0:03:51.0] CT: Oh, it's my pleasure. I always love talking to you.

[0:03:54.7] AS: Yeah. We met everybody through Brodie Welch, who has been on Insatiable as well. Then we got together in Montana in person when I was at a retreat last year and had so much fun. I'm just so glad that we can have the type of conversation that we had there and here so everyone can learn from it.

[0:04:11.1] CT: I know. Me too. Yeah, it was so great that you – very few people come to my part of the world in Montana, so it was so great you were here and it was so awesome to meet you in person.

[0:04:20.5] AS: I was ready to move to Montana and I told Carlos, "We have to spend more time up there." It is such an amazing place. For anyone listening, if you can get out there, like go, stat.

Before we get into our episode today Courtney, I just want to make it clear for listeners that we are not saying that any tool, like today health coaching is good or bad. It's all about discerning the right tool at the right time. I'm just giving that as a caveat for each of our episodes, because if we still have pieces of an all or nothing mindset that we haven't weeded out, we will hear something like we're going to talk about today and people might think, "Oh, my God. I need to do this, or that, or I need to do it all," and we end up overwhelmed.

I just want everyone to realize that the point of the series is to help you discern the right tool at the right time to satiate your current hunger. I think many of us turn to health coaching whether we can articulate it or not, but we are hungry to not go at things alone and we have an inclination that we need to go deeper than our current understanding of the situation. Just wanted to put that out there.

Courtney, let's start with some of the pros. Why did you coming from a fitness and dance background decide that you wanted to gain coaching as a skill set? What do you think are some of the pros about when it makes sense?

[0:05:39.1] CT: Yeah. For me, it was born out of my own rumbling with my own health. I really was in my late 20s. I had been a trainer for a decade. I really approached everything from a movement perspective. I just got to a point where physically, I was broken. I looked like the fit healthy trainer from the outside, but I had terrible digestion, my joints hurt, I was super reactive, borderline depressed. I just knew – that I just had that intuition that something was way off and I didn't know what it was.

I had a group of clients that I was working with at the time that were all transforming before my eyes. This is going to sound terrible, but I knew that the way they were transforming was not because of the work that I was doing with them. Because it was a type of transformation I'd never seen before. They were more confident. They were just more excited about life. Their skin was clearing up.

It wasn't just they were getting leaner, right? They weren't just getting stronger. They were literally transforming from the inside out. I had asked them like, "What the heck are you guys doing?" They were all working with the same health coach. I did what I always do, which is I pursued that health coach and I worked with her for almost two years to transform my own health story. What I learned was so radical and so different from how I had been trying to help people improve their health, there was no

way I could go back to personal training. That's what set me up for my pursuit of learning more about health coaching and starting to do that work myself.

[0:07:16.5] AS: I just love that, because I think one of the reasons when health coaching makes sense is when the doctor or the current paradigm, for you it was fitness, for me it was Western medicine, doesn't give you choices you're happy with, right? Maybe you were getting some other relief, but if you intuitively see something else that you want and it bumps up against the limits of what you know, I think health coaching can be really great to expand what you understand is possible.

[0:07:42.9] CT: Oh, hands down. I think also, my background was as an athlete I was a dancer and you would think that athletes have access to all this very holistic nutrition and lifestyle information. We're talking 20 years ago. I did not have that information. Even though I was using my body probably to the point of abuse to do my sport, I didn't really know what it took to keep it in a place where it could really help me perform at optimal levels.

I do think there is a – I don't know. We have this weird judgment in our culture, like if someone is overweight that they have a health challenge. Then we look at athletes and think, just because they look a certain way, they're healthy. I am calling BS on that loud and clear, because probably 50% of my clients are coaches, trainers and athletes, who literally are broken to the point that they need to basically figure out what are the missing links.

[0:08:43.6] AS: Well and I've noticed too from hanging out with some trainers and also, it struck me. I'm getting back into lifting and I was at this gym in Philly or Pittsburgh – my God. I live in Pittsburgh.

[0:08:54.3] CT: Where do you live?

[0:08:56.5] AS: It was this girl. I mean, everyone looks so young to me now, right? I'm like, she's in high school, which means she's probably in her 20s as I get older, but she's talking about how she was on her fourth cup of coffee and it was 9:30 in the morning. I'm like, okay, I could probably do amazing performance in this hour class if I had been drinking four cups of coffee. Now I would struggle to recover, right? I would crash. It made me start thinking about the trainers that I know tend to be in their 20s, right? Which we have a different type of recovery.

[0:09:26.3] CT: Of course.

[0:09:27.3] AS: They're all on tons of caffeine, like tons of caffeine and overtraining in a way. I was like, but we think that because they're young and on the outside look what we deem is healthy. People start asking them for nutrition, or coaching information and it can set you back.

[0:09:44.9] CT: Definitely. I think of how naive I was as a trainer – I knew a lot about training, but I did not know all the other ways to nourish the human body to support training. I look back on that period of my life and I did the best I could with what I knew at the time. I definitely felt – I just got to the point where if I was being really honest with myself, I was under serving my clientele, because I didn't know enough. Health I was starting to understand was so much bigger than muscle strength and cardiovascular capacity and how you looked in a bikini.

[0:10:23.1] AS: Well and this is what I love about you though, right? This is part of as we get to how to find the health coach for you is like, I want to know someone who's willing to learn how to learn. I don't want someone who is militant about you have to be keto, or you have to do this workout.

I used to when I was still lost and I was completely lost, I would look for someone who's like, "This is the answer." I think especially, because one of the cons of health

coaching and we'll get to this, is the varied type of education, right? There is no – I want to give people some context for that. I think that's such an important point that we're going to – that we can just talk about now is really, people who have studied in various fields.

Now you don't have to study every field. You can't. It's impossible. I think that's one of the beauties of health coaching is if you're an interdisciplinary, what they would call an academia interdisciplinarian. You have nutrition background, you have a fitness background and then you learn about coaching as a skill set. It's like, I'd rather work with someone that we would consider a generalist, right? Rather than in the healthcare system, the specialists are rewarded.

In an ideal world, you start with a generalist who can see how everything's connected in the bigger picture. Then if that generalist can help you, then you want to see a specialist, but we reverse it in our culture.

[0:11:42.2] CT: Yeah, it's so true. I loved it. I love how you just use that analogy of a generalist and a specialist, because we use that a lot in movement, that when you become a specialized mover, let's just say that all you do is lift weights, or all you do is yoga. It's not that either one of those modalities are better than the other, but when you hyper focus on one, you lose a lot of other skill sets, because you're missing a lot of other movement links.

The answer really to having a happy body is to become a movement generalist, to be able to try a lot of different types of movements on, not just specialize in one arena. I think this is so true of health coaching, right? You just spoke to that, that when you have someone who's willing to come at it from more generalized perspective. Like you said, if they can't be helped, but absolutely you send them to a specialist who can look at things in a more detailed fashion. I think often, people are coming to health coaches looking for the specialty. They want to know exactly the diet they should be on, right?

How many calories they should be eating; the macronutrient breakdown of those calories.

I'm not saying that there isn't a time and a place for those things, but I think it is a very – a lot of people are going there so prematurely when they haven't even gotten to know their own bodies and learn how to communicate with their own bodies.

[0:13:02.0] AS: I love that. I love that. Because part of what I think a pro of health coaching can be at its best and again, this is when people are properly trained and we'll get to again, that con of the varied training and health coaching. To me, the best of what health coaching can do is fill a need unaddressed by our current system. Again, I love to see as our medical system.

Okay, so let's take a step back here, because I've been in health coaching pretty much from the beginning. In fact, when I went to the Institute for Integrative Nutrition in 2006, we were called health counselors. Then a few years later, it was changed to coaching because general coaching was becoming more and more popular.

I just want to give people some context of when you think of our healthcare system right now, it was never designed for chronic illness. I think on this podcast a lot, I tend to throw western medicine under the bus. I say, "Hey, it saved my life, but it also is very broken." I think it's easy to rail against our current system, at least here in the US. Sweden and Europe, you guys – I've studied your systems. I mean, Americans would go apeshit if they saw the care that you guys got.

I mean, and they have better outcomes, right? It's not just the care itself, it's better outcomes as well. Our current healthcare system was never set up for chronic illness and you have really good people. A lot of my clients are in the current system trying to do their best in a really crappy system, because it was designed for almost trauma, right? Emergency, like getting in a car accident, or breaking a leg, or a transplant.

What we have now in terms of anxiety, well yo-yo dieting, which to me is unresolved trauma, or even in skin issues, or autoimmune conditions. The current healthcare system was never set up for that. We're asking her medical system to do things that it wasn't necessarily set up for. I'm hoping that as we start to try to correct our healthcare system, that health coaching is this amazing opportunity to completely redefine healthcare.

In my vision, you would have a well-trained health coach as the person you meet first. It's not your primary care doctor. You can still meet with them once a year, but more you have this ongoing relationship with the coach, because I don't know about you Courtney, but for me, I'm someone who doesn't often want to pay for support and yet, it's been the biggest game changer for me in my life; when I find the right person to get that support and start a deep relationship.

I think a lot of people feel they can share with their health coaches that they may not share with someone like a doctor, because they're deemed as the expert, right? Doctors we put on this pedestal, right? People won't tell their doctor stuff. Sometimes doctors are judgy, not all of them. I think that's one of the opportunities that health coaching can really do is start from this generalist place and get people to see that part of a successful relationship with any practitioner is just being able to trust people and open up to them and have someone who's willing to listen to the whole of you, which is what you were describing in terms of being that generalist.

[0:15:58.5] CT: Well, and I think health coaching also provides the opportunity for clients to start doing the work. By the time they go see the specialist, the doctor, they've already started taking measures to improve whatever the underlying challenge is. At least that doctor knows that there's been some actions taken. It's not just that they're going to write a prescription, right? I mean, I really think that health coaching provides

an opportunity for people to take responsibility for reversing their conditions to the degree with which they can.

[0:16:29.3] AS: I love that. Yeah. As I was thinking this episode, I was thinking part of on a deep structural issue. I mean, how I really work on with clients is how they make meaning and shifting identity. There's something about working with the health coach and seeing that this person who maybe overcame something themselves, but isn't in the traditional hierarchy of authority, right?

We put doctors on pedestals, right? Which disempowers us, right? Any authority we think, "Oh, they have the answers." I was thinking on a deep level, working with a peer to help you reverse stuff is like, "Holy shit, I've got some power here. I have some choice," right? You didn't go to medical school for 12 years, right? You gave me these things that at the beginning, it's a learning curve. They reawaken this common sense like, "Oh, yeah. I should be eating from nature, right? Not a box."

I think there's so much power. I know from me it was this huge awakening, when I was able to get myself better and the doctors weren't. It was this dark night of the soul of like, "Oh, no one's in charge at the wheel. Shit. I had put my faith and trust in someone." You're right. It got me to start taking action in so many other ways and I love that point that you brought up. That's really important.

[0:17:43.4] CT: Well, I know you and I are both such big fans of self-leadership, right? That's largely – It's not to say that everyone who takes care of themselves on a great level is not going to experience some disease in their body, or future struggle. We can't avoid those things entirely. We do want to maybe move from a place where we know we did all we could to prevent it.

[0:18:07.1] AS: Yeah. Yeah. I agree. I think there's even healing and knowing that you have choice, right?

[0:18:13.0] CT: Yeah, of course.

[0:18:14.1] AS: It's like, "Whoa." Even if it isn't ideal choices, because it's not always the ideal choice, but being able to navigate that in a way is so empowering and I think wakens us up to what our bodies are trying to tell us, rather than thinking that we're broken or need to be fixed.

Yeah. I also think to your point to how you even got into health coaching, I think there's so much value when someone has been through where you are. We tend to in our culture only value this abstract, detached, objective, double-blind study knowledge, right? When someone has been there through the ins and outs, and I know that's why I've been able to create the Truce with Food process I have, because I had been the person who was binging and felt it was a willpower issue and everyone telling me it was just discipline and willpower and that not matching up with my experience.

I think that's another huge pro of health coaching is a lot of people get into it, because of the deep empathy they have from their own illness, or their own challenge has opened up to them. I think again, empathy is a tool that gets overlooked in traditional medicine, that I think health coaches really bring to their experiences.

[0:19:24.5] CT: Yeah. Again, I think health coaching provides an awesome platform for people to get to know themselves on a deep level, which you aren't going to get when you just go to a doctor to get a prescription or whatever that specialist fix is going to be. Yeah, I think providing people with the opportunity to get to know themselves, why they do the things that aren't serving them and why they don't do the things that are more in-line with what who they want to be in the world. That's good stuff to know.

[0:19:49.4] AS: It is. Yeah. Because I think of in a nutshell the pros and the possibilities of health coaching is you can get groundbreaking results that you can't get with medication alone, but yet it's going to take you awakening to your own agency and

the choices that you have outside of what the mainstream paradigm is going to give you. You learn a lot about yourself. I think that opens up the most possibility.

[0:20:12.9] CT: If you're willing to lean into it though, right? Because it's not easy work and it's – I always say it's the work that people would much rather sweep under the rug. It's the dirt that no one really wants to look at.

[0:20:22.8] AS: Yeah, I agree. Although, I think and again, this has been my experience and we were talking about this before getting on. The people that you and I serve who are people who are go-getters, they want to take some responsibility or whatever, I find that those people if they have a process they can trust, that they are willing to do it. I think for so long the diet industry, right? Because really up until wellness existed, diets were really your only avenue of health. Unless, you were a hippie who was just –

[0:20:53.2] CT: Oh, that's true.

[0:20:55.7] AS: You lived through the 60s and 70s and you saw how sick our culture was, right? I mean, I was born in the late 70s, so just didn't live through that. I took my own health crisis. I think though that if people are given something that actually does work and looks at the whole of them, and I think that's a hunger why especially women turn to health coaching is they've been so dismissed by the medical system. I mean, to the point that one woman was doing this research study I'm like, it could be basically called malpractice how women are dismissed for their aches and pain and all that stuff.

I do agree that I think most we talked about, okay yeah, we definitely have a small where our clients are a smaller part of the population, right? It's definitely not the majority. You're right, even if you want to do it, it can still be uncomfortable. That's a great point that you brought up. I think that's the limit of health coaching as well. It's

not a magic bullet. There's no formula, right? I think not all health coaches are created equal, which is what I want to spend some time on talking about the cons. That's true of every profession, right?

[0:21:57.5] CT: Of course, of course.

[0:22:00.1] AS: One of the biggest weaknesses – are there any other pros, I should start that you think I didn't mention, that you – I mean, you brought up a lot of good points, but is there anything that you wanted to cover that we haven't discussed already?

[0:22:12.8] CT: No. I mean, I think we mentioned it. Just getting to know yourself, being able to be presented with choice, feeling empowered, coming at it from a generalist perspective. Yeah. One of the ways that I love to look at it is I always tell women what discerns the work that I do from a lot of cookie-cutter diets out there is I help women build a practice of self-care, rather than chasing results.

[0:22:37.0] AS: I love that. To me, I feel that's definitely a doorway that health coaching offers is helping women, or helping – I shouldn't say women. I work with women, that's why I always say that; helping people to really build a practice of self-care. A practice is something that we do imperfectly, that's why we practice it.

Plus, if you think of diets, they're the opposite. Women are hell-bent on doing it perfectly. Then that perfection of course can get in the way of them making any progress at all, because it's just not coming from a good place. I think definitely focusing on it, building a practice of self-care can definitely be a paradigm shift for people.

[0:23:19.6] AS: Well, that's a great segue because even that approach is very different than most health coaches. You get in this I would say bind. Well, it's a bind if you're not

– especially if you're new, I think that you want to, from a marketing perspective, tell people I can help you with this solution, right? You focus on the results of I don't know, supporting your Hashimotos, or some people do weight loss, or some people – I say Truce with Food.

People tend to – especially in the beginning, right? If you don't know what you don't know and this is a big con of health coaching is the varied education of health coaches. I don't think what we're saying here is going to surprise anyone who has tried to hire a health coach, right? Everyone has a very background and we are in a transition time. Again, we see a need for a different type of training, right? Yet, it's not exactly clear what that should be.

In the same way that if you've started something new, any of us who have tried a practice of anything, until you get to that promised land of consistency, you're trying a lot of things that don't work. Health coaching and what health coaching is and it being regulated, it's just hasn't happened yet, right? Because it's so new. I am in a here in Pennsylvania. I'm in a very traditional healthcare system. I get this notice, “We have health coaching and here's some health coaches recommendation.” It's recommending whole wheat bread and low-fat dairy.

I'm like, “Oh, my God. Where are their health coaches getting trained?” I know that the health coaches working within the system are just getting trained by the system, right? These may not be their beliefs and this is why I've always been out on my own. I said, “Uh, I could find someone who aligned with my philosophy, I'd go work with the team.”

There's so many various training schools. One of the challenges to circle back to what I was saying is when you're new to health coaching and we've all been new, or you're new to it, you think that there – things are much more formulaic than they are. The more expertise you get, the more you realize how nuanced and complex everything

is. I think that's a challenge of health coaching right now and a con of it is that there's various levels of promises, I guess as saying it.

[0:25:37.0] CT: It is true. There's such a fine balance, isn't there? Between educating clients. That is our job, right? To educate people about pathways that might help them to get into a space where they feel better for sure. That is a big part of our job. The other part of our job is also guiding clients back to their own knowing and allowing them to move forward with that, in a way almost pulling the answers out of them.

That I think is a skill set that I think a lot of health coaches are missing, because what they're doing is giving all the education constantly, or the formulas, or those cookie-cutter recipes and they're negating to actually coach people into a different way of behaving.

[0:26:21.5] AS: I love that you brought that up, because the point is coaching is an actual skill set, everyone. Everyone is calling themselves a coach now, but a lot of trainers will call themselves coaches, but they're taking more a cheerleader role, which is this accountability role, which is an aspect of coaching but it's not the entirety of it.

What Courtney is describing helping someone come to their own answers and the premise of coaching is that people are brilliant and you just have to give them the right questions and hold the space as we say in the biz, which is letting people process on their own, to come to their own conclusions. That is not what the majority of health coaching is doing. Even when I was looking at different types of schools that I wanted to recommend to people to look at, has your coach been trained here? A lot of people are trained in only the keto diet, or only the vegan diet.

Cornell does a plant-based education, right? People think, "Oh, Cornell. Ooh," right? It's like, no, those people are trained in education of a plant-based diet, what Courtney was saying. Or they're trained in the education of how to be vegan with the recipes.

That is not coaching. Education and learning and changing, sometimes they overlap if you think of a circle, right? Education and coaching, there is an overlap, but they're also not the same things at the same time often.

[0:27:43.3] CT: Well and here's the other thing, behavior science tells us, shows us through research that when you tell somebody what to do, they are far less likely to sustain that behavior than if they come up with it the action step themselves. Yeah. We want people to come up with their own answers and we want it to feel inspired. We want them to feel inspired by themselves, because that is what creates long-term sustainability. Not someone constantly telling you what to do.

[0:28:10.9] AS: Yeah. For people listening, the paradigm shift, the ripple effect and the paradigm shift of this is so exponential, because what happens is you go from trying to be good or bad, to please your – I saw a nutritionist in high school, right? Because I was binging and wanted to lose weight. She gave me a plan that actually I knew more about, because I had been trying to diet so much by that point. You go from trying to be good to please your coach or your nutritionist or whatever, when you're in that model to when you're working with a coach, the rewards become, "Oh, my God. I'm feeling good. I feel better for myself. I'm doing this for myself, not just to get the approval of the person that I'm seeing right now," right?

Because this is what I hear a lot with Weight Watchers, or for my clients like, well when I was working with that nutritionist, but then I fell off. What I'm hearing, they think it was the nutritionist or something inherently flawed with them, but what I'm hearing is you never learn what work for you. That's what I'm hearing. I don't know about you.

[0:29:10.3] CT: No, a 100% absolutely. Again, somebody takes a strategy that worked for maybe a handful of people and then they sell it to the masses and market it down our throats that it should work for everybody. You know what? In the short term, it might work for an awful lot of people. I'm not interested in the short term. I don't want

to have to keep doing this over and over again. I think that so many women can identify with that. I want to build a practice that I am committed to forevermore.

One of the biggest questions that I ask my clients is when they tell me that they want to take on a new action in their their self-care, I will say to them, "Is this something you see yourself still doing six months from now?" Right? Because if it's something really extreme with their diet, or some really aggressive exercise program – and again, I'm not saying that you can't dabble in those things on occasion, because maybe sometimes in your life you're going to, I don't know, just want to push harder for a short period. Generally, is this something that you're going to sustain? If it's not, why are you doing it?

[0:30:17.8] AS: Well that's a good question, because then people start to realize what they think they want is often influenced by the media, or what they think they should be doing, versus what really feels good for them, right?

[0:30:29.8] CT: Exactly, exactly. I want to speak too to what you said earlier, just about coming at it from a – that place where someone's always telling you what to do. Because like I was sharing with you before we actually started recording is once I came out of the personal training field, even when I first got into health coaching, I was really coming at it from a perspective that I'm supposed to be telling people what to do. That's what I thought, because the health coach that I worked with approached the work with me that way.

It took me about five years to realize that I was actually disempowering my clients, because yeah, anybody can follow a list of instructions, but they can't sustain that lifestyle forever if it's not really in-line with who they are.

[0:31:18.1] AS: I'm so glad you brought that up, because it also limits the potential of the results that you can actually get, right? Because if it's not the alignment of what's really

working for you – and to your point, I love that you brought about short-term versus long-term, because most things will work in the short-term, right? Then people, instead of questioning the approach, they question themselves, because like, “I couldn't keep that up,” or whatever.

No one's measuring the long-term damage. We know cutting calories drastically, going on a diet long-term is the biggest predictor of weight gain, right? I have clients come to me and they're like, “I gained all the weight back.” They blame themselves and I'm like – because their doctors put them on this, by the way.

Of course, you're going to trust – in the beginning you trust, until you're like, “Oh, my God. This didn't work.” It's like, no long-term. If you're really looking at long-term results, going on a diet is the biggest predictor of weight gain. It's like, “Okay, why didn't people tell me this?” It's like, because most people are only following people for three or six months. It's crazy pants, I guess.

[0:32:20.7] CT: It's a crazy pants.

[0:32:23.6] AS: One of the things – I just wanted to give people a couple of schools that – Oh, and I also just really appreciate you acknowledging that coaching is a skill set, because I got my masters in change theory, and coaching was as a piece of that. When people are like, “Oh, so I'm a coach.” They've taken a weekend NLP course and I'm like, “Okay, it's not the same thing.”

I mean, and you don't need to get your masters in coaching either, but you do need to understand what coaching is. It takes time to get really good at coaching. I think in the health coaching world, people gets mixed in with this online marketing world of well, you can have a practice overnight and just follow these steps to make a sustainable living. It's like, guys any job that you have, whether you're in the corporate world, or a teacher, or in the entrepreneurial world, yeah you have to learn how to market and

stuff, but you actually also have to learn to get good at what you do. I didn't feel masterful until year nine.

[0:33:23.2] CT: Yeah. I'm with you.

[0:33:24.5] AS: It took me that. Part of me was like, "Why is it taking so long? I even went to school for this." Because first of all, what you learn in theory no matter where you go to school is very different when you're working with real humans.

[0:33:35.0] CT: Of course.

[0:33:36.3] AS: It just takes time to get masterful at this. I think that's something that's a challenge of when you're new at coaching. For those of you who are considering hiring a coach, it can be tempting to look for people who are offering the formula in an oversimplified view and these people are well-intentioned and they want to help, except when you're new at something, you just don't know what you don't know. You get the curse of knowledge the more that you go along, right Courtney? What did you say?

[0:34:05.7] CT: Yes, of course.

[0:34:07.1] AS: What did you say before we started recording? You're like –

[0:34:09.7] CT: I said, I wish that I didn't know what I know, because I would probably make a lot more money selling really fly by the seat of your pants programs that I could just market the heck out of, but don't really work for the long run. I mean, that's the gift of just being naïve. That was been me in my 20s. Just didn't know better.

[0:34:31.4] AS: I know. I know. I just wanted to let people know a couple of places that I really – a couple of schools that if I was going to look for a health coach, here is who I

would look for; Andrea Nakayama, she runs I think it's called Functional Nutrition – as in functional nutrition school. She was originally replenished PDX. She trains health coaches in her own matrix of functional nutrition. She's brilliant and her coaches are well-trained. That's who I would look for.

Also, the Institute for Functional Medicine. I believe they've started a program. I don't know the details of it, but at its highest score and we're again tuned into episode 3, which I'll be doing pros and cons of functional medicine because functional medicine is a tool, it's not a magic bullet. They have all different ranges of educated people. Institute for Functional Medicine is supposed to be evidence-based protocol. They are putting together a health coaching program I mean, they've had it together based on functional medicine principles like blood, sugar control, gut health, etc.

Then Chris Kresser, who he is a functional medicine expert/acupuncturist. He's also started his own health coaching program. I haven't seen the results of that. People have graduated because it's so new, but yet, I know he has a pretty standard – a high standard of excellence. Those are some of the people I would see, have they trained with people there.

Courtney, part of why I want to have you on is you're on the west coast, so you know completely different people. I mean, Chris and Andrea are on the west coast, but you just know different people than I know, right? You and I only know so many people that are doing this. I mean, you've done precision nutrition. Do you –

[0:36:10.7] CT: Yeah. I speak I think so highly of precision nutrition I mean, and I say that because everything they do is research-based. John Berardi who's the head of that company is just – he's a brilliant man and his coaching is it's not light. The first level of certification takes usually people about six months to a year to get through.

Then there's a level two coaching program that they offer, which is what I did where I get assigned a mentor and I have to do case studies. It was a pretty intensive process. I've never been disappointed by precision. I think Chris Kesser is amazing. I have followed him for a really long time.

Same thing with Institute for Functional Medicine. I mean, I know a lot of the same names that you do. At the end of the day, I also think yes, education a 150% is something to look out for. Also, I'll tell you this past summer, I was – I hired a counselor to work through some stuff that I was going through and I had put the hiring a counselor off for way longer than I should have, simply because I didn't want to try a lot of shoes on, right?

There's a lot of resistance that comes from that, because when I look at hiring a professional, I'm not just looking at their credentials. I have to be a good fit with that person. We have to communicate well together. I need to feel inspired and led by that person in a way. I have to feel they'd get a lot of good information out of me. I feel there's just this special cocktail of attributes that you're not really going to know if somebody's a right fit, unless you test the waters, right?

That's why I think a lot of coaches offer – I know you offer one-to-one sessions, right? Before people really have to commit to some of your bigger programs. I do the same thing. I don't just do it for the customer. I also do it, because I want to make sure that the person's the right fit for my program.

I think that a lot of reputable coaches out there will have some level of I don't know, just being able to taste the offering, so you both know if you're a good fit, because I don't want to be in a relationship for six months to a year with somebody that I can't communicate well with.

[0:38:17.5] AS: Yeah. I'm so glad you brought that up, because I skimmed over it and the pros, but you guys 50% of a relationship, of any medical relationship, or any

therapeutic relationship is just if you trust the person. That is 50% of the foundation. To Courtney's point, I always tell people look for testimonials of actual results as well. Not just like, "Oh, this person is great," right? That's important as well.

Get on the phone with them. I always say hey, if you're unsure, let's do 30 minutes together, because I want to make sure that we are the right fit and that you feel like you can trust me, I feel I'm the right fit for you. I totally agree with that. You have to feel comfortable with the person.

Sometimes that is I am comfortable – we all make decisions differently. I'm someone who – I'm a hard sell. I want to see someone has the people and the experience and the social skills that match mine, but I also want to see that they are well trained. That's me. I am very – For some people, they don't need that as much. We only buying decisions and purchase is different, right? It's important that you feel you can trust the person and whatever those credentials are, right? Is it yours of experience? Is it who they've mentored with, right? To your point Courtney, and it has to be that you have to feel comfortable with them for sure. I'm glad that you brought that up.

The other thing I want to bring up too is that there are varied motives of health coaches. I'd say 90% of health coaches hearts are in the right place, right? I have definitely not surveyed this, but as I get more into this field, I've seen so many people put together programs that are basically delivery vehicles for their multi-level marketing product.

[0:40:05.4] CT: Yeah, sure.

[0:40:07.8] AS: I'm not saying that's good or bad. I mean, I don't sell things like essential oils or supplements, because I just can't do the one-size-fits-all thing. That's just not my – and it's just not what I want to be doing, right? This is not a judgement, but I'm just telling you that sometimes a lot of the coaches actually, who I guess they

would be called celebrity health coaches. They're building this model and a business that they'll do a 30-day cleanse, or –

[0:40:35.1] CT: It's all-around product.

[0:40:37.0] AS: Yeah, but it's just to get your – They'll put their product in that process. I just want people to realize every industry and I'm not saying that's wrong or right, I'm just saying don't discount all of health coaching if that doesn't work for you.

[0:40:51.5] CT: Yeah. For sure. Yeah. So many different layers of health coaches.

[0:40:56.3] AS: Yeah. That brings up another point is I see coaching as a field, just to give people a background, most coaching – and I actually been coached very differently than this. I take a developmental approach to coaching, which is more route in change theory than coaching. Coaching comes from the therapy field.

A lot of coaches have taken – they are really into what's called CBT, but CBT is a huge therapy field, or positive psychology comes out of some of Carl Rogers' therapy. My point is that a lot of coaching comes from therapy. It's building on the research, because coaching is a relatively new field in terms of – in terms of decades compared to centuries of other things. I see a lot of life coaches who all of a sudden, they get into health and fitness and now they are just transferring all of that into health.

I just want people to realize, there is actual acumen that you need to know when you're in the health field, the health fit. Courtney knows all about movements and nutrition and hormones and all that stuff. I know all about hormones and GI and blood sugar. I've mentored in functional medicine for four years, as well as going to a couple nutrition schools, as well as taking course ongoing education. It's a big pet peeve of mine when people think they can just transfer a life coaching skill over into the health

domain and it's just not the same. There is domain knowledge. I wouldn't try to be a health coach, or a life coach, I don't know. How do you feel about that?

[0:42:24.9] CT: Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I think I have a little bit of a different perspective in that I definitely hear what you're saying, because I see this too where life coaches will move into the health and wellness space and definitely not have the layer of information that they need to help people on a deep level. I definitely see that gap.

However, going the other way, I feel as someone who has been in the health and nutrition space for my entire career, that I'm always looking towards more life coaching skills, because I really feel at the root of change, that's a very important conversation, because health is largely about how you're living your life. I think it depends how you're defining, right, these forms of coaching, because I know for me, I will tell you personally and all the women that I've coached over the years that yes, we can talk about diet and exercise, but at the end of the day where most of the problems are rooted is in the relationship that a woman has been in for many, many years that refuses to leave, even though it's toxic. Or the job she's hated for 20 years, or her inability to say nice things to herself, right? I just feel there's some crossover, where I feel if people were educated in both arenas that could be powerful.

[0:43:44.0] AS: Yeah. No, I'm so glad you brought that up because I totally was not clear. I mean, most of what I work on is not even the food, right? The reason that I said that from my perspective is because I look at things from a systems perspective. For example, I had a client who she had worked with a career coach twice before coming to me, right? She wasn't coming to me for career work. She always battled food and she had worked with this career coach and the career coach which has comes from life coaching, like all of these coaching schools I guess it in general, to me take more of us – they don't take a root cause resolution to change approach.

The career coach helped her manage her relationship with her boss, who was causing her a lot of stress, right? Stomach problems, all the stuff. Then eventually she changed jobs and that's ultimately the career coach helped her transition into that. Then when she came to me, she realized that part of the reason that problem had just gone away was because she transitioned to a new job, but the pattern within her was still there. When we worked on story and narrative coaching, which most life coaching does not do, or even health coaching, she was able to see the problem with the boss in a completely different way and also how that pattern actually had transferred to her peers.

I'm actually looking at things from a systems perspective, rather than just the issue at hand. Most life coaching, and this is what I think is health coaching has the same blinders as therapy does, as medicine is it's limited to the same cultural myths, of let's take things just at this one issue, like what you tell me it is. Even a lot of times when health coaches are saying we're getting to the root of issues, there is even deeper roots there than –

I'm glad you brought that up, because I agree. I think as health coaches, we can transfer more easily. I guess, I just – the way that I see most life coaching schools being trained, because I had to study some of them in graduate school. We had a couple books from some of the more popular life coaching schools. I saw that as just one piece to the change puzzle.

[0:45:44.9] CT: Sure, of course. Yeah, absolutely.

[0:45:48.0] AS: Yeah. I've seen some life coaches who are now doing mental health programs and I'm like, this is part of –

[0:45:55.3] CT: The timeline. Yeah.

[0:45:57.6] AS: I see a lot of therapists trying to change this, but it's therapists weren't changed – they weren't trained in the gut biome, or blood sugar control on how that influences panic attacks, or anxiety. We aren't an interdisciplinary culture, right? My graduate degree was actually in the school of liberal arts. It was not in the school of medicine. It was not in the school of nursing. It was not at Penn. It was in a completely different school.

We as a society – this is why – Now I'm getting off on a tangent away. I think women are socially conditioned at least to be more interconnectedness. I think we're bringing – all of us are bringing fields back together that probably should have never been separated in the first place.

[0:46:38.7] CT: I think the big message here is that I think that yeah, it's bringing so many fields together to heal the whole person. I mean, because that's really what it takes.

[0:46:48.8] AS: Yeah, yeah. That's also why I wanted to have you on, because we have such different approaches, right? We're both well-trained, we have also results for our clients and you and I take such different approaches. That's why to your point, I think it's so important for people to hop on the phone with someone and do some research about where they're coming from and if you vibe with them. Because part of that is intuition, right? It's like, okay this is the right next guide on the side for me, right?

[0:47:16.6] CT: Yeah, definitely. Really, I think to your point too is just discerning between am I really looking just to achieve a result, or am I actually looking for more life satisfaction? There's a difference, because I would argue that a lot of women who are chasing weight-loss goals, they'll get there and they're going to have all the same challenges and problems and issues that they had at their higher weight, like nothing has really changed, except the number on the scale. I think clients need to get clear what change they're really seeking, because there's a big difference.

[0:47:51.2] AS: Ooh, that is so good. I always say that about when people – because part of what a preview of the functional medicine episode is people sometimes want to get all these tests, right? I'm like, "Is that going to change your behavior?" If you find out that your cortisol is high in the morning, is that going to help you get to sleep faster at night? You still are going to have to make the behavioral changes, right?

If you're not doing the basics of eating well most of the time, getting sleep, getting out into the sunlight, moving your body, drinking water, in some people it will change, right? Seeing those numbers can often motivate them. For most part, I've seen it doesn't motivate people. I don't know about you. Yeah, it is really what kind of change am I really about right now? Is it do I just want to focus on the nutrition steps? Am I ready for the emotional stuff?

Part of my own process is getting really clear of I'm here when you're ready for the emotional piece and it's not going to be these. It's going to be freeing and great when you start to get some momentum around it. We'll look at the food. Some people will emphasize the food a lot more.

I did some consulting for a hospital company. They're doing a project on helping people, especially their type 2 diabetic population, more rural population really start to be educated around nutrition. They're getting these great results, because people are learning – one of the video testimonials was like, "I didn't know what Swiss chard was," right? These people are motivated, because their type 2 diabetes medication has stopped working. I'm like, "That is one population. That's not my population," right? These are people who are like, "I know what Swiss chard is. I know I should be eating and I'm not doing it enough."

[0:49:31.2] CT: Sure. I always look at it. I always think that there's a maturity spectrum to health that I've had 20-year-olds who are like 80-year-olds on the maturity

spectrum, where they're so ready to do the emotional work at a very young age. I've had 60-year-olds who are like 14-year-olds on the maturity spectrum, where like you said, they don't know what Swiss chard is, right? Or they really think that dieting is still the answer to all of their health concerns. I think that it's in-line with what we're talking about here. I think there's a maturity spectrum to health coaching.

[0:50:07.3] AS: I love how you frame – There is and it's really where you are on the change, right? There's five stages of change. You have to figure out, “Do I need more information and I need someone to help me with getting in the kitchen?” I love that. Or am I, “Okay, I'm at the place where –” That is a developmental plateau when people start to realize, “Oh, the experts don't know it all. Oh, my God. They're human too.”

This isn't to throw expertise, because I think we're in this era right now where people think like, “Oh, experts don't know anything and everything's fake.” No, no, no, no. I'm not going to that extreme. I'm just saying that every frame of education, whether you're an acupuncturist or a doctor has their limitations and their blind spots. It's so important that you as a patient to be empowered, know where are you in terms of what support you actually need.

If it's health coaching, finding the health coach within there that's going to help where you are on the change process. Because food can be a doorway into the most radical of change, or the most hey, this one guy was like, “I don't need as much medication and he was a pastor at a church and now he's teaching his congregation and everyone's really excited and they're all losing weight.” Yet, they're losing weight because they're getting off processed foods, right? No, but that's radical for some people, right?

[0:51:29.3] CT: Absolutely. It's so true. You know, at the end of the day what I love so much about what we do is that no matter what specialist you go to, let's just say that you go to a hormone specialist, right? Or you go to a gut health specialist, or you go to

somebody who specializes in neurology. At the end of the day, every single one of those specialists to some degree is going to ask that you take responsibility on the front of what we teach, which like you said, are those primary lifestyle behaviors that we know help to foster great health like eating real food, getting enough sleep, drinking enough water, getting out in the sunshine, keeping your mind in a growth minded place.

Those are the fundamentals that any specialist is going to recommend. Now they have the higher power to of course, write scripts and do more aggressive protocols as well. In terms of personal leadership, that's really what they're going to recommend to everybody, that everyone takes responsibility on that level. That's what we can help people do.

[0:52:31.2] AS: I love that. I think we're going to end here. Mic drop, you just took me to church. No, but it's true. Because I often tell people, my clients when they're like, "Should I get this test for that?" I'm like, "Look, that specialist is going to –" We all have genetic issues, right? Or genetic weaknesses, but everything comes back to those foundational things that you just described and that I had mentioned earlier. Those are the harder pieces. They're simpler, but they're more complicated because of the emotional and the mindset piece.

Yeah, you may be able to tweak a supplement here and there, but your supplement is not – it's not going to be as effective if you're not doing those foundational things, or whatnot. That's the bigger I think cultural myth challenge that we have is that health should give you more freedom, not give you more to dos. It should simplify your life. Be the front and center project, right? It's just the vehicle for more leadership in our lives and creating life on our terms.

You said it's so well, Courtney. Thank you so much.

[0:53:35.1] CT: Awesome. Please. No, this is so great. I love talking to you and this is such a pleasure.

[0:53:40.2] AS: Yeah. Okay and I always ask, anything else I forgot to mention that you think is important to say?

[0:53:45.5] CT: No, but just know that your health is – that you're worth it. If this is something – if you've been contemplating hiring a health coach, it is definitely worth doing the work around to seek out the right one. Because like you said, you and I both have the experience of it being so transformative. We've seen that in so many of our clients as well. It's work worth pursuing. You just want to make sure you're in the right hands.

[0:54:08.0] AS: Yeah, yeah. Getting support is – I'm so slow to invest in it, because it takes me a while to listen. I mean, I've been working with a naturopath and an acupuncturist this last year and I can't believe how – like, why didn't I do this sooner? It's to your point.

[0:54:21.8] CT: Exactly. Isn't that always the case? Nine times out of 10, that's how most people feel like, "Okay, why didn't I just ask for help sooner?"

[0:54:28.8] AS: I know. I'm always skeptical though. I'm like, "Can this person really help me?" I just got my thyroid results back and I was doing this protocol with my naturopath and she was like, "Give me two months." I was like, "Okay." I was like, "I'm probably wasting this money." My primary doctor gave me my thyroid – I went and got my thyroid test and the results came back through his office and there is – I went from 3.5 TSH to 2.0. I was like, "Oh, my God." I wrote to my doctor, this hippie homeopathic stuff works.

I was like, "I just did it, because I wanted to be open-minded and walk my values." I mean, he's retiring, because he's so – he's much more natural than most doctors. He's like, "Yeah, Ali." He's like, "Sometimes that homeopathic hippie stuff does work." He's like, "I'm so happy you don't need to see me." Yeah. I mean, that was a side story, but it made me realize once you do the research to find the right support and then go all in.

[0:55:23.5] CT: Exactly.

[0:55:25.6] AS: Thank you so much for being here, Courtney. Where can people find you?

[0:55:28.1] CT: Yeah, over at graceandgrit.com is the best place. They can find my podcast and everything there, so I would just say graceandgrit.com.

[0:55:34.9] AS: Awesome. We will put all the links to all the places Courtney hangs out, including on Instagram. You always give me a sort of, "Yeah. Sit up straight girl," on Instagram.

[0:55:44.3] CT: Oh, good.

[0:55:46.3] AS: I can be whiny sometime like, "Wha." And your posts are always like, "Get it together, girl."

[0:55:53.7] CT: Awesome.

[0:55:54.6] AS: Thank you so much for being here.

[0:55:56.3] CT: Thank you. Have a great day.

[0:55:57.7] AS: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:56:02.0] AS: Thank you, health rebels for tuning in today. Have a reaction, question, or want the transcript from today's episode? Find me at alishapiro.com. I'd love if you leave a review on Apple Podcast and tell your friends and family about Insatiable. It helps us grow our community and share a new way of approaching health and our bodies.

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