

## Ep #274: What You're Training People to Expect of You



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

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This is episode 274 and today we're talking about training people. Let's get into it.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen, then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Hello folks, welcome back to the podcast. I am so excited for today's episode because this is something I have been talking about a lot on my coaching calls in the membership. It actually originally came up as a concept during The Herd Within, which was a small group coaching program that I ran in the autumn last year, all about leadership and relational power.

But since then, I've been talking about it in the membership, and I've been promising to do an episode all about it. So here it is. And it's the idea, or rather the reality, that you are always training people. You're always training them to expect you to behave in certain ways.

You're training the people that you love, the folks you work with, the people you lead, and all the people that you're scared to disappoint or let down in some way.

People trust patterns more than statements. We don't build trust off what people say they're going to do. We build our expectations off what happens consistently and repeatedly over time.

That means that you can express yourself verbally. You can say that you're not available to do something, and you can express your boundaries to people. But it's what you do that counts. That's what they are going to register, that's what they are going to remember.

So what you do is what people learn from and come to expect from you. And if you don't like what they're expecting from you, we don't start with correcting them; we start with correcting the training that you have been giving them. Because they didn't come to expect that for no good reason.

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Something has gone on that they think that's what they can expect from you.

So I'm going to tell you a story about my horse because it's useful to take this out of the context of human dynamics for a moment. Those of you who have or who have had furry friends like cats or dogs will immediately get what I'm talking about. And then we're going to apply that to challenging human dynamics.

So my horse lives out 24/7 in a small herd. Every time I go out to the field and I want to bring him in, I need to catch him. And every time I put his halter on to bring him in, I give him a little treat after the halter goes on, which means he's always willing to stand there and put it on. And then when I do the buckle up, his lips start twitching. It's very cute, but they start twitching in anticipation of me giving him his treat. So he knows exactly what's coming. He also knows not to mug me for it.

So I've also trained him that if he starts trying to graze me and mug me for the treat, then he's not going to get it. He gets the treat once he actually stands still and looks away from me. So now he actually doesn't bother trying to get it off me. He just shifts his head away from me and gives me a little side-eye like he knows it's coming.

So that's very clear, intentional training with a predictable outcome. He knows what to expect. But the thing is, I don't want to trek around the track that he's on to get him because it's half a kilometre long, especially when it's really muddy and slippery, which it has been this winter.

So bit by bit, I'm training him to come to me. And 70% of the time he's doing that, and I reinforce that with a treat. But a lot of the time he wants to stay on his hay with his mates, and why wouldn't you?

But then, when I bring him in, we go through a couple of sets of electrical fences and some wooden gates. And he knows how we manoeuvre our way through them. He knows where to stand, when to walk, where he needs to turn because we've done it like a thousand times or something like that. So he knows what to expect of me. He knows what I'm expecting

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of him. There's a pattern and a routine that he is used to because that's what I've trained him to expect.

You have done the same thing with the humans in your life. Everything I've just described, you have been doing with every human that you interact with on a regular basis. You have been giving them rewards of some kind for the ways that they are interacting with you. They know what to expect from you.

Now, likewise, when I ride my horse, and I'm having a lesson with my instructor, I've trained him in a not-so-great pattern, something I'm working to unwind right now. So a lot of the time when I'm having a lesson, it's really windy or rainy, and it's hard for me to hear my instructor as I'm riding around the arena. So when we finish an exercise, I will head over to where she's standing so that we can talk and actually hear one another.

But what that means is that when we finish an exercise, Buttons just starts drifting towards Julia. And it's great because he likes her. He wants to be next to her, which is a lovely thing. But what we ought to be doing is finishing an exercise and standing square in a halt position because in a dressage test, you can pick up or lose a lot of points with the quality of your halt.

But of course, he doesn't just start drifting towards Julia. He does it because I have been letting him do that, however many hundreds of times. So now he thinks, oh, this is just what we do.

And it's not that I want to stop us from going over to have a chat with Julia, but what I'm now training him to do is do a proper halt and pause for a bit, and then go over to Julia. So I'm correcting the training.

Now, think about what you have trained the people in your life to expect from you. What have you purposefully or inadvertently trained them to expect through repetition? Because this is how training works, whether you're doing it on purpose or not. There's always a cue, there is always your response, and there's always reinforcement of some kind, or there's correction. And reinforcement is what creates expectation.

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So one exceedingly common way this comes up is when you get annoyed at someone for expecting something from you. This happens a lot.

So maybe a colleague of yours is annoyed that you didn't reply to their out-of-work-hours email. And then maybe you get annoyed at that because you've told them that you're not available for emails after work, or maybe that's what your email signature says. But here's the issue. If you say that, but in fact, you typically reply, then that's what they've come to expect because that is what you have trained them in. It's not that they're a bad person out to get you or they're trying to keep you up at night being annoyed at them. They're just used to you replying because that is your pattern. They are responding to your training.

So you're always training people. Always. So the question becomes, what are you training them in?

I've got more examples for you from my own life, as well as some examples we can apply to yours.

So when I am doing deep focused work, I'm not available to answer questions, whether that's from Paul, my team, or people in a coffee shop. Those times are blocked out. They are labelled on my calendar, and they're typically the same every day, like 8 till 11 or 12.

Most days, I go to my favourite cafe to start the day. I get a solid block of work done, then I go home and do the next chunk. I always have a black filter coffee. And the cafe staff know that. They're amazing. They just bring it out to me. And I just start typing because my brain is usually raring to go by this point.

So I just walk in, the lovely staff put a filter on my table because they know that's what I like. They know that I don't like having a hot drink at the same time as food, so they don't ask me if I want any food. They know my patterns very well.

And I know their patterns. I know the cafe system is that they clean a table and then you sit down. It's always funny to me observing people who are

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visiting, often from London, and they have like quite a frenetic energy, like we've got to get a table, got to get a table. And you can see them getting anxious that someone else is going to get the table, even though they've been asked to just wait a moment whilst it's being cleared and cleaned. But once they've been told and had the experience, then they would know what to expect, presumably.

But it can't just be the telling of these things. It has to be backed up with action and consistency. So likewise, people know that when I'm typing, I'm in the zone. And I might look up and smile to say hi to someone, but friends that are also in there, they know not to disturb me.

I spoke to a friend about this a month ago because she was saying that when we were first getting to know one another, and she didn't know me very well, it was very clear to her that when I'm working, I am not to be disturbed. But sometimes she will come in, this is currently, she'll come in at a moment when I'm just like coming up for air and I might like to pause and have a chat. But what she and other people expect from me is that I'm not going to have a conversation with them, even a short one, because that's what I've trained them to expect. Same goes for Paul, same goes for Nelson.

If someone does try and talk to me when I'm in that zone, I always let them know. Hey, I don't want to lose my train of thought. And I'm not mean about it. I'm just very clear about it. And they're just being friendly. And I'm also in a public space. So that is an environment where it is entirely reasonable to expect that people will talk to me. So if someone says hello to me in a cafe, that is not a boundary issue for me.

But if I talk to someone for five minutes every time I see them in the cafe, then I will be training them to expect that. And they will therefore conclude that that's what I want to happen, and therefore fine for them to continue. I can't get pissy about that.

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If they're trying to talk to me and on 90% of all the other occasions, that is what has happened, I can't get pissed about that. That's what I've trained them to expect.

A very simple, very domestic example of this. You're going to love this, is laundry.

So I don't turn Paul's or Nelson's clothes the right way round. So if socks or clothes go in the wash inside out, that is how they're going to get washed, and that is how they're going to be hung out to dry. They are both old enough and capable of doing it themselves. So I am not going to train either of them that I will turn their clothes the right way round. I'm not going to do that.

Sometimes that means that Nelson's football socks come out still muddy, and that's how he's going to learn that there are consequences to taking them off like that and leaving them for someone else to deal with. I will put a load of washing on. I will do my bit to ensure that there are clean clothes in the house, but I'm not going to do that part for them. No way. I highly encourage you to do the same if you find yourself in a similar situation.

Another example is that Nelson knows that when I'm on a call with a client, he can't disturb me unless it is urgent. But he also knows that if I'm on a call and I am the client, he absolutely can. And that hasn't happened as a result of one conversation. That has come through repetition, which has included him coming in the room when I'm on the phone with a client and me saying, is it urgent, my love? And when he says no, I've told him he has to wait until the time the call finishes, or go and find his other parent.

But I also communicate that in advance so that he knows exactly what's going on, and he isn't left guessing. It's very clear.

Now, here's the pattern that I want to spend a moment on because it's the one I see most often and the one that carries the highest cost. And it's if you've trained people that you are endlessly available. Because maybe you are a really great friend or daughter or sister, partner, colleague, and you pride yourself on being competent and reliable or being there for someone,

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because you're the one who picks things up when they drop, because you've always been there. And so everyone has learned, very reasonably, completely rationally, to expect that you will continue to be that kind of person.

And this has happened through a thousand small repetitions. Each one maybe made complete sense to you in the moment, but the issue is now you're feeling resentful for what people are expecting from you.

But that resentment isn't about other people crossing your limits. It's about the training that you have given them and the emotional cost that you're now paying for it.

So they're not doing anything wrong by expecting what has always happened. I hope you can see that. You've just decided that you want something different, which is fantastic. Great to have that awareness, to recognise the resentment, and then do something about it. All of that is completely valid. Go for it. But the work starts with you, not with them.

Have you trained your team that deadlines are flexible because you always move them? You know, if someone doesn't meet the deadline and you're like, well, that's fine, you know, Tuesday's not going to be an issue, then if you do that a thousand times, they're always going to think that deadlines are flexible.

Have you trained your manager that you'll stay up late or work weekends to revise work?

Have you trained your clients that they can reach you whenever they want because you always reply, even when that contradicts your working agreement with them?

Have you trained your colleagues that you'll always accept their meeting requests and move your schedule to accommodate their meeting times?

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Have you trained your clients that they can have endless revisions of work, or have you trained them that they get the two rounds of revisions that your contract with them states they'll get? You see the difference?

This came up for me early in my career as a practitioner and doula. So I was 24, young, covered in tattoos, no kids, didn't fit the picture of your standard doula. So most doulas at the time were older, mothers, or grandmothers, not many tattoos. And if there were tattoos, they were hidden away.

And I was also very much experiencing what I'd now call good girl syndrome. So very keen to prove myself, keen to please. And I love to over-deliver for my clients. But doing that now comes from a completely different place. Back then, I wasn't as secure in myself, and I felt I needed to prove my worth and also make people happy.

So those early clients got an extraordinary level of service, way beyond what my contract said. Five-hour antenatal meetings, acupuncture and reflexology thrown in, me staying for dinner afterwards, getting home at 11 at night. Like, I was giving a lot, and I enjoyed it, right? It wasn't a problem at the time. Sure, with hindsight, I can look back and see that was coming from a not-so-great place within me. But at the time, I enjoyed it. It was my job. I was new to it. But as I got busier and my availability and my capacity shifted, I got a lot clearer about my scope of work.

And then what happened is a client, a lovely, lovely client that I had worked with in those early years, hired me again. And by this point, I was working in a very different way than when I'd supported them in their first pregnancy. And I also felt much more secure in myself and my worthiness. And so I worked with her a second time, and then years later, she gave me feedback that really took me by surprise. She told me that she hadn't been happy with that second experience. Not because I'd done anything wrong, but because it wasn't like the first time. She didn't get the level of service that I had supplied the first time.

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So the first time was her reference point. I had trained her to expect that whatever my contract said, there would be all these additional extras on top. So if you're used to a five-hour meeting with reflexology included and your doula staying for dinner, then that's what you're going to anticipate happening the next time. Why wouldn't you do that?

But with hindsight, I could have said up front, here's what this engagement includes. I know we worked together like this last time. If you want any of the additional things that I did before, here's what that is going to look like now. But I just hadn't clocked any of this yet. This is how we learn.

So whatever you do consistently becomes the baseline and the expectation. And if you change it without addressing the actual training that you're giving people, then you will be held to the standard that people have come to expect from you.

So think about how this shows up with your loved ones. Do your friends and family expect you to be the one who checks in or who organises things? Do they expect you to organise holidays and trips out? Well, why would they expect anything different this time around if this is how you've always done things in the past? If you want to switch things up, fantastic. But you cannot be pissed at them for expecting it.

Have you trained your family that your needs come last because you always accommodate them first?

So my son is now 10, and I try to do a mix of things with him. Sometimes I'm immediately available for him. Other times, I let him know that he needs to wait until I've taken care of myself first. I don't want to raise a man to expect that the women in his life will drop everything for him, that they will always do that and that his needs are always the priority.

Now, of course, he is a child. He's growing up for sure, but he is a child. So his level of need is going to be different to an adult man, but I do make sure that there are times when I say, I will help you with that, I need to do this for myself first. And he's actually pretty great at understanding that and taking

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those things into consideration. So I'm very intentional about that. It's important training for him to receive. I take it very seriously.

But there's one more layer that I want to get into on this episode and it's a sneaky one. So sometimes we accidentally reinforce the very behaviour that we don't want through our reactions. So if someone does something and you smile or you laugh or you soften yourself or you just jump in to fix a situation, they're going to assume that you liked what they did and that you're happy to jump in and keep doing this.

So, for those of you who are highly attuned and perceptive, I know a lot of you are, you might assume that people will pick up on the awkwardness behind your smile. But you can't rely on that. Not everyone can read microexpressions. Not everyone is as good at picking up on subtle expressions as you are.

So when someone makes a request of you, and you plaster a smile on your face and the please and appease stress response is being activated, then you are going to respond in a certain way that is going to give them information that you are happy to do this thing. Add to that, I'm going to assume that you were also basically socialised to be a calming device for other people and to make everything okay for everyone else. I've got a great episode about being the emotional support type if you want to go deeper on that one.

So people pick up on your answers and your reactions. So changing this is going to require a few things. It's definitely going to require you to have a level of presence and awareness when you are in these types of interactions. It's also going to require you to sit with any awkwardness or discomfort that comes up when you go about changing your behaviour and retraining other people.

An example of this I can give you is that Nelson, for sure, knows when I don't give a solid no when he's asking for something in the shop. And then he's got wiggle room to get what he wants. So if I waver in my answer, he knows that I could end up being a yes, and that his persistence is probably

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going to pay off. That is a child responding intelligently to the data and the training that he has received.

So I've had to train myself to be really on it with being present to what he's saying and asking me, and then to give him a proper answer and to give a very clear no. If I say it like that, I don't get any pushback. There's no follow-up questions. If I go, no, then he'll be like, oh, okay, but how about this, or how about this? And especially if I've got if I'm like in my own little world and I have something on my mind, and I'm maybe not listening fully. So I just have to be really on it.

And once you can see what's going on with the way that you are training people in your life, of course, then it's about what you are going to do about it. So first of all, name the pattern to yourself. Not getting wrapped up in judging their behaviour and how they're doing things and how that's wrong, and you can't believe they're treating you this way or anything like that. You're just going to acknowledge, I have trained this. That is it. No self-judgment, beating yourself up, no story about what it means about you, just the straight-up observation.

And by the way, I'm just going to point out, of course, I'm not talking about abusive behaviours, like behaviours that we're absolutely going to be like, that is not okay. I am not in no way saying that you have trained other people to treat you with that type of behaviour. Just to be very clear.

So to recap, first you're going to name the pattern to yourself and acknowledge that you have somehow trained this. Second, you're going to choose one specific change that you are going to make consistently for the next seven days. Small and specific is better than ambitious but vague. So if you've trained people that you'll reply to out-of-hours messages, the change you make isn't going to be, be less available. That's pretty vague. It's, I won't reply to messages after 6:00 p.m. for the next seven days.

And then third is expect an extinction burst. When you change the training, their behaviour may escalate before it settles. So they might ask again, they might push a little harder, they might get louder or more insistent,

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more emotional, or suddenly act confused about something that used to be fine. This is a known behavioural phenomenon. It's not personal and it's not a sign that you've done something wrong. It's evidence that the previous pattern was a very reliable one.

So their system has registered a change. And they're doing what's always worked, pushing a bit harder, like Nelson at the shops wanting something. Or like pressing the button on a vending machine that just didn't deliver the snack, right? You just press it again. That's all they are doing.

But here's what matters. This is exactly the moment for you to hold your ground. If you wobble, if you revert to your most practiced patterns, or you go wishy-washy in some way, what you've just taught them is that persistence works, that if they push you for a little longer, you will eventually fold. And then the next time you try to change the training, you will need twice the commitment to make it stick.

So you need to be ready to tolerate their reaction or their disappointment, their confusion, their pushback without doing what you usually do to make it all better. Because this is what changing the training actually requires. And none of this means the other person is malicious. Most extinction bursts are people simply repeating what used to work.

So what I want you to take from today is this. You are always training people. The question isn't whether you're doing it, the question is what you're training them in, why you're doing it, and what the retraining, the correction, is going to look like.

And if you're ready to change some of those patterns in a grounded, self-led way, that's exactly the work we do inside my membership, Powerful. If you're already a member, take this to ask a coach, bring it to the community, bring it to a call, get coached on the specific pattern that you are working with. And if you're not a member yet, the doors will be opening soon.

Okay, folks, that's a wrap on this week. I'll catch you next time.

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