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Brain Rewiring for Better Coaching: Building New Connections

Spark Talk transcript
IGNITE: Global Gathering
Denver, October 2026

Edited for readability. Filler words and false starts removed.

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TRANSCRIPT

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I am so grateful for the opportunity to follow two professional speakers. Now for something different. Yes, I am a physician. And yes, although there are some medical conferences going on in Denver, I am at the right meeting. This is actually where I want and need to be.

I'm wearing this white coat because this is how I arrived to coaching: looking like this, hiding in a white coat, hoping that some of what I did in my day job would make me a great coach. A big portion of my identity, and actually the neurobiology of my brain, was caught up in what I did in the exam room every day with my patients.

So:

> *What metaphorical coat were you wearing when you came to coaching?*

We all come to coaching with an outfit of sorts. We arrive with certain talents, certain things that will transfer easily, but also certain things we need to unlearn or relearn in order to be a great coach. These pathways in our brain have become highly paved, and they can be hard habits to break.

So what happens if you come to coaching with a day job, or a caregiver role, or some other responsibility that takes up all of your time, yet you want to be a good coach? How do you practice those skills so you're showing up effectively for your clients? How do you grow and improve your coaching skills when your schedule is so full? When do you practice?

We can't create more time in a day. I know, I've tried, and it has not been successful. And there are no more days in the week. So the challenge is to practice those coaching skills in our daily life.

I'd like you to think back. Whether you're a baby coach like me or a master coach, think of some aspect of your coaching or your coaching business that has been sitting in the back of your mind, something you'd like to improve. Lock in on that for a second. Write it down or make a mental note of it. We'll come back to it later.

If you've seen *ER* or *The Pit*, you know that when doctors tell stories, they do it in a certain format. They do a case presentation, they do a physical exam, they talk about the diagnosis,

and then they talk about a treatment.

So while my white coat is off, I'm going to take you on a little bit of medical rounds. As we go, I'm going to introduce an easy three-step process you can use to take the coaching or business skill you want to develop and practice it in your day-to-day life.

Once upon a time, there was a person who had a successful career but wanted something more. As a coaching client, they got clear on their goals. They set bigger goals. They stepped back from the brink of burnout. Having had a couple of excellent coaches, this person became so fascinated with the process of coaching that they became interested in becoming a coach themselves, and they enrolled in night school to become a coach.

As the weeks went by, this coaching student realized that while some things transferred, there were definitely some things that did not. In fact, that brain had to be rewired to show up in the best way possible.

Of course, this case presentation is me. No judgment, please. I probably should have waited until I got my certificate to make that disclosure, but we'll see what happens.

My vital signs on examination were okay. I could be professional. I could be empathetic. I had a genuine interest in helping people. But the diagnosis came from my instructors: I needed to pause more before asking the next question.

There were other things that were problematic, but for the purposes of this discussion, we're going to talk about the pause. I needed to be able to tolerate silence in a session and slow down the pulse of my questions so the client could arrive at their truth and their next idea.

It made total sense. Looking back, as a physician, one person comes in, they present their case, I size things up, I look for patterns, I make a diagnosis, I give them advice, and then they leave. That is not what we learned to do as coaches. So while this helped me in my medical career, it was not helping me become my best coaching self.

The treatment was that I needed to be able to tolerate the pause. But I had no time to practice, and I didn't want to leave it all until I was in the room with a client.

So, through the power of neuroplasticity. If you don't know what that is, it's the brain growing and adapting in response to life circumstances and rewiring things. Think of "fire together, wire together." I needed neuroplasticity, and I needed time to practice.

And because this is a TED-style talk, Brittany said, I thought the easiest thing would be to give you a three-step approach with the mnemonic TED: Target, Exercise, and Debrief. This was my approach to practicing the skills I needed to develop in my day-to-day life.

T First, establish the target. The key question here is: what element of your coaching do you want to improve? Could it be comfort with silence? Could it be recognizing body language, or asking powerful questions? Or if you are a seasoned coach and have all of that down pat, is it marketing your business? Is it taking that next courageous step forward?

Now, this is not neuroanatomy, but because the white coat is still sitting here, I'm going to tell you the part of the brain involved: the prefrontal cortex. It's right behind your forehead. It's the part of the brain we hope matures really quickly in teenagers, before they make bad decisions. It's responsible for executive function and for choosing new neural pathways. So T is target: what element of your coaching would you like to improve?

E E is exercise, and this is the tricky part. It asks: where does this skill show up in your non-coaching life? In which environment can you cultivate it? Could it be carpooling, time with grandchildren, waiting in line at the supermarket, sitting in traffic, your day-to-day interactions with other people? Once you figure that out, you ask yourself, "What's going to be the exercise? What do I need to practice?"

D D is debrief. As it sounds, you debrief your progress, either on your own, maybe by listening to a coaching session and seeing whether you've improved on that skill, or by asking others to review your progress. Then you go back to the beginning and ask yourself: did I effectively train myself in that skill? Do I need to go through that loop again and re-practice the technique, or do I get to move on to something else?

In my case, I needed to develop comfort with the pause. So I decided I was going to wait patiently in Atlanta traffic. There are a couple of people here from Atlanta, and you know that traffic is pretty fierce. So I waited patiently. I also intentionally waited before I scratched an itch. Yeah, yeah. Very tough, trust me.

And I purposely got in the longer supermarket line and waited there patiently. I was able to debrief both with my recordings and with my instructors and evaluators.

So now it's your turn. Think about that element of your coaching or your coaching business you'd like to improve. Start thinking about where it shows up in your non-coaching life. What can you leverage to practice that skill? And who can help you debrief your progress, or how will you do it?

To conclude, we're all on this journey of self-improvement as coaches, and we wear many other hats in life that pull at our time. Using this TED approach, Target, Exercise, and Debrief, can be one way to learn, or in my case unlearn, some of the pathways that have become habit. I think both our clients and we will be better for it. Thanks so much, everyone.