

Introducing This Week's Guest: Camille's Coaching Journey

Phil: Thank you so much for being on the show.

Really happy to have you here, Camille. We know each other because you recently did my course, 'Land the Clients You Love' as well, so there's a connection there. So it's really, really nice. And I feel like most of the podcast guests that I have on the show, I've not met before, we've only had a to and fro, via email,

so it's really nice to actually know a bit of your story ahead of time, but we're going to be using this half an hour just to discuss and chat through the kind of people you work with, we'll be looking at what brought you to coaching, why to ACT in particular and how the tools impact your personal life and your professional life as well.

So, uh, let's kick off with a question I always love and one that I'm personally passionate about and that is, who do you feel as if you are in service of? Who are you called to coach?

The Unique Challenges of Unconventional Leaders

Camille: I feel called to coach people who don't fit the conventional image of leadership. So that may be because of who they are physically, or it could be their leadership style, but there's something about how they lead that creates a sort of nagging sense of uncertainty. And I love helping people claim their leadership identity.

Phil: Yeah. Very important. Very important. Especially like for those folks that you were mentioning there where they don't necessarily feel like maybe they fit the mould or where you are historically

speaking. Oh yeah. Could you say more about that? Like, like, yeah. What kind of leaders do you actually work with?

So it's interesting. You mentioned the predicament they might find themselves in, but yeah what kind of leaders really inspire you to work with them?

Camille: Yeah. So I work most frequently with CEOs and company founders, typically in the biotech pharma or technology space, and sometimes they are pure scientists who've never led a company before and all of a sudden they're managing a board and they're thinking about taking a company public and there's so many things they're called on to do that have nothing to do with science

and they just are riddled with insecurity.

And it's not necessarily an imposter syndrome, they have a ton of confidence about who they are scientifically and what they're building, but there's so many skills we expect and behaviours that we expect leaders to demonstrate to sort of, as you said, fit the mold. And how they operate may not do that.

It may be effective, but it's not what people expect and that tension between expectation and delivery can create a lot of uncertainty.

The flip side of that is people who demographically have not held these roles before women who are in leadership positions, people of color. You name it, they aren't the people we expect to be a CEO, that we expect to be a company founder, and there is a heightened level of scrutiny from investors, from board members, who just keep thinking, this wasn't quite what I thought it was going to be, and if you're not behaving or talking or acting in these ways, can you be good? And it's working through all of the noise that comes at them to help them stay grounded in what they do bring to the table and to make them more effective to cope with all of those things and to meet the challenges that they're facing as leaders. I

Phil: Ah, that's really clear. That's super clear. Wow. That's really clear. That's, that's fantastic. it's oftentimes coaches have a clear understanding of their niche and the way they describe it, but the way you describe that is, I can picture them, I can see them.

The Impact of Coaching on Leaders in High-Stress Roles

Phil: I can feel those struggles that they have, those challenges.

What do you get a sense are the impacts on those people? Like, how do they feel if they don't address these predicaments they find themselves in? So if they, if they don't seek out coaching, like for instance, like how, how are they impacted negatively?

Camille: I think that the stress can become unmanageable. Sleepless nights, a real doubting of their ability to just do all their basic tasks, running the company, interfacing with teams, delivering usually the medicine or the science that they're tasked to deliver just becomes almost insurmountable

and so much of being a CEO in this space is fundraising. It's getting these huge investments from venture capital firms or very established pharma companies and saying, yes, we believe in not only the science you're doing, but who you are as a leader. And if they can't convey that with certainty, their runway to deliver the science becomes very short. And I think that creates an enormous sense of pressure. They're responsible for all of these employees, they're responsible for meeting the needs of patients. Oh my God, can I do this? And it just becomes this... I've had some clients describe it as a vortex of stress that they just can't seem to get perspective on or the tools to manage.

Phil: Wow. You're very clear again, it's like going a layer deeper. It's fantastic because ACT, we focus our coach training on leadership and training amazing people to be amazing leadership coaches, but helping support leaders who are doing really important work in the world.

Yeah, so it's really heartening to hear the kinds of people that you're working with and that you're supporting and I wonder how, because people aren't necessarily born into the role of leadership, are they? It's almost like some fall into the role of leadership, some are pushed and some are not wanting to be there necessarily.

And maybe they've been doers, they've been incredible technicians, programmers, coders, or whatever, scientists and now they're in a position of leadership, which potentially requires a whole load of different skills and I'm wondering what it's like, that kind of challenge that they face where they're having to take on board these whole new ways of being.

Camille: I think that it creates, it feeds into that sense of uncertainty that we've been talking about. So, sometimes it means that they are taking on a set of challenges they've never faced before. And there's just that, I'm really good in this space, I've never faced these obstacles before, do I have what it takes? How do I even begin to think about this? And particularly for people who've been very successful in their zone, facing that kind of uncertainty under a spotlight of leadership, is very destabilizing, or they reinvent themselves a number of times as these companies, you know, start-ups are tough. Sometimes they work,

sometimes they don't, regardless of industry, so if they reinvented themselves again and again, they start to wonder, does the track record I've built, is it a net positive or a negative? Is it a liability or an asset? And how do I claim all of what I've done to show up ready and seen as capable for my next opportunity?

Phil: Yeah. And it is the word that kept cropping up for me, or the phrase is imposter syndrome when you were talking, I was just thinking of how sometimes, if they're put in a position of leadership, you're expected to know what the answer is traditionally speaking, but then there is this whole kind of

category of imposter syndrome is like, am I able to do this? Am I, how am I supposed to do this? And who am I meant to ask for support and clarification? And it feels like what you would do with would be to provide a space and, a thinking partner where they can explore that and they can explore the actual leader within as to who they are in that particular role.

Camille: Yeah, I think that's true. I'd also say, I think there's an additional nuance to the idea of imposter syndrome. I think that's a good catch all for the totality of the experience, but I think that what these unconventional leaders face is an additional layer of difficulty because they might feel quite capable, but because they execute it or look differently than what's expected. They're getting feedback that isn't necessarily representative of the quality of their work, but it's based in bias or conventional expectation about what good looks like. And so how do we expand that idea? And so some of it I think is imposter syndrome and some of it, I think is retraining the people around them to say, oh, leadership can look a lot of different ways and still be effective. And how do we thread the needle on taking in that feedback for them as when I'm working with them as a thought partner and sometimes saying, actually, I

think that might be biased. That may not be real. How do we distinguish between those things?

Phil: That's really interesting. And, I think that, that varies according to the culture we find ourselves in as well, doesn't it? The country we find ourselves in

historically, it's so fascinating. This is what I love about ACT and the kind of the amount of attention to detail in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

They really go there. Like we really make a point of, yeah.

Camille's Personal Journey to Coaching

Phil: And was that, I guess before we go into the, I really want to jump into more about your niche because I'm so interested in what you're saying, but I really would love to hear a little bit more about kind of your background, really, in terms of like your upbringing, like we, were you always curious about other people and what was going on for them psychologically?

I think I was for a really specific reason. So I was raised in a really tight knit family, but it was an interracial family. I was sort of approaching the world at a different lens and claiming an identity as an interracial person, not black and not white, both. And having to lean into that and defend it a little bit. And also just being very aware of how race was operating in the community that I was growing up in schools, et cetera. And that sort of sparked a long term curiosity about how people come together and live or work successfully when they are different. And so I ended up, you know, as all interracial kids do, I got a PhD in history and thought, "Oh, I'll just crack the code on this". But I wanted to understand why is this possible for my family? And feel so impossible for other families, other companies. And that's what sort of led me maybe through the back door into doing people strategy and coaching and human resources for organizations. And so much of that work is coaching. It's helping people through really difficult conversations, in perspectives that are holding them back and need to be reframed, that sort of reactive to creative journey that ACT takes us through. I think it's a great way to think about that. But so much of that is working with leaders to understand these are tools that you can use to do your best work, help your people grow, get

more of them and be truly successful. And so that's how I got into this space to begin with all from, It

makes a lot of sense.

Camille: Yeah!

Phil: Isn't it interesting our kind of formative years and the stories that we make up and sometimes assumptions we make up and how those things shape us and point us and get us curious about certain things, whether it's trying to fix the difficult relationship our parents have, or whether it's trying to address something culturally where you've just felt that's just not fair.

I think our drivers, our motivators, so much of the time come from those early experiences and it's so fascinating to hear like where people end up or certainly where they end up mid-journey and then what they move on to maybe from a place more of, um, adulthood and awareness and inclusion of what's come before integration.

And then it's right now, I know all this, and now I know where that yearning or that seeking has come from. I wonder how I can do something about it now, professionally, like, how can I bring that into the equation?

Camille: Yeah. I think so much of who I feel called to serve as a coach, not only springs from my academic training and understanding what it takes to create these really functionally inclusive environments, but also just what it's like. I've been a leader in start-ups and then fortune 500 companies where I didn't fit the mould because I was a woman because I was brown, because I didn't take the traditional HR path. You know, who in HR comes to it with a history PhD? Nobody, like I had not checked the normal boxes and people thought, if you haven't done compensation for 20 years, how could you possibly be our head of HR? And so there's all these ways that I learned what it's like to lead when you don't fit the conventional mould and how to navigate through that and my own coach during those times was instrumental.

Phil: You must've had to be really resilient I would imagine like when you're describing that it's, it takes a lot of courage and a lot of bravery to persist when you get a sense that people around you maybe doubting,

or they're not necessarily trusting that you can do the job or it's not what they expect.

What kept you going? What gave you that resilience?

Camille: I was committed to the mission. It got really hard and sometimes it was just a very lonely place to be. But I think that the coaching aspect of my work kept me passionate because I was able to have these one on one impacts with the employees around me or the leaders that I was coaching. And I thought, even when it's really difficult for me, I feel like there's a reason I'm here, I can see myself making a difference and I've looked for different ways to express that, that I think really focus my professional skills more onto that exclusively,

Phil: Yeah.

Camille: but thus specifically the coaching but yeah, I think it really helped me get through it.

Phil: No, that's powerful, isn't it? And I think if we have personal experience of it, it definitely plays a part, it's like, 'Yeah, I remember what that felt like and I'm not willing to stand back and let that perpetuate. I feel as if I can do something about this. I've got the skills and I've got the tools

and the desire to make a difference here and I'm going to step up and do that'. That's leadership isn't it?

Camille: It is and I think that really matters to my clients that while it's really fundamental to have programs like ACT where you're getting these, deep training around the models to use my clients also want to know that I've walked in their shoes a bit.

I know what it's like to stand in front of the board and they're looking at you sideways and you've got to figure it out.

Phil: Yeah and stay without crumbling, without like tap into resource and to get centered and grounded. Yeah.

The Transformative Power of ACT's Coach Training Program

Phil: We mentioned ACT there and of course, this is an ACT podcast and the reason I kicked it off was because I really wanted to hear the stories of the people behind the training, because I know we have an incredible program and I suppose this is leading me up to thinking like, so what had you choose ACT's LPCC certification program above others?

What had you choose that?

Camille: I think for me it was that there was such a sense that we were going to go deep both on very tested practical models, but also that we weren't going to be sitting on our hands being fed things. "Here's the thing, now go do it". And you're like, "Oh no, you just told me I'm not ready".

Phil: Yeah. Yeah.

Camille: And again and again, being thrown what felt like the deep end of the pond, but always we were ready. And we come out of those, breakout sessions and come back and think, 'Oh my gosh, I just did that'. And it was both educational and empowering

Phil: It's really experiential, isn't it? I think that's one of the fantastic things about it. And even though we do a virtual and a hybrid and face to face at Brown, you know, there's, there is a sense that everything is experiential. It's here's a tool, here's an incredible thing, we're going to show you it, demo it

then we're going to give you an experience of it yourselves and you're going to be coaching each other and then put you into breakout rooms or into triads and what have you, bring you back and then talk about it. Debrief it. I think that makes a big difference.

Camille: It does and I think that at the end of it, I have bonded with the members of my cohort so much so that, classes have been over for quite some time and we still reach out and ask questions and jump on Zoom and say, how are you dealing with this? What's this like? And it's just tremendous.

Phil: Because I think you go really deep together, don't you? Like the cohorts of people I think is up to 24 members, no more than that. There's such an intimacy that builds over that period of eight months. It's just unbelievable, isn't it? Like the connections that you get.

Camille: Yeah. It's as impactful, I think, as the training.

Phil: Yeah. Yeah. Yes. And I love that, that it's not death by PowerPoint, as they say.

Camille: No, I signed up thinking, okay, you can stay awake for three full days of Zoom meetings. And in the first hour I thought, oh my gosh, this is so fantastic. I never thought a virtual learning experience would be that engaging.

Phil: Yeah. It takes a lot of skill to be able to

facilitate training over Zoom, looking at a screen for a period of time, but to actually get that experiential felt sense of coaching with someone else or what it's like to be a coachee receiving coaching. And I think it goes to prove the point. So us as coaches, you know, like I've been a coach for 16 years and we were around in the early days of Skype when it looked like Lego, it was really blocky and

horrific. Yeah.

And actually we just did audio coaching, we didn't even use video. So, when Zoom came along, it was no problem. But I think for new people coming in to the equation on training to be a coach, sometimes it can be a bit disconcerting thinking, I'm just looking at a screen. How am I going to train to be a great coach?

But did you find it was okay? You sounded like you did.

Camille: I did I didn't find it a barrier at all and it's helpful because with my own clients, it's such a mix, sometimes we're on the phone, sometimes we're Zoom, sometimes we're in person. And I feel like it really allowed me to build skills around how to meet my clients in the space that fits best for them. And I felt prepared to do all of those

Phil: Amazing.

Yeah. That's brilliant. It's like building the muscles, isn't it? Building the muscles in doing it virtually over screen to screen, or whether it's doing it just audio going out for a walk in a park, even, or whether you're doing it face to face, whether you meet clients face to face as well, and so much range and possibility in all three approaches I think.

Camille: Absolutely

Phil: Yeah.

The Ripple Effect of Coaching Skills in Personal Life

Phil: just really moving into the last few questions. I feel like I could chat for hours. It's so interesting listening to what it is that you do but I guess what I'm curious about is how have the skills that you've developed through training to be a coach and through your practice of being a coach, how have they impacted

not necessarily your, your working conversations and your working experiences. Because you know, you spoke about those a little bit. I'm really curious about how the tools have impacted your personal conversations with friends and family. If you're okay to share that.

Camille: No, I'm happy to. It's interesting. I think if I was to boil it down, I'd say the two big differences I notice are that I am a much better listener, like really staying with the person and listening deeply and I give a lot less advice.

Phil: Maybe it's like, yeah. Hmm.

Camille: You just know to button it and that, you know, that idea that we're seeing, our friends as creative, resourceful and whole, and not just our clients, that expectation that 'you know this problem better than I ever could'. And I know you have the resources you need. How can I support you emotionally? How can I help you think through this? But I know you've got what it takes and that's really different than all the ways we might intervene with our friends otherwise.

Phil: Oh, you know what you should do? I've got an idea kind of thing.

Camille: Yeah, let me tell you.

Phil: I think that, you know, is, is like, I ask this question quite a lot cause I'm really curious about it myself, and I know it impacted my friends and family as well when I trained to be a coach and it's almost like some of them would say, are you coaching me?

What are you doing there? What is that? You know, but then other people would suddenly go, actually, 'Where did that come from?' 'How am I sharing that?' 'Why am I talking about that?' 'What have you done to me?' You know, but it's really just how to listen well and effectively. And I think that is always seems to be the biggest gift of coach training, particularly ACT coach training.

It's how do we listen in a real safe, container and how do we give space for that person to be really able to unfold and feel confident and comfortable to be able to do that and it's so lovely when it, when that enriches our private relationships as well.

Camille: I agree and I think that, one of the things I noticed in the cohort that I was in is that so many of us came from what I'll call helping professions and we're used to having answers. And so it is really fantastic training to let that go and just be the supportive sort of framework for helping someone else get there. And it's just, it's wonderful to see and I think it's more impactful.

Phil: Yeah. Because we, we ultimately, we don't know the sum total of who this person is in front of us and what they truly want or what they truly need and so for us to actually give advice, obviously there's mentors and there's consultants that do that, but a coach is very different.

Camille: It's a different job,

It's a different job

Phil: Yeah, yeah, it's a different job.

Exactly. Like we switch hats and sometimes I say that cause I'm a mentor too. So I switch hats with, with clients and say, okay, sounds like

we want to step into some mentoring here and I think once we've trained with our clients and trained them to be aware of how much availability there is for them to be able to explore what's true for them, it just feels like, ahhh, a breath of fresh air.

It's so liberating.

Camille: Yes. Yeah. And I find it less effort on my end, which is also nice.

Phil: Yeah, Exactly. That was a tough one for me to be with at first because I was like, surely, I've said very little in this coaching session and they said they got a lot from it, but I feel like, have I earned my money? What's going on here? So there's a lot of work to be done around actually, get out of the way and let the coaching come through you.

Yeah, that was something I was taught and I think that's very true. Yeah.

Camille: I agree.

Phil: Amazing.

Closing Thoughts and How to Connect

Phil: This has been a fantastic conversation. I've really enjoyed it.

Camille: Oh, thank you I feel the same

Phil: How can people find you? How can they reach out to you should they wish to connect?

Camille: Very easily. You can go to my website, camillehendersondavis.com and book time.

Phil: Easy. Love it. Thank you so much. It's been such a pleasure. Really enjoyable conversation.

Camille: Oh, thank you so much for having me, Phil. It's been wonderful.

Phil: If you'd like to train to be a professional coach, why don't you check out act leader.com that's www.actleader.com.

Phil Askew: On our website, we have a ton of information that can really help you get clarity on the exact right course for you. We also have articles that go into detail about the different aspects of coaching, how to apply it and why it's a wonderful thing. Look forward to seeing you soon.