

# 63. How Coaching Shattered my World View and Changed my Life

**Vanessa 00:00**

Welcome to coaching for Latina leaders, the only podcast dedicated to the advancement of Latinas at every level of life with your host Dr. Vanessa Calderon, a Latina with over 20 years of leadership experience, Harvard grad physician, and mother of two.

**Vanessa 00:19**

Hi friends, I have a very special announcement for all of you. This month we're reopening the doors to my signature coaching program The Life and Leadership accelerator. The accelerator is the only evidence-based coaching program created exclusively for female physicians of color. It's an incredible all-inclusive 12-week program. You get everything. You get coaching, teaching, healing, you get CME, and you also get an amazing community of other female physicians of color that care about your success just as much as you do. In the accelerator, you're going to learn how to unjumble your brain, get unstuck, so you have mental clarity, you're more focused and confident, and you're going to learn how to master your emotions and stop feeling unnecessary guilt and overwhelm.

Plus, you'll learn how to set boundaries and say no to things without disappointing others, you're going to learn how to get organized and have full control over your schedule. No more running around with a never-ending to do, that we should be exhausted at the end of the day. Your calendar and what you spend time on will finally reflect your priorities. And you're going to learn actual mindfulness tools that work so you can be more calm and centered and less stressed and overwhelmed. Listen, friends, mindfulness and self-compassion are my jam. I have advanced degrees and training in this stuff. In fact, I'm the National resiliency expert for large physician organizations. And I got my compassion fatigue education from the guy who invented the term compassion fatigue. So the tools I teach are solid.

And lastly, I use my 20 years of leadership experience to teach you all the nuts and bolts of transformational leadership. You'll learn how to get promoted and be seen without overworking, how to speak up confidently how to deliver stellar onpoint presentations, like you're delivering a TED talk, how to negotiate so you'll always create wins, and so many other good things. Okay, so this is the last time the program is going to be available this year. And I really don't want you to miss out so you can go to my website right now, to learn more and join us at [VanessaCalderonMD.com/join](https://VanessaCalderonMD.com/join). That's [VanessaCalderonMD.com/join](https://VanessaCalderonMD.com/join). and join us for the Fall cohort. It starts on September 6. Okay, my friends, I am so excited about what's possible for you when you join us in the accelerator. Gets me all giddy inside doors closed on August 30th. So make sure you check us out [VanessaCalderonMD.com/join](https://VanessaCalderonMD.com/join) before then.

Alright, enough gushing, on to this week's podcast. Hi, friends. Welcome back to the podcast. So the next few episodes are a series on the transformative experience of coaching. And the reason why I decided to do this is that I had a conversation with one of my clients. And she was just sharing with me how her life has essentially been turned inside out for the better with coaching, and how she's so grateful that she knew me because she hadn't really ever understood or was super clear about what coaching was, it wasn't something that was in her world. But she knew me and she trusted me and she knew I was a coach. And she thought that I could probably help her. And so she dove in with me with coaching and it transformed her life. So then I started reflecting back on my experience with coaching. And I realized that in the beginning, I was also really resistant because I also didn't know much about coaching.

And I, you know, I realized that we just don't know what we don't know. And what I'm hoping to do with this series is give you all an insider's view of what it's like to experience the transformative power of coaching. And I thought that I would first start with my own experience, and then you'll hear in the next few episodes, the stories of a few of my clients. Okay, so, for me, I'll tell you this, when I was first introduced to the idea of coaching, I had no idea what it was. And I thought my life was fine. You know, I didn't think I needed to fix anything. I didn't think that there was a problem. And you know, what I didn't know is that the majority of the things I had been doing in my life are unintentional. I had been doing a bunch of stuff because I thought I had to or I had never really explored the deep underlying reasons why I had chosen to do things. I had never stopped to ask myself, you know, and at that time, I was doing really well in life, or at least I thought I was I was excelling in my career. I was super physically fit. I was running half marathons. I was married to a great guy, and we had just had our first kid. So I saw, you know, I have a great relationship with time, I'm pretty efficient. I was getting a ton of stuff done. I was, I had just finished this admin fellowship, I was a young mom, I was already a department chair and a medical director.

So I thought, you know, why would I need coaching? And I first decided to jump into coaching because my older sister had done it. And a year after she had gone through her coaching experience, she was still having these sustained changes that I had noticed, she was way more patient, and she was more kind. She was way more thoughtful, and she was way more aware. So I started getting really curious. And I decided, You know what, let me try this for myself. Because if something could have that profound of an effect, you know, it's not like, you know, you change just one thing, but her entire life, her entire ways have been had transformed. And they had sustained that transformation a year later, it made me really curious. So I decided to jump in. And my first coaching experience was a group coaching experience. And this is back when everything was live and in person. So I showed up to this room with a bunch of strangers, and I was super nervous, I was entirely unsure of what to expect. And I realized that the expectation was that we would share with the group and get vulnerable and get coached. And I was super afraid of that. Here's a bunch of strangers, I don't know if I'm ready to be vulnerable with them.

And so I asked myself, I was like, Listen, you know, you've taken all these days away from your family, and from work to be here, like, what is it that you want from this experience? And so I decided at that time that I was going to go all in and get the most out of this experience. So I did, I started raising my hand to get coached, I allowed myself to be really honest with myself, and with the group, I got really

vulnerable. And I was just really curious, I wanted to see you know, how much I could learn and how much I can improve along the way. And I just decided to be open with the process. And I quickly started to question all of my own beliefs. And it totally shattered my worldview. My first experience with coaching totally shattered my worldview, I realized that the motivation behind so much of what I had been doing was coming from two places, it was coming from fear. And it was coming from automation. And there were three key things that were really missing in my life. It was the intention, awareness, and self-compassion. So let me share a few examples with you. First, I'll share an example of how fear was really playing a huge role in how I was living my life. So at that time, I had mentioned I was incredibly physically fit. In fact, I had run a half marathon six months after my daughter was born. And I had PR, which means I had created a new personal record, I ran, you know, the half marathon with a pace of like seven minutes and 45 seconds. And I had always said that being fit mattered to me because I wanted to be healthy. But what I realized after coaching is that I had some serious body image issues, and I was super afraid to be overweight. And I had body image issues for the same reason that so many young girls do.

Because everywhere I looked on TV, in magazines, the stories that I was hearing is I was being told what size was the perfect size, and that if I wasn't that size, there would be something wrong with me. And the interesting thing about body image is that even though I was never overweight, I still had a body image issue. And you know, I never had an eating disorder. But I'd always been really disciplined. And I use that skill of discipline on what I put in my body. And I always prioritized exercise. So now let me just share the beautiful thing about coaching. It's that coaching helped me uncover that this body image issue existed, but it allowed me to approach it without judgment. So instead of having the awareness that I was having a body image issue, and then judging myself for it, I had the awareness that I was having a body image issue, and then I was able to approach it with self-compassion. And for me, I had this thought where I was like, Oh, of course, I have these fears about weight. Look at what society, you know, I was born into and look at what I've been taught and look at this like fat phobia has been fed into my brain from you know, the moment that I was old enough to watch TV. It's why the weight loss industry is a billion-dollar industry. And once I had that level of awareness, and I was able to approach it with self-compassion, I was able to shift the way I approached my exercise routine and my diet in a way that was way more intentional way more purposeful, and aligned with who I wanted to be. So now, you know, after coaching, I'm still physically fit, and I exercise regularly. But I'm no longer afraid I need to be a perfect size. Instead, for me, now, it's all about the mind and body connection, I exercise because I want to be strong. In fact, I'm trying out, you know, mixed martial arts next and jumping into kung fu.

And I've also eliminated or eliminated almost all animal products from my diet because I want my diet to be aligned with my values. And so exercising and being fit is still a huge part of who I am, it's just coming from a totally different place. Now, it's coming from self-compassion, awareness, and really just living a life of purpose. Let me share one more example with you. So that example was of something I had been doing that was based on fear. Now, let me share an example of something I had been doing based on just running on autopilot, which is how so many of us live our lives, you know until we have that moment of awareness. So before coaching, I had had this super clear five-year plan, I had become a department chief and Chief Medical Director, this was part of my plan, that I would become a department chief than a chief medical officer and then I would eventually become a CEO of a hospital.

And that had been my plan because I thought that that was what I was supposed to do. You know, I graduated residency, we bought a home, we were going to have kids and I was going to move up this career ladder. And that's just what I thought I was supposed to do. And so that's actually what I went to work to do. I did an admin fellowship, right after residency, and I got my first department chief offer while I was still a fellow, and I waited a few months until I finished the fellowship. And a few years after being a department chair, I got my first CMO job offer. And before I took the CMO job, I had already experienced coaching. And so I use my coaching tools to really examine if this is what I wanted to do next in my life. And what I realized was that you know, this actually wasn't in line with who I wanted it to be this career path wasn't aligned with me. And you see, before medicine, I was a social justice activist, I was working specifically on healthcare rights and racial disparities, empowering individuals and communities to fight for themselves and working with organizations to fight for the rights of marginalized communities. That stuff lit me up. That's the stuff I love to do. And so I used my coaching tools of awareness of intention and self-compassion. And I asked myself, How can I use all of my life experience and my passions to create a career path that is aligned with my values? And that's actually what brought me here today as the CEO of my own life and leadership coaching business because my passions are equity, diversity, leadership, and empowerment. And so I use my 20 years of leadership experience and my passion and experience in equity and diversity. And I've created a coaching practice to lift up communities of color, by directly empowering, black, brown, indigenous, and other people of color. Because I know from my years of experience as an activist, that the way we build a movement is by empowering the minds of one person at a time, by liberating the minds of one person at a time by giving one person just one person the tools that they need to think for themselves, to make decisions that are aligned with who they want to be.

That's how we start a movement. And that's what I've decided to do. In fact, one of my coaching programs, The Life and Leadership accelerator is specifically created for female physicians of color. So we can do this work in the community, it's a really amazing space to come in and learn and heal and grow with people that look just like you and care about your success just as much as you do. Fact, there's nothing like this out there. And I'm really proud of what I've created because I've seen the impact of the work and it's really profound. So, you know, if you are a female physician of color, I want to invite you to check out the leadership accelerator. Okay, so, I've talked a lot about mind and body in this episode. And I want to share one last story with all of you about the mind and body connection. And it's about how stress affects our bodies. And you'll see how this ties into the entire story in just a bit. Now, I think we all sort of cognitively understand that stress affects, you know, who we are in our body, okay? And the thing is, though, you know, we don't really sort of know-how that actually feels on our body unless we're totally in tune to our body. So I'm going to share an experience of what that actually looks like in practice. Because again, so many of us are living with levels of chronic stress, and we don't know how it's affecting our bodies, because we're not intimately connected with our bodies. So let me share an example of how this showed up for me. So many, many years ago, when I was a department chair, I had a whole sort of onslaught of things happen to me at the same time, we had just given birth to our second kid. And this is after three miscarriages. And so I had created a really healthy parental leave.

And you know, like 12 weeks off, I had stepped up the side and made sure everything was taken care of, and I was going to take a healthy parental leave. And while I was on leave, my mom got diagnosed

with stage four breast cancer. And around the same time, our department became my emergency department became critically short-staffed, because one of our Doc's was in the ICU, and I had to take him off the schedule. He also happened to be a night doc that worked 17 shifts a month, so we were in a pretty bad place with staffing. And then within weeks after that, my hospital put our Emergency Department contract up for RFP, which means a request for proposal, which means they weren't actually sure they still wanted our group to staff the department. So I cut my parental leave short, and I go back to work, so I can help cover the holes in the schedule. So now I have this newborn baby, and another kid under three, I'm trying to help cover all of these shifts on the schedule, working a ton of night shifts, while I'm still you know, trying to breastfeed and pump. I'm managing the hospital contract negotiations and the insecurities that the doc's at my site and the PAs have about their future jobs. And I'm the only doctor in my family. So I'm doing everything I can to be super present for my mom as she's going through her cancer treatments. So it's no surprise that I started to experience stress.

**Vanessa 16:51**

You know, when we experience stress in our bodies, our bodies release a hormone called cortisol. And cortisol travels to our entire body and tells your body to react to stress. Now, this stress response is awesome. And it works really well for acute stress. Acute stress is like you know, your life is actually in danger. You have a gun to your head, for example, or there's a car that's about to hit you. It's that the stress response is so quick. And it's so reflective, reflexive, that it's the reason why we're able to stay alive, why we're able to jump out of the way moving car. When you think about the acute stress response, I want you to think about, you know, like a primitive or primitive response. It's like why animals are able to survive in the wild.

The thing is, though, that our stress response is not hardwired for chronic stress. It's just not because if you think about somebody in the wild, like an animal in the wild, they're being chased by let's say, you know, a Zebra is being chased by a tiger, for example, the Zebra has cortisol that gets released in its body, and it escapes from that tiger. And eventually, the Zebra is able to go into a cave and take a nap and reset its body. And that's how our stress response is supposed to work. It's not supposed to be on all of the time. If that zebra was chronically being chased by a tiger its whole entire life, it would eventually get tired out and die, right? The Tiger would eat it. And you know, we're not constantly being chased by something like that in our lives. We're not constantly experiencing actual stress where we hit where our lives are actually in danger. But what we do experience on a daily basis is chronic stress. And when we experience chronic stress, when our stress response is on all of the time, cortisol continues to circulate in our bodies and starts to affect us in ways that we didn't even realize were possible.

We start experiencing a ton of weird aches and pains in our joints, joint pain, knee pain, back pain, chronic neck pain, we get sleep disturbances, and once your sleep gets disturbed, it's a whole onslaught of other issues. Because when you're not sleeping, you're not at your best you start you know, gaining weight because you're craving carbs and sugar. You start eating things you normally wouldn't eat. If you have any autoimmune issues like psoriasis or eczema. All of those things tend to get flared up when you're experiencing chronic stress. And you start experiencing a bunch of GI issues, things like constipation or diarrhea and things that seem like irritable bowel symptoms.

So let me just share with you how this manifested for me years ago, when I was experiencing chronic stress, the first thing that I experienced was neck pain. I had this really bad neck and back pain. And I thought, hey, no big deal. I know I carry my stress and my shoulders are just a little shoulder pain. I'll go and get a massage, no big deal. And then my sleep started getting disturbed. You know, because for me this wasn't just like, you know, three months of all these issues. It was over a year that I just kept thinking I'd be okay and I kept trying to deal with it. So then I started having sleep problems. times where I was training, for example meeting with the CEO of the hospital or negotiating the contract or the schedule. And my sleep started getting disturbed. And I ignored it. I thought no big deal. I've had sleep problems before. I know I'm probably just a little stressed out, no big deal. And then my milk production started going down. And you know, for my first kid, I was kind of like a cow, I made a ton of milk, I was pumping all the time, and I made a ton of milk. And so I was a little surprised when this was happening with my second kid. But I did not connect the dots, I didn't think it was at all related to stress. I thought maybe I was just getting older or there was something else going on, maybe my body was just changing. And then finally, I got this horrible toothache.

**Vanessa 20:43**

And I thought that I just had a cavity. So I went to the dentist. And it turned out I did not have a cavity. In fact, I was grinding my teeth at night. I had never done that before. But it turns out that when you get stressed out, you can grind your teeth. And I had been doing this all the time at night, I was grinding my teeth so much that I had this horrible toothache and I couldn't chew on the right side of my mouth. And that for me was my big aha moment. I was like, Wait for a second like I don't want to live my life like this. And I was super blessed because I had already experienced coaching before. But for this I went headfirst, I just dove back into coaching again.

And with the help of coaching and resiliency work, I turned my life around. And I didn't quit medicine or leave my leadership role after that. In fact, I was a department chair for many years after that. What I did though, was I recreated the way I had been doing things and I recreated my life in a way that was aligned with the life I wanted to be living, you know, I didn't want to just be working, I wanted to be present for my family. And I didn't want to have so much stress and be so disconnected from my body that I didn't even realize that these things were causing a problem. And I share this with you because I, you know, first I hope none of you are experiencing that same level of stress that I had. But if you are because I know that it's common.

If you are, I want you to know that you're not alone. And you don't have to keep living your life that way. There's another way. And this is why I share the story with you because for me, I wouldn't have known there was another way until I had experienced coaching and really questioned all of this for myself, you know, I wouldn't have realized that there's something else I could have been doing with my life a different way to keep doing what I loved to do, but in a way that wasn't causing me to be physically ill, for example. So you know, again, if you're a female physician of color, I want you to join us in the Life and Leadership accelerator because you know, I want to help you and that is a great community to come into to experience coaching and get all of the tools you need to transform your life. And if you're not a female physician of color, I still want to help you DM me on Instagram or Facebook and I'll put a link to both the accelerator and my Instagram handle in the show notes so that you can reach out to me. Okay, cuties you just got a super deep dive into my brain and my life before and after coaching. I

hope that was helpful for all of you and have a super fantastic powerful week I will see you all next week. Adios

**Vanessa** 23:24

Hey, friends, you know all those times when you wanted to say no, but you felt guilty? Well, I created a free guide just for you. It's the ultimate five-step guide to stop people pleasing, where I teach you how to say no guilt-free. Plus, you'll be added to my mailing list and that's where all the magic happens. You'll have access to my free resources, training, and weekly notes of inspiration. You've got to check it out. There's a link in the show notes. Alright, see you next week. Adios