



# Coaching for Creatives

*Finding Clarity in the Chaos*

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BY KRISTYN MILLER



Let me take you back to 2012. Everything felt stuck - I wasn't happy in my job, and I didn't really know what to do about it. I lived in a perpetual heavy fog - months full of days where I was "doing" a lot (hi, recovering workaholic right here), but nothing was changing - especially my attitude about the whole thing.

A friend of mine mentioned that she was working with a coach. He'd been super helpful for her - she was using words like path and clarity and evolution, and she was talking about taking systematic next steps in her business to bring it into alignment with her life and beyond. These are all things I'd been desperate for, but hadn't known where to start!



I started working with this coach too - every two weeks we'd hop on the phone for an hour and dive into my messy, foggy brain space. I filled notebooks worth of notes from our calls - flashes of clarity and moments of doubt. I got homework after every call - and even doing that felt like a little bit of clarity, which felt like momentum.

It wasn't therapy - this wasn't about my childhood or my marriage or my past failures (of which there are plenty) - it was about really understanding what I wanted out of this precious time I have on the planet. In our work together, we were getting to the heart of what mattered to me - how to create and build and be in the world, naming the thoughts and circumstances that seemed to get in the way, and getting a better understanding of how to use my own intuition as a guide to make the next move - tactically, creatively, and on a deeper level too.

It would be wholly true to say that the decision to work with that coach changed the trajectory of my life - and I've been working with amazing coaches ever since. After that time of fog, I found a new job where I thrived, started my photography business, and eventually took the leap to being a full-time photographer and a creative coach, too. I'm constantly remaking my life, but this version of it (which I love so much) all started with deciding to hire a coach.





A good business and creative coach helps you see the next right step clearly, and pushes you to trust your own creative instincts – right to where all the magic really happens for you and that vision of your life that you want to create. Once you feel what it’s like to align your life and your work with your inside creative self, it’s hard not to believe that anything might be possible.

It’s often in those times of transition - whether it be an evolution in our creativity or business as it is, or when we’re looking to make a leap into a whole new space and season - when hiring a coach feels like it makes the most sense. Working with a good coach gives us the opportunity to ditch the perpetual heavy fog we can sometimes find ourselves in, and tune in to what our inside self already knows to be true about the direction we want our lives to go.

And it all begins by asking the question: What do I really want?

While it may seem counterintuitive, starting with those big picture questions helps lead us to clarity about all the daily things we need to do to get there - and who we need to be in our business and our lives to stay there. As solopreneurs, we’re bouncing on a daily basis through a to-do list a mile long (one that never really gets shorter) - and taking the time to ask these deep questions actually builds the foundation for every tactical choice that comes afterward as we build our business and refine our creative voice.

Often times, clients come to coaches and mentors like myself with really tactical questions as the starting place for our discussions - “How should I price my work?” “How do I market myself when there are a gajillion other photographers in my area?” “Everyone else is offering xyz, can you help me do that too?”

When it comes to running a photography business there might be 100 different ways to get to the same goal, and which path feels right for you could be really different than what feels right for someone else. Knowing which action steps to take when it comes to the nitty gritty of the business (think branding, marketing, communicating with your clients, intel about gear, financials, building a support team...the list goes on) can feel completely overwhelming when you’re trying to make those decisions without knowing which direction ultimately aligns with your needs for your life. After all, running your own business is best done as a marathoner, not a sprinter.

This is when coaching can be a really good way to get the tactical, practical guidance that can help you over the long term - and it’s not the same as taking what someone else is doing in their own business and applying it to yours. After all, our creativity is different - why would our business models be exactly the same?

With some of those big picture answers in place about what really matters to you (from the money you need to make to the pace of the life you want to lead), you can begin to evaluate your strategic business choices by looking at what others have done and assessing what's in alignment with your own values, creative needs, and longer-term goals. It's so much easier to feel confident about how you price yourself, or the options you offer your clients, or even how you talk about your work on social media, when you have a strong foundation. What anchors you to your present and propels you into your vision for the future?

Community plays such an important part of this too - having a community like the one within the NAPCP to lean on for ideas and fellowship and support is so key as you're making choices about what fits for your business and your longer-term goals. I know I've got a short list of dear friends in the business who I look to as sounding boards on a daily basis for everything from constructive feedback on my images to a safe space to talk about challenging client situations. These kinds of friends and communities are vital places and relationships within which we grow and push each other.

But a coach is different. A good coach holds you accountable, and objectively pushes you to go deeper and dream bigger - in part because by financially investing in a coaching session or program (and all the hard work that you do as a part of that experience), you've made a tangible commitment to your future self.



## WISE WORDS

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## WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

If you're in a season where clarity about what to do next feels far off (even if it's something tactical like how to change your pricing for 2020, or how to streamline your workflow), take some time to sit with some key questions:

1. *At the end of this year, this decade, what will matter to me in my work and in my life?*
2. *Am I honoring those things on a daily basis? If not, what's in the way?*
3. *Am I feeling the tug of trying something new, or the comfort of growing into what I've already created?*
4. *Do I know what I need out of my business (financially, etc) and my creative work to fuel my life in positive ways? Am I getting it?*
5. *What makes me the most excited about the work I do?*
6. *What do I wish I really didn't have to do?*
7. *If I could solve/evolve/adjust/tweak/change one thing about my business THIS MINUTE to change my whole outlook, what would it be? What's in the way?*

## FINDING THE RIGHT COACH

Once you've spent some time sitting with those questions (even if you come up blank!), you're ready to start looking around for the right coach to help you. Here are some tips for finding the right person to work with:

1. *Ask for recommendations from friends and colleagues - people they've worked with and had a good experience with, too! Make sure you ask what areas the coach was most helpful in, so you can get a sense for how that person might be helpful for you.*
2. *Take some time to explore the online persona of the coaches you're interested in working with. What do they share? How do they talk about their work and their values? Does it align with your approach to the world?*
3. *If you know you have tactical questions about certain aspects of your business, keep an eye out for someone who has a background in that area and has succeeded in ways that showcase that they can put what they know to work beyond just theory.*
4. *Most coaches offer a free initial call - a chance to meet each other in person or virtually, to chat about what you're looking for and what they offer. This call is so important, because like meeting anyone new for the first time, it gives you a chance to see if you feel comfortable with them, their energy, and their approach to coaching. It might take a little shopping around, but finding the right fit is key!*

There are so many ways to find fulfillment in this job that we get to do with families and kids in front of our cameras - it's remarkably special and important work! Grounding ourselves in the big picture, and defining the directions in which we're growing and evolving, honors not just our clients - but our creativity and our purpose, too.

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