



## Love Write Podcast

Speakers: Venessa and Towanna

You're listening to the Love Write Unplugged Podcast, with you host, Dr. Venessa Marie Perry, where we talk about all things love and relationships.

Venessa Today on the *Love Write Unplugged Podcast*, we're interviewing Towanna Burrouss, President of Coach Diversity and Founder of Black Life Coaches. Good Morning, Towanna.

Towanna Hello, how are you?

Venessa I'm wonderful, how are you?

Towanna I am doing fantastic, thank you for inviting me.

Venessa Thank you for making the time. I know that it took a little while for us to get scheduled but we're happy to have you on the *Love Write Unplugged Podcast* today, and what I wanted to do, since you are the Coaching Guru, I wanted to talk about Life Coaching. I think that a lot of people hear the words "Life Coaching" they may think of a period of time when a lot of people were saying "I need a Life Coach" and "What is Life Coaching", and everybody was getting a coach. Why don't you tell us, first, what is "Life Coaching"?



Towanna You know, there truly has been quite a buzz over the last decade, and it has been trending for about ten years now. But Life Coaching in its simplest form is the ability to work with someone who is very committed or has the desire to transform their way of thinking to move their personal goals and objectives forward to strategize a vision for their lives and have that fulfilled. To literally be able to say what you want, when you want it, and how you want it.

That coach is your accountability partner who is on that ride with you along the way, keeping you aware and connected to your goals so that you're able to complete them and do it in a timely way. A way that fits your life to where it resonates with you, where your values aren't compromised, where you feel stronger, more empowered, more about you and less about what other people want from you.

So, it is truly an incredible skill to be able to be a coach, but it's also an incredible journey that, if you've never had a coach, and if you've ever had a coach that's not been properly trained. I understand that some people may have their differences of opinion, but a properly trained coach can have an amazing relationship with you and create magic. It really is a beautiful thing.

Venessa Right. I love your description. It is so thorough and complete. It really talked about transformation and accountability. I want to dig just a little bit deeper on that, real value as it relates to coaching.

For someone who is thinking about coaching, what's the real value in it?



Towanna      You know, the value is what you bring to it. So, it's not the value that the coach brings. It's the invaluable desire that you have to make your dreams come true, to change your life, to build better relationships, to have an amazing life. It's how you measure the value of that, the outcome, where you want to be. That's why it's an invaluable opportunity and an invaluable investment, because it's about you, it's not about the coach.

To frame it properly would mean I'm doing this because I'm playing full out for me. And so, it's invaluable because what I want out of life, and what I'm about to do next, I don't want to fall short. I want to make it happen. I want to be my most powerful self. It is important to view it as the most important contribution or gift that you can give yourself.

Venessa      Right. Coaching is really about where you are, currently, and where you would like to go versus counseling, which is maybe issues that you dealt with in your past.



Towanna That's correct. There are differences between coaching, counseling, therapy, and mentoring.

In coach training, we get into this, because a coach who is on the journey to be a coach, to train to be a coach, that's very important to know – that there is a delineation between all of them and that there are times that you are a consultant, and you are also coaching. There are times you are in therapy, and your therapist has a skill or has been trained in coaching. So they do both and we call those people coach clinicians.

There are variations of your ability to apply the coaching skills to your experience and your education to what you contribute to the world. So, yes, counseling is the look back. It is the frame of why things happened. Like with therapy, "Why was this?" "What was the beginning of this?"

Although coaching does look at the past, it isn't nurture or develop context around the past. What it does is that it looks at the past, creates a framework to understand exactly where it came from but it then becomes part of the journey to understanding why you are the way you are or why you tend to do the things that you do as you continue to move forward, so that you are not triggered to behave that way again or that you are not triggered to withdraw and not achieve your goal. Those cues from the past set you up for an amazing agenda for your future.

Venessa Right. Absolutely. That was really key, that last piece. I think that you're absolutely right about that. Your past is setting you up for the future and helping you develop a new reality, a new roadmap for you to follow. I think that that's particularly key.

What does the actual process look like? You've given us an overview of coaching and what it is. Walk us through the process. Someone contacts you and they say "Towanna, I need a coach, and I want to work with you".



Towanna You know, I'm so glad you are asking these questions, because this is helping your audience to understand and take the mystery out of coaching and to help the understanding of the value of coaching. When you're looking for a coach, the process is quite simple but yet it requires your own due diligence while you're selecting your coach.

Most often a coach will offer a consultation that will allow you to spend some time – 15 minutes, 30 minutes, to get to know that coach. I would create an opportunity for us to kind of get to know each other, virtual tea or coffee as they call it nowadays. Just discuss what you would like to accomplish, and establish a coaching agreement to understand exactly where you want to go.

From that call we're able to connect. You'll be able to determine, based on what we call discovery sessions or complimentary sessions, whether you and I are a good fit or if it even makes sense for me to take you on this journey of self-discovery so that you can accomplish your goals. Not everyone is a good fit.

You've got to think about, again, the value of what you're about to do and how important it is to you. Not just anyone can take you down that road. Not just anyone should be partnered with you on that journey. That discovery session is so important because it allows you to just check in and just say "You know what? I like her or his vibe" "I appreciate their style and their strength" "respect their expertise, and I look forward to seeing how their expertise can shed light on where I want to go".

This is the conversation that you're having with yourself while you're on that discovery call. If there is a great match, then the next step is for the coach to give you an agreement. This is more like a contract. That contract is, basically, whatever the terms you agreed to for the number of sessions that you want to have.



Now, it's important that people understand that it's not a one-and-done kind of thing. Coaching is a series of sessions that will allow you to achieve your goals. If you look at the invaluable gift that you're about to give to the world, and you think that it's so amazing, do you think it's going to happen overnight? Absolutely not.

Venessa      Right.

Towanna      The partner that you choose in a coach is the one that is helping you to unpack and carry that out. You want to make sure that you have enough time to invest in the process, the transformation process, and you also want to make sure that you have enough resources, revenue, all the different tools and equipment and resources that you need to make that thing happen. The coach is going to take you on that journey, but you've got to make sure that you're ready for the journey.

It's not the coach's position to create those things for you, unless they're in a consulting and coaching relationship with you. If they're a coach and a consultant, they're going to bring things to the table. But, if it's just coaching, and again, like I said earlier, there is a combination of styles and approaches that make the relationship and the transformation happen. You want to make sure that you're ready financially, that you have the right resources, and that this individual is the right fit.

That is a part of the beginning process. So, that time that you invest in it, and the resources that you invest in it, after that, you may not, once your goal is achieved, need to continue on. Sometimes coaches are so connected with the client that the client ends up saying "I want to expand, I want to keep going", and then that relationship continues.



Venessa Absolutely. You identify a coach, you make sure that you have the right fit, you identify that you're in the right place and the right frame of mind in terms of moving forward, and then you set a series of goals and move through that process until you get to a place where you've met that goal or you want to start working on something else.

Towanna That's right, and you want to keep it moving. That's right.

Venessa Got it. Talk about some of the things that people can get coaching on.



Towanna

Oh my goodness, you know, I'm so amazed at some of the different coaches that are out here. There are coaches who specialize in grief and specialize in working with someone after losing a loved one. Grief specialists are what I like to call them. You can work with someone who is grieving, you can work with someone for health and wellness on a particular weight loss goal or just lifestyle change so that they can become more healthy. Not necessarily about weight, moreso about making more time for yourself, more self-care. There are lifestyle coaches. There are coaches who specialize in relationships, romantic or familial. If you want to build better relationships, there are people who specialize in effective communications, how to build better relationships or how to improve intimacy and become more transparent, more self-aware, and being more confident. There are intimacy coaches. They're actually the most fun because they have so much energy, they have so much honesty, and they're so open because they deal in a space that requires you to be vulnerable and at the same time, confident. They're a lot of fun to work with and to learn more about how they deliver their services to the world.

The spectrum includes business coaches and then there are coaches that work with teams to specifically those that work with a certain demographic, very, very narrow. For example, only working with professional women, only working with teens from urban communities, only working with men who are reentering (society) from being incarcerated for a number of years. They helping people transform their lives from almost anything that you can think of; that is why it is so amazing.

It's a skill that's transferrable. Remember earlier I said that it is a skill in our profession because if your resume says that you are an IT Project Manager, which is what I came from, as a IT Project Manager, my skillset of coaching is added to my ability to help managers manage not only projects, but the resources, the people resources, to be more productive, to be more powerful, to be more proactive and less reactive, to have 100% engagement. That then



leads to talk about leadership coaching and management coaching that will allow them to become stronger and become resonant leaders within their organization.

Venessa

Wow. That's key. I think about how there are so many different coaches right now.

Years ago, before I became a coach, I remember working with several different coaches before I actually found one. But, there was one in particular who I worked with, who I felt, at the time, and I think that this may have been because the coaching profession was so new, this was probably about 15 years ago, who I felt like I wasn't getting the value that I needed from her. It was a situation where I was in transition from work, and I needed some help to try to figure out what my next move was. This woman just said "Okay, we'll meet in person". We just kind of talked. I remember leaving those sessions each week feeling like I wasn't moving forward until finally, I just stopped and realized that this totally wasn't working.

Then I met another coach who literally was just as you described. She was very organized. She was my accountability partner. She very much was focused on what I wanted to achieve and how I wanted to move forward and helping me develop a plan to move forward. I thought that that was really, really key, and it was a real turnaround for me.

I had spent a lot of money on two different coaches before I found this third coach that was fantastic. In working with her, despite being a clinician myself, that really encouraged me to do coaching, as well, because I realized that here was a level of skill in which you could really help people transform their lives. It was really all about transformation. The difference from counseling is that you're not transforming. I mean, you may be, if you're a coach clinician, but for the most part, you're working on those things that are in the



past. I appreciate the value of coaches who really are honed in on transforming the clients that they work with.

Towanna Absolutely. I couldn't agree with you more.

I think that it was key when you said that your first coach was meeting with you, and you guys just talked. It's important – it's a tell-tale sign that you're not properly paired with the right coach. It's not a girlfriend relationship. This is not friends sitting down having a conversation.

Like I said earlier, the value of what you're about to present to the world, the transformation that you're about to make, the transition from being to an employee to an employer, the move from being a single woman to being a married woman, the transition from being a woman without a family, without children, to being a parent, those major decisions that people make in their lives require a certain level and skillset. Like anything else, with all due respect, if I'm talking to you, and you're just a girlfriend, you weren't properly trained.

That's not what this is about and so I'm so glad that you ended up meeting someone else that gave you the support that you needed, that gave you the opportunity to develop that plan of action, because it is about the roadmap to getting where you want. That life plan or that learning plan, it depends on, some people have the terminology – we do visions and dreams, and we also do learning plans. However you like to describe it, without that, and creating those milestones and objectives and then getting an established coaching agreement at the beginning of every phone call, those are the basics of coaching. Those are foundational principles. If that's not happening at a minimum, then it's not really going to serve you much, so I'm so glad that you found someone who set the tone for you, so that when you moved into the coaching space you knew how important it was for you to be trained properly and how to serve your clients better.



Venessa      Exactly. Absolutely. You have taken it on to actually begin to now train coaches and develop coaches. You've got the Black Life Coaches and you've got Coach Diversity. You're making sure that people are properly trained all the way around. Tell me first about Black Life Coaches, because that's what you've had the longest, and then we'll talk about your new venture.



Towanna

The Black Life Coaches Network we started in 2011 because there was a gap in the marketplace where we didn't have enough coaches of color. We didn't have enough coaches whether they were black, Latina, Asian. There weren't enough of us.

I started out to fulfill requirements for a corporate contract, and a number of my clients were saying "We need more coaches of color that reflect what the workforce looks like". It was just so difficult. This was over 10 years ago. When I started the Network, it was because, first of all, I wanted to establish a community of people who were in the industry who needed support, who may not be building a client list because it was so new for some of them at the time so I wanted to offer my support. I wanted to be available to those who were in love with coaching and wanted to do more of it. They needed to build their businesses so they could continue to do it and not go back to work or go back to their old life.

The Network was established for two purposes. One, to help support my clients and keep coaches working and two, to establish a community of coaching professionals who can be supportive of one another on this journey of business building because so many coaches don't have MBAs. They're not businesspeople. They're in a helping profession where it's more of a soft science than anything. It's hard for them sometimes to understand the marketing, the advertising, the sales connections, the sales funnels, and such that you need to be relevant and visible.

That's why we established it. We went from very natural, organic building. We were moving at a rate of about 100 members a year, and that was without advertising, just people looking for community. We found each other naturally, and by the time we get to 2017, we're over 600 individuals in the coaching industry and we are international.



A gap in the market also revealed that some of the coaches who had attended certain schools weren't properly trained. These schools that they attended offered short online programs. There wasn't enough practice. There weren't enough fundamentals, and in order for me to keep these coaches working, I decided that it was time for me to get into the training space and create a school that would allow the coaches within my community to really hone in on those skills to keep working and be excited about coaching.

Coach Diversity was established for two purposes. One, to keep coaches' skillsets up and to get them the skills if they're not skilled and get them ready and marketable. We help fill in the gaps in the training that is needed to be a coach here because certification now, is required. So many people are out coaching without certification and with improper training.

Now when you go to a client, they're asking for your certification. They want to know where you were certified. They want to know whether the program has been accredited by the International Coach Federation. They're asking more questions now because, although it's not a regulated profession, we're still dealing with people's lives, and there's still liability associated with it. It's so important that people respect the ethics that go with being a coach and also the skills that we're using to move people in different directions.

Could you imagine the damage you could do to someone as you're coaching them to make a decision, and it's the absolute wrong decision and the liability attached to that? It's significant. Coach Diversity was born to ensure that we fill the gap in for coaches of color who actually needed more training so they can stay busy. But, at the same time, everything I've ever done has touched community and built communities in a powerful way.

Our entire mission is to reach those change agents and those thought leaders in the community who are really committed to improving the conditions of their community. We do that without



avoiding the discussions around race and gender and equality and social justice and around ethnicity and lifestyle choices. We're very bold about that because we believe that because America is now becoming more colorful and people are coming in with the immigration, obviously we have a lot of immigrants in the United States now, and the descendants of these immigrants that are now in the United States are going to cause a significant shift in the way America looks today. We have to prepare. That is the second mission of Coach Diversity, and I could not be more excited and more proud of the work. It's just phenomenal.

Venessa      That sounds incredible. You are really not only preparing a diverse cadre of coaches, but you're also training individuals on what it means to be a diverse coach, to be culturally competent, to deal with diversity and inclusion, correct?

Towanna      That's right – diversity and inclusion and being able to coach across those diverse lines. So often we only want to coach people that we're comfortable with. And so, if you are interested in being a little bit more bold and a little bit more empowered around and in the coaching industry, then Coach Diversity is the kind of training that you would want to become certified through. We're helping you to become more empowered in that way. One, you're not leaving money on the table and two, you're doing yourself the wonderful service of becoming more open to the world that is changing around you.

Venessa      Wow, that's incredible. When is the next coaching class starting for Coach Diversity?



Towanna Thank you so much, I appreciate you for even acknowledging that.

In August. Right now we have two full courses a year, and our next one is coming up in August. Our weekend of training is August 25-27<sup>th</sup> in the Washington, DC area. Again, that's August 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> of 2017, and we have two classes a year. Right now we do, but that's about to change really quickly, especially since the demand is increasing. I invite any one of you to visit our website and to learn more about the work that we're doing and our desire to really impact the world with an amazing group of people.

Venessa And, how long is the coaching program?

Towanna There are two paths to training. One path is the non-certified path which is being able to obtain the coaching skills that are the foundational principles that you need, the core competencies, and that's just 30 hours of training. That's three days of training face-to-face. The certified path requires you to do over 125 training hours. That's three weekends in the DC area. Three weekends that we spend across six months with a lot of work in between, a lot of virtual training, and a lot of practice and coaching to help you really sharpen those skills. The certification path is a little longer but it's still within six months of learning.

Venessa Individuals, once they go through this training program, they are certified through the International Coach Federation or some other body?



Towanna Yes. We are accredited through the International Coach Federation, in addition to Coach Diversity. We are an accredited program, so you become a Certified Empowerment Coach through Coach Diversity. If you decide to become a member of the International Coach Federation, you take those credentials that we've given you, and you let them know that you attended our school because we're accredited with them, and then you are trained at the Certified level, the TCC level.

There are three levels of training but you have enough hours to qualify for TCC level. But most people, when they finish the program, they're still having to build their client list and build their number of hours that they work with clients. That's how ICF really separates different levels of skills because you have to have enough practice in the field to qualify for every level all the way through to top tier which is Master Coach.

Venessa Excellent. If folks want to contact you regarding Coach Diversity, where can they find you?

Towanna They can visit our website at [coachdiversity.com](http://coachdiversity.com) and they're always welcome to email me and/or the team. I can be reached at [towanna@coachdiversity.com](mailto:towanna@coachdiversity.com).

Venessa What about those individuals who may want to become a member of the Black Life Coaches?



Towanna Yes, we're all under one big company now, so Black Life Coaches is a part of the Coach Diversity family. We also have the Asian Life community for Asian Pacific Islanders, we also have Latino Life which is the Latino Community Coaches. We have a number of different affinity groups now. If you're interested in being a member of the Black Life Coaches Network, you can use [towanna@coachdiversity.com](mailto:towanna@coachdiversity.com) and we will definitely provide you the information to participate as a member of that network.

Venessa Wow. That's fantastic. You have really grown exponentially. If you are interested in any type of coaching, you want to get certified, you want to learn more about it, definitely go to [coachdiversity.com](http://coachdiversity.com) and Dr. Towanna can definitely help you get started on that path. We just thank you for talking with our audience today and really giving us the foundation of Life Coaching because as I said, a lot of people don't know what life coaching is or they hear about it and they want additional information. I think that our listeners will really find this to be valuable. I just thank you so much.

Towanna Dr. Perry, I appreciate you and your audience. I want to congratulate you on all of your accomplishments and you're moving forward and I am sure that there is so much more ahead, but I definitely want to show appreciation for operating this space as a qualified woman, I am so honored to have been a guest on your show and if you ever need me to come back, do not hesitate to reach out.

Venessa Oh definitely. Do not be surprised if we call on you again because we greatly appreciate you!

Towanna Thank you so much.



Venessa      Take care.

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