

# Ep #199: Safe Spaces and Accountability in Coaching Containers with Alex Ray - Part 2

## Full Episode Transcript



With Your Host

**Simone: Grace Seol**

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Welcome to *Joyful Marketing*! I'm Simone Seol, and I teach you how to get your life coaching practice fully booked, without having to pay for ads, buy Instagram followers, or complicated sales funnels. It's not rocket science, and you can do it too. Listen on to find out how.

Simone Seol: Hey, everybody. Today's episode is a continuation of the conversation that was released in the previous episode, Safe Spaces and Accountability in Coaching Containers with Alex Ray. We start mid-conversation, picking up where we left off yesterday, enjoy.

We came up with incredibly similar policies for our advanced mastermind containers without ever talking to each other. We independently made these decisions that were incredibly similar. I would love to talk about that.

Alex Ray: Same. You want to go first? You want to share first?

Simone: I'll go first. Okay, so, because I've been thinking about all these things for a while, and I spent a lot of time thinking, thinking, thinking about how I wanted to make my containers a safe space. One thing that I want to say before I forget to say it is that I am not at all presenting myself as like, "Oh, I got this all figured out perfectly, now." No, I don't either. All of it is an experiment.

And I bet if Alex and I got together in another two years to talk about this, we'll probably be talking about all the mistakes we're making in 2022. My mantra is, I'm always going to be making spectacular mistakes and learning ritually, from all of them, right? So, I'm probably making a new set of mistakes as I go along, but you know what? I'm going to be fucking sure that I learn from all of them.

So, here's the experiment, that I'm conducting now with my mastermind, which is to make accountability explicit. Meaning, up until now, I haven't seen examples where people go into a coaching container, especially a

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group coaching container, and be able to... You kind of have to guess at what you think the leader thinks that they're accountable for.

When you think that they're not being accountable for something, you have to be, you have a very hard choice of; do I say something and be gaslit? Or, do I just brainwash myself into thinking that this is okay, and I should change my own thoughts about it? And so, I want it to be very explicit from the beginning.

We are all accountable to a set of standards here. I am accountable to a set of standards. And all of you are accountable to a set of standards for yourselves and to each other, for all of us to have the greatest experience. So, I literally made a list of I think it was, I don't know, seven things, ten things.

Here are my commitments to you, and I expect you to hold me hold me accountable for them. One, I commit to making this space, a safe space for you to disagree with me. For you to do things differently for... That was one of them. It went on and on.

Those questions were based on what I thought were my most important values that I wanted to express through this container. I also wrote a list of... Because accountability is two-way, right? I don't have power over every single experience you have. If I pretended to, that would be a different form of gaslighting.

So, if you want to get the most out of this experience, this is going to be your commitment to yourself. You're going to ask for what you need. You are going to... What else was there? I can't remember. But it was all things that again, I thought reflected the highest values of the container.

We are going to do two sets of evaluations. I'm going to ask everyone to fill out a survey, anonymous, with these questions like, did Simone succeed in

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the commitment that she made to question number one? What about this other commitment?

And then, they're going to rate their assessment of how I did from one to five. Like, "Yes, she lived up to that commitment. That one, I'm not so sure." Then, they're going to be given a chance to talk about it. You don't have to put your name on it. All of their feedback gets to me and I get to find out my students perception of whether I lived up to my own commitments.

Alex: Wooh, I love this.

Simone: It's making my butthole clench all the way up. You know what? I would rather do this, and learn about how I can do better as a teacher and as a leader of a space, than protect my ego, and not be curious, and not learn, and just la-la-la-la, everybody loves me, right?

Oh, by the way, Alex, that's another thing that I was thinking a lot about is, my ADHD brain.

Alex: I'm too, so it's good.

Simone: How easy it is when lots of people love you, and you are known, and you're successful. How easy it is to just cherry pick what you want to believe about yourself and what you want to hear. And, whoever disagrees or whoever has criticism for you, to be like, "Oh, well, they're just haters," and just shut that out of your mind. It's so easy to do that the more fans you have. Why would you listen to critics and honestly examine yourself when you could just listen to all your fans? It's so much less threatening for your ego.

Alex: It is. It is so much more comfortable.

Simone: It's so much more comfortable. I decided that's something I really want to watch out for, as I gain no more visibility and become wealthier. I've

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seen so many leaders just drink that poison of...I mean, starting with our biggest political leaders, right? Why do they do fucked up shit? Because they're only listening to yes-men.

The people around them, that they surround themselves with, they're acolytes. They're like, "You're so great. Whatever you do is amazing. Don't listen to those haters." They curate the information that reaches the leaders. This happens on giant political stages, and happens with entrepreneurs. And I do not fucking want that to happen to me.

So, if I have been entrusted with the care of these human beings' minds for this purpose, if I'm not living up to my commitments... That doesn't mean everybody has to like what I do all the time. I actually don't care if you like what I do. I just care that we are all here for the same transformation, and that we are being up-front, and honest, and explicit about what our commitments are to each other and how we live up to them.

What was I saying? Oh, yeah, so, that's one of the things that I am doing, and, I, as a human being, it's fucking awful and scary. It's what I'm doing next to learn more about how to be a more ethical leader.

Your turn. Pass the baton to you. Can you tell us about...? I know you did something very similar, but can you tell us specifically about the part where what you have your clients do when they feel unsafe, or when they have a problem with something in the container? Because I was like, "Ah, mike drop! So good."

Alex: Yeah, absolutely. So, I thought of this when creating the... I did a similar thing with an agreement for my mastermind we started back in January. I love your list of commitments. I do have a section on there where, here's how I will show up for you. Here's how I want you to show up for yourself.

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Very similar, but you've also got my brain thinking, how can I make it a fun list of these items, that makes it even clearer and more obvious?

Simone: Fun/terrifying.

Alex: Terrifying. Oh, my God, when I was putting it together, I was so uncomfortable because I decided, okay, well... I felt there was some accountability lacking in other spaces that I've been, in many spaces I've been.

For example, this is kind of hard to just drop in here, maybe, whatever. I started therapy in second grade; I was in and out since then. I've been on and off medication, and I was actively on depression medication, when I attempted suicide back in 2017. I was telling my psychiatrist that the medication wasn't working, but he refused to switch it.

And I also, almost got in a car accident on another medication that he had me on. I ran off the road, thankfully didn't hit anything and got back on. But I fully fell asleep at the wheel, crossed two lanes of bumper-to-bumper traffic, and went into the grass. So anyway, shit, like that.

But I didn't know; who can I go to? I don't know. And now I know, there's probably a board or something somewhere I could go to and be like, "Hey, I had this really awful experience."

Simone: But they don't exactly tell you, "If you have a problem with what this doctor is offering you, here's where you can go to." But they don't tell us, so how the fuck are we supposed to know?

Alex: Right. So, experiences like that when I was creating mine, I was like, "Oh boy, this is going to make my asshole pucker. I'm going to throw up here. Why am I about to do this? But I need to." I put my assistant's contact information... So, I said, "Hey, if you have a problem with me ever, here's my contact information. Please reach out to me directly. And if you do not

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feel comfortable doing that, please contact my assistant,” so at least there's someone else and he can be a mediator, he can kind of help out.

Now, with a new iteration, now that I'm ICF (International Coaching Federation) accredited, I'm going to put the contact information for the ICF because I also, if I'm not adhering to their standards, I can lose my accreditation. So, that's a nice way of handing some very obvious power... Again, I do believe that everyone, whether they're Dom or Sub, has power but often, they forget.

I'm making it really obvious, like, “Here's the contact information. FYI, I'll be examined by a board and if I'm found to have failed, then there goes my certification. You've got the power, friend.” So, my new assistant will be on there, the ICF board, with clear directions how to contact them.

Again, I want to vomit when I think about that, but also, I think that's necessary. I think if it didn't make me nervous, then I wouldn't care. So, I'm glad it makes me nervous. And if I didn't put it on there, then, why not? Do I really think that I'm going to do something that's going to screw everyone over?

Simone: Right. When I was thinking about creating these client evaluations of whether I'm doing my job, and whether they're getting what they came for, I was talking to a mentor of mine about how scary that was, and how much I didn't want to do it. And, they were asking me why. I went through the exact same sort of self-coaching; what am I afraid of?

That they're going to say, a bunch of people are going to say, “Simone is doing a terrible job?” Okay, so what am I afraid about that? Am I afraid that it's true? Then, in which case, what am I doing where I'm insecure? Or, is it because something else and I have to go all the way to what I was really afraid of? And from that, it was horrible, uncomfortable, terrible, scary work.

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But when I got to the end of it, it was really like, I would rather learn how to be a worthy steward, a worthier steward of these kinds of things. I would rather learn how to be a better teacher and coach through the pain of being told that I'm doing it wrong, and examine my role in that.

And the thing is, if somebody says, "Hey, Simone, you're doing it wrong. I don't agree with what you're doing. I don't like it," it doesn't necessarily mean that I look at those circumstances and agree to change my behavior, or agree that I need to do something differently.

Sometimes it could be, "You have thoughts, and I can totally honor your thoughts. And also, you know what? These are my standards, and this is my philosophy, and I stand behind it." So, those conflicts may, and probably will always, happen and how do I want to show up when those things happen? Am I just going to hide in fear of those things happening? Or, am I going to learn how to show up with my values and who I want to be when I navigate those conversations?

And also, think critically about what kind of different decisions I can make in enrollment, and in terms of how I market, how I teach, to have less of those things happen over time. Right? So, there's all this learning, all this maturation for me, that was on the other side of me being willing to feel the discomfort of my own clients, whom I love, telling me that I'm not living up to my commitments, or that I'm not doing it well.

Alex: Yeah, the realization that helped me the most is the concept of the yin and yang. That realizing, honestly, no matter what we do, we are going to do both good and harm. While that can be a really discouraging realization, I think it's actually a really inspiring one.

Like, "Okay, I am going to be damned either way. So, am I proud of what I'm doing because the benefits are good to me and outweigh what damage I do? Or, oh, my God, is this damage, actually? Am I not okay with it? It is



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not outweighing it? Let's switch it, so I can do good in a different way and do harm in a different way that I'm actually okay with.”

For example, I know some of the community that I'm, we could say I'm doing harm against; I'm totally offensive to religious communities with the way that I talk online. The way that I talk about cult mentalities and everything, I'm sure is really angering people and really hurting some feelings.

My opinion on religion is it works for some people, otherwise, it wouldn't be here. So, I'm fine with letting them have that. But also, for me, it was harmful, and not having it is so much better. So, I'm going to talk to those people.

Simone: Right, right, right. The way I articulate exactly what you're talking about, is we're always going to do harm no matter what, there's no such thing as, “I don't do harm, because I'm taking enough precautions. I'm enlightened enough, and I'm trained enough,” and this and that; that does not exist. So, if I'm always going to be doing harm anyway, then I want to be intentional about what kind of harm I might be doing.

If you're caught off guard by some harm that you do, I feel that's a problem. I mean, not a problem, but that you might want to bring more awareness to it. Just like that you are aware that you might be doing some harm to some well-meaning religious people and you're like, “I see that and I choose that. I'm unwilling to change because of this other thing that's really important to me.”

So, for example, a real example from my life right now, which is I'm promoting a masterclass that I'm doing. By the time this airs, it might be over, I don't know; called, Non-abusive Selling. In promoting that, I very heavy-handedly draw an analogy between toxic sales culture and rape culture. Because I believe that they're both very serious and very dangerous.

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They are based on the same violent, violative patriarchy which bulldozes over your consent and your safety, to extract from you what it wants. And, that is what makes rape culture work. And, that's what toxic sales culture runs on. To me, it's so important to name that.

I have had people reach out to me and say, "This is very damaging to," their words were, "to make light of rape culture by comparing it to sales; rape is very serious. You're traumatizing people. You're triggering people by saying rape over and over and over again." And, I see that and I acknowledge that.

I have so many other people saying, "I'm a rape survivor. What you are naming is so important, it is so resonant. Thank fuck that you're saying it." To me, I'm also a sexual assault survivor, like so many fucking women are.

Alex: I am too.

Simone: I'm not minimizing or making light. I'm not using it as a punch line to get sales. It's so important to me, to name how violent sales can be, because it's coming from the same bullshit patriarchy. So, I made the choice...

I need to say this for the people who need to hear it in this way. Some people will be harmed by it, and I hate that. I don't delight in it, nor am I nonchalant about it. Every time somebody is hurt, because of something I did, I feel terrible. And yet, I'm not going to change my decision because of where my priorities and values and commitments lie.

Alex: I'm on the side here of, actually, when I saw that, I was like, "Thank goodness, someone's taking this toxic sales culture so seriously. It sounds to me like you're minimizing. And again, not to invalidate people that have the opposite experience..."

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Simone: If you're like, "No, that did feel like Simone is minimizing it," you are completely entitled to that experience. I'm not going to tell you that you're wrong to have that. And I'm, as of now...

Alex: If you did tell them that they were wrong, then you'd be...

Simone: I would be the exact opposite. Exactly. I think a lot of people confuse prioritizing consent and safety, with doing whatever the other person tells you to make them feel better. And, that is does not the same thing. That's people pleasing.

Creating a safe place in your coaching containers does not mean just doing whatever it takes, so that your clients feel amazing all the time and feel validated all the time. It's not about that. It's about making very conscious decisions, knowing that there is no such thing as perfection. There's no such thing as doing zero harm.

And making conscious decisions about: What do you stand for? What is your style? What are your preferences? Who are you here to serve? And, taking a stance for it. Unfortunately, because of the world we live in, I think there's no situation in which everyone's going to be 100% thrilled with what you're doing, and agrees that what you're doing is safe. Your choices will always be unsafe for somebody. The question is are you curious about that? Are you being intentional about it?

Alex: Definitely. Can I add one more note to accountability? I think another way, as business owners, that we can hold yourself accountable is by hiring intentionally diverse... When I put out my application for a new assistant, I was like, "Hi. FYI, I'm looking for someone who's different than me. I would like to hire someone with a different LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual) experience," because it is important to me to have everyone within my company queer.

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Because then, the money is going back into the community, and also different races; I don't want just another gay white dude. If that was my only application, maybe I would have hired him, but thankfully, it wasn't. I didn't get any gay white dudes. No one that had my same life experience applied. It was amazing.

I hired someone who is trans and is super awesome, and brings a different perspective to my business. I've had intentional conversation with him about, "Hey, if there's ever anything that you notice on my website, in my messaging, anywhere that you're like, 'Huh, you don't realize it, but this is offensive to these people,' please call me out. Let me know."

Simone: I love it. I love it. You did promise to plug *Joyful Marketing* a little bit. So, ...

Alex: We have to. Do you want to talk about it, or should I?

Simone: I don't know. I want it to be like you just can't wait to talk about how awesome *Joyful Marketing* is. So, please tell us Alex.

Alex: Okay, well, I do love *Joyful Marketing* so much. One of the things that really stood out to me about it was this trust in yourself and your own method. I love that. That was something that was really attractive to me from the beginning. "Oh, good. This is a container where I'll be encouraged to, actually be myself in my marketing and not to be like, 'Hi, I'm here to create robots. Can you please do things my way?'"

Simone: My clients in *Joyful Marketing* are consistently angry at me because I won't tell them what to do. And I won't tell them if they ask me; is A the right decision? Or is B the right decision? I refuse to tell them do A or do B.

People get mad at me about it until they realize, "Oh, Simone is just trying to get me to see that she does not know better than I do about my

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business. And actually, she keeps handing me back my own power because it doesn't belong to her." That's the moment when a lot of people have breakthroughs.

All of *Joyful Marketing*, in a nutshell, is, "You're the boss; you decide. Here's how you develop the kind of skills of having your own back, and the skills of loving yourself. And, believing in yourself enough to go out and test a bunch of things and learn from them and create what works for you."

So, I think of it as spiritual work more than marketing work. But we just use it for marketing.

Alex: You use a lot of the same language that I use in my programs, of having your own back. That's part of my simple process. Yeah, but the thing is y'all, I reached out to Simone a few weeks ago maybe, I don't know, maybe a month ago, I don't know. Anyway, I said, "Hey, we should do a podcast talking about what it's like to actually run your business in a way that's not performative, but rather actually supportive of minority communities."

Because you have a monthly call on *Joyful Marketing* for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) people, and you have a LGBTQIA+ call. And, I'm the coach for the LGBTQIA+ call. I was LIKE, "Thank you, this is so amazing."

One, it's such an amazing opportunity for me; I love it. But also, from a business standpoint, you actually are assisting the queer+ community by hiring someone from that community. So, you're financially putting money into that community. And, having the person leading the support calls for that community, someone *of* the community.

I've seen/ I did, I was one of the coaches, run things where it was like, "Here's my call for this minority group, but I don't belong to that minority group. I'm not going to hire someone from that minority group to work with

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that minority group.” I was like, “That's fucking ridiculous.” Although, again, I did it myself, so...

Simone: So have I. We just learn from all the ways we fuck up. Our BIPOC calls are run by Black, Latino, not white people. And, our LGBTQIA+ calls are run by Alex, so far. Are you the only coach...?

Alex: I'm the only one right now.

Simone: Yeah, okay. But I think it's because it's not that we don't have other amazing coaches who are queer, but Alex is such a rockstar. We're so lucky to have you coach every month. Wow, that was some really light chit-chat about...

Alex: Just a casual chat.

Simone: Oh my God, I feel I need a cigarette.

Alex: Mine is like, I need some ice cream and comedy.

Simone: And a cigarette. I'm like, “That sounds great. And a cigarette.” I haven't smoked in like a decade but, that's not true. Anyway. I was like, “Is that true? No, I just lied.” I don't smoke regularly.

Alright, everybody that was... I don't know, here's all I can say, I just know for a fact that if Alex and I got back together again in two years and have this conversation again, there would have been so many things that we would have learned from everything that we're doing now, and we're about to do.

I am obsessed with this makeup channel on YouTube and this guy James Welsh, not makeup, skincare. His opening line, whenever he talks about skincare is, “Skincare is all about progress over perfection, because

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perfection does not exist.” He says that every single time. So, as I’m learning about skincare that line is baked into my brain, and I love it.

So, it's all about; Alex and I are committed to doing one thing better at a time, knowing that we're not going to get everything right. We're always available to learn. And, that is something that I wish was modeled to me. That's something that I wish somebody told me it was okay to do; maybe two years ago, maybe even a year ago. I hope that, for you listeners, that's something that you take with you. What would you...?

Alex: Yeah, because otherwise, it's so overwhelming.

Simone: It's so overwhelming. Progress over perfection, because perfection doesn't exist. What do you want to offer our listeners as the last takeaway?

Alex: I want to just hand them back, the reminder that we encourage you to have your own back. I don't think there's any way we could possibly ever cover all the ways that... Having your own back and how to... There's not a correct way. That would kind of be, again, contradictory to the whole entire concept. So, you know what having your own back is.

Simone: Can I just add something to that? I think having your own back means refusing to believe that the way you are and who you are, is a problem.

Alex: Yes, yes.

Simone: So, if anybody tries to make you, or even your own brain tries to tell you, “Oh, I feel ghastly. No, that's probably just you; you're just wrong.” If you want to have your own back, just remember this: Refuse to ever believe that you are wrong the way you are. What you think, what you want, is wrong. It's never wrong. You are never wrong. You are never a problem.

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Alex: Yes, thank you. On that, I had an experience recently, where one of my clients quit a program. And I was like, “Hey, just wanted to follow up with some... I would love to improve the program. I am not going to try to convince you to come back because I honor your decision.”

And she was like, “The program's great. I just realized that I've been outsourcing all of my decision-making. So, I need to go. This next stage is me being on my own. I can't even work with a coach,” and it was amazing. Fly, go have freedom. I was so excited for her because that really, truly is having her own back. So, yeah, don't rely on whatever marketing or whatever messaging you're hearing that...

Simone: Or, even your favorite coach.

Alex: Yeah, whatever they're telling you. If you're like, “Hey, wait, this actually is me not being myself anymore, then it's not right for you.”

Simone: Perfect. Okay, go fly, birds, whatever.

Alex: Unicorns.

Simone: Unicorns.

Alex: I guess this is Pegasi.

Simone: You can be naked on your Pegasi, if you want. All right, my friends we'll talk to you later.

Alex: Bye.

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been known to get people to come out of the woodwork and ask to work with you. So, get on that link, in the show notes, and I'll see you in your inbox next time.