

## 451: Ambiguity Problems



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Jody Moore**

[Better Than Happy](#) with Jody Moore

## 451: Ambiguity Problems

Welcome to episode 451, Ambiguity Problems. Human beings are amazing problem solvers. We are creative and resourceful in extraordinary ways at times. So if this is true, why do we feel so stumped at times? Why do we sometimes have no idea what to try or where to begin? Well, there can be several factors contributing to this, but a big one you may not have considered is what I'm calling an ambiguity problem. Stay tuned to learn what this is and how to spot it so you can get back to finding solutions.

Welcome to *Better Than Happy*. I'm Jody Moore and I'll be your coach today.

Hello, everybody. How are we doing today? As I record this episode, I am, as soon as I finish this, going to be heading out to the airport to catch a flight down to Southern California, where I'm going to be teaching our small group, 25 people. We only sold 25 seats to this one, doing a workshop called Navigating Conflict with Confidence. And we're going to spend the whole day together and then we're going to take the recordings and turn it into a workshop for everyone in The Lab, which I will supplement with live coaching.

So I'm so excited. I have so many fun things planned for this day and I'm so excited to see those of you that are coming. I picked this topic because it's an election year in the United States. And it's looking like it might be a little bit of a dramatic election. That's my guess, that's my thought.

And I just love, Governor Cox is heading up an initiative called How to Disagree Better. And I was really inspired by it and some of the things I've been learning and studying. Because not only on a larger global scale would it be useful for us to be able to handle conflict better, but it helps within our personal lives, our families, our working relationships. And even our relationship with ourself improves when we learn these skills. So get ready if you're in The Lab, get excited about that coming soon.

So today I want to talk about this thing that I see come up a lot in coaching that I'm calling an ambiguity problem. So what happens is oftentimes somebody comes on to the coaching call and they tell me what they're

## 451: Ambiguity Problems

struggling with or what they want coaching on. And they describe it with a lot of ambiguity, which is not wrong in and of itself. We all usually start out there, when we're even just talking to a friend, because what we're doing is, we're sort of summarizing what's going on. We're summarizing patterns that we've noticed.

And we're trying to be efficient in our communication by putting it into one or two sentences. So being ambiguous like this is not wrong in and of itself. I just want to bring it to your attention because there will be times when it's going to prevent you from making the progress you want to. So for example, people will come on the call and this is kind of what triggered me to or prompted me, I should say, to want to make this episode is our coaching call from yesterday in The Lab, which was the February 21<sup>st</sup>. It was an evening coaching call we did.

So if anybody wants to go check out the replay in The Lab, go find February 21<sup>st</sup>. But what happened is a woman that I coached was giving me a lot of ambiguous statements. So she came on and she said, "I've just really been neglecting my own self-care." Notice how when she says that, I don't really know exactly what she means by that. Well, she definitely has a much better idea than I do, but it's a broad, ambiguous statement, I've been neglecting self-care.

She also in the same coaching session said to me, "I'm just not being intentional with my parenting." Notice how vague and ambiguous that is. We all have a million interpretations of what that might mean. Other things I hear people say a lot when I'm coaching entrepreneurs, they tend to give me a lot of ambiguities, like, "My business isn't succeeding or it's not growing, or my marketing isn't working or I'm not working enough. I'm not following through. I'm not putting forth enough effort."

These are ambiguous, vague, broad statements that could mean all kinds of things. People often say to me really ambiguous statements about relationships like, "My marriage is just really hard, or my mother and I have always had a really difficult relationship, a really strained relationship." Sometimes people talk about this with regards to their health goals. They'll

## 451: Ambiguity Problems

say things like, “I’ve just gained a lot of weight or I eat emotionally. I’m an emotional eater.”

Again, I know kind of what these statements mean, but I don’t know exactly what any of these looks like in somebody else’s life if they say this statement to me. And the reason we do it is because like I said, our amazing brains recognize patterns, summarize them into a statement like this, “I’m a people pleaser. I have a problem with people pleasing or I have a hard time saying no or I’m not comfortable dealing with conflict.” Notice these are all vague things that could mean a lot of things, and they’re all thoughts.

None of these are facts. That’s the first thing that’s really important to notice. When we have something vague and ambiguous it doesn’t go in the circumstance line of our model, because it is vague and ambiguous and could be interpreted in 100 million different ways most likely, any of them.

Today’s episode is brought to you by Make Peace with Food, a four week challenge with me, Jody Moore. When I think about the percentage of my thoughts in my lifetime that have been about food or my body, it makes me cringe. What a waste. Can you relate? Did you know that you don’t have to live this way for the rest of your life? It’s true. Or maybe you have health goals you haven’t been able to achieve and maintain. But you know you still have a lot of food and body drama preventing you from eating and living the way you need to achieve them.

Whatever your goals are, I want to invite you to join me for Make Peace with Food. You’ll learn things like how to decide what you want from food. How to navigate cravings and urges. What to do when you fall off the wagon or when you’ve been really good and how to be in it for the long game, and more. It’s our next deep dive workshop in The Lab, so Lab members will be able to participate already. But if you’re not in The Lab, you can join the challenge for just \$29.

Yeah, for 29 bucks, you’ll get multiple video lessons from me each of the four weeks and live Zoom calls weekly where you can bring questions and

[Better Than Happy](#) with Jody Moore

## 451: Ambiguity Problems

get coaching. If you've been looking for something new to motivate you to make peace with food, consider this your sign, it's time. Head to [jodymoore.com/food](http://jodymoore.com/food) to join today. That's [jodymoore.com/food](http://jodymoore.com/food). I'll see you there.

So the reason I'm pointing this out to you is because again, when you guys bring me a statement like this on the coaching call, it's totally fine. I'm not saying not to start your coaching session this way. But what I immediately begin doing is trying to get specific. I start asking you questions or I just keep listening. Sometimes you'll keep talking and you'll tell me more about what you mean by this. You'll give me examples hopefully. If not, I'll ask you usually for examples. And that is not just because I need it to coach you.

It's because we both need it, you and I, you as my client and me as your coach, we both need it in order to figure out the best way to approach this challenge. So even if we want to go all the way to action line advice, what I mean by that is, those of you in The Lab know that we spend a lot of time coaching around your thoughts and your feelings. But we also coach on the action line. We also talk about what you might want to do or what you might try.

So thoughts, feelings and actions are where we're spending our time so that we can create the results that we want. So I don't like to ignore or skip the thought and feeling part. I like to make sure that's included, but that doesn't mean we don't talk about actions. I'll even offer suggestions. But my point is, even if we weren't going to cover the thought and feeling, if we were going to go right to the action, what you should try. It's really tough to know what to do when we have this ambiguous statement.

For example, the woman I was coaching last night who said, "I just have been neglecting self-care. I've been putting myself last." I said, "Okay", this was after a few minutes of the discussion. I'm like, "Tell me what that means. What are you not doing that you want to be doing? Or what are you doing that you need to stop doing?" And she said to me, "Well, for example,

## 451: Ambiguity Problems

I get an average of five to six hours of sleep a night and I need more than that.”

So notice how different these two statements are. I neglect self-care and put myself last feels really big. It's sort of hard for the brain to know where to even begin. If my friend tells me that she does this, if I'm not coaching someone, if it's a friend and she tells me this. I'm going to offer sympathy. Maybe that's all she wants. Maybe she just wants some validation. But if she says to me, “I get only five to six hours of sleep a night and I need more.” Now, I immediately have some ideas for her. I may have more questions, which I did with this woman when we were coaching.

I said, “What is going on? Are you not going to bed when you want to be going to bed? Are you going to bed but you're waking up a lot and you're not able to sleep? Say more about why you're getting five to six hours when you want and need more.” And as she dives in and explains things like, “Well, I tend to go to bed but then I wake-up and when I wake-up and can't get back to sleep then I just get up and I start doing projects.”

Now what is the solution to this? I don't know exactly, but immediately I have some ideas. I bet as you listen, you have some ideas. I bet you have things that she can try, maybe things that you've tried if you've struggled with this. I have some supplements I take that help me sleep. I have certain things that if I do wake-up seem to make it harder to go back to sleep and other things that might make it easier.

We start having tons of ideas and even if we don't have ideas, we could go to the internet or we could call a friend or a doctor or somebody and say, “This is the situation, I'm going to bed at whatever is a reasonable time. I wake-up though, and I can't go back to sleep and I'm only getting five to six hours. I'd like to get eight hours of sleep a night”, or whatever. Now we have a problem that our amazing brains can go to work solving. Do you see how different those two statements are?

How about this, she also said, “I'm not being intentional with my parenting.” And we talked about that and that was kind of a whole other, that was her

## 451: Ambiguity Problems

comparing herself to someone else who used that phrase, intentional parenting. And she suddenly went, “I don’t think I’m being intentional with my parenting.” I was like, “Well, what are you not doing, again that you want to be doing or what are you doing that you want to stop doing?”

That’s a much better question to ask yourself once you get this ambiguous problem happening, because when you can hone in on, I want to go on a one-on-one outing with each of my kids. Now, we can suddenly start wrapping our head around, what are the challenges preventing that and how do we overcome those challenges? Is it a planning issue? Is it a time issue? Is it an ideas of what to do issue? Is it a money that we think we need on those outings, issue? All of these things are not that difficult to solve.

We can come up with lots of ideas, but I’m not being intentional with my parenting. That’s really hard to solve because it’s so vague. It’s so ambiguous. See what I’m saying? Let’s talk about the business examples I gave you. My marketing isn’t working. What in the world does that even mean? What part of your marketing isn’t working? Because the way I market anyway is in several stages. I want to serve people. I want to find people who don’t know what I teach, that want to learn it, that are struggling. I want to offer them some relief.

I want to get their feedback about whether or not it’s helpful. I want to invite them to come and get more help. There’s so many phases, so many steps of marketing that I don’t even know what that means when somebody says to me, “My marketing isn’t working.” Is the whole thing not working? And so with business it’s easier because we go in and we look at metrics. We look at conversion numbers. We look at all the steps along the way.

Oftentimes what’s happening is the person doesn’t even have a whole funnel built out, if you’re doing that kind of marketing. And it doesn’t even have to be hardcore, let’s run an ad and send somebody through this process. Your funnel may be through word of mouth or through a referral. But what exactly is going on in your business? What is the specific problem? Because if you can identify a specific problem, you can start



## 451: Ambiguity Problems

finding specific solutions. You can first of all put your amazing brain to work on finding a specific solution.

You can ask people better questions because you know what the problem is you're trying to solve. You can get on the internet and find better answers because you're asking better questions. I actually had this happen now that I think about it in one of my coaching calls. I have a business coach I'm working with and he asked all of us on a group call this week to identify what is the main problem in your business right now. And what I noticed is that my brain was still in this very ambiguous state.

I had a really hard time articulating exactly what the problem is, which means that's why we're not finding solutions. If we aren't clear about the problem, it's going to be much harder to find a clear solution. So it requires your brain working harder than it's going to want to if you're anything like me. My brain just wants to be like, I don't even know what the problem is. That's why I'm so frustrated because I don't even know. If I knew the problem, then I would go to work, but I don't even know what it is.

That's what my brain wants to tell me because it does not want to do the hard work of thinking. And maybe having to look some things up and maybe having to pull some numbers and asking other people on my team to help me provide the information that I don't even know where to find. And then analyzing that information and making some guesses.

That's a thing, we don't always know what the problem is exactly for sure, but we can make a guess about a specific thing and say, "I feel like if this specific challenge were something we could tackle or improve upon, it would help with the overall problem." So that's the other thing, we're afraid to get it wrong. But the alternative is, we just spin in this ambiguous confusion.

Again with relationships, my marriage is really hard. When somebody says that to me, I'm like, "Okay, tell me more." And usually they'll start giving me more specific information, and again, at some point I always ask for a specific example. Because even as the person starts talking it through with



## 451: Ambiguity Problems

me and saying out loud, “Well, the problem is my spouse and I don’t talk about anything that feels very deep or connecting or interesting to me. We have a lot of surface level conversations right now and it feels like we’re not really seeing or hearing each other. It feels like we are a little bit living different lives.”

Well, if that’s the case, don’t you start having a lot of ideas you could offer this person? Again as the person says it to me out loud, they even start going, “I mean, I know we probably need to be better about having a date night. And I know I should sit down and have a conversation. And I know I might be reading too much into something and so I should take a look at my own thoughts about all of this.” They immediately start telling me the solutions that they are aware of. We don’t consider them when we just settle for the ambiguous summary our brains give us of my marriage is really hard.

We talked a little bit about health and weight. People say this to me a lot, “I’ve just gained a lot of weight or I lost weight but then I gained it all back.” “Okay, tell me more specifically.” And we could get specific with numbers. Someone could tell me they lost 50 pounds and then they gained 70 pounds back or whatever. But what I mean is, tell me specifically what are the behaviors and what are the smaller bite size problems that are leading to this bigger problem for you? Is it, I stopped exercising?

I used to exercise or I used to go for walks or whatever and now I don’t do that, and if so, why is that? And let’s examine that because if we realize, my job changed and I work different hours now. And I used to exercise at this time, that was my habit and then I stopped doing it. Then we can suddenly put our brains to work on, so how am I going to solve this problem? How am I going to keep putting in the time at the job I want and be able to fit in exercise? That’s actually a really simple problem to solve.

And again, here’s the interesting thing about our brains is, our brains would just much rather stay in ambiguity because then we don’t actually have to do anything about it, in some cases. That’s what I notice with my brain anyway, we’ll just be confused about this. We’ll just keep describing it in

## 451: Ambiguity Problems

this ambiguous way. Because then when people do offer solutions, have you noticed this? You give an ambiguous problem. People offer a solution and you're like, "No, because of x, y, z, that won't work."

And it's because they didn't clearly understand the problem because we didn't give them a clear descriptor of it. So they're trying to solve for a piece of that big, ambiguous problem that isn't even the piece you're struggling with. So get more specific about what the problem is, you'll be able to find a specific solution. I eat emotionally. I'm an emotional eater is a very ambiguous, vague, big, hard to solve problem.

But most days at three o'clock, I feel restless and tired and then I go have a snack, even though I'm not hungry and it's not serving my health goals in the end. Suddenly I can think of 10 possible solutions to that, can you? Can you talk to people about good news? What we need to do is plan something every day at three that gives you some relief from the stress or the exhaustion or whatever, that gives you a break that isn't food. Here are seven ideas I could think of.

Call a friend, go for a walk at that time, take a little nap, go drink water at that time, whatever. There are so many simple solutions when we really nail down the problem. So again, sometimes I notice that you guys take the tools I give you and you use them against yourself. And you'll start noticing yourself have an ambiguous problem come up. Either you're saying it out loud or you're thinking it in your mind, and then you go, "Oh, I'm not supposed to do that, Jody told me not to do that."

So I just want to be very clear. I'm not telling you not to do it. We all do it. It's human nature. The brain wants to save energy. The brain is actually a really amazing skill that we can summarize a whole bunch of specific things into one intelligent statement. So it's not a bad thing. It's just if you're feeling really stuck. If you're just like, "I don't really know what to do. I'm tired of this challenge or problem. I want to find a solution." Because sometimes we're not ready to find a solution yet.

## 451: Ambiguity Problems

So when you're ready to find a solution, when you're tired of feeling stuck and you notice you don't have any ideas and you're not finding good ideas, you're not getting good ideas from people you talk to. You're not finding useful things show up in your line of sight, just in your world. Then ask yourself, have I described this problem for myself in an ambiguous way? And if so, how do I get more specific? How do I whittle it down to, it might be a series of small, simple, specific problems, things that I'm doing that I want to stop doing or things I'm not doing that I want to start doing.

And then what are the challenges in getting myself to do those things? That's where sometimes your thoughts and feelings are going to come in. And then we execute. So all problems are figured out-able thanks to Marie Forleo for that word. Everything is figure out-able, but if we don't understand the problem it will be much harder to find the solution. Keep an eye out for this.

And thank you so much for joining me on the podcast today. Again, if you have a question or a comment, don't forget we have a podcast hotline where you can call and leave me a message. I get all of those messages. And it is 1888 hi Jody M, 1888 hi Jody M. Send me a message. I'd love to hear from you. Alright, have a good one.

If you find the podcast to be helpful you're going to love The Lab. *In Better Than Happy: The Lab* we experiment with applying all of it in your real life. Whether you're in the middle of a challenge and ready for some relief or you're ready to commit to pursuing your dream goals and making them a reality, come join me in the lab at [jodymoore.com/thelab](http://jodymoore.com/thelab). That's [jodymoore.com/thelab](http://jodymoore.com/thelab).