



Bonus Interview: Ken Mossman, Men's Coach

Deb Elbaum: Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host Deb Elbaum and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone. It's Deb. Today I have a bonus interview episode with executive coach, Ken Mossman, the founder of Cirrus Leadership and Coaching, as well as the host of the podcast Mojo for the Modern Man. Ken's specialty is coaching men to help them reflect on and live into what it means to be an emotionally connected, conscious man and person. In our interview, Ken and I discuss what's important about men having access to their feelings, the constraining messages that many men experienced growing up and his biggest advice for the people who live with and love men. Let's dive in. Hi, Ken.

Ken Mossman: Hello, Deb.

Deb Elbaum: I am so glad you are here today. Thanks for, thanks for joining me to talk all about men.

Ken Mossman: Thanks for inviting me to talk all about men. I'm psyched.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. Yeah. So let's dive in. Let's dive in. You do work with men, um, and with the mojo, mojo of men.

Ken Mossman: Mojo. Well, that's the name of my podcast and that's also, that's also a bit of my brand, you know, helping men refind their mojo sometimes refined and refine by the way.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. How do you define mojo?

Ken Mossman: Yeah, that's a great question. So, so to me, mojo is, you know, this my particular brand of mojo, if you will lives in the arenas of, of creativity and the expression that goes along with that, um, inclusivity. And when I say inclusivity, I mean, you know, we are multidimensional beings.

You know, we have many different aspects to us, so it means, uh, finding and bringing back home the different parts of themselves that they may have put aside along the way because of messages that came from family or the culture or other institutions, but bringing all the different parts of themselves back and, and, you know, finding out that yeah, you know, they have a place that they have a place at the table of who I am as a man. And, uh, my life is richer when I include these different aspects of, of who I am. So there's a lot to it.

Deb Elbaum: And that's really what we do in coaching is help people figure out who they are, the fullness of their lives, so that they can be intentional about how they are living. And

we do that through asking questions. What are your favorite questions, your favorite coaching questions to ask clients?

Ken Mossman: I don't know. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I don't know that I have favorite coaching questions. I think, you know, the, the there's that Uber question that we all eventually play with one way or another, and that is what do you want, what do you want, where are you headed?

Where do you want to be headed? Um, but from there, all bets are off and yeah, I don't know that I have any favorite questions. Um, You know, maybe it's, maybe it's less of a question, and, uh, as it, as much of it is, uh, as much of it, as much as it is, that's easy for me to say as much as it is a sentence fragment, which goes something like this AND... Um, that

Deb Elbaum: ...which invites people to go deep.

Ken Mossman: Which invites people to go deep and to take a look and, and see, you know, really find their own path. Of course, that's the essence of the work is, you know, ,

Deb Elbaum: What's important specifically for men to explore who they are? Why does it matter?

Ken Mossman: Yeah. To me, it. Boy. That's, there's so much to that question. How much time do we have here? Um, that's more than that's more than a 20 minute conversation. Um, I want to go back to what I said just a couple of minutes ago, and that is that, you know, culturally we're, we're taught, we're encouraged to leave parts of ourselves aside and the, so what's important, particularly with the men that I've had, the pleasure of working with over the course of many years is, um, you know, bringing emotions back into the, into the picture in a, so, so we do a lot of work with emotional literacy, emotional flexibility, uh, leading up to hopefully, uh, emotional fluency and, and understanding that emotions, you know, emotions are information and they're a key part of us, you know, they're not the be all end, all of who we are any more than, uh, being rational. You know, is, is, is the be all end all we need to, all of it, you know, we need it, all of it. I'm not sure I answered that question or not.

Deb Elbaum: Well, you know, you, you, you did. I, what I hear is the reconnecting a big piece of it is helping reconnect men to their emotional life, uh, building emotional vocabulary and having the awareness that we do have emotions and often we get cut off from them because of.... Like you said, how we grow up or society constraints. And I'm curious if you've noticed

Ken Mossman: Before you ask me this question, I want to underline what you said, what you just said, and that is the, the, the, that we have emotion because the way the culture one of the lies that the culture tells us is that, you know, if you allow yourself to feel, you're going to be, you know, you're going to be overtaken by this, you know, this emotional monster, and you're never begin to be able to come back and there's. That's so the opposite of what's true. We have emotions. And when we allow ourselves to have emotions and we train ourselves and practice ourselves to have emotions, then you know, we get to have them. They, they, they don't have us. It's an important, it's an important distinction.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah, absolutely. And, um, I talk a lot about emotion with my clients from the neuroscience perspective and this idea that when we have more emotional granularity in our life, meaning like you said, more emotional fluency, literacy, vocabulary, actually research shows that it helps us cope better with situations. It helps us be healthier and helps us bounce back more quickly from illness. So your health, right? So it helps all of us, um, helps all of us. Um, my curiosity, why I was going to ask before is you, you probably work with men of all different ages and just given what's going on in society, do you see differences between older men, younger men in this emotional awareness and, um, fluency?

Ken Mossman: Well, I work across a broad range of ages. Usually I'm working with men who are, you know, between the ages of 35, 35 and up. Um, so I don't work with a lot of, I don't work with a lot of younger men. Yeah. You know, it's a fascinating thing. I, I don't see, obviously, every, everyone is different. Every individual is different. On the one hand, on the other hand, Uh, because the, the men that I work with are mostly coming from Western cultures, um, that's not true of all of the, you know, throughout and I've worked with, with, uh, men and in the middle East and in, in, in, uh, Japan, et cetera. Um, but for the most part, I'm working with Western men and the, and it's uncanny how similar their experiences are and how similar the messaging that they received is whether they were, whether they grew up in, uh, you know, in Switzerland or in France or in the UK or in the Eastern us or Western us, or, you know, name it. It's the it's, it's really uncanny how similar their, uh, the messaging across the board.

Deb Elbaum: What's the main message that people often feel they've gotten?

Ken Mossman: Yeah. Yeah. Jeez. Um, there's a set of them, you know, there's a set of them and if I could bottom line, them it's, you know, don't do anything that's going to have you be perceived as girlish or feminine. So that's, that's one. And you can see that, you know, right away that the assumption there is that, you know, don't be, don't let yourself be emotional. Um, You know, from don't don't, don't, don't throw like a girl on, on, on, on, down the line. Um, the other, the other arena of, of messaging is this is what it is to be a man, you know, be this, you know, don't do that, but be be this be stoic, be rational, be the person who has the answers. But don't get, and don't get caught, not knowing by the way. Um, you know, don't ask questions, don't be vulnerable. Vulnerability is, is, is, is equal to weakness and whatever you do, don't show weakness. So that's, that's, that's, that's the, those are the big ones, so to speak. Yeah. Yeah.

Deb Elbaum: Hard, hard constraints to live up to.

Ken Mossman: Hard constraints to live up to, uh, Tony Porter, um, refers to it as the man box. I don't know if he came up with that, but it's, you know, this it's, uh, it is, it is constraining.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You mentioned when you're talking about a female, male, don't be like a girl, boy. Where does your work intersect with the gender spectrum?

Ken Mossman: [Laughing] I'm laughing because I'm thinking, you know, jeez I'm dating myself somewhat here you know as a 63 as a 63 year old man growing up. Growing up when I grew up, um, you know, when I grew up there, the gender spectrum wasn't anywhere near as broad as it is now. So, um, you know, that's, uh, it's, it's a fascinating question. And what I, what I would say, what I will say is that you know, anyone I'm happy to work. Of course. And of course I work with women as well, but I'm happy to work with anyone regardless of how they, how they identify, you know, anywhere on the, on the gender spectrum. I'm I'm I'll say this. I'm, I'm fascinated by the way the gender spectrum has expanded. And I have great conversations with my son, who's 22. Um, you know, Hey Kai, will you explain this to me? I don't quite get it. He's like, Oh yeah, dad, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I was like, Oh yeah, that's kind of, it's kind of cool.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah, it's interesting also because I believe that our words create our reality, our words shape our reality and we'll see with, with many more words to describe how people, um, their gender, many more words that people use to describe their gender. Um, what, how the thoughts, you know, how thoughts will follow.

Ken Mossman: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I would, I I'm, I'm, I'm fascinated by that as well. And I'm really, I probably won't be around to see it. Um, but I'm, I'm really curious about how, you know, what, what are conversations around gender going to look like, sound like, you know, a hundred, 200 years from now, right? Or, or, or, or 10 years from now, 10 years from now, I'll be around, but, you know, farther on down the line as we learn more and more, I think as a, as a, as a species, as we learn more and more, uh, how to include these differing uh, perspectives, identities, um, awarenesses that, that, that people have and the willingness, hopefully the willingness to, you know, to, to accept

Deb Elbaum: right. All of those. Yeah. It's fascinating. Our work is fascinating. We have the best work in the world. Yeah. Um, is there an example of a client that you can share that really highlights the power of reconnecting to who you are as a man?

Ken Mossman: Oh my goodness. Yeah. Um, I'm thinking more in terms of groups, in terms of groups that the groups of men, because one of the, uh, in my, in the coaching, uh, we'll work this stuff in as it comes up and there's, Program that I do that's called I am. It used to stand for integrated adult man, and now it's, I am, is so much more punchy and to the point, but, um, the, the, these entire groups of men that I've taken through this program, um, that have, um, uh, I'll rephrase that who have gone through this program with me because every time I offer it, you know, I, got to go through it myself again. And, um, There are, you know, it's fascinating seeing where we begin and where we end up with being able to have conversations with one another in this community. It's like, Oh yeah, you know, my child, my child showed up and, and I was able to recognize him and, and, and not, not my literal child, my inner child know. Yeah. I was able to, I was able to recognize what he was saying, and I didn't have to hand over the wheel to him or my, you know, the part of my inner adolescent. I came in and, and, and wanted to run the show, but I was able to set him aside. And so, yeah, I could, I have many, many, many, many, many stories of, uh, that I could tell.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. Yeah. What do you hear as with the impact? People have an impact on those, around them, and their family. When someone, when a man goes through this program, through the coaching, what's the impact on their family?

Ken Mossman: Yeah. So more than a few, I'm just thinking of this last group that finished up in December. And, um, you know, more than a few times to hear the story, a story that goes something like this, um, I was talking to my wife the other day and she said to me, I don't really know what you're doing, but I really like what's happening.

Yeah. So there's a way, and here's what I can point to, because there's a way that when I would assert that when we start showing up as, um, as conscious adults when we start showing up in our world as conscious adults, the people around us, well, they know they certainly notice the difference, but of course the people that we surround ourselves with can't help but be mirrors, you know, serve as mirrors and you know, the, the, the changes in behavior changes in attitude, uh, changes in so much begin to show up in the, in the, in the people around us. And that's a lot of what I hear. No, I don't, I don't know exactly what's going on here, but you know, the feedback I'm getting, you know, feedback I'm getting in my world is that there's something different about me and it's working.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. What would you say, because there are many of us in this world who have men in our lives who love men, who live with men. What's your biggest advice to us, people who love men about understanding them.

Ken Mossman: Yeah. I draw on the wisdom of, of, of Brene Brown here. Um, She tells a story in one of her books about a man who, uh, approached her at one of her talks and, uh, and shared with her that he was allowing himself to be more vulnerable with his, you know, with his family, you know, particularly with his wife and uh, sharing more of his own emotions, which of course his wife had been asking for, and, uh, and that his wife freaked out because, you know, for the first time he was, you know, he was sharing what was really going on for him. And in some way, shape or form his wife perceived that as, as a threat to this, to the stability, you know, cause he'd always shown up as the rock of the family. So where I would point people is, um, first of all, um, okay. If you're demanding that or even if you're requesting, you can't demand, but if you're requesting that the, the man or the men in your life be more emotionally available, when they show up as more emotionally available, welcome their emotion, you know, welcome their emotion and, uh, yeah, without, without, without making it wrong, wondering what's, you know, being surprised by it. Um, you may be surprised by it and hopefully you'll be surprised by it in a delightful way. Um, but as you know, as men step more into taking ownership of their own emotional experience, um, it's really important that the people in their lives, you know, particularly the women, I'm going to say, particularly the women in their lives, um, make space for that, you know, every bit, as much as they want space to have their own emotional experience.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah, because it could, I can imagine it could be disconcerting, like you alluded to that someone always shows up in the same way. And what if one day they show up really differently what's going on.

Ken Mossman: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Exactly. It, it, you know, this is, it's just a part of our, uh, it's just a part of human nature and the human condition. Of course we want the people that we want to grow, and we want the people around us to grow. And, um, you know, and at the same time I was like, well, I wanted you to grow, but not that way. Yeah. Growth is never comfortable. You know, growth is never comfortable, so yeah. Yeah. Boy, is it worth it?

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And you know, we, we really, you and I talked about personal individual growth and I'm guessing that there's huge impact in the corporate world and organizations when men, um, do this inner work and connect more with their emotional life. Do you hear, do people talk about impact in, um, at work?

Ken Mossman: Yeah, for sure. Yeah, for sure. And it's funny I'm taking, uh, uh, uh, uh, a course right now in an advanced coaching course. And one of the things that we're talking about is the effectiveness of leadership. Um, you know, beyond, beyond the realm of, um, I'm, I'm making a hamster of the language, but beyond the realm of command and control and, you know, in, in the effectiveness of leadership in a world that is increasingly complex, uh, increased VUCA, you know, volatility, volatility. Yeah. You know, volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. And, um, you know, I joke in some of the men's in some of the, uh, men's groups that, uh, that I, that I worked, some of the calls that I, that I lead, it's like where this is life, you know, life is in fact this. And so having one's emotions in, and again, having one's emotions versus being ruled by one's emotions. Um, but being able to have, and have, and, and, uh, uh, openly have share, process, quote unquote, uh, those, those emotions, um, across the board, you know, including the, the vulnerability piece. Hey, I don't know where we're going, let's go with that way. You know, that's, that's great. That's great leadership. I mean, that's true. That's real, uh, so much more than the audacity to think that, well, I know exactly where we're going and I know exactly what's going to happen because I've read the report and I can read the future. It's like, no, you can't. You can't no, it's like great. Let's march into that. Let's march into that unknown future. Yeah. Great, great authority and zero attachment.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, cause leadership, I believe leadership is, is awareness. It's awareness of who you are, what you stand for, your thoughts, your patterns, your behaviors, and then being intentional about how you show up. So as I'm listening to you, I'm thinking people who have more awareness are going to have more capability for showing up, um, to have impact.

Ken Mossman: Yeah, absolutely. To have impact and to have empathy for the impact on those around them. And to recognize again, in a system sort of, you know, all of these impacts, uh, bumping into each other and everybody having their own experience.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. Fascinating. Ken, thank you so much. I, we could go on and on. This is so interesting to me and, um, You are, I'll just say you are one of the teachers I so appreciate from coach training. So thank you. It means a lot to me that you, that you joined me today. Thank you very much.

Ken Mossman: I'm honored to be invited.

Deb Elbaum: Yeah. Where can people we'll find you online, if they're curious to meet you or learn more.

Ken Mossman: So my I'm on I'm on LinkedIn, uh, on Facebook I have a business page, Cirrus Leadership, as well as my own personal page, and of course my own website, which is Cirrus C I R R U S leadership, Cirrus leadership.com. And there's links there to connect with me and to find out about the I am program and other cool stuff that I'm doing, newsletter, et cetera, and a podcast. And my podcast called mojo for the modern man. Yeah. Great. All of those.

Deb Elbaum: Wonderful. Thanks again, Ken. I appreciate it.

Ken Mossman: Thanks so much, Deb. Likewise.