



Alanna Levenson  
Sales and Business Coaching  
Career and Leadership Development

# Managing Your Time Well and Being Flexible Translates into a Higher Level of Success.

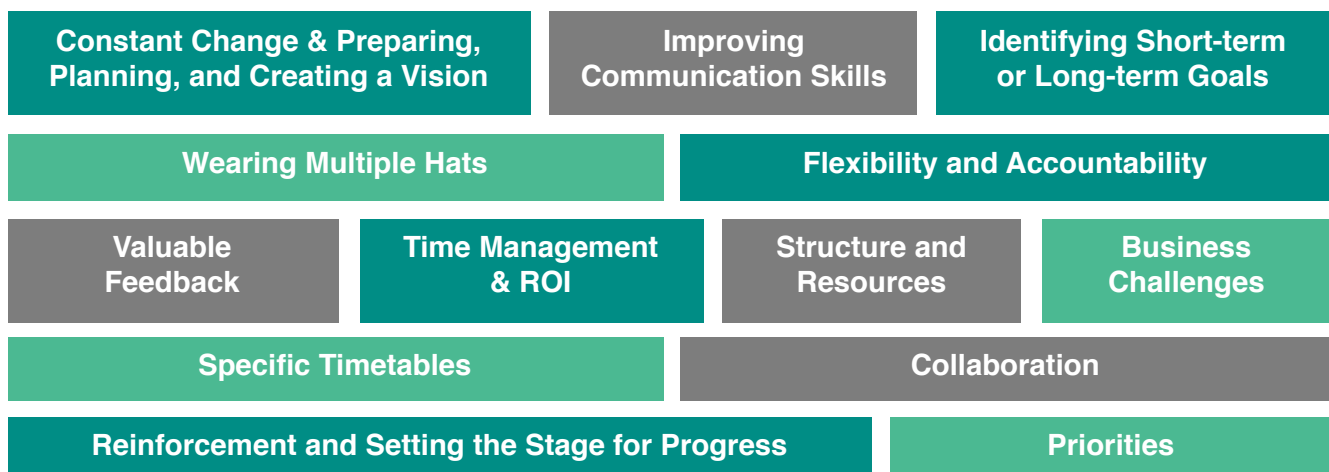
Working more efficiently supports being more available for clients.

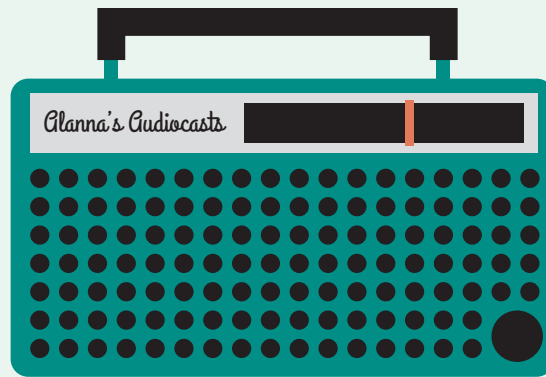
**Interviewer:** Alanna Levenson, Founder of I Love My Life! Coaching

**Interviewee:** Mark Levinson

**Law Office of Mark L. Levinson: In business for over 40 years, private practice**

Below are the highlights of our conversation where he shares what he has learned, and what has impacted his results.





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**Alanna:** Hi, there. This is Alanna Levenson with I Love My Life! Coaching. My guest here on this call is Mark Levinson, no relation of course. He is a Family Law Attorney. Thank you Mark for agreeing to participate in my client case study series. I really appreciate you being here.

**Mark:** You're welcome. My pleasure.

**Alanna:** First, I just want to start off by allowing you to tell everyone about yourself and your business.

*"I needed someone that had dealt with people in a variety of areas and that had expertise in how those firms grow, how they manage themselves and what challenges they would face that I hadn't even anticipated."*

**Mark:** As you know, I'm a Family Law Attorney. I handle all phases of Family Law including custody visitation, spousal support, child support and everything that goes along with it. I've been specializing in Family Law for over 20 years. I've been in practice for over 30 years. I represent both men and women in the divorce process.

**Alanna:** Great, Thank you. What I would love for you to share with everyone is, before you started working with me, what were your concerns, your business challenges or what made you decide to hire a coach?

**Mark:** I had previously worked with Family Law firms where there was more than one attorney and office staff and secretaries. When I decided that I wanted to open my own practice, I found that there were many things that I thought had been taking care of and just realized I had to do every single thing.

### **Wearing Multiple Hats**

I wanted to work with somebody that could help me prioritize needs that was knowledgeable in the field, that knew the challenges facing sole practitioners in any business because I firmly believe that the law is a business and that other people working for themselves also have businesses.

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I needed someone that had dealt with people in a variety of areas and that had expertise in how those firms grow, how they manage themselves and what challenges they would face that I hadn't even anticipated.

**Alanna:** When we're in our own world it's hard to look at things from every angle and so it's easier for someone like a coach to see it from a more objective view point.

**Mark:** I thought the objectivity was very important. I also thought that the skill someone would bring to the table was important for me when I open my own practice.

**Alanna:** That perfectly leads me into my next question which is, if someone else were to ask you, "why did you decide to work with Alanna?", what would you tell them?

**Mark:** A couple of things really. One is you do business with people you know and people you respect. I knew some other people that you worked with. I knew the challenges they faced. I had seen you in various atmospheres, various groups.

I thought you were extraordinarily bright. You are organized and you are concise and I valued all of those skills.

### Improving Communication Skills

I wanted to work with somebody that was not afraid to tell me where I needed to either make corrections or change what I was doing, or perhaps a better way to say something, somebody that had a different way of looking at different challenges to help me as I moved along and improved my practice.

**Alanna:** I appreciate you saying all that. There's a lot that goes into this process. How would you describe coaching to someone else who hasn't worked with a coach before?

**Mark:** I think that everybody looks for different things in coaching, but for me, it was the benefits of somebody who had experience working with people that were working for themselves in their own business.

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It was scheduling priorities. It was an additional resource, including when I needed, just for example a billing service, you knew all different types of services that would help me out.

I like the idea of accountability that we made schedules, we made goals that were both short-term, long-term, intermediate range goals, and then we checked in or I checked in with you more properly and more accurately and say, "Here's where we're going. Maybe we've solved this problem or maybe it's not as big as we thought it was. Maybe this goal should be either shorter term goal or longer term goal."

### Identifying Short-term or Long-term Goals

It was a flexible process. It wasn't a rigid A, B, C, & D and then next month we're doing D, E, F. It was, "Let's examine where we're going. Let's examine the progress you've made or if we need to make more progress in one particular area."

Then also, things change as you go along. Certainly my practice has, where sometimes you have extraordinarily difficult clients who take up a lot of time. Other times, it seems like a more complex case but it's not unusual.

We discussed it, and you advised me to keep clients accountable also for my time that they were using. When I ask them something, keeping them on track and not allowing them to divert my attention to things that they thought were perhaps important, but really in the scheme of what I was trying to do were not.

*"One of the things that I should add is before we finished every session I remember, you would say, "What did you get out of this session?" It makes me articulate and focus on, okay when I'm walking out of this door or away from this session, what did I get?*

*That is important for two reasons. One it's very good reinforcement, "Okay what did I get out of this session and how is*

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*it going to impact my practice?" Two, it sets the stage for what we're going to do in the next session."*

**Alanna:** I'd imagine that because of what you do, if we talk about it, when we get together is that Family Law in that area of divorce and sometimes dealing with kids, it can be a really emotional thing.

I would imagine that sometimes people unconsciously mistake you for a therapist rather than, "Wait a second, this is my attorney and he's helping me with my case," and some other things that you mentioned too that are an important part of this process to point out is time and prioritization and you mentioned that a little bit earlier too.

**Constant Change & Preparing,  
Planning, and Creating a Vision**

That is I think a big challenge for a lot of full practitioners or business owners as well, is the change that can happen over time. There are things that we can see that are coming and sometimes there are things that happen that we can't see coming.

**Mark:** I was just going to say that that's very true. Just for example today, I got a call from a client who's spouse, and I won't identify if it's the husband or the wife, but they didn't return the child and left a message that they were taking off with the child for a couple weeks.

That requires basically dropping everything to get an immediate court order where other things that were in the high priority range take one-step act now. The clients have to know that when their need meets that threshold, I'm going to drop everything to work on their client and work on their issue.

That's important and other people as they say you have to ... We discussed a number of times, educate them to the system. Unfortunately, I think everyone knows that the court systems are far more clogged than they used to be and delays happen.

Your friends who got a divorce in one year may take longer now because there aren't as many judges or courts working on the case. That's an

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education process that I know we've discussed and how to present that issue to the clients.

**Alanna:** Yeah, and to work with an expert, someone like yourself who knows the ins and outs of the system that's why it's important to work with someone like you.

**Mark:** One of the things that I should add is before we finished every session I remember, you would say, "What did you get out of this session?" It makes me articulate and focus on, okay when I'm walking out of this door or away from this session, what did I get?

### Reinforcement and Setting the Stage for Progress

That is important for two reasons. One is that it's very good reinforcement and I happen to be a note taker, but it's very good reinforcement, "Okay what did I get out of this session and how is it going to impact my practice?" Two, it sets the stage for what we're going to do in the next session.

*"Is my business growing? Is it growing in the way I want it to? Is there a way to either streamline the process or is there a way to prioritize differently? Just different ways of looking at things that do change over time....It's like any business. Businesses change and I think coaching changes.*

*I think as I explore different things, you can give this accurate feedback, you get to it. We're certainly not talking about the same thing we talked about two years ago. We're talking about different issues now than we were two or three years ago."*

**Alanna:** I actually really love that part of the session. Of course I love working with people throughout the entire time, but at the end when we can talk about, "What did you get from our session today or from our conversation?"

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I could try and guess what people are going to say and half the time it's not what I would guess. It's something completely different. It's good to hear that feedback. Like you said, for you as a client, it's a great way for you to affirm for yourself, what did I discover? What did I learn? What did I reaffirm or maybe it's something to carry over into the next session as it's approaching that organic process.

Speaking of process, you and I have been working together for quite a while on and off, so why retain the working relationship? Why stick with the process?

**Mark:**

This is all partition obviously that I got different things from you in the beginning and I face new challenges as time goes on because there's changes in clients, there's changes in law and there's changes in just how businesses function.

### Flexibility and Accountability

A couple of things that I think are important when working with a coach are, one is flexibility and accountability. It's a way of checking in to say, "Yeah I am doing okay on this. I need to focus a little bit more on one issue perhaps." You get feedback from what other people say and do in a similar area, and it is definitely a process.

It's more intense times than others, the coaching process not the practice. I just say that, but when you're working with a coach and have the ability to get instant feedback on different ideas that you're maybe toying with, even different accounting programs that I've used, but I think that in the long run it still has the same goals.

Is my business growing? Is it growing in the way I want it to? Is there a way to either streamline the process or is there a way to prioritize differently? Just different ways of looking at things that do change over time.

Therefore I think that the coaching process is an ongoing process. It's not you come in, fix it, okay I broke my arm it's fixed now. Bye-bye. It's a lot different. It's like any business. Businesses change and I think coaching changes.



I think as I explore different things, you can give this accurate feedback you get to it. We're certainly not talking about the same thing we talked about two years ago. We're talking about different issues now than we were two or three years ago.

**Alanna:** There would be another issue if we were. [laughing]

**Mark:** Let me just say that I'm heavily involved in nonprofits and you help me, I would say, sort out where my real goals are in that area as well, and maintain an interest in activity in certain groups.

But others that weren't giving me the feedback I wanted or fulfillment, I wanted, ... We would agree on a time and then if that situation didn't change, I drop those groups because they weren't giving me the feedback I want.

That was something I certainly never thought of when we started working together. It's something that impacted my time management. It impacted my availability for clients. It impacted my ability to work in the groups where I'm really getting good feedback and have a sense that I'm accomplishing something.

Alanna? Hello? Alanna, I think we got cut off here.

[Alanna was disconnected and then came back on]

**Alanna:** Sorry about that. Are you still there?

**Mark:** Yeah, I'm still here. I think we got cut off.

**Alanna:** We did. My cellphone got disconnected. We'll just pick up where we are now. I think what I was saying is, what I admire about you and what I thought was neat about yourself, is that you're very passionate about helping other people and devoting your time to nonprofit, to really amazing causes, and you're stand for kids in many different ways.

*"...coaching is a process. Be flexible. Be open-minded. Be forthcoming with what you think are your challenges, your*

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*strengths and your weaknesses because a coach like a doctor, like a baseball pitcher or anything, they can't help you unless you give them the whole picture."*

In working with you on that too I could see where we wanted to make sure that the time that you were spending on these organizations or being on the board, was not only helping other people, which of course you were, but it was also fulfilling for you and that it was working well within everything else that you wanted to achieve especially professionally.

### Time Management & ROI

**Mark:** This is very true. I would call it two things, one is certainly time management. The other is feedback from any particular group. Not necessarily accurate feedback, but feedback in terms of was I getting the emotional return on it that I wanted? We went through the different groups to see.

**Alanna:** There's a return on investment in everything. It's not just financially. We invest our time and energy and so it's like looking at what's that ROI for those as well. As far as what would you like others to know about coaching and how did working with me uniquely fit your needs?

**Mark:** I think that's really two questions, but to answer the first one, what would I tell people about coaching is, coaching is a process. Be flexible. Be open-minded. Be forthcoming with what you think are your challenges, your strengths and your weaknesses because a coach like a doctor, like a baseball pitcher or anything, they can't help you unless you give them the whole picture.

Two, what did I get from working with you all these years and that will continue. If I didn't feel that I was getting anything, obviously the feedback and the ideas that I needed, I would be working with somebody else is I think you're extraordinarily bright.

I think you are perceptive in terms of what my personal issues may be that you understand what my business is, you understand my varied interest, things that obviously we both developed over time.

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You know what my goals are in the nonprofit world, in the business world and we're able to mesh those together. I think that's probably your strength. Also it's what you bring to the table in terms of, "Yes, this is going to be a big challenge, but let's maybe look at it a slightly different way." It's getting a second pair of eyes and looking at something.

**Alanna:** It's always good to have somebody else's help, even for myself sometimes I reach out to friends or coaches and have them help me look at it from a different point of view or perspective. How would you say coaching has been a positive and productive investment for you and your business?

**Mark:** It certainly has prioritized some of my goals. It's helped me in the resources you've given me or referred to such as someone to work on my computer, billing systems, things that seems so inconsequential when you're with a major firm.

#### Structure and Resources

When you're on your own, all of a sudden they're huge issues. Those things have helped. The structure is good. The ability to have accountability on a schedule so that you don't just say, "I think in a month or so I should look it all, I'll look at my billings, look at my receivables, look at my work in progress."

We're doing that on a regular schedule, so there's an automatic check in which is very good and helpful.

**Alanna:** That also leads to, how do you think coaching has made you a better business owner?

**Mark:** I do. I've used the word before so I don't want to overuse the word priorities, but everyone has incredible demands on their time. Time management is certainly a goal. Priorities will shift as a goal. Looking at things with flexibility, in other words what worked for me in January may not work in March, but it might be great again in June.

The ability to, not go with the flow, but be flexible on the demands of the practice which do change and some cases do demand more work at times where then for whatever reason they're going to sit there because nothing is particularly happening and that's okay.

*“One...they need to understand that you’re a resource as well as a coach and resource being one for different specialties or expertise.*

*Two, for looking at things a different way. Three, to see how a particular issue or problem fits into the entire issue you’re working with or the entire business, whether it’s selling books or legal services or dentistry or anything else really.*

*Every business will have similar challenges and every business will have challenges that are unique to that field. They’re not necessarily mutually exclusive. Anyone in the business has billing challenges, receivable challenges.”*

I have one case where the husband and wife are probably going to work out 90% of the issues together. In other cases, the husband and wife can’t even be in the same room together. The amount of the estate or the amount of money involved is really not an issue. It's the personalities. I think we have worked on those issues as well.

**Alanna:**

It's interesting. In working with people from different industries or different types of businesses, it seems like people think that a lot of their challenges are technical or tactical. What it boils down to is the fact that we're human beings and we're dealing with other human beings.

It's how do we get along with them or communicate more effectively or at least be a more active listener and address the challenges from that place from a human standpoint.

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**Mark:** I think we've also discussed child custody is a huge issue in family law, is stepping back and saying, "What does this fit in the entire picture of this divorce?" It's the ability to step back and take a fresh look sometimes.

**Alanna:** I bet. Again, emotions are pretty high in terms of what you do. In rounding this down, what else would you want somebody know about coaching and working with me so that they're leveraged to benefit from it?

**Mark:** One is full disclosure. The more discussion you have going in about the nature of the business, challenges you perceive, the goals you have both short-term and long-term, I think you need to communicate those to you.

I feel that people need to understand accountability that on their own goals they need to understand that you're a resource as well as a coach and resource being one for different specialties or expertise.

Two, for looking at things a different way. Three, to see how a particular issue or problem fits into the entire issue you're working with or the entire business, whether it's selling books or legal services or dentistry or anything else really.

### Business Challenges

Every business will have similar challenges and every business will have challenges that are unique to that field. They're not necessarily mutually exclusive. Anyone in the business has billing challenges, receivable challenges. Approaching them in different ways is helpful.

**Alanna:** Billing like accounts receivable is definitely something that I've seen come up too not only in law practices, but in bookkeeping and in dentistry and some other markets as well. That's what's interesting about what I do as a business coach is that although there's a uniqueness to what each of you do and the industry that you're in but yet the business challenges are sometimes very similar.

What would you say is the most important thing that you've learned about yourself from business coaching?

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**Mark:** The ability to be flexible. The ability to set goals, to modify those goals when necessary and to prioritize and to take a look at the goals and see, when we set those goals were they achievable in about say three months rather than six months?

Instead of six months were they really nine-month goals? I think that you have to have goals, you have to have priorities and you have to be flexible in them and make sure you stay on track, which is one of the things that coaching does is keeps you focused on where you're going, what you're doing and how you're getting there, where you can have goals that are perhaps not as precise, but I think if you work with a coach and in particular I know working with you, those goals were always very specific.

I don't walk out of a session with a vague idea where we're going. It's specific goals and specific timetables.

#### Specific Timetables

**Alanna:** I appreciate you saying too about flexibility, because I've had clients where they set a goal for themselves and I thought that it would take them six months and nine months to get there and they ended up getting there in three.

Or it might take them a little longer than what they initially thought but by allowing themselves be flexible and just stay in action and be in the process, they end up still achieving it a few months later.

You can stay stuck in the upset of, "I didn't do it by the time I said I would" or you can celebrate in the fact that, "Wow, I did it."

**Mark:** I think close things to happen, but I think when you're working with a coach, if you have a six-month goal, we're constantly checking in to say, "Okay, it's one month out of six. Are we making the progress we wanted or have we made more?" Perhaps you can use some of your time on a different project.

*"I think that you have to have goals, you have to have priorities and you have to be flexible in them and make sure you stay on track,*

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*which is one of the things that coaching does is keeps you focused on where you're going, what you're doing and how you're getting there, where you can have goals that are perhaps not as precise, but I think if you work with a coach and in particular I know working with you, those goals were always very specific."*

**Alanna:** Yeah, checking in about the measurables and like you've mentioned a few times here or as I talk about the people almost everyday is how to effectively use their time so that they feel productive and they're seeing the results that they want to see. Do you have any other comments that you want to share to those that will be listening to this before we sign off?

**Mark:** I've been incredibly satisfied with my relationship with Alanna and that will continue. I think that coaching is a process. It's not over in a finite period of time and that there's always new challenges to face.

It's easier to face them with somebody who is critical or looks at them with a critical eye, not mean to - I don't want to use the word critical again, but not meaning to downplaying idea but someone who has a fresh set of eyes on a problem or a situation or a goal.

#### Collaboration

**Alanna:** Thank you, Mark. I look forward to continuing our collaboration and working together so I can continue seeing your success. I thank you for taking the time to participate in this.

**Mark:** You're welcome. My pleasure.

**Alanna:** Thank you.

**Mark:** Bye-bye.

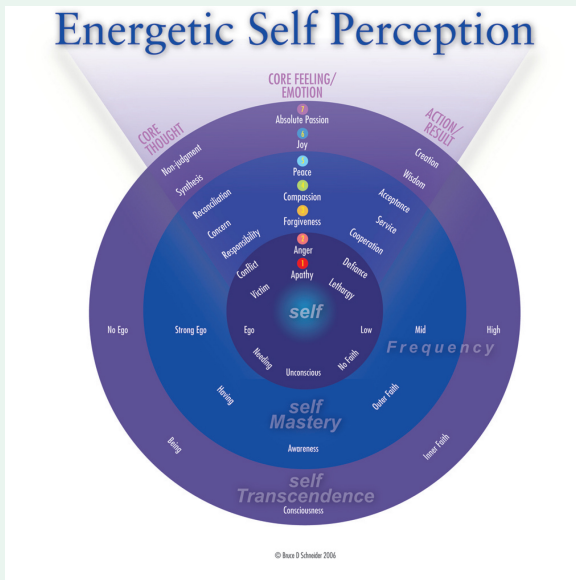
**Alanna:** Bye-bye.

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