**YGT episode 192**

This episode of you've got, this is brought to you by my virtual writing groups program, a 12 week series of weekly group coaching meetings that can help you to ease back into meaningful writing habits. This summer. Each virtual writing groups package includes 12 weekly meetings, two private coaching sessions with me on topics of your choice, access to my nine part course on academic writing and publishing, and a lifetime membership to prolific my online community.

Focused on aligning your goals with your values. If you're ready to deepen your relationship with your writing this summer and have some fun along the way, I hope you'll join us groups for summer 2020 start the week of June 8th so check out the program today. You can learn more about the upcoming virtual writing groups program@drkatielinder.com backslash B w G or just click the link in the show notes you're listening to.

You've got this episode one 92. Welcome to, you've got this, a weekly podcast for higher education professionals looking to increase their confidence and capacity for juggling the day to day demands of an academic life. I'm your host, dr Katie Linder. On this episode, I want to talk about relaxing expectations.

Now, this is a topic that is really top of mind for me because all of my coaching sessions have really been around some version of this topic in the last couple of weeks, and I think that we are still definitely in the midst of covert 19. Haze, a met and response and trying to figure out what are things going to look like in, um, here in the U S in the summer months when folks still have kids at home, they might be teaching online courses.

And life just continues to look very different. And so one of the things that I've been talking about with a lot of my clients is. How are our expectations for ourselves really changing during this time? And I actually think that this is a huge silver lining, at least it is for me right now. So let me first talk about what is it, what does it mean to relax expectations?

And let me give some concrete examples of what this looks like for me and also how I'm doing it, because I think the health part is actually the hardest. So the first thing, I think that relaxing expectations looks like. Is establishing a new baseline of what counts as success. So the old meter, maybe the pre covert 19 me would really have a long to do list each day.

And a lot of how I felt at the end of the day was really based on what did I get checked off my list. Now I'm definitely a list person, so this may not be exactly true for you, but I'm sure some of you listening are in this boat where if you check things off the list, you feel great, and if you don't, you don't feel so great.

Now I feel like now I have kind of a new concept of what success means to me. Where I have a few things that I intentionally choose for the day, and I'll talk about this a little bit later, and if I cross those things off that I intentionally chose and I felt like they were important and they were important priorities for me, that is my new baseline of success.

So I don't necessarily look at, you know, the entire day. I don't necessarily look at all the things that I check off, even though I often check off more than three things each day. But I really try to think about, you know, how do I want to spend my time? What am I prioritizing and how does it relate to things that I value?

And that has become my new baseline of success. Now it's not always going to look like a productive day. So let me be clear about that. Sometimes success is not defined by everything that we get done. I think sometimes success can look like we had a day of rest. After a difficult week or we really listened to a colleague and gave them our time and attention in a way that we knew was really helpful to them, and that feels like success.

So it's really about redefining and a very personalized way. What does success look like. The second thing that I think relaxing expectations means to me is being a lot kinder to myself about what I'm capable of in a given day. And I, the old me, like I said, would maybe feel a little guilty if I wasn't able to cross off all the things that I had planned for the day.

And also what I'm realizing is when I made plans for the day in the past, I wasn't always being super conscious of things like my schedule. I would just like throw things on my list without a lot of awareness about other things that I had going on. So oftentimes my expectations were maybe a little bit unrealistic about what I could get done.

Now I just move things to another date on my calendar and I really let it go, or I don't add those things to my to do list in the first place. If I know that I have a busy day or there's some other kind of contextual thing that's really going to keep me from getting something done. I also think that relaxing expectations is about creating opportunities for rest and fun.

And I feel like the older version of me was really squeezing in the stuff in the margins, you know, like it was an afterthought. I wasn't necessarily making a lot of time for this. And now I'm really trying to create time for fun in my calendar and on my to do list. So it's actually something that I'm noting.

I am setting aside time, I'm planning for things in advance, and it's helping me to kind of, again, broaden my understanding of what success looks like of what counts as success on a daily, weekly, monthly basis. So let me give you three kind of concrete examples of what this looks like for me lately. So if you follow me on Instagram, um, and you look at my Instagram stories, you'll have seen that I'm choosing three things each day to focus on.

Now, I, and I know I've talked about this in some other places, um, so even if you're not following me there, you might know that I'm doing this and I've been doing this for a couple of months now every day. Uh, I do it on the weekends. I do it on the weekdays, but here's the key. I'm not choosing the hardest things on my list.

I'm choosing the things that I feel like are going to be reasonable for me to do that day, and I'm not using that as a strategy as like motivation to do hard things. It's not even really about. Public accountability of, you know, if I, if I don't get this thing done, then everybody will know. You know, it's not really about that.

I'm more using it to stay on track with what feels important to me for that day. And also it's kind of a reminder of what will take up most of my time. So oftentimes I will note on there if I have like seven zoom meetings throughout the day, like for me, it's not that the accomplishing of the zoom meetings is my success for the day.

It's more a reminder to myself of, this isn't a day to try to do a bunch of other crazy things because you have. Zoom meetings all day long. So that might be the day where my other two things are. Things like unloading the dishwasher or putting away clothes that I had folded, uh, earlier in the week or something like that, because I'm not trying to layer on kind of a higher expectation of what I can get done during that day.

So choosing three things each day, making sure they feel intentional for me, and also choosing things that don't necessarily feel hard. Now, the other thing that I'm really doing is I'm changing my mind about what I will get done in a very intentional way rather than in a kind of guilt inducing way. So for example, each day that I list these three things, of course there's other to do items on my list.

I'm not just doing three things every day, but I have a lot of flexibility around moving those things if I'm not able to get them done. So right now I'm organizing my to do list. I include meetings that I have on that list, and I am doing this in notion, which I've talked about before. I'm color coding some things, so it makes it kind of easy to see where my meetings are.

And then I take other things that I want to get done throughout the day, and I slot them in in the time of the day, roughly where I think that they'll happen. So let's say I have a meeting at 10 o'clock in the morning and then I don't have another meeting until. Two, I might put some two dues in the middle of that window so that I, I have kind of a sense of when in my day I might try to get that done.

Then I can kind of think just in my head, do I feel like there's enough time in that window or do I need to kind of reshuffle some of those to do's around so that I have a little bit more margin, or maybe this is something I can move to the following day. I just do it in a really intentional way of thinking about my time, my capacity to get something done, and if I feel like I'm going to need downtime in between, like a lot of meetings if I have them, that I'm not trying to squeeze an extra two dues.

Now, the third example I think of relaxing my expectations is I am not doing what I would call powering through. I'm not doing it anymore. And this is something that I used to do all the time. And I think if some of you at least may know what I'm talking about, where you look at something and you're like, Oh, I don't really want to do that, but I'm just going to power through it anyway.

Or you know, I should be done right now cause I'm really tired. But I'm just going to get one more thing done or I'm just going to answer one more email. I am not doing that anymore. I am not powering through. I am, instead of moving things to the following day or two to another time on my calendar. So what this means for me, cause some of you might be thinking, well sometimes you just have to power through.

I get that. I really do understand. And I would say that right now I'm paying more attention to my calendar in general when planning my to do list, and it helps me to see a larger context of what's on my plate so that I'm not having unrealistic expectations of what I can do in any given day. So when I pick my three things in the morning, I'll look for example to see how much my on zoom today.

And if I'm on zoom like all day long, then I'm not going to put a bunch of extra stuff in my head about what I want to get done. I'm going to be kind of realistic about what that looks like. Now, it might sound kind of crazy, but in the past I didn't always look at my calendar. When I was planning my to do list.

I would just like throw things on my list and hope that they got done and I would feel guilty if they didn't, but I wasn't always planning it in the midst of this context. I also am paying a lot more attention to what I feel like doing each day. Now. Recently I saw a tweet or something online where someone said, basically, I have two good days, and then I have kind of a.

A garbage fire day. And then I come back and I have a couple of good days, and then I have a bad day. And I would say that I'm maybe not on on a exact cycle like that, but I'll have a couple, two, three days where I feel really productive. And then I'll have a day where I feel like I need a little bit more rest, or I need a little bit of just downtime.

And so when I wake up in the morning, I can kind of ask myself, how are you feeling today? You know, like, are you feeling like you want to kind of. Push and get some things done. Is this feeling like a productive day or is this feeling like a day where you just want to kind of hang out and chill and get done what you need to get done, but not really anything extra.

So I'm paying a lot more attention to that each day. And then the other thing I'm really paying attention to as it relates to this concept of powering through is I'm paying more attention to what feels good for me to do versus what I think I'm supposed to be doing now. This is one that I think is the hardest, and I've talked with a lot of clients about this lately in academic life and in higher education in general and in general work-life, I would say in like.

Capitalism. We are kind of told, you know, there's a certain number of hours you should be working per day. There are certain things you should be getting done. There are certain ways of working that are better than others, and we've kind of taken a lot of that in. It's very ingrained in us about working all the time, getting email responses back within a certain time window, that kind of thing.

And I have really tried very intentionally in the last six to eight weeks to question those kinds of things that feel ingrained to me and to ask myself again, this is part of that redefining of success. Am I doing something that feels good versus something that I feel I'm supposed to do because of some kind of expectation that I have ingrained within myself.

That is not necessarily an expectation from me. Maybe I took it on, you know, years ago, and I'm still kind of living out that expectation. And a good example is like responding to all of our emails immediately. And maybe I can wait and I don't have to respond to everything immediately and I can hold off and leave some things to the following day or something along those lines.

So I'm paying a lot of attention to that and trying to really question. What are some of those assumptions that I've made in the past and are those assumptions that are aligned with my values or not? And realizing that I have some choice around that and I can make some decisions about how I want to spend my time and how I want to feel during the day about how I'm spending my time.

Okay. So some of you might be listening to this and thinking, well, that's all well and good, but how do you actually do this? Like how do you get to a place where you can relax these expectations? Because it's one thing to say that you're doing it and it's another thing to like feel it inside in a very deep way, and not to feel that guilt and to really embrace this new idea of what success can look like.

So here are some of the things that I'm doing that I think have been helping me. One is that I, uh, as I've talked about before, I'm engaging in a lot of reflective journaling. Now, some of this happens in the morning with my morning pages. I also am keeping a yoga journal, which I mentioned on a previous episode.

And then I also am journaling just really briefly at the end of the day as kind of a closeout journal. And I just kind of say, what went well today? Is there something I would change about today? I have a quick gratitude list. Um, and so it's just a very quick kind of, uh. Debrief at the end of the day. I think that the reflective journaling is helping me really to tune in to how I'm feeling at any given time, and it's allowing me to just process some of those feelings before I get into things like making to do lists.

I'm also able through that journaling, I think to note some patterns, if I'm having kind of consistent up and downs or if I'm feeling I'm really good at the end of a certain day, I've really tried to dive into like what made me feel good about what I was able to get done today? You know, what are, what am I associating positive feelings with?

What am I associating negative feelings with? And that's been really helpful. The second thing that I think is really contributing to my new kind of relaxed expectations is practicing yoga daily. Now. I think that the main thing that this is helping me to do as it relates to this is pay more attention to my body and how I'm feeling in my body.

And when I wake up in the morning, um, maybe I'm feeling kind of tired or fatigued, or throughout the day if I'm getting a headache or something like that. In the past I might've ignored that. I might've just kind of powered through. And I think that's actually one of the biggest. Problems with powering through is often you're ignoring physical sensations and you're just using kind of a mental game to keep going.

And I'm not doing that anymore. I'm really trying to be careful about not pushing through, especially things like physical pain when I need to stop, stretch, take a break, you know, grab some Advil, whatever it may be to deal with it. Now, what that also means is that I'm listening a lot to my body and Mike, my kind of gut sensations when I'm getting up in the morning, so I'm not choosing to just power through as a default mode.

I'm, I'm really kind of checking in with myself in the morning and then kind of at different points throughout the day. And the yoga is a really good reminder about how to do that because I'm really in my body at least once every day and it's helping to kind of set me up, I think for more success. Now, the last thing that I'm doing that I think has been really helpful, and this is something I practice for a while.

I don't necessarily associate it with coven, but I think it's been heightened by this period is if I don't feel like doing something, I don't do it. I acknowledged to myself why I'm choosing not to do it, and then I really try to let it go. So I really want, and this is something that I developed initially with my writing practices when I was working on books and things like that.

I never wanted those things to feel forced. I always want to have a really positive relationship with my creativity and with my writing. And so if I'm not feeling like it, I often will not force myself to do it anyway. Um, so a good example of this is, uh, this past Friday I was having really spotty internet in the afternoon.

And this is not something that it usually happens. It was kind of, um, I don't, I don't know why it was happening, but we knew there were outages in our area. And I had a couple things on my list that I wanted to get done Friday afternoon for the weekend. And, uh, I just wasn't able to get them done. I mean, like the internet was just not stable enough for me to complete what I wanted to complete.

And it was a real bummer because there were a couple of things that I was actually like really looking forward to getting done. And I just had to kind of say to myself, well, there's extenuating circumstances here. Like there's literally nothing you can do. And when the internet came on later that evening, I intentionally made the choice not to do the work.

Later at night, I could have said, Oh, you can still check this off. You can power through and get these things done before the weekend. And I didn't want to, I was spending the evening with my partner. We were watching a movie together. I didn't want to disrupt that to just get a couple things checked off my list.

So I intentionally moved those items to the following Saturday morning. So that I could get them done and it was fine. It was something that was, again, my intentional choice. And I think sometimes when it comes to relaxing expectations, the more intentionality and purpose we build into these kinds of inner dialogues that we have with ourselves about why we're not doing something or why we're having a hard time pushing something forward.

That kind of positive self-talk around choice and agency is a huge part of relaxing those expectations. So I would love to hear what expectations are looking like for you right now, if you're choosing to relax them, if you're struggling with this in any part of your work life or your personal life. Um, because it has been such a topic of conversation.

So I thought I would just share a little bit about what this is looking like for me right now, but I would love to hear from you too. So you can always email me@helloatdrkatielinder.com. You can tweet to me at Katie double underscore Linder. You can connect with me on Instagram at Katie underscore lender and I would just love to hear what this is looking like for you in your own lives.

Thanks so much for listening.

Thanks for listening to this episode of you've got this show notes and a transcript for this episode can be found at Katie linder.work/podcasts. If you found this episode helpful, please also consider rating and or reviewing the show in iTunes. Thanks for listening.