**YGT episode 213**

You're listening to, you've got this episode 213. Um, 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 give you a bit of a structure for how to strategically break down a large project and create a bit of a timeline or a work plan for that project.

Now, this is coming off of several coaching sessions that I've had with clients, where they have said, I just don't know how to. Estimate time. I don't know how to create a work plan for something that's like really a longer project, like a month or longer. And we use our sessions sometimes to do this together.

And so I thought I would offer it to you in this podcast episode, in case you've got a project that you need to do a little bit of planning with, and you need to do some breaking down of that project so that you really know how long it's going to take you. And when you're actually going to get it done.

So the first step is to try to understand the deadline for that project. Now, this is a little bit different. If you have a project that doesn't have a deadline, so if it doesn't have a deadline, I would try to have a rough timeline of when you want to have it completed by. So it could be like quarter two of, uh, 20, 21 or something like that.

So you start to kind of narrow in on an understanding of. What, what is the priority that you have for that project and when you want to have it done, but if you have a deadline, um, and this is specifically helpful around writing projects, then you can say, yep, this is due back to the editor on this date.

And I know I can kind of work backward from that. So once you have that deadline in place, we're going to just kind of set it aside. And then you're going to look at your calendar and decide how much time do you have available per week between now and when that deadline is to be focused on this project.

So you might decide that you have a couple of hours, you know, a window of time that you're going to put in every Tuesday afternoon. Or you might decide that you have, you know, an hour a day that you're going to try to devote to this on workdays and that's five hours a week. Um, and let's say this is a project that's two months away.

Well, five hours a week, times, eight weeks. And you have roughly 40 hours that you can devote to this project in that time period. So you want to be looking at your calendar and trying to get a sense of what can you actually carve out. And whenever you're thinking about time, I encourage you to. Um, kind of overestimate the time you're going to need and underestimate the time you're going to have.

So if you're like, well, I usually have one to three hours a week, then I would say estimate on the one hour side versus the three hour side, because if you're more likely to have less time than more, we want to go with the most cautious, uh, estimation of what it is that you're working within with that project.

Okay, so you have your deadline and you have the amount of time available per week that you're going to be working on this up until the time that it's, that it's due or needing to be done. Now, you're going to look at your list of the main tasks that you need to do to complete this project. You might already have a list or you're going to create one and.

Usually this works well, when you can kind of break it down into like themed buckets of tasks and you can drill down as far as you need to within each of these tasks so that you have a really clear understanding of what you actually need to do when it comes to completing the project. So I encourage my clients to really try to break this down, take the time to do it.

And I can give the example of, you know, a writing project where you might say, well, I need to do this revise and resubmit that I got back from an editor. Well, some of the tasks involved in that might be reviewing the, um, feedback that you got from the reviewers and deciding what you actually want to act on and what maybe you just want to respond to.

And, and. Defend, you know, and say, I don't, I don't want to change this. Um, but here's, here's the rationale for that. And then you might have some other things that you want to actually, uh, change or revise. And from that list, you might, you might generate a list of to-dos of, I need to strengthen the transition between parts one and two, and the paper.

I need to read these two extra books that are recommended by the reviewers and incorporate them into my literature review. I need to, um, Re analyze some data that one of the reviewers questioned and just to kind of make sure that it's, it's, you know, analyzed in the correct way. And I need to add a point to my discussion, um, because the reviewer raised something that I kind of nest, uh, in terms of discussion.

So you might list out those things. Now, the next thing I'm going to ask you to do is what all of my clients, every single one of them, they pushed back on and I'm gonna encourage you to do it anyway. And we find ways to do this, which is to have a time estimate for each of those tasks and break down those tasks until you can get to a place where you can have a time estimate.

Now. All of my clients. I mean, maybe there's like 2% that don't do this, but pretty much 98% of them will say, I can't estimate the time for these tasks. That's just, you know, it's too variable. It's too difficult. So what I will typically ask them when we get to that point in our conversation is, um, would this task take 30 hours to do?

I'll just pick a random number. Usually it's kind of a high number and they'll say, no, no, no. I don't think it'll take 30 hours. And I'll say, okay, well, would it take 15 hours? And then we'll kind of stop. And they'll think they'll say, well, maybe it'll take like two hours to do this part. And then another hour to do this part and maybe 45 minutes to an hour to do this other part.

Okay. So roughly I think it would take me five to seven hours and I'll say, okay, well, because we're overestimating the time we think things will take just to be cautious, we're going to say seven hours. For that particular task. And we will run through all of the things on their list for that project and try to do rough estimations of the time that we think it's going to take.

Then we take those tasks and we try to map them a little bit in, in the order in which they need to happen, because there might be some tasks that need to happen before other tasks. And sometimes this is just because, you know, one task triggers another task or literally one task is dependent on another task.

You might have some tasks that it doesn't matter, you know, they can happen in any order. Um, but you want us to kind of get a rough sense of, are there certain things that need to happen first? And then you're going to start to combine all of this information that we've gathered. So we have the deadline, we have the amount of time available per week.

We have the things that need to be done to complete the project. And we have the time estimate for each of those tasks and the rough order in which they need to occur. Now, we're going to start to look at your weekly breakdown of time. And we're going to start attaching things to the weeks. And what this is going to allow you to do is to say, well, if you have estimated that you need 20 hours to read and take notes on the two extra books that the reviewers told you, you needed to put into the article, then that could take of the fi let's hear devoting five hours a week to this project.

Well, that's a month of time. That would take you a month to do that reading and note taking. And how does that fit into your overall schedule? Because if you only have two months to do this project, the whole first month is being taken up by that reading and note-taking well, when some people hear that they're like, Oh, okay.

Maybe I can kind of skim the reading or I can look very strategically for what I need in the reading. I don't necessarily need to take 20 hours to read a note take. I'm going to try to cut that in half. I'd like to have that done in two weeks. Or they might say, well, I really do feel like it's going to take 20 hours, but maybe I can up the amount of time that I can devote earlier in the project and maybe backburner this other thing on my plate so that I can try to get the reading done more quickly and then devote more time to the other tasks.

When you look at the time estimates for the tasks on your list, part of what we're looking at is the total, when you total all those things up. Does it match or fit within the timeframe of the hours you've given yourself per week up until the deadline of when this thing is due. So it's kind of pretty simple math, but I think we've all told ourselves this story that we can't estimate time.

That is associated with certain kinds of tasks. And even now, as I'm saying this, you might be thinking, Katie, I've got this project where I can't do that. I'm like, you're already telling yourself that story of why you can't match your project onto this method. And I hear you, I hear this going through your mind and I'm telling you, you, that everything in your life does take a certain amount of time.

It will have a beginning. It will have an ending. It will have a finite amount of time that it takes you to do that thing. And even if you're off by a little bit, that's okay. We let our perfectionism get in the way of adjusting and kind of estimating these amounts of time because we're afraid we're going to be wrong.

It's okay. If you're wrong. You'll use that information for next time when you're estimating how much time this thing is going to take and you'll adjust your schedule and you'll, you'll adjust your other tasks to make sure this thing is getting done. But this is the primary method that I recommend to people.

When they're doing, trying to plan out a large project and try to figure out how long it's going to take and how they're actually going to fit it into their schedule. So once you start to map your tasks and attach them to the dates and times on your calendar, you're going to start to realize, especially for projects where maybe you've chosen a deadline, it may not be a hard deadline from an editor, but it might be something that you're just trying to accomplish by a certain date.

And this time of the year, it's typically stuff where you're like, Oh yeah, I can finish my book by the end of the calendar year. And then when you start to map it out, you're realizing like, Oh, it's actually not going to fit. I don't have enough time in my week. There's too many tasks and they're going to take too much time.

This project is actually not going to be completed until February of 2021. This allows you to get just way more realistic about the kinds of things that are on your plate and how they can actually fit into your schedule. Now, for the most part, when I'm working with clients and we go through this process.

It will take us within a session. That's about an hour. We can usually fit in a full project in that time, or maybe a couple of projects, depending on what they're working on. Sometimes I've had clients bring like a short list of, you know, three writing assignments they're trying to get done in the next two months.

And we'll be able to do this for each of those writing assignments in just an hour. So this is not something that has to take a lot of time to do this planning process and to really kind of break down. What is it that you're, you're able to kind of fit in within a certain period of time, but it does take a commitment to some decision-making.

You have to decide on a deadline. If it's not already there, you have to decide on the amount of time you're going to make available for this project. Each week, you have to decide what are the tasks that are going to help you complete the project, decide the time estimates, which is the hardest thing for a lot of people.

And then you have to decide where you want to put those things into your calendar. What is the priority for each of those things? What has to come before other things? Now, this also allows you to establish milestones and many deadlines throughout, especially a longer project, if you're trying to break it down.

Um, but I thought that this would be helpful just to say that there are a set of steps that you can take. You might have to open yourself up to different kinds of stories about your ability to estimate time. Um, and your ability to kind of hold yourself to a schedule and to a little bit of a discipline where you can actually execute on what your plan is, which is a whole different topic for a whole other different episode.

But these steps will help you to break down a large project into reasonable pieces and help you to know when you can actually get it done. So I would love to hear, if you try out this method, you can always email me at hello at dr. Katie linder.com. You can tweet to me at Katie double underscore Linder.

You can connect with me on Instagram at Katie underscore Linder. Any way you want to connect with me. I always love to hear from you. Thanks 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 dr. Katie linder.com/podcasts.

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