**YGT episode 216**

You're listening to, you've got this episode 216. Welcome to you. 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 finally would share a little bit about my PMP exam experience because I just took my first attempt on Thanksgiving to, as I record this, it was yesterday and I wanted to talk a little bit about how I studied for it.

And spoiler alert. I did. Pass, which I am super, super excited about. So I will first link in the show notes, a previous episode, where I talked about pursuing the PMP, which is a project management professional credential. And so you can go back and listen to that. If you haven't already just to hear a little bit more about what this is and why I decided to do it, but I wanted to give a little bit of a breakdown of how I prepared for this and how I was feeling going into the exam.

And then what ultimately that experience was like, in case you're interested in doing something like this for yourself. So, um, the first thing to know is that I took some training in the summer. When you apply for the PMP exam, you have to have a 35 hour training course, or at least 35 hours of training through a range of different experiences.

And you also need to have a certain number of hours of access. Experience with project management in a professional environment. So you can't just take the exam without those things having, being done first. So I had this training in the summer, which really kind of introduced me to the language of the PMP, which is very different than the language that we use in higher education, around project management.

And I actually think that's one of the biggest hurdles of this exam is that there's a lot of jargon. And it is not always intuitive. And when I was studying for the exam, I used an exam simulator, which we'll talk about in a little bit. And they did include kind of like fake words and phrases that are not really used for PMP.

And, um, I, it was hard to tell the difference because it's just a lot of jargon. So I took that training in the summer and then I really started studying an earnest in October. And I actually, um, had scheduled my exam for November 28th, um, which would have been tomorrow. And I got really nervous about it in September, and it was just making me feel very overwhelmed and anxious with everything else I had on my plate.

So I ended up canceling it. Um, and I was like, I'm not sure I want to do this right now. Maybe I want to wait until 2021, because I had a full year after I applied, um, to take the exam to actually complete it. But then I went back and kind of looked at the requirements because one of the reasons I had booked the exam in late November in the first place is because the exam is changing in early January.

And, um, that made me a little bit nervous too, because I thought I would have to study a bunch of new material and I really kind of wanted to get this done and crossed off my list before the exam changed. So I canceled the exam and I was like, if I feel like I can do this. You know, I I'll book it again, you know, I'll, I'll find another time.

And there was no cancellation fee or anything like that. So I, after thinking about it for a little while, I listened to a couple of podcasts about the new exam, and I kind of did some research on the new exam and decided it was kind of now whenever I really wanted to do it. And I wanted to get this done before the exam change.

So I started really studying an earnest in October. And I ended up taking like seven practice exams over about six or seven weeks. And I did this using what's called an exam simulator. And this is basically something that's trying to replicate the experience of the PMP exam. So it looks like the PMP exam.

It includes similar questions to the PMP exam and it had eight exams total, and each exam had 200 questions in it. Like the actual PMP exam. Now this simulator, which I will link in the show notes in case you're interested, um, also allowed you to quiz yourself on different questions. It broke down the questions by categories.

You could see where you were scoring well, where you weren't scoring. Well, it allowed you to easily review incorrect answers that you had to questions. Um, and then it explained for every question why the answer that was correct was correct. So it was a great investment for me to actually be able to use this tool.

And, um, the other course that I took earlier in the summer, it gave some paper based exams, but nothing that was kind of a digital simulator. So that was really important. So each of those practice exams took me about two to three hours, depending on how much time I had available. And admittedly, there were a couple that I really rushed through because I was like in between meetings and try to squeeze it in.

So I ended up passing the first three exams, which was any score over 70%. Then I failed three in a row. And then I passed the last one that I took and all of the scores were kind of hovering right around 70% on average. And what you've, what you're told online is that you shouldn't really take the PMP until you're, you're getting like 80% on these exams.

So I was feeling a little bit nervous. I'm not gonna lie. I did better on the exams where I took more time to think through my answers and I wasn't feeling rushed. And then after each practice exam, I would review my incorrect answers and really try to learn the material that, that I'd gotten wrong. And again, the simulator would explain why each answer was correct or incorrect, which was super, super important.

So before I went into the exam, I had a couple major concerns about my knowledge, um, around project management. One of them was there's about 25 formulas that can show up on the exam to calculate things like, um, like earned. Project value and you know, a lot of jargon, I can't even remember what these formulas are about, but it's basically how do you calculate, you know, different things about time and cost and how things are going with a project.

And these are all formulas that in the future, I would probably just look up if I had to use them in my actual professional life. Um, so I chose not to memorize those. Uh, which was making me a little bit nervous, but my memory is, um, admittedly not super great. And, and this is why I keep lists and write everything down.

And so I didn't feel like that was the best use of my energy. The second thing I was nervous about was I didn't really memorize what is called I T T O or input tools and techniques and outputs that could be referenced on the exam. So, um, The PMP study guide, which is called the project management book of knowledge has 49 different processes included in it.

And each of them have their own individual inputs and outputs and tools and techniques that are associated with them. And there was a specific exam in the simulator that was just on this content, the ITO. And that's one of the ones that I failed. I got like 53%. Correct. Um, I just chose not to memorize this because it was just a huge amount of content.

So between not memorizing the formulas and not memorizing ITO, which is, these are pretty hefty areas of project management. Um, I was really questioning like, was that a mistake, uh, has to go into the exam and not memorize those things. Now you might be saying if those things are so hefty, what's left, you know, like what else is on the exam?

And, and really it's a lot of scenarios. So it might explain a scenario and then say, What would you do next as the project manager? And there's a series of steps that happen kind of in order within project management. And you really have to understand the order of those steps in order to answer some of these questions correctly.

But these questions are also completely unrelated to higher education. So it's like you're building a bridge and you find out that the concrete is the wrong kind of concrete, and you have to swap out the concrete. What do you do next? Or you're managing an international project with people from 15 countries and the communication style isn't working.

What do you do next? Like it, it has those kinds of scenarios. So, um, I went in basically on the strength of my knowledge about the scenarios that I felt like I could. Take a best guess as to how these things, um, would kind of work out and, and what I would do next in a kind of very, uh, if this was me and I was the project manager, like, what would I do next?

So the day before the exam, which again was on Thanksgiving, I had planned to take one more practice exam. It had the eighth, one left to go and then go through some more incorrect answers. But at that point, the anxiety and the nervousness about the exam was really starting to hit me. And I felt like I just needed a break because I had taken two practice exams already earlier this week.

And I just didn't really feel like I would get more information in a way that would feel meaningful, that I could actually remember it. And so I just kind of rested and I took a break. I didn't take the last exam. And again, I was thinking to myself, like, is this a mistake? Like, there are things that you could learn in the last, you know, 24 hours that, that might impact your score on this exam.

So I was really, um, really kind of, not sure how this was going to go. I mean, I. I cannot kind of explain enough about like my doubts that I had about this exam. Um, okay. So then the night before the PMP exam, I had not just one, not just two but three full on anxiety dreams about this exam. And they were all focused on the proctoring aspects because this is the first time ever that I've had to take a live proctored exam.

Um, and because of COVID, I chose to do that. And in the dreams I was doing things like getting up and leaving the room, which would like result in an automatic failure of this exam. If you know anything about life proctoring and just a quick side note here. After this experience, I will never give students a live proctored exam experience.

Like I was so nervous. I had such a difficult time focusing on the content because I was so nervous I was going to do something wrong and that they would think that I was cheating. I mean, it was just a really uncomfortable environment and it wasn't that bad. But just as someone who has anxiety, I was triggered like the whole time I was taking this exam and it was really challenging.

So because of these anxiety dreams, I didn't end up getting a ton of sleep. So then I went into the exam super nervous and not really feeling all that confident because I was, I was working off of maybe like five, five and a half hours of sleep. And the exam was at six 45 in the morning. That was the only time that was available for like this weekend for me to book it.

So, um, yeah, it was just, it was a very interesting experience. So the exam itself is broken into two parts. The first one had 89 questions, and then I got a 10 minute break where I could actually get up and move around. Um, I didn't know that though. And the exam proctoring had like a chat feature and I literally asked the person on the chat if I could get up and go to the bathroom.

Like I was so nervous about like failing this thing, like in the middle of it, because I just didn't understand how proctoring worked. And like, what if I did something that was like, You know, something that was an automatic failure. Like, I, I was just incredibly nervous about that because after putting so much time into studying for this thing, I spent like 20 hours in the simulator just on its own with these exams.

And that doesn't count other kinds of studying that I was doing. So I had the first part with 89 questions, and then I pause, took a break. I used almost the full break, just to kind of like stretch, go to the bathroom, take a moment to kind of calm down. And then in the second part of the exam, I had the remaining questions that added up to a 200, so 111 questions.

No, I felt super lucky that this exam did not have a lot of those formula questions that I mentioned where I chose not to memorize the formulas. They did not show up a lot. I would say there was maybe five to 10 questions that had some kind of formula and of those five to 10. I mean, I felt like I could.

Kind of figure out what I needed to, to answer. So that was like a huge win, um, as I was going through the exam and the majority of the questions were really just scenarios where you had to decide what the project manager would do based on the details offered in that question, kind of like I described earlier.

So I, again like the, the exam felt a little bit easier to me than the simulator had been, which was probably a good thing because I felt like it prepared me really well. So in this exam, I did have the option to flag questions for later review and kind of go back and check on them. Um, but I ended up just making the decision on my answer in the moment and not really flagging anything, because I felt like it was one of those things where I didn't want to second guess myself, if I was kind of answering from my gut.

So I basically tried to eliminate as many choices as I could, based on what the clues were in the question. Just like with any exam that you would take that has multiple choice. And then I would kind of go with my instinct or go with my gut of what I thought the answer was. Now I had done this, there was at least one exam that I took for practice, where I was doing this, you know, like kind of going with my gut instinct.

And I felt really confident in that exam. And it was one of the ones that I failed. So I was like not able to interpret at all during this exam, like how well I was doing or not doing, which is like the worst part about it, because it's like, if you're two questions off and you're going to fail it, like.

You don't even know which questions to go back to and try to change the answers on. I mean, it's just, um, it's hard. I mean, like these kinds of exams are really challenging, so, okay. The end result I get to the end and you click a button and you find out right then if you pass this exam or not, and I tried so hard to prepare myself of like, If I don't pass this, like I had already blocked another time on my calendar to take the second attempt because I wanted to do it before the exam changed.

And so I was like trying to just like really hold myself up. And if this didn't work out, it was okay. And I had another practice exam and you know, like I could keep studying. And so I click the button and it says that I passed the exam. I felt such relief. I was so. Happy that I was not going to have to keep studying for this, that I was able to check this off on the first attempt.

I, and I also felt like I probably passed it by the skin of my teeth. Like I just, I was not still not feeling confident about it. And I mean, you guys, if you've listened to the show for a long time, you know that I'm not someone who. Usually underestimates my abilities. Like, I feel like I'm a pretty good judge of what I know, what I don't know.

And I try to not be, you know, really mired and imposter syndrome and all those kinds of things. But I do have to say, because this is really an exam that is based in like another industry entirely. I wasn't sure. Like, I just really wasn't sure how this was going to go and, um, having anxiety on top of that with certainly not helping, but I think that even leading up to it on a good day, I was just like, really unclear about kind of where I stood in terms of, of scoring on this thing.

So this morning, they emailed me a breakdown of the actual exam and there are five areas on the exam and you can score at below target at target or above target. And I was really aiming for target if I could get it right. Because I think you can pass with like one below target or something along those lines.

It kind of depends. It's really unclear what a passing score is on the PMP exam. It's not something that's published, but from what I've heard, people have guessed that it's basically 60% or higher is a passing score on PMP. And usually like 50% of people fail on the first try. Um, so this is a pretty challenging exam just across the board.

So I got the results and found out that I passed above target in all of the categories. And I was completely shocked. I could not believe that that was the score that I had gotten, and it breaks down into certain tasks and how you score it on, in different task areas, which I want to dive into a little bit more and just look at.

Um, but I definitely felt like the simulator that I purchased, which again, I will link in the show notes. Um, It was harder than what this exam was, which I would actually prefer. I think that I would rather go with a hard kind of study method and then have the exam be a little bit easier than the opposite way around.

Um, but I, I will tell you, I was genuinely kind of surprised, um, that, that I had scored that well, Okay, so what's next? Well, um, I have a few other projects to get off my plate, but I'm going to be working on translating some of this into some kind of program for academics and higher ed professionals who really want to increase their skills when they think about project management, because.

I honestly think one of the biggest hurdles when you're looking at something like the PMP is the language it's just not built for higher ed. And so I have been so excited about diving into this material and basically translating it and saying, okay, so this is what this looks like. If you're managing a large grant project, or this is what this looks like.

If you're like co. Facilitating a committee on like strategic planning at your institution, or, you know, other kinds of projects that are more typical for our industry. I feel like we just need to take some of this content, which is actually incredibly helpful and change the language and the scenarios so that it feels a little bit more applicable to our actual work.

So I think it just feels very overwhelming when you have something that's just really different than what you normally talk about in your professional setting. So translating that is, is one of my number one goals, and I've, I've got some resources and materials that are going to help me do that. I bought some books on project management that I'm hoping will help me to kind of see it from a few different angles and make the information that I can kind of glean from it.

Really actionable and realistic for academics, um, so that they can really apply it and benefit from it in their own lives and careers. So stay tuned for that. I'm not exactly sure what it's going to look like if it's going to be like a live training opportunity or some kind of course, or even like something that I would do with people in a coaching environment.

Um, but it's definitely been on my mind for a long time that I think we need more project management training in higher ed. And when I look around, I just don't see it. Um, which is unfortunate. And, and that's definitely like my Mo I love to look around and find those gaps of places where it's like, I wish that I had those things.

I wish that I had a training program for project management and higher ed, and I can't find it. So, um, I'm going to create something and we'll see kind of what that looks like. And of course, I would love to hear your ideas. If you have certain project management, things that you want to know more about that you want to see me include in something like this.

Uh, let me know because I'm going to be working on it probably for the first quarter two of 2021. So that is my PMP exam experience. Um, I was admittedly a little quiet about when I was taking the exam because I, I thought I was going to have to take it more than once. Um, and I wanted to kind of tell the whole story about how everything happened.

And so if you've been kind of rooting for me or sending me good wishes about this exam, I want to thank you. Um, this was an experience that I. Really don't want to do again. It was really nerve wracking, but I learned a lot of really good information and I'm excited to translate that into ways that are again, really actionable and realistic.

Steps that academics can take to find project management easier to apply and benefit from in their careers. So feel free to reach out to me. If you have any questions about this or want to share your own PMP exam experience, I think it was worth it, but it was just quite a bit of work. And, um, I'll put a bunch of links in the show notes for the project management Institute who hosts the exam, the simulator that I took, the training that I took as well, in case you want to look into any of those resources or materials.

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