You're listening to, you've got this episode 289. 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. I'm your host, Dr. Katie Linder on this episode, I want to talk about how I think we need to be less efficient.

Now this may come as a surprise to some of you because, you know, I like to fit in all kinds of things. I'm a multi-tasker. I like to check a lot of things off my list, but I've actually had a couple conversations lately that really helped me to think about this from a very different angle. So one of these conversations I had with when my coaching class.

And she was talking about how much she is challenged recently by having to switch between a lot of different tasks that she has on her plate. And, um, we identified that part of the challenge for her, which I identified with so much myself, is that she is always trying to fit in one more thing. And she's not leaving a lot of like time in between all of the switching that she's doing between these different tasks.

And I think about how I do. All the time. Like if I have two minutes in between a meeting, I'm trying to like send one more email. I'm trying to check one more item off my list. Um, even the other night I was trying to throw in a load of laundry right before I went to bed because I knew my partner could switch it out if I fell asleep first.

And he was like, you know, if I wasn't here, you would just be like exhausting yourself all the time. Cause you're always trying to do, you know, like one more thing. Now I've talked before about needing to have more margin in my schedule and trying to figure out, um, how I can do that because margin does make such a difference in terms of trying to, uh, just take a breather, you know, in the middle of the day in between meetings or things like that.

But really what I realized through this conversation with my client after kind of thinking about it after we were done talking together is how we've been spending all of this time, training ourselves to be more efficient. That we actually have to, if we, if we want to go in the opposite direction, we have to kind of train ourselves to be less efficient because we've gotten into this mode where we're kind of trying to do more and more and more, and we're trying to cram more into our schedules, more into our lists.

And when we actually start to try to take things out, I think it feels really unnatural. And it's very challenging for us to do that. But it's what gives us the space. Think and process, and even be creative is to have a little bit more of this margin and to be less. So I got to thinking, I was like, what are some ideas for how we can kind of do this, how we can practice this concept of being less efficient?

So the first thing I thought about was really getting kind of ruthless with your timelines and deadlines and knowing exactly when you need to get something. Done for me, I'm a procrastinator. So I like to get a bunch of stuff done ahead of time. And I feel like this is the area I need to work on the most.

I like to, um, have a lot of extra time so that I have a lot of flexibility. Like this is why I build this into my schedule. But what it often means is that I get kind of rigid about when I want to have things be done. So a good example of this is when I have books on the whole shelf of my library. There on that shelf for like 10 days.

I mean, like, there's, there's a good chunk of time at which I could like build this into my schedule, find out what I want to do this, but I usually go get them like the day they arrive the day I get the notification. Now part of this is because I enjoy going to the library. I enjoy getting these new books, but I could definitely be more strategic about how I build this kind of thing into my schedule.

So I'm really trying to understand, like, not having to work as much ahead. How do you kind of give yourself the flexibility of basically using the full timeline that you have to get some. The other thing I was really thinking about in terms of how to kind of train ourselves to be less efficient is to start using breaks in your schedule for actual breaks.

And this is again, something that I also don't do very well. Um, like I've noticed in between meetings. If I have 15 minutes or something, I'll go check in with my assistant. I'll try to triage my email. Um, and then I realized I'm like going into my next meeting and I have to go to the bathroom or I should have gotten a snack or something like that.

Like I should have taken care of myself in an outbreak period. And I, I need to actually get better about using my breaks to actually take a break. Um, now the other thing I find myself doing, and this to me is a huge sign of, of trying to be overly efficient. Is, I will set a timer on my phone if I have a break in between meetings to basically remind myself to go back to the next meeting on my calendar, because I'll get into a task, I'll get into kind of like a flow state of like writing an email or something.

And I know I will lose track of time. And so I have to kind of set an alarm to remind myself to like go to the next thing. And what that tells me is I'm always trying to work up until like that very less. Of of when I can have to like, switch into this next thing, and I'm not giving myself a lot of transition time to do that.

I think it's helpful to set the alarm so that I don't lose track of that time, but maybe to use that time, not to work, but to, to take a break or even take like a quick walk or something like that. Now, the other thing I think to kind of help in this area is really just honestly, to stop trying to do so many things.

I mean, I think that when I really think about all this stuff, On my plate on my colleagues play on my coaching clients play it like we're actually trying to do just a lot. And it sounds simple to kind of stop trying to do so many things, but really we're just adding more to our plate. Like every day. I don't think it's simple.

I think that we are constantly adding more. And so part of this I think is to start to curate our project lists and to do. To something that feels more manageable. Now I will, I will preach this every day of the week that we need to have manageable to do lists because I do think things get kind of out of control.

And I was actually thinking about this in relationship to Charlie. Gilkey his book start finishing, which I can link in the show notes he talks about in this book about having only five projects on the front burner at any given time. And I would say I've got about 15 projects right now that I'm shifting back and forth through.

And it's not really helping me to get some of these projects done because my attention gets spread really, really thin. So even if you take a moment, like right now, maybe pause, pause the podcast episode and think about how many projects are on your list. Like just take a moment to think about all the projects you're kind of thinking through now I define a project.

It could be personal, it could be professional. Like if, if, when we were renovating our kitchen, like this was a project that was like actively on my list. And then once you thought about your project list, narrow into the ones that you're actually spending decent amounts of time on, and I bet you, it's probably around, only.

'cause that's really what we can handle kind of cognitively is devoting our time and attention to maybe five things at the same time. But if, and if we're doing more than that, it's probably spreading us a little bit too thin. So this also got me thinking you can tell I was on a bit of a, like a. Going down a rabbit hole here, just in my own kind of experiences with myself, with my coaching clients.

And I was thinking about, um, this coaching client I have in this metaphor that we came up with for her. And I can't remember, I've shared this on the podcast before, so it may be something I've shared, but we were talking about this concept of having things on the front burner and having things on the back burner.

Yeah. What we found is that she was really overwhelmed by that. Like, there were just too many things constantly being rotated between the front burner and the back-burner. And we decided to come up with this other kind of metaphorical place called the freezer, which was basically like, if it's not simmering on the back burner, can you literally just put it in the freezer and put it away for awhile?

Like know that you're not going to actively be working on it right now? Now it doesn't mean that you're. Going to work on it at some point, you know, we have to check the freezer, we have to rotate, you know, what's in the freezer. We have to take things out and actually consume and finish the projects that are in the freezer.

Um, not to mix too many food project metaphors here, but I think that, um, this idea was actually really helpful because it allowed her to take some things actually off her plate and to put them in reserve basically for something later. And. You know, five main projects she was working on and then to rotate when, when a project got completed or when she handed it off for a short period of time, she could bring something out of the freezer and kind of add it to the stove.

And that's really what I was thinking of here is even if we have this kind of backlog of projects, it's, it's a little bit like what you would think of with like a scrum methodology, where you have, uh, your backlog, you have your things you're actively working on, and then you have your projects that are completed.

I think our problem is we look at our backlog as if it's his fist on the front burner. Like everything's on the front burner when really it's not. And part of this is just us being realistic about how we're defining the projects that we're currently working on and where we want to be giving our time, our energy and our time.

So, um, I want to thank, you know, all of my coaching clients who bring these really interesting questions and challenges to me because it often gets me thinking about my own work strategies. What's working for me in terms of project management with working for me in terms of managing my time and the lesson I really took away from thinking about this was like, it's okay to be less efficient.

I think sometimes we are kind of sacrificing ourselves. This idea of efficiency that isn't necessarily healthy. I mean, I think we've all known this for quite some time. This is why so many of us feel tired and burned out. And like, we constantly have things that we're, you know, thinking about and, and that we can't get off of our minds is because we're, we're just trying to juggle too much and it's a lot, um, to cognitively do.

So I'm really actively thinking about now, when I look at my schedule, You know, how can I actually not try to cram one more thing in, how do I actually create margin? How do I do that on the weekends? How do I do that in the evenings during my day, taking a lunch hour or taking a walk, um, going the long way on the walk, not the most efficient way of where I need to go.

All of these things are ways of being less efficient, building in more margin, more time, more space. And I think giving our brains that space. Actually helps a lot with solving all kinds of problems and being creative and in the long run, it probably makes us better workers too. So I'd love to hear if you are trying to be less efficient, especially as we head into at least here in the Northern hemisphere this summer season, where maybe we have a little more margin a little more time.

Naturally. I'd love to hear how you are trying to be less efficient. You can always email me at hello at Dr. Katie linder.com. I always love to hear. Thanks for listening. Thanks for listening to this episode of you've got this. You can access show notes and transcripts for each episode at Dr. Katie linder.com/podcasts.

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