You are listening to, you've got this episode 318. 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 wanna talk about some strategies for looking at something from a different angle, and I'm particularly thinking about those kinds of things that come up in our lives that feel.

Kind of impossible or just really hard. And how do we kind of get ourselves back into a frame of mind where we can think about those things and realize that there are different perspectives that can kind of help us to get some clarity. Now, before I do that, however, I did wanna give a quick, um, update on how things went for my winter break, um, because in the last episode I talked about my 23 goals for 2023.

I really wanted to post that at the beginning of the year. . But I also wanted to give a bit of a debrief cuz I talked about my plans for my winter break and a little bit about what I was able to do over that period of time. Um, the first thing I can say is that I really, uh, sunk into rest . Like I, I needed some rest.

I knew I needed some rest and I got a few things done that were kind of on my work list. But I've realized very quickly that I was gonna like, set aside some of those expectations for my winter break because I wanted to just, Do the kinds of things that I don't normally get to do when I have all of that uninterrupted time.

So some of it was good thinking time and and time to kind of get some tasks done, but I really, really wanted to just read . Like that was honestly like what was gonna be like reading to my heart's content. Like that's really what I wanted to do. And I had a lot of reading related things, you know, that were on my, my list.

I had a huge pile of books that I wanted to get through. And so over the winter, Um, I basically just read the whole time. I mean up to like two to three books a day, audiobooks, regular books, eBooks. Um, I read a ton and I had this goal of maybe hitting 300 books read for the year, and I did indeed do that.

You can go see on Good Reads. I'll link to it in the show notes, you know, all the books that I read in the past year. Um, some really good ones over the break. Really, really, really enjoyed that. . A couple other things that I did, um, over the winter break that kind of stood out to me. I got some gift cards over the holidays and I ended up buying some poetry collections that I had really been kind of interested in looking at.

Some of them are more seasonal, like poems for the winter, for example. Some of them are, um, like daily poems, um, that are kind of themed for the day. . I also found a couple other poetry collections that I had really been wanting to add to my library to like dip in and out of. So I will link to those in the show notes just so you can kind of get a sense of what these poetry collections were.

But that was really fun. That was kind of my gift to myself, um, over the holidays was to, to buy some of those poetry collections. Um, a couple other things. I, I had some, like things I wanted to do around food. I ended up eating a ton of salad, which I don't do a lot, uh, during the week, and, uh, made a couple of gluten-free vegan pizzas, which was really fun.

I hadn't had that in a really long time. Um, and my partner and I watched, you know, a couple of movies together. He did some reading too over the break. That was really kind of our focus we, we really enjoyed just sitting down together and, and doing some reading. So it was, it was restful. Um, I really enjoyed it.

And so I just wanted to give that quick update before I kind of dive into today's topic. Of course, I would love to hear how your winter break went as well. Um, and those of you who are on the other side of the world, if you had a seasonal break, I would love to hear about that also. So you can always email.

at hello@drkatieleonard.com and tell me about your, uh, time away. Okay. So onto the topic of this episode, which is how do we find a different angle when we're looking at something that feels kind of complicated or impossible? and why this has really been on my mind and why I kind of chose it as a topic for this episode is, um, I have mentioned in a couple of places I can link to a blog post where I talked about this, that I have been kind of pulled into a new project at work.

Um, this project was a little bit unexpected. It is outside of my original portfolio of what I was hired to do. Uh, it is, um, institution-wide. It's very large in. and I would say we're about halfway in to like the, the first big part of this project. So we're about eight weeks in. There are another about eight weeks to go before we get, um, a sense of kind of like closure of like phase one of this project.

And it's really been stretching my leadership skills. If, if I'm being just completely honest, like there's just a lot about this project that it's very complicated. There's a lot of things I've never done. and, um, I'm, I'm really learning a lot along the way. Part of why I'm not talking about it a lot on the podcast and in the blog is because I'm in the middle of it and I, I often like to wait until I get to the end of something and then I can kind of process it and pull out lessons and kind of share.

And, um, I don't really feel like I'm at that stage yet, but there, there is a lesson I'm kind of learning in the middle of this project that I thought might be worth sharing for those of you who are kind of in the same boat of, um, tackling something that feels big or complex or, or kind of impossible.

Because in the midst of this project, I would say roughly once a week, there is a situation where I am, like me and this team that I'm kind of working with, were kind of asked to do something that at first glance like it, it just seems. impossible to do like, and that that level of impossibility is like ratcheting itself up the further along we get into the project.

So we'll like figure out what impossible thing and then like the next week there'll be another impossible thing. But it's like bigger than the thing before. I mean it's, I've never really experienced on this level the consistent need to kind of problem solve very. Situations and it's really caused me to think very carefully about how can I, because this is happening so frequently and kind of regularly, how can I not just consistently think it's impossible?

Like, how can I kind of shift my mindset to understand the kinds of strategies that will get me out of that impossibility as, as soon as I. and so I've come up with a number of things that have allowed me to kind of look at the problem in front of me in, in a different angle so that I can try to like kick myself out of like, What do I need to do to start to see this as like a more manageable thing that I can solution for and that I can kind of come up with some ideas about?

So the first one I think is kind of obvious. It's the one that we all know, which is you need to give something some time. Like sometimes like the thing in front of you, it's just for whatever reason, not making sense right now. But if you give it some time, like the pieces start to come together and there are a number of things that can happen over that period of time that can help with that.

But I think about even like, Um, in a very small, kind of silly, simple example, I, every day I play the spelling Be Game in New York Times. And this is a, a game where you make words out of letters and the goal ultimately is to find what they call the pangram, which is the word that uses all of the letters, um, the seven letters that are in this puzzle.

And like this morning for example, I usually wake up and this is something I do when I'm lying in bed. Like, I'll look at this and I'll kind of start to play this game and it kind of wakes up my brain and it's kind of fun. And so this is like, my morning routine is I'll start to play around with this puzzle.

And sometimes I come back to it later in the day. Sometimes I don't. I mean, it really just depends on, on what I have going on. But like this morning, I could not figure this out. Like I, I, the, the letters were just like not fitting into words for me. And I was like, okay, this is just not making any sense. I set it aside.

And at the end of today, I came back to it and I immediately knew what the word was. Like I just looked at the letters and for whatever reason, my brain was just like, oh, I know exactly what this word is that I can kind of put it together. So sometimes for whatever reason, it's like that time that you give something, like you look at it at one point and it makes no sense, and then you look at it at a entirely different point and all of a sudden it makes sense to you.

Now, a second strategy that I think can be really effective with this is getting a different perspective from another. , and I think this can happen in a number of ways. One is you just ask someone for their perspective. Like you, you say, I'm running up into this problem. I'm not quite sure you know how to solve it.

How would you do it? You know, like, try to get some, some ideas on the table that are not coming from you. The other kind of angle for, for that particular one is to try to see an example of how someone else has done it before. Um, so it may not be like asking the question of someone live, it's more like looking around and trying to find.

has, has someone kind of done this in the past in a way that can inform what you're trying to do now? Now I think that what is helpful for me, even in kind of a, a small way, is to kind of look at a problem and say, I am not the first person to try to solve a problem like this , like just to remind myself this is solvable.

Like other people have done this kind of thing. Um, and so that, that is helpful cuz it kind of puts me in the right. . Another strategy, I think, is just to learn more about whatever the thing is that you're trying to solve, because I think one of the most frustrating experiences we can have when we're trying to solve a problem is like, we don't go in with enough information, and so we're, we're thinking it's like.

A problem with like our brain or our thinking or like we're not being creative enough or whatever. And it's actually that we just don't have enough information, um, about what's going on to try to like solve the problem in a way that is appropriate to like the size and scope of what we're doing. So I think that sometimes just trying to get more information can like lock certain puzzle pieces into place that can be more.

Okay. I have co couple more strategies here cause I was really thinking about this today. I was, I was thinking about how can I write these down so that I can be more helpful, you know, to myself as I'm, I'm running into this stuff. So the next one that I thought about was going macro and thinking big picture.

Sometimes I think we're too close to a problem and we have to like back up and try to understand how all of the pieces fit together. Now, as a systems thinker, I really like to see how small pieces fit together into a bigger picture, but I don't always do that. Sometimes I'm like in the weeds and I get kind of caught in the weeds, and so I have to like back off of a problem to try to understand like, is there something that like wasn't in view because I was so.

It's kind of like this concept of like seeing the forest for the trees. Like how, how can you back up enough that you start to see all the pieces and, and it might give you some ideas of like different ways you can leverage it. . Now the opposite of that I think is going micro and digging into the details.

Sometimes we're so far away and we're looking at the big picture that we don't realize that there's some kind of detail work that would help to get kind of the process started of of problem solving. So the example that I really think about for this is when I feel like super overwhelmed and I dunno where to.

This concept of like, just start somewhere. Like, just like pick one small thing to try to like move forward or make progress on, or solve for like a smaller problem and a much bigger issue that can sometimes just get the ball rolling where you, you pick like one small detail and then that expands into something bigger.

And so I think that, um, going micro and really digging into very detailed level components of a project, um, or a, a problem can help you to figure out what a, a good solution. Now. I also think a really important one, and this is one that I've really been trying to figure out how I can do this more. Um, because when you're in the middle of a big project and it's kind of all consuming, it can be hard to step away.

But sometimes I think that getting rest, taking a nap, taking a break, taking a walk, like resetting, somehow your brain can help you to. Step away enough that you, you really do see something differently. So it's kind of like the idea of time, you know, like if you walk away and give something some time, but sometimes you just need to like walk away and not look at your computer screen.

Or you need to like get some fresh air or you need to just like, let your brain reboot a little bit. And the, the reason why I feel like this one is kind of tough is cuz when you're involved in a project that's like really. All consuming and very complicated. Like sometimes you just think about it all the time, like it's kind of always on your mind.

You're always kind of noodling on something. And I think about this, like when I'm writing a book, for example, like the book is always in some part of my brain. Like I'm, I'm thinking about a chapter, I'm thinking about a citation that I read, or you know, something like that. And it's hard to kind of step away from those kinds of projects.

But I do think that when you're feeling really frustrated, That's like the time to do that. Like to really just say, you know, like me banging my head against a wall is not solving this right now. like, let me, let me take a step back. Let me just like take a break and, and see if I can do that. See if that will help to kind of solve the problem.

So these are some things that have just like immediately come to mind, some strategies that I've been using. to basically try to help myself understand that just because I don't see an immediate solution doesn't mean that the solution is not there. And there are all these different kinds of strategies that can help you to kind of problem solve and really think through a very complex problem.

And really what I found is by writing down these kinds of strategies and by like documenting what I do, I get more confident over time that I can solve these kinds of really wick. problems, you know, that, that I can kind of work with my colleagues to like, bring different ideas to the table. Um, I think that there's a lot of trust involved in like, brainstorming different ideas and, and everybody kind of contributing their best thinking to try to solve something.

Um, but over time, you know, you start to kind of feel like, like, okay, even if I don't know what it is right now, I know I'm gonna figure it out. Even. . And I think that when we're doing really hard work, you know, whether that's work with our teaching, work with, you know, writing projects, work with other kinds of complex things we have going on, um, and even sometimes in our personal lives where we look at something and we're like, okay, this feels impossible.

You know, any of these strategies can, can maybe help to give us a little more clarity or a little more confidence that we're gonna figure. . So those are just a few of the different ways that I'm trying to see different problems from a different angle as I kind of work through this project. Of course, I would love to hear if you have other ideas of, of how you're looking at things and, and adjusting them in different ways.

You can always email me at hello dr katie leonard.com. I always do love to hear from you and I'm really looking forward to, to sharing more of these kinds of strategies and techniques of what I'm learning as we go even further into this calendar year. Thanks for listen. Thanks for listening to this episode of You've Got This.

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