You are listening to, you've got this episode 320. 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'm going to talk about steps that you can take when you are feeling overwhelmed or underwater.

And the reason that this is on my mind lately is because we're not even through the first month of the year and I was already starting to feel. Behind in a number of areas in my life. And I put some steps together that worked for me. And I've actually since shared them with a couple of people, including my coaching clients and some of my colleagues at work who were finding themselves in similar situations.

And, uh, people, I found this to be helpful, so I thought I would share it here as well. And so basically if you're in this mode where you're feeling like you need to like dig yourself out of, um, feeling kind of like super stressed about everything on your plate, uh, maybe this would help. . The first is to start with journaling.

So I got my journal out and I just focused on a few things. The first was what emotions am I feeling? So for me, I was, at the time that I was journaling, feeling. Pretty much overwhelmed behind, but also a little bit chaotic. Like, it just felt like there were so many things going on. I wasn't tracking them well.

Um, and because sometimes when you just feel underwater, like you don't feel like you have control over anything. . Once I was able to kind of locate what the feelings were, then I decided to focus on what are the factors that are contributing to those specific emotions. So, um, at the time that I was writing and journaling the past week, it had been a holiday on Monday, and then I had a big event on Tuesday tied to this project that I'm working on.

And I had a member of our team that was out sick that week and uh, on Wednesday we had a snow day. So it was. Really kind of discombobulating. So I was really feeling like, really, um, kind of even confused about like, what day is it? Because we had been kind of working on the weekend, Monday was a holiday, Tuesday was this big event.

Wednesday we had a snow day, but there were still some meetings that I was still having and I was trying to get things done. So I was kind of like, all of these things were coming together to create kind of a perfect storm where I was like, what am I even supposed to be working on right now? Like, I'm, I'm just feeling completely over.

So once I had identified that, and part of the reason is really just to say what are the external factors that are contributing to my emotions . Like, it's not just me, like not being able to do everything. Like there were some definite things that had happened in the past several days that were, um, clearly, you know, making a difference in terms of how I was feeling.

Then I asked myself, what are the areas that I need to like debrief on with? . So how can I like bucket or categorize the kinds of things that I need to focus on so that I can kind of do a bit of a rundown of like, how are those areas going? So what I ended up, um, bucketing for myself was first routines and habits, and that would include things like exercise, self-care, like are, are there things that I would like normally be regularly doing that I'm not?

Are there other things that I, I'm continuing to do, you know, and it's going well. Um, I also decided to do a debrief on all of my major project. , and this includes things happening at work, things happening in my side business. Basically anything that had like a deadline or a timeline that I knew I needed to be working toward.

I wanted to like check in with myself and see how it was going. And then also I chose some theme areas that I just care about. So this would be like my annual goals, um, things like reading, which I do on a pretty regular basis. You know, what are the areas that I'm like trying to kind of work toward on a, on a consistent basis, and how can I check in about those?

And then for each of those areas, I wrote a status update about how it was going. And one of the most important things I think about the status update is I made sure to know what was going well as much as what was not going well. So for example, I had the dishes. Done. I had caught up on laundry. I was in a good place with like my reading goals for the month.

You know, like that kind of thing. But then I also made notes on what I felt was really weighing on me or stressing me out, and that was really important. What is kind of the things that in my own mind are carrying the most weight and that I, I'm feeling kind of the most concerned about? So once I had done all that journaling, and it was about four pages of journaling to just kind of get all this.

Try to organize my thoughts a little bit, make sure it wasn't all just like floating around in my brain. Then, um, given the timing of this journaling, which was about 10 days before the end of the month, I decided to use my strategy of doing an end of the month to-do list. Now this is something that I have previously podcasted about, so I'm gonna drop it into the show notes.

But this is basically when I compile a list of the things that I wanna get done before the end of the month, and it allows me to kind of time block and say, what is the stuff that is of like immediate concern that has either some kind of deadline or timeline that's happening in the next like 10 days?

And then what's the stuff that I, it can just wait. I can kind of take it off my brain for now because it doesn't need to be a. . So then once I had that list, which probably had, I'm just kind of ball parking now cause it's not in front of me. There was probably maybe 20 things that ended up on this list.

Um, and some of them were like multi-step projects, like more complex. Some of them were relatively easy. So for example, I needed to like food prep for the next week. Like this was something that was timely. I wanted to make sure that I had like, A batch of soup that I could take for lunches to work, you know, that kind of thing.

Um, and then other stuff was a little bit more complicated. Um, like I had, um, some deadline specific tasks at work that involved like collaborating with multiple people. , but once I had that list, I could start to plug things into my schedule and decide what to prioritize when, and I could have a more clear picture rather than just this like jumble that was in my mind when I was so overwhelmed.

I had got a really clear sense of like, what do I actually need to get done in a relatively short period of time? . Now, I will say that getting my emotions on paper and having a list to work from immediately made me feel more motivated to tackle the things in front of me. I immediately felt better, um, about all of this stuff that was kind of stressing me out, and I ended up doing this.

This was like, I think it might have been the Friday of the week that we had, like the snow day and the holiday. Um, it was in the morning before work because I was, I woke up and I just was not in a good place. I, I was not in a good mood. I was not motivated. I felt really jumbled. I felt really, you know, overwhelmed and stressed.

And I thought, how can I kind of get this organized? And, and this was the series of steps that I, that I took to, to move in a better. . So I think there's a few key things to note here. One is to identify the feelings that are causing distress. Sometimes when we don't name them, it's hard to understand exactly what would fix or help the situation.

So I think it's really important to name it. also, I think it's important to locate what exactly is causing those feelings, because sometimes it's not the tasks, it's like the circumstances that we find ourselves in and the feeling of like overwhelm is not necessarily coming from the list itself. It's coming from other things around you in your environment, um, or in just your context or your situation.

and then make a plan for, I was thinking about this like kind of laughing to myself. It's like this concept of like turn your frown upside down, , like I feel like how can you get to the opposite of the stressful feeling? So is that like calm instead of overwhelm or stress? Is it like control instead of chaos?

And for me it was all of those things, like I wanted to feel more calm. I wanted to feel a sense of direction of like purposeful productivity, that I was actually doing things that felt like they were gonna move the needle for me, but also that they were gonna ease my. Now I'm happy to report that after making this list, even that day I had, you know, some margin in between meetings.

I had my lunch hour. I was able to start chipping away at this list, and it made me feel so much better to be able to just start knocking things off this list. And then over the weekend I made kind of a plan and I looked at the list and said, okay, what exactly can I get done over this weekend? And then as I went into the next week, I looked at the list and said, okay, what is it that I wanna get done this week versus next weekend?

And I was really able to start kind of like dividing and conquering what was on the list. And I immediately felt so much better that I had a plan and that I was able to kind of tackle these things one at a time. also, I think when you create a list like this, it also allows you, if you can, if it makes sense for what's on the list to ask for help.

So when I was able to like make this list for myself, I could see for example, that I needed to pick up some groceries to do like my meal planning for the week, and I was able to kind of delegate that to my partner and say, you know, here's this list. This is what I'm working on. This is something that you can help me with.

You know, is this something that you can tackle and kind of take on? And he was able to do that. So I think the other piece of having this in front of you is you can start. Have a bit of a strategy of how you're gonna tackle it, and sometimes tackling your tasks involves other people. When I'm feeling this level of overwhelm, I always tell my partner, I always reach out and say, okay, like, this is a, this is a stressful time because of these reasons.

Um, I'm, I'm trying to create a plan of what I'm doing, but it's also, I think, important for the people around you to know if you're in a particularly stressful period or you're just trying to, like, juggle a lot of things. Um, it's always helpful. people who know you and care about you, they know how to kind of comfort you or how to maybe like even stay away from you if you're like super stressed out and you're just trying to get things done.

I think it's always good to kind of communicate that to the people who are like in your family or who you live with. It's, it's helpful. So, I wanted to offer these steps just because I can imagine that some of you may be also kind of coming into the new school year or coming into the new term, um, and you're starting to kind of get that feeling of like feeling underwater, feeling like there's too much on your plate.

So I just wanted to encourage you to like pause and take a minute to just process what you're feeling and try to figure out what are the things that are gonna make the most difference in the short term to help you start to kind of dig out of that. and get to the opposite of that stressful feeling to feel a little bit more calm, a little bit more in control.

So I would love to hear if you try this, if it works for you, you can always email me at hello dr katie leonard.com. I always love to hear from you, and of course, I am absolutely wishing you a smooth transition into this next academic term. Thanks for listening. Thanks for listening to this episode of You've Got This.

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