You are listening to, you've got this episode 321. 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 some of the benefits of how to craft a challenge for yourself.

And I definitely mean challenge in a good way because I feel like as we get deeper and deeper, at least here in our hemisphere, into the wintertime, , we start to get a little bit slogged down, with all of the tasks on our plate in my world, with the cold, with the snow. Um, and I have to kind of like make my own fun a little bit.

And, um, I feel like February, which we are just shifting into now, is actually a really perfect month to complete a challenge because it's the shortest month of the year. And you might be familiar with kind of like these 30 day challenges that you see out and about. Um, and this is kind of what I'm talking about, but I also think that sometimes we just have something that's kind of sitting directly in front of us that we can turn into a bit of a challenge and it allows us to be kind of extra motivated.

So what I'm gonna talk about today is a few different kinds of challenges, but. Um, focusing specifically on this one that I put together for myself to read through the piles of library books that I have both physically and digitally. It's getting a little out of hand and whenever something starts to kind of stress me out and it has like, I don't know, like it's, it's, it's all falling into kind of one theme.

For example, like I have like a ton of laundry to do, or I have like a, a ton of books to read. I start to think about like, how can I challenge myself in a way that feels kind of motivating? . So when I think about these kinds of challenges, I think they have several different components. One is that they really are meant to help motivate you.

I mean, this is not about making yourself feel bad cuz you're not getting certain things done. I mean, it's really meant to motivate you to work through a pile of stuff that you have. So whether that's like grading or cleaning or whatever kind of task that maybe you're not wanting to do or just feeling overwhelmed by, it can help to motivate you.

I usually think that these challenges are often kind of time bound. Um, so it could be like time to a day or even like an hour. I'll talk about a couple smaller challenges, and for me, I'm thinking it's more of like the month, like what can I get done in the month of February? I think that these kinds of challenges help you focus on a particular area that needs attention.

Um, so this could be like a self-care challenge. This could be like a sleep challenge. I mean, there's so many different things that you could put in here. And I also think they're really great for building habits. And I'm gonna give an example of a challenge that I think falls into that category as well.

but maybe most important, these kinds of challenges can be super flexible in their rules because they're not meant to make you feel bad. They're just meant to help you kind of chip away at a particular thing that you think needs more attention. And what that means is you can kind of change up the challenge.

You can make it different, you can adjust it at any time so that you're actually kind of doing the thing that you're hoping to. . So I'm gonna give you a few examples. First, I'm talking about this library book challenge and I figured in the month of February I would just see how many books I can read off of the pile of books I have, again, both physical and digital that are due soon.

And a lot of these books are books that are really popular and so I, I don't wanna have to like run out of time where I give them back to the library and I haven't read them yet cause it'll take a long time for me to get access to them again. So it's motivating me to get through this pile of books before they are.

Back, and right now that's about maybe a little bit shy of 30 books between what I have checked out through the Libby app, which is audiobooks and eBooks, and what I have checked out as, um, physical copies from my local library. Now, um, I'm slightly ashamed to admit that there are even more books that I have checked out, but they're just not due in the month of February.

So take that information as you will. But I am a definite library user and I have all these books I have to get through. So what I did was I made a list of all of the books that I've checked out that are due this month that I can kind of track my progress. , and this is the list that I used for my February TBR R pile, which is the YouTube video that I make every month to talk about what is on my YouTubey red list for the coming month.

So I'm actually gonna have a video soon on my YouTube channel talking about this list, and I'll probably talk a little bit about like why these library books, like what led me to reading and checking out these particular ones. . So that is an example of like a month long challenge. And the idea is not to get through every single one of these books.

I don't know that I can read literally like a book a day in the month, the February. That's probably kind of a, um, high expectation for myself. And so I don't wanna cause pressure, but I do want to kind of narrow my focus rather than having books that I can kind of pull from. Own shelves and like I have books that I can pull from Audible and uh, Kindle Unlimited and kind of all these different places.

It's really focusing me in on the books I already have in piles around my living room that I want to be able to return. . Now, I think another obvious example of a challenge that would kind of fall into this category is what many of us have seen on YouTube, and we've probably done this ourselves, and that is a cleaning challenge where you basically pick a room or a floor of your house, you choose an amount of time, you set a timer.

you put on an audiobook or some music and you see how far you can get this kind of challenge, I think is a really good one for things like grading or, um, things where you wanna get like a pretty good amount of stuff done in a relatively small period of time. So when I have a situation where I have like a certain amount of time in between like meetings for example, I might say to myself like, what is it that I have on my list that I'm gonna kind of like rush through a little bit to see how much of it I can get done?

Now, I don't mean rushing through in terms of like, , you're not gonna do it in a good quality way. It's more like you're rushing because you feel just like a little bit of added pressure because you know you're gonna run out of time. So, um, I think this is a great challenge. You can kind of set up a bit of a list for yourself or just kind of put yourself into kind of one room or floor of your house and go to town.

Now, the other challenge that I was thinking of, cause I was trying to think of one that really falls into this realm of like, uh, building a new habit. And I have talked with several people lately who are trying to get to this like inbox zero. And basically what an inbox zero is, is when your primary inbox for your email you don't have anything, you kind of clear out that entire inbox.

And I have typically been an email inbox zero person because. At work, I do all these folders within my email, and so when I'm done with an email, I file it and I really try to get to the end of the day or the end of the week with like nothing in my inbox. I don't use my inbox as a to-do list, like I'm really trying to be close to that inbox zero.

And for me, that just helps me stay organized. It helps me make sure I'm not missing anything or losing anything in my email. It's just the easiest way for me to. . So with this kind of challenge, what you might do is choose a period of time that you want to use to learn the new habit, and then you could dedicate a period of time to either get yourself to like that zero baseline.

Like you might say, I'm gonna spend a day of just like digging into my email trying to get it down. Or you might choose to do a little bit of it each day for the period of your challenge. So you might say, I'm gonna do like a seven. Inbox zero challenge, and by the end of those seven days, I'm gonna try to clear out as much of this as I can and get as close as I can to inbox zero.

You can also decide what kind of rules you wanna use to stay accountable to your challenge. So for example, do you wanna try to have zero by the end of each day or by the end of each week? Do you wanna try to have zero inbox by the end of each month? Like this is really up to you. It doesn't have to be, um, something that other people necessarily know about.

It's like your own set of rules of what that looks like for. . Now, of course, with any of these challenges, you can also give yourself some kind of reward. For me, the outcome of the challenge is sometimes its own reward. So if I get through all these library books and I can like drop them off of the library and get them outta my living room, that's actually a pretty great reward that's gonna feel really good for me when I do a cleaning challenge, like having that like fresh smell in my house and seeing like decluttered counters and and those kinds of things, that's its own.

Email, uh, inbox zero. Same. Sometimes the, the challenge itself kind of gets you that feeling of satisfaction, but I also think it's helpful in these kinds of challenges to choose a reward that reinforces the challenge outcomes. So in a cleaning challenge, you might like get yourself a new pack of sponges or, you know, whatever it is that kind of like, uh, maybe it's like a new candle that like smells really good in.

Um, but with a challenge, you can kind of theme the reward to reinforce the thing that you're trying to do, whether that's cleaning or having a new habit that you're building into your schedule. . Now, I also think that you get some bonus points for these kinds of challenges if you do them or talk about them in kind of a public way for accountability.

So like I'm doing on this podcast where I'm saying this is the challenge I'm doing for the month of February, I'm also going to be, um, putting a video together for YouTube, talking about this challenge as well. And it's just a great way to kind of keep people in the loop about what you're working on and also to hold you accountable to updating about how the challenge is going.

So if you need that little extra bit of accountability when you're trying to take on stuff like this, um, you can definitely do it in a more public way through things like social media. . But I would also say sometimes it's totally fine to just take on these kinds of challenges and do them just for you.

And if you're not someone who really needs a lot of external accountability, I think it's totally fine to have kind of private challenges that you're taking on throughout the year and just kind of learning and growing for yourself in terms of the kinds of things that you might be gaining from those kinds of challenge.

So I would love to hear if you're gonna take on a challenge, especially in the month of February, the shortest month of the year, such a perfect time. You can always email me at hello dr katie linder.com. I always love to hear from you, and I am looking forward to seeing how many books I can read in this library Challenge of for myself in the month of February.

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