You are listening to, you've got this Episode 324. 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 how you can define a season.

And this is definitely top of mind for me because I have recently realized I am in a season , and I certainly don't mean like winter, fall, spring, summer. Um, sometimes we have these seasons of our lives. Fall outside, you know, of the calendar seasons, but you can definitely recognize them as being kind of set apart.

And, um, I have realized that I'm definitely in one of those seasons and I find it to be really helpful to name it, to describe it, and to try to have a bit of reflection around what is happening in this season so that I can feel like I'm actually like engaging in it with meaning and purpose rather.

Sometimes it feels like we're just like passively being acted upon by some of these seasons in our lives. So let me describe a little bit about what I mean here. So when I would describe this kind of season that I'm in, um, heavy, heavy work period in my day job and, and I've kind of alluded to this on some other episodes, I'm involved in a very intense project in my work.

Um, and there's just a lot of days where I end the day feeling very fatigued. , but this is usually because I'm really showing up and I'm sharing my strengths and I'm, I'm really trying to push, you know, on this project. Um, but at the same time, what I'm realizing is I feel like I'm not always able to do my best for a lot of the things I have going on because I'm just juggling so much and.

rather than kind of like beat myself up about that. I'm kind of just like noting that this is the season that I'm in, so I'm not gonna have a ton of extra energy to give to all kinds of things. I mean, I would put like self-care in that. Um, my partner, like time that I've been able to give him has, has, you know, decreased in quality.

Um, the projects I have going on at work, because I'm, I'm juggling a lot of things at once. I don't always feel like I'm giving like 110%, which is. Usually like to do. I don't feel like I'm doing poorly at any of these things necessarily, but like it's just not what I want to be able to give. , I am definitely hitting some capacity limits of cognitive load because there's just a lot going on that I'm trying to juggle and, um, I feel like there's just a higher amount of expectation of how I can contribute during this time.

And also it's just a, a period of a lot of learning for me as I'm, I'm trying to figure out how best to, um, situate myself within this project so that I can really contribute well now, , I, I was also trying to figure out like, what would I call this season? , because it, naming it and kind of, kind of confining it to a period of time is helpful.

And I feel like I have a sense of how long this season is gonna last, you know, at least right now. Um, but I, I've decided that I wanna call this season, like this season of doing my best, but also acknowledging that doing my best does not mean perfection. It just cannot. Be a perfectionist kind of season.

It has to be like showing up in the moment, giving what I can, doing the best I can, but just like acknowledging and having a lot of kindness towards myself that I'm juggling a lot of things and, and that's okay. So I know that this season is gonna be at least six months long. It started in November. It will go at least through April.

It's possible it will go longer. Um, and I think it's actually one of the kind. Silver linings that I'm kind of giving myself with this particular season is I feel like it's a good test of what work would feel like if I was involved in high stakes projects all the time. So if you think about, you know, the position I'm in right now, which is an executive leadership position, if I were to go higher, It would be like this all the time.

Like I, I've kind of stepped into a project that is like very quickly moving. It's very high stakes and, um, but it's unusual for me to be kind of engaging in a project of this size and scope. It was a project size and scope that I engaged with when I kind of first stepped into this job. And then I had a bit of a break and now I'm kind of back into like a, a larger project and basically what these projects require from me,

Um, well, it's just more stress. I find it's a lot harder to turn off my brain because I'm, I'm constantly like problem solving and like, puzzling trying to figure out, you know, how to, to get through these kinds of projects. And I also find that I need to have more intentional time away from work because it's just a lot harder to step away.

And so I have to be really thoughtful about like, when I'm gonna be able to do that. So for this particular, um, season, I think it's gonna go, you know, into kind of Middle Spring. It's a little unclear at this point how it will resolve. Um, but that gives me a little bit of a sense of like, what am I planning for in terms of my own energy limits and kind of my capacity limits.

Now some of you might be listening to this and be like, why are you even doing this? Like, it sounds super stressful. It sounds like a lot of work. It is. Like, I, I'm not going to lie. It, it is, it is a very kind of, um, difficult, nuanced, complex project that I'm dealing with and I have to kind of ask myself the question of what makes this season worth it?

Like, what is motivating me to keep. and some of the things that I've really been thinking about is I do feel like this is truly a meaningful contribution to my institution for me to be contributing to this project. I can absolutely see on a daily basis how my work is making a difference to the team that I'm on because I have a very specific contribution that I'm making to this.

Kind of effort and people comment on it and kind of compliment and like affirm that for me regularly. And so, so that helps it to feel meaningful. I'm learning a lot of things that I know it will apply in the future. And I know I haven't, uh, said a lot about this project and kind of, and I'll edit a later point, I'm gonna do a deeper dive on it.

I mean, I, I'll just say one word, which I think will clarify a lot. This is a project related to budget. So , if you are on a campus that is doing anything related to your budget right now, you know, it's like highly complicated. A lot of relational work. Um, and there there's just a lot of complexity, um, to this kind of project.

And then the last thing is I know that this season won't last forever and I, I can do sprints for specific periods of time when I need to do them. And having a sense of like, what are the different phases of this project and how I'm contributing, you know, has helped quite a bit. . So the last question that I'm kind of asking myself, um, when I'm thinking about this particular season is, what do I need most in this season and how can I support myself in a season like this?

And I think this is actually one of the key things about defining a season that you're in, especially a professional season, sometimes like a a per a personal season feels this way too. If it's feeling difficult or if it's feeling, you know, like it's really straining you. , what do you need and how can you kind of give yourself that support knowing that you have to be in the season?

It is what it is, um, but how do you kind of like acknowledge it and plan around it a bit? So some of the things that I'm really working on is stripping away extraneous things that are not necessary for me to spend my time on right now. . And a good example of this is I have delayed the bookwork that I'm doing this year.

I've talked with my co-author and I've just said, I cannot do this right now. Um, because of this project, because of these things that are going on in my my work. I have to wait and I have to do this bookwork later in the year. And that's been really helpful to just completely take that off my plate and say, there is no expectation that I'm gonna be able to move that forward in the next couple of.

I also think that what I really need in this season is to take breaks when I need them. This has been incredibly challenging. , I'm just going to say because this is a project that has required night work, weekend work. Work on holidays, like, I mean, the whole team has been contributing to this because of the timeframe in which we have to complete it.

And so trying to find like any time off has been incredibly challenging. I've really tried to give myself evenings when I can. Um, and I'm gonna do my best, like to take a week off in March. We have a spring break coming up and I'm trying to take that entire week. Um, this is something actually that the institution has kind of acknowledged that the planning team like needs time off because.

Like the pedal to the metal like, um, approach that we've had to take with us has just meant a ton of work that is like outside of our typical hours. And I also wanna really try to find more like one day break periods, try to work less on weekends when I can like, just really build in. Moments of rest and recovery time.

Um, I think that sometimes when you're in a sprint, you just kind of like go and, and you realize that you can kind of push yourself a little bit to your limits. But everyone has capacity limits. You know, everybody has limits where it's like, I just need to take a break. I need to have vacation, or I need to just have time that's like unscheduled, uninterrupted, that I can just do whatever I want.

And I'm definitely coming up to that where it's like, yep, I, I need a day here or there just to kind of like give myself a little bit of. . Now, the other thing I'm really doing in terms of supporting myself in this season is keeping my priorities front of mind. Um, really asking myself what is the most important thing to me since I have limitations on my time.

and my energy resources and what are the ways that I can also ask for support, you know? And one of the key things I'll just say is my partner is very aware of what's going on at work. I debrief it with him, you know, uh, in the evenings. Like he, he has a clear picture of like what I'm being asked to do and, and how labor intensive it is.

And there's a lot of emotional labor and kind of relationship management with what I'm doing as well, which is, Very draining for me to do. Um, and I really wanna do it well. So I'm, I'm putting a lot of energy into that, and because I'm able to kind of choose what those priorities are, it allows me to kind of let some other things go.

Or, um, as my partner has sometimes describe this, like, you can juggle all these balls and you can like, put a ball down. You just have to pick it up again. Like, you don't have to let these balls smash on the floor. Like you can just pick one out and say, , I can't juggle that one right now. And, and kind of set it aside for a period of time.

And I think that that's a wonderful metaphor for how you can kind of keep your priorities front of mind, set some things aside, know when they're gonna kind of come back onto your plate. . And then the other thing I think that has really been a, a huge support to me during this period is finding ways to process what I'm learning both about this project itself, but also about myself and what I'm able to contribute as a leader.

I have conversations with my partner about this. I'm journaling. Um, and taking time to kind of really reflect on this each day, and that's helping me a lot. I'm also having a lot of really fruitful and wonderful conversations with colleagues at work who are kind of in this project with me, and we're all learning so much through the process that it's helping me to kind of see, um, how I can support them and how I need to be supported along the way.

So all of this to say, I think there's a few key questions that you can ask yourself when you are trying to define and kind of name and work within a season of your professional or your personal life. So I'm gonna repeat those questions just in case this might be helpful for you too. . The first question is, how would you describe the season that you're in?

What are the kind of characteristics or variables that you would use to describe that season? And then based on those characteristics or variables, what would you call this season? So is there like a shorthand that you wanna use to define the season? . The third question is, how long do you think the season will last?

So giving yourself a bit of like a light at the end of the tunnel, or a sense of when you might get some relief, especially if you're in a season that feels very challenging. I think it's really important to identify an end point. . The fourth question is, what makes this season worth it for you? Or in other words, what is motivating you to keep going in the season?

And oftentimes there is some kind of silver lining that we can find, even if it's something that feels really, really challenging. It may even be that you're offering help to other people, you know, in this season that you're in. Um, even if you're not feeling kind of personal benefits. . And then the last questions are, what do you most need in this season and how can you support yourself in this season?

And it is so important when we're doing things that feel really strenuous to really think about the support structures that we're creating around us to help ourselves get through things that feel kind of hard or difficult. . So I say all this not to concern you cause I'm sure some of you are listening and just going, oh no, this, this sounds like kind of hard and, and like, how is Katie doing?

I'm doing okay. It's just um, it's enough going on that I felt like I needed to name it and I needed to say like, yep, this is definitely a thing going on that will stand out in my mind when I think back on this time in my career, this will be a major memory of what I was working on. early, you know, late 2022, early 2023.

Um, it's been a really big deal. It's taken a lot of my time and energy and effort, but I'm also learning a ton and it's allowing me to practice a lot of the things that I feel are really important about leadership. It's just important for me to name it. To name it when it's happening and to also give myself like some really clear priorities and reasons to keep going when the going gets a little bit tough and, and when it feels a little fatiguing.

Um, but it's worth it for a lot of reasons. So I would love to hear if you're in a season right now, what are you calling it? How are you defining it? How is this kind of exercise helpful for you? You can always email me at hello dr katie leonard.com. I. Love to hear from you. And as I continue on this project, of course I'm gonna continue to pick it apart, talk about the process, and eventually do a big old debrief of all the things that I've learned through it, because, um, as I've said, it's definitely been a season and, uh, there's a lot to take away whenever you find yourself in that kind of space.

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