You're listening to You've Got This, episode 370.

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 a bunch of different ways that I stay organized at work.

Now you know that lately my work has been pretty busy.

I've mentioned on a couple different episodes, I have a lot of meetings, a lot of projects, and many of them are pretty high stakes.

And so I need to stay really organized to make sure that I'm kind of on top of my game as I'm just going about the day-to-day demands of my job.

And I got to thinking about the kinds of things that I'm doing to stay organized.

And some of them are actually very simple.

And so I thought that I I would share them here just in case they're helpful for you too.

So you'll see that some of these things are pretty basic.

Um, but I do find them to be just incredibly helpful when I'm juggling a lot of projects and initiatives all at the same time.

So, uh, I have 10 different strategies here.

The first one is like the most simple thing I can think of, which is basically take notes on important decisions and next actions when I'm in meetings.

Now I will just say I know my own cognitive limits and I don't have a great memory.

This is something that I have mentioned.

I'm sure on other occasions and after going from meeting to meeting to meeting throughout the day, I really struggle to remember like the important actions and next steps that resulted from all the different conversations that I've been throughout the day.

And so I'm taking notes on kind of the overall decisions and most importantly, my personal next actions that I need to be kind of responsible for.

And it just helps me to kind of keep these things, uh, on track to know what these next actions are.

And I just have like a small, um, notebook that I carry around with me.

I can link it in the show notes.

Um, and because I don't always have my laptop when I'm in these meetings.

And so it's easy just to have like a notebook.

I can jot down notes and then move on to the next meeting.

The second strategy is a little bit similar to this, but it's basically to track project steps and owners.

So I will often delegate different parts of projects to like other teammates or people who report to me, but I need to keep track of who owns what step in various projects and especially when there's like a team of people working on an initiative together.

It can help me to know who I can ask like for a status update from at any given time.

So I like to make sure that, um, I'm just kind of keeping things moving forward, no matter who things are assigned to.

And right now I feel like a big part of my job is just making sure things are not stalling out because they're not getting the attention that they deserve.

A third strategy is for me to determine kind of the level of trust that I can give to people that I'm delegating to.

Now, I think we all know there are some people that we can give things to and they're going to like do the thing we asked them to do.

They're going to do it in an amazing way.

They're going to keep us updated.

And then there's other people that we can maybe give a task to, and we're going to have to keep checking on it and we're going to have to check the quality before, you know, we sign off that it's completed.

And I actually think that it's fine, that there's a spectrum.

I expect that, but I think it's important to kind of name it and know who I can trust and know who I may need to pay a little bit more attention to or oversight to.

And that just helps me to stay organized in my own levels of supervision for different projects that I have on my plate.

A fourth strategy that I use is timers to allow me to do deep work in short bursts of time.

Now I will admit it used to kind of bother me that I was like, my day felt like it was just constantly setting timers to kind of keep myself on task.

Make sure I was getting to the next meeting on my, my schedule.

But now I find that this is actually really helpful for me to do like short bursts of deep work without worrying that I'm going to like miss the next thing that I need to do.

So this is now like a trusted system because I use it all the time.

And basically if I have like a little bit of time between meetings or I get like unexpected time windfall, like when a meeting gets canceled, I will try to use that time to get some actual work done.

Now I know many of you probably identify with not being able to actually do your work during the day because you have so many meetings.

And so when I do this, when I have these like time windfalls and I have these margins in between meetings, I like to see how far I can get of like getting things done so that I don't have to like take them home at the end of the day.

So this is a strategy that I use to really try to like maximize what I can get done in a given day.

The fifth strategy for me right now is to create collections of important and often referenced information.

Now one of the most recent tools I've used, this is this is one of the most recent tools, is to have like folders that collect information that I need at my fingertips.

Now I'm actually talking about physical folders here and And you might think like, why not digital folders or why not digital files?

And sometimes those are the best things for what I'm describing of just needing to have things at your fingertips.

But the volume of information that I'm kind of managing right now, I actually find that that is sometimes not manageable because there's so many things coming in through my email and so many like files that I'm trying to juggle that sometimes if there's things that I'm going to be like referencing a lot, like organizational charts, for example, of like different employees.

It's better to just have a printed copy that I can like quickly reference in my office.

Okay.

The sixth strategy is to process any notes, tasks, or follow-ups on a daily basis.

So I feel like I have so many tasks that are coming across my plate every week, every day.

And I find that things just tend to stack up super quickly and it's really easy to start to feel overwhelmed.

And so I've gotten into a rhythm of processing my notes and my tasks at any follow-up items that are coming up out of like meetings and things every day so that I can make sure that nothing is getting delayed due to any kind of lack of attention from me.

Now of course that also means staying on top of my email box, which lately I've been able to do.

I will say I have hundreds of emails that are coming in and I can't always check them, you know, during the day.

I've mentioned this recently, but I am trying to stay on top of that as well just to make sure nothing is falling behind.

The seventh strategy is to draft running agendas for regular meetings.

And this is just for meetings that I have with different teams on like a weekly basis, we do keep a running agenda.

And this helps me to be able to look back at past topics and make sure nothing is really getting kind of lost in the shuffle.

So these are shared documents that people can kind of add items to as they come up.

And this is another one of those strategies that's like super simple.

Like, I mean, I'm sure many of you are like, yup, I do that.

This is one of these things that is very powerful, even though it's very simple.

The eighth strategy is one that I have talked about before, and I will continue to talk about it over and over again, and that is to utilize email folders for tracking past communications.

So I will link to a blog post where I talked about this in the past, but this is still going strong.

I use this system all the time.

I have a very detailed foldering system, and this basically makes it really easy for me to find things that I know where they came from, but also to just get things out of my inbox.

So I know what is like active in my inbox that I need to worry about.

And then everything else kind of gets filed away.

And that just like that visual decluttering of my inbox is really helpful for me.

The ninth strategy that I was thinking of is to use project management tools.

And the ones that I like immediately came to mind were things like RACES, which are kind of, um, it's a tool about like roles and responsibilities.

It's an acronym R A C I.

And then things like stakeholder mapping and project scoping documents, things like that, I admit-- I mean, I just openly admit I have never been more grateful that I took the time to earn my PMP credential.

This is a project management credential.

And I will link a couple of podcast episodes in the show notes where I talk about PMP and I talk about my experience doing the exam.

But having these kinds of tools is just incredibly helpful to me because I'm managing projects.

But I'm also overseeing a lot of other people who are also managing projects.

So just having a literacy about the different kinds of tools that are available that can be helpful has been massively important to my current work.

Okay.

This last one, my 10th strategy.

I feel like this is the one that you might have the most disagreement with, but I'm going to put it out there, which is I like to offer to organize materials for committees and working groups that I'm on to help create structure.

Now this means like taking notes in meetings and stepping up to do like the administrative work of some of these committees and working groups.

And some of you may be thinking like, Oh my gosh, those are the tasks that I hate.

Like these are the things that like nobody wants to raise their hands to do.

And I admit it is not the most glamorous job to be like doing these admin tasks and doing the note taking and all of that.

But I've also found that it gives you a certain amount of power over this structure because you're the person to give organizational structure to documents and to generally create order out of chaos in some of these like committees and working groups.

And I always find that that's really highly rewarding to me personally, but I also know it's so helpful to the people that I work with.

And I think that that's one of the most important things is when you can raise your hand and volunteer for something that other people really don't like to do.

And you can find some way of feeling rewarded by that work.

It's a huge contribution to the people around you.

And so that's something that I really, um, I found in my most recent work, I'm doing a lot and, um, it also, I would say is, is some of the more easy tasks that I have on my plate to take notes in a meeting or to organize a document.

And given everything else I do that feels like not easy at all and is like highly complex, it's just kind of nice to mix in some tasks that feel like, you know, relatively easy for me to do in the midst of that other, you know, really complex stuff.

So those are the 10 ways, 10 strategies I'm using to stay organized at work.

I would love to hear if you've tried any of these and if they work well for you.

I would also love to hear if you have other strategies that you think I should be trying to stay organized at work.

You can always email me at hello@drkatylinder.

com.

As you know, I always love to hear from you.

Thanks so much for listening.

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