You're listening to You've Got This, episode 414.

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 want to share about a gift that you can give to yourself, which is pre-populating tasks in a task management system, calendar, or planner.

But before I dive into that, I do have to mention that I posted my first YouTube video on the Workflow channel.

Since I had just mentioned some fears about that in a previous episode, I thought this would be a timely update, so I will link to that video in the show notes if you want to take a look.

Okay, back to pre-populating tasks.

So I took some time to do this in the week before 2025 launched and in the first week of the year, and it has offered me such relief to know that these tasks are not needing to stay in my brain because they are recorded somewhere else.

Now, if you're not sure what I mean by pre-populating tasks, I'm basically describing thinking of all the tasks that you can think of that are happening in the future and writing them down on a calendar in your task management system or a planner so that you have them in the future and you're not just relying on your memory to get them done.

So I thought I would share about the system I use to do this, as well as some of the examples of the kinds of tasks that I pre-populate, so you might get some idea of whether this is something that might work for you.

So let's start with the system.

The first thing that I do is I look at all of the different areas of my life and I put them into broad buckets.

So for example, this might include work, my business, personal, reading, because I do a lot of things tied to that, and writing projects.

I mean, have broad buckets related to that.

And then I take those broad buckets and I break them down even further.

So for example, in my business, I would have subcategories for programs like PM by Design, Coach Training, Prolific, which is the online community that I facilitate, Slow Hustle, the AMA sessions that I launched this year, Content Creation, my website, Taxes and Finances, and maybe a general list of admin tasks that don't fall into other areas.

So I can kind of take a large bucket and divide it into a bunch of subcategories.

Now similarly for writing projects, I might have a subcategory for each of the different writing projects that I'm working on.

So right now that would include the edited collection on Coaching in Higher Ed, I have a chapter on promoting scholarship of teaching and learning work that I'm working on, and also a chapter on the post-pandemic university that's like, I just wrapped up and might be doing some promotional things around.

So once I have the broad buckets and the subcategories under each one of these broader things, I think about if I need any further categories.

So for example, for most of these, I would just have a task category.

But for some of them, like the programs in my business, I might have another category called Events because I have different sessions that are running for each program.

And it's easier for my brain to kind of think about events and tasks as separate things as I'm trying to kind of like generate things for these pre-populated lists.

So once I have those structural pieces in place, that's when I start to do the brain dump.

Now I would also mention that if you wanted to just start with the brain dump and then categorize things, you probably could, but having the categories can make you feel like you're doing this in kind of a more comprehensive way.

So the first category of tasks that I think about when I'm doing the brain dump is anything that might be recurring.

So a good example of this is for my content creation.

I release a podcast episode every Wednesday.

I have a blog post that goes out every Friday.

So I might create tasks that are tied to producing those pieces of content.

And those tasks are going to occur regularly because they're tied to a pattern in my schedule.

Another example of this might be weekly meetings that I have with my boss.

I might have a recurring task that tells me to create and send an agenda to him prior to each of our meetings so that I don't have to like remember to do that in the midst of a busy week.

And I would also mention as a personal example, I put a recurring task for taking out our trash and recycling because otherwise I would just forget to do it.

So this can follow a number of different things that you might have in your buckets.

Now the second category of tasks that I consider are any tasks that have dependencies or that have like a sequence of tasks that are related to each other.

So let me offer another example of this as well.

I'm offering some programs now like coach training and PM by design that require me to actually ship materials to people who participate in those programs and they launch at various points throughout the year.

So I might look at a program launch date and then plan backward from that date of when I need to ship the program materials.

And I might plan backward from the shipping date of that.

I need to finalize the program materials that I've created, but also source other program materials like books that I also send out.

I might also for those programs have tasks for kickoff emails that need to be drafted and also like reminder emails that go out right before the program launches because I need to collect information from people in the program.

Like the addresses I need to ship the information.

So I can kind of work backward from a particular date or time and then think about other things that are kind of tied to that.

Now another example of this kind of sequencing might be the production of the YouTube videos that I'm working on right now.

So I have dates that I want to release the videos, but that requires scripting the video, recording the video, editing the video, et cetera.

There's a bunch of things that are tied to it and I need to work backward from the release date to mark all of those tasks off my list.

So another way to think about this is basically are there milestones in any of the buckets or subcategories that have tasks associated with them?

And can I document any of that ahead of time because I know certain things that I want to get done within a particular timeframe.

Now the last category of tasks that I might consider are just random things that I know are going to happen, but they're not recurring and they're not dependent on anything.

So for example, I keep a separate list of books that are releasing.

So I know when I can find them available at my library to put them on hold.

So as I learn about a new book coming out, I put it on my task list to remind myself that it's coming out.

And this is something that, again, I don't have to like remember when this is happening.

I can just, you know, set it and forget it basically on my task list.

So the last thing that I do with each of these tasks and like buckets and subcategories is that I color code them.

Now this is something that has always been so helpful to me.

I'm not exactly sure what it is about my brain that just really needs this, but I currently use Asana for my task management system.

And I have different colors for different items that show up on my weekly dashboard of tasks.

And basically what this looks like is a little bit like a Kanban board, if you're familiar with that, but it's basically just columns for every day of the week.

And I can drag and drop things depending on, you know, if I move different tasks to different days, but I have a personal tasks in blue.

I have coach training tasks in green.

I have my work tasks in orange.

I have prolific events and tasks in purple.

And basically this helps me to see at a glance, the kinds of things that I need to complete each day and what's kind of coming up for me throughout the week.

And this is something that I have just always found to be incredibly helpful for myself.

So although it may seem kind of challenging to carve out the time to do this kind of brain dumping and pre-populating of tasks, I do find it so incredibly helpful because it gets me in the mode of planning, which I think is really significant.

And it also gets everything out of my head and into a system that I know that I can trust because I am just constantly dumping tasks into this task management system.

And in just a couple of hours, I can write down a ton of things.

And the more that I generate, the more I think of that I can add ahead of time to make sure that I'm really preparing my future self as best I can.

And that just frees up my whole frontal lobe for the creative work that I'm trying to do instead of reserving it for memory, short-term memory, where I have to remember all of these things and try to do them in the moment.

So it's kind of like my present self is creating a plan for my future self in terms of what my future self needs to get done.

And the other thing that's really helpful about this pre-populating of tasks is it does help you if you do get a time windfall.

It does help you to actually work ahead a little bit because you can look at your task list and you can see all these different things that you're trying to do.

And maybe I have a meeting canceled and so I will look at tomorrow and gather some tasks that I had for tomorrow and get them done right now.

So there are so many benefits, I think, to pre-populating your task list.

Of course, I would love to hear if you do any of this and what systems you use to do it and how it works for you.

You can always email me at hello@drkatylinder.com.

I always do love to hear from you.

Thanks so much for listening.

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Thanks for watching. (gentle music)