You're listening to You've Got This, episode 428. 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 thought I would talk a little bit about reflections for times of uncertainty. And recently I had this opportunity where I had something that kind of got canceled that I was expecting to go to. And it allowed me to have a couple of hours strung together, and I used that time to just journal and like sit with myself. And it felt so luxurious. And it was during a time when I was asking myself just some powerful questions about kind of like, "Where am I? Where am I going? What feels important to me right now?" And I jotted down some of the questions that I wanted to talk about in this episode as kind of journal prompts if you find yourself in this kind of time of uncertainty. Now, there's of course the time of uncertainty of just what is going on in the world. And for many of us, we're steeped in that. We're really feeling kind of maybe our foundations are shaken a little bit or we're feeling very uncertain. But there's also times when we just have personal uncertainty or professional uncertainty or just that feeling of like misalignment where things don't feel quite like they should. And I have this happen quite a bit with coaching clients that I work with where they'll come to me and they'll say, "I don't know quite what's wrong. I just know that I don't feel great and I'm not sure what to do about it." And typically where we will start is something like values misalignment and try to figure out what's going on that they're feeling misaligned or they're feeling like something is not having meaning or purpose for them. So that's certainly one direction to go. I think if you're feeling times of uncertainty is kind of to root yourself into your values, which if you are not sure what your values are, I will link an episode where I talked about how do you identify your values. And so you can always go that direction. But I also thought that these journal prompts were certainly helpful for me and maybe they would be helpful for you as well. Now, before I get to the prompts and I promise I will get to them, I also want to just mention if you are not a regular journaler, that's okay. So I have talked before about my journaling practice. It's something that's very important to me. As someone who is super introverted, often in my own head and wanting to just think through things for myself, I don't tend to talk them out necessarily with other people, but I do write them out with myself. So I do have a regular journaling practice, but I think that any of these questions, you could literally just sit down with a notebook or even type into a laptop or even onto your phone. Like, how are you feeling about these things? Or you could even use them as prompts to talk about them with a friend, a colleague or a partner or a family member. So I think that there's lots of different ways that you can use this. Don't let the journaling part freak you out. If you're not someone who does that, I still think these might be helpful. Okay. So question number one is what feels certain or stable? I think sometimes we have to ground ourselves in what is the thing that feels like an anchor that I do feel like I can rely on this thing. So oftentimes for me, where certain and stable starts is like something with my partner. My partner feels certain and stable. We've been together a long time. We weathered a lot of things together. That is something that feels kind of like certain or stable for me. There may be parts of my job that feel certain or stable. There may be parts of my identity or parts of the things that I'm caring about, practices, routines, habits that I have ingrained that feel certain or stable. But noting those things first can be kind of like grounding or anchoring during a time when you're trying to kind of work your way through a lot of shifting stance. Now, the second question, of course, is what feels uncertain or unstable? And I think it's also helpful to kind of follow this question with why. So if something is feeling uncertain or unstable, why is it feeling uncertain or unstable? And oftentimes it's because there's just a lot of unknowns or there's something that feels out of our control and we're just like waiting to see what will happen with a thing. So asking this question next, I think it's really important to try to identify and define and name the things that are maybe feeling uncertain or unstable for you. The next question that really was helpful for me when I was doing this practice was I asked myself to understand what are the things that are making me feel a certain way. So when I was actually journaling in this practice, the feelings I was feeling were confused and lost. And so I asked myself, what is making me feel confused or lost? Now, you might have other feelings that you are trying to decipher and understand like what is making me feel this way. So it could be, you know, what is making me feel sad or what is making me feel out of control or, you know, like whatever the thing is that you're really maybe struggling with or wanting to think through. You can always fill in the blank. What is making me feel a particular kind of way? And I really was able to unload a lot of things when I asked myself this question that also led to more questions of what I was kind of trying to figure out or what I was trying to determine for myself. And I found that to be just a really productive practice. The next question is what can I depend on? So this might feel a little bit similar to the what feels certain or stable question, but that question of like even in the midst of feeling uncertain, unstable or other kinds of emotions that are feeling difficult or challenging, I can still depend on some things. And what are those things that I can depend on that do feel like things I can continue to come back to even in this time of uncertainty? Now, the fifth question that I asked is one that is my favorite. And I like to ask this pretty frequently of myself, which is what will help me to feel more aligned? So when I get knocked off base or when I feel uncertain or when I feel unstable, it is often because there is a feeling of misalignment for me. And sometimes that is misalignment with my values. Sometimes that could be misalignment with another person or like a project that's on my plate and really trying to understand what will help me to feel more aligned or feel more connected with my purpose or what I feel like I am meant to do in the world. That is always something that can be grounding and centering and anchoring for me as well. Now, knowing I've gone through all of these questions, I've written down a bunch of notes. I've unloaded a lot of things from my brain. The next question is what do I know now? So based on all of those reflections, I may be able to say, okay, here's what I know. Here's what I feel certain, more certain about maybe than I did in the beginning of this journaling practice. And here are the things that feel like I can maybe build off of because there are things that I know to be true. And then, of course, the next question is what do I want to know? So if there are things that feel like they are unknown to me, if there are things that feel like I still have a lot of questions or I don't have enough information or I'm not sure what is going to happen, I can name those things of what do I want to know. And then I can understand if those things feel realistic to know or if it's like I'm never going to know those things. And I need to figure out a way forward in this uncertainty, knowing that I'm not going to know those things. So for example, today, actually, I entered into a meeting and our icebreaker was what kind of person are you? Are you the person who watches the stock market when we're in a situation like we're in as I record this podcast episode where you feel like you have to look at all the numbers and kind of obsess about how things are? Or are you the kind of person that totally ignores that and just puts your head in the sand and completely pretends like everything's fine? Now, I may want to know what will happen in five years with my retirement savings. That's not necessarily something that I can know, but it certainly points to the things that I'm concerned about. It points to the things that I have anxiety about or that I'm worried about. So this question of what do I know now and what do I want to know can sometimes surface things, even if they don't feel like they're going to be like productive things that you can come to understand. Now, the final question that I ask after going through all of that reflection is what next steps did these reflections uncover or unveil for me? So when I have gone through this kind of conversation with myself where I'm trying to figure out what feels certain for me, what can I depend on? What do I know? And then also trying to find out what feels uncertain. Why do I feel confused? Why do I feel lost? What is going to help me feel more aligned? What do I want to know moving forward? Oftentimes these things will uncover natural next actions that I can start to think about and decide if I want to move forward with them. Now, I will point out that each of these journaling prompts are something that we call powerful questions in the coaching space. And so when you coach, you get asked these kinds of questions and oftentimes through a coaching session, you come to this sense of natural next steps and next actions. So basically, this is a form for me of self coaching where I'm asking myself a bunch of questions. I'm giving myself the time to deeply reflect on them. And then I'm basically seeing what emerges in terms of the next steps that I want to take. So you can basically ask yourself any open ended question. They often start with what if you're going to ask a powerful question and then do a series of those questions and see what emerges for you. And you're probably going to find some pretty helpful stuff. So I'm curious, of course, if you decide you want to use this exercise, if you find it helpful or what other kinds of questions you might ask yourself, you can always email me at hello@drkatylinder.com. I always love to hear from you. And I do hope that some of these reflections might be helpful if you are in your own time of uncertainty. Thanks for listening. Thanks for listening to this episode of You've Got This. You can access show notes and transcripts for each episode at drkatylinder.com/ygt. If you found this episode helpful, please also consider rating or reviewing the show through Apple Podcasts or sharing the show with a friend or colleague.