

#96: There's Nothing Wrong with Procrastination



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With Your Host

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with Marissa McKool, MPH](#)

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Hey you all, I'm Marissa McKool, and you're listening to the *Redefining Rest Podcast for Public Health Professionals*. Here we believe rest is your right. You don't have to earn it, you just have to learn how to take it and I'm going to teach you. Ready? Come along.

Well, hello there. How was your weekend? Happy Monday. I know for many of you who listen or those of you who are new listeners, Monday is not a happy day but it is over here in my life. And we are going to make it one over in yours. But how was your weekend really? Did you get downtime? Did you get to be present? Did you get to enjoy friends? What happened? And I really hope it was better than mine.

Jared and I both caught a 24 hour bug that took us out. I had plans on Saturday to get all my laundry done and get to read by myself and get some other things done and bake. And it was a nice day. I didn't have appointments or friend dates or stuff scheduled. I was just going to have the whole day to myself. We both woke up with kind of the aches and did not feel good. So the weekend, the plans did not happen and it really only lasted 24 hours. There is a little after bit left but it was just a weird – I don't know if it was a flu or really bad cold or what.

And one of the things that happened when this happened actually brought up a re-realization for myself. So a lot of times when you are working on your mindset, doing thought work, getting coaching, evolving, creating transformation, going after goals, whatever you want to call it, you learn lessons along the way. But you don't just learn it once and it sticks because there will be new challenges and new contexts. And you have to re-realize things, you have to relearn the lessons. And it's a different experience every time, it's on a deeper level.

And one of the things I really realized over the weekend is that a lot of times, especially when it's around taking action or making a decision, your brain is going to be an asshole to you either way. What I mean is we often

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think there is a 'right choice'. And if we make that right choice our brain will be quiet. So if our brain's not quiet then we haven't made the right choice. But a lot of the time no matter what you decide or what action you take your brain's going to be a jerk either way.

So this weekend, Sunday we did have an appointment set up. And on Saturday my brain kept going on and on and on about how if I didn't email them to cancel as early as possible then I was going to come off as a jerk or leave them hanging or make it harder to reschedule or they'll think I'm lying, so many things my brain was saying, on and on and on and on. And I finally emailed them and I emailed them directly and then I responded to the calendar invite. And then my brain, when I did that, I responded to what it said I should do.

Then it was still a jerk, it was saying, "You sent too many emails. Now you're going to come off annoying and clingy and like you're freaking out. And they're not going to respond and they're not", blah, blah, blah. Either way my brain was just being a jerk, you can't win either way. And there was another incident where this happened over the weekend. And I just had this re-realization, I've realized this before, I've gotten coached on this.

That a lot of times when it comes to taking action or making a decision especially if you're a woman. Because we are so socialized not to trust ourselves to defer to external authority that when we go to take action or make a decision our brain makes it a problem no matter what we decide. It thinks thoughts that create doubt or disappointment or shame or guilt no matter what. This is really important because we think if we make the right choice our brain will be quiet, our brain is signaling.

But that's not true, our brain is just programmed to judge ourselves and to critique ourselves and to go into doubt. And by program I don't mean we are born this way. Babies don't do this. We're socialized, our brains get this programming through socialization. And I share this because a lot of times

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just naming that and acknowledging that, either way my brain's going to disapprove, either way my brain's going to try to make this a problem, either way my brain is going to judge me.

Then the reason to choose the choice isn't about getting your brain to shut up because it's not going to shut up. And it releases so much pressure and it makes it so much clearer. I had that re-realization this weekend and I've really been chewing on it. And for some of you especially if you're newer to the podcast, that might feel a little meta, that's totally okay. But those of you who listened to the maybe hole episode or who have been listening for a while or gotten coaching. I really want you to think about that. So that's your little bonus mini lesson upfront of this episode.

Today we are talking about procrastinating. So many of the public health professionals I work with, whether it's one-on-one or in my group trainings, teachings, courses, struggle with procrastination. And many coaches, teachers, books, advice and talks on habits, TED Talks, internet advice, so many different areas. When it comes to procrastination all they talk about, all we hear from them is how not to procrastinate. But I actually don't think procrastinating is a problem at all. I know, crazy.

I think we make it a problem. I think the real problem is how we shame ourselves and judge ourselves for procrastinating. All procrastination is the action of delaying or postponing something. Think about this, when you tell yourself I'm procrastinating or I procrastinated or I'm a procrastinator. So many of you label yourself that way. How do you feel? For most people there is an air of disappointment and shame and embarrassment.

But when you say, "I decide to delay it or I decided to postpone it", do you feel that same air of shame and judgment? Probably not, yet they are describing the exact same action. We have taken the action of delaying or postponing and putting the label of procrastination on it. And then attaching that label to shame. Society, family, peers, teachers, coaches, supervisors,

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schools, so many other things have told us procrastination is bad, that it's a problem. And that we should feel bad for doing it and that something is wrong with us if we procrastinate, that it means something about us.

We have been taught that it means we're not organized or aren't committed enough or can't motivate ourselves or don't care enough. But we don't make that same meaning or attach the same judgment when we talk about postponing or delaying something. Isn't that interesting? And now, some people might say, "Well, delaying and postponing is an active choice and procrastination is an outcome of avoiding, meaning the intent behind doing something later or putting it off is what makes it different.

But that does not explain why we have taken the word 'procrastination' to mean we are lazy and disorganized. And the other one of delaying, postponing to mean we are thoughtful or smart. Even if you are procrastinating because you are avoiding which we'll talk more about in a second, that does not mean you're lazy or disorganized or should be ashamed. We have just attached those meanings there. All of that judgment is optional. And this is why that's important.

What I have found in myself and coaching all my clients is that judgment about procrastinating is actually what gets in the way, not the procrastination itself. That self-judgment and shame gets in the way of you feeling proud or confident about what you do no matter when you do it. It gets in the way of feeling calm and relaxed during the additional time you are giving yourself. It gets in the way of either letting yourself do things later or last minute without feeling bad or figuring out why you want to delay it and addressing that if you want to.

Notice I said, if. I think we all make the assumption that if we are procrastinating we should change it, we should have to change it, we should want to. No, I don't believe you have to change this. I don't believe you have to want to change this but I do strongly believe that you need to

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drop the shame and judgment. Delaying or putting off work and doing it closer to a deadline might actually work best for your brain. A lot of people with neurodivergent brains work better under pressure. They might be more likely to get things done when there is a tight deadline.

Whether or not you have ADHD or a neurodivergent brain, your brain just might function better under a tight timeline. Maybe it's because your brain narrows in and doesn't get distracted as easily. And if you were to try to do it earlier your brain would get distracted more easily because there is more time. Or maybe your creativity, your intellect means that you actually only require an hour or two to get the task done.

And doing it last minute or towards the deadline allows you to just honor that and do it in the hour or if you try to do it earlier you get all up in your other judgment about how it should take longer, you overthink it, you drag it out. So actually doing it towards the deadline might help you not overcomplicate it and just get your brilliance out or whatever else the reason is. I think for so many of you right now you don't even know the reason, you don't really understand your own brain's best optimization because you've spent so much time judging it.

If you do a Google search on the word 'procrastination' you will find thousands of articles as to why it is a problem. Very few talk about how some people's brains just function better or more efficiently or effectively or get the most clean and clear and direct things out if they do a task right before the deadline and that's okay. I don't know where we initially got the idea that everyone's brains should and do function exactly the same because they don't and that's okay.

The problem here is the self-judgment and shame. Our society especially in school and workplaces have been structured by and around people with neurotypical brains, brains that function on a linear path and doing things in a specific order consistently and planning things out and working from a

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traditional kind of nine to five structure and a million other things. So if your brain functions differently when you're in school or traditional workplaces you get messages, something is wrong with you, that you should be different but that's not true.

This is part of the reason why actually when you look at entrepreneurs, people who own their own businesses, meaning they can set exactly how they work, the times they work, the function of their work. A lot of entrepreneurs have ADHD or neurotypical brains because being an entrepreneur gives you that freedom and flexibility to do the work in a structure and in a way that works best for your brain. Now, this can look a lot of ways, not just procrastination.

Whether it's allowing your brain to work in shorts sprints where it has really great ideas and then giving yourself lots of time off in between. Whether it's working a lot for a couple months and then taking a couple of months off. Whether it's working on something a little bit you're excited about and then changing it and working on something else. There's so many other examples. This shouldn't be only the case in entrepreneurship. What you think should be different is your brain but that's not true.

What really needs to be different is the structure of our work environments in our school, in our society to allow space, structure, flexibility for everyone's brain to not only be accepted but to function the way it functions best, to have that support and structure. And while we are working on that, on that external structure or systems change you can also do this work internally by undoing your own self-shame and judgment.

If you dropped the shame and self-judgment then there wouldn't be a problem with delaying or postponing. In fact you wouldn't even have to call it procrastination or delaying or postponing. You could just accept that your brain works best right before a due date and you decide to schedule that time or plan on doing it right before then. What makes the experience of

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delaying, postponing, procrastinating, whatever you want to call it, so stressful is not the action or decision of delaying or doing it last minute, it's your self-judgment and shame you attach to it.

If your report is due Friday and you spend the whole week telling yourself something is wrong with you, you should be able to get it done, you're going to fuck it up, why can't you just do it early like everyone else, then your week is going to be stressful. If you spend the week knowing that you do your best work right before the deadline and you have that time blocked off and you don't shame or judge yourself and you let yourself be present and do the other things you want to do then you have an extremely less stressful week.

And you can use that mental and emotional energy during the week for something else. This is also what happens when you drop the self-judgment and shame. You can uncover and clearly see if there is something under that buried, maybe your brain actually doesn't work best last minute. For me, my brain definitely works best if I draft something 'early' and then have time to reflect and come back. I am a processor. Sometimes I can be a quick thinker but when it comes to presentation drafting or reports or even these podcast episodes.

I work best when I get my ideas out to begin with and then have some space from them to reflect on them and think about them and then come back. Some people they don't need that, their intellect, their creativity, the way their brain thinks is different than mine. Maybe they don't need processing. Maybe what they get out immediately is exactly what they want to say. And all of this is good, we want diversity of thought. We want diversity of brain processing, of how our brains function because we all bring something important and unique to the table.

What I miss in the ways my brain processes or does work, someone else with a different brain that processes differently gets, catches, and vice

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versa. It's a beautiful, beautiful thing. But in order to see that for yourself and everyone else we have to drop the shame and judgment. So for me I know my brain, it helps to draft earlier and come back. But when I'm doing that and I'm judging myself and shaming myself for it and saying, "I should be able to do this. This shouldn't take me as long. Other people can do it quicker. This takes up way too much time." I won't be able to uncover the why.

And what happens sometimes is when we have that narrative, that really propels us to delay or postpone. My procrastination, your procrastination might be happening actually because there's also judgment and shame underneath it about something else. But you can't see, you can't get to if in addition to that you're layering on judgment and shame about procrastination.

So if I am judging myself saying, "I should be able to get this done faster. I shouldn't need as much time as I do." And that pushes me to postpone, delay, procrastinate, and then I judge myself for procrastinating, there's two layers of judgment. And the layer of judgment on the procrastination gets in the way of me seeing the judgment that's driving the delay or procrastination.

But if I don't judge my procrastination, I don't shame myself for delaying and I just notice it and I say, "That's interesting, I'm really avoiding this." Or I'm really putting this off or I'm really waiting till the last minute. I wonder why. If I'm not making myself bad or wrong for it and I just see what's happening, I can get curious. I can ask questions. Is it because I've never done it before, my brain is making that scary? Is it because it involves a skill I don't think I'm good at? Is it because I'm worried what other people will think?

And then from there I can learn something about myself and use that information to better support myself. If you know that every time you do a

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new task for the very first time your brain's going to think it's scary and then want to avoid it or not do it. Then you can just know that ahead of time. You can see it happening when it does happen. You can choose to plan or expect for it, or when it comes up, to calm your nervous system. You can structure and time to support that experience and a million other things.

Or you can choose to change that if you want by getting coached on what's underneath, whether it's the fear or the worry or the uncertainty. Even if truly you want to and you're choosing intentionally, you want to change your experience and not delay your work and you want to do it earlier, if you're truly doing that and deciding that from a place without judgment or shame and that desire is not from society's expectations. Procrastination is still not the problem to be solved.

The problem there would be what's underneath it, which is some sort of other judgment or shame, that has nothing to do with the procrastination. So either way, whether your brain actually functions best doing things close to the deadline or your brain functions best doing things earlier or spreading it out or not close to the deadline. You won't be able to discern which one you are, which category you fall into for lack of a better term, if you are judging and shaming yourself for procrastinating.

You have to first let that go in order to either accept fully how your brain works best and optimize it and let yourself operate from that place without judgment and shame and instead unconditional love and confidence. Even in the face of a society that tries to say you should be different or find out what's underneath that, what's going on under there? Is it feeling scared of trying something new or worrying what other people will think?

So this week all I want you to do is practice not judging yourself or shaming yourself for delaying something, postponing something, procrastinating, doing something last minute. That's your next step, practice not judging. And a lot of you will say, "Well, what does that really mean?" The first piece

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of that is just notice your brain doing that and name it, my brain right now really wants to judge me for procrastinating. My thoughts right now are trying to shame me for delaying and naming it.

And you might not be able to catch it 100% of the time or in the moment, maybe it's after the fact but that's okay, that's the first step. So I want you all to start there. And if you want more, if you want additional steps, if you want support, really doing this fully, before we go, if you've been thinking about signing up for my one-on-one coaching program that's where we do this. Maybe this is the first time you've been hearing about my one-on-one coaching program because you're new here. Welcome, so glad you're here. A great episode to start with.

In my one-on-one coaching program we work every single week together to do this work of dropping the judgment and shame, noticing it and naming it, changing it, accepting yourself, creating confidence so you can have more time, so you can have less stress, so you can do more of what you want. And right now, if you're listening to this when this airs, there is a short amount of time left to join this program. If you're listening to this episode the day it airs, you can sign up for a consult this week. I'm going to be leaving town for a week but there are still a couple of days left.

Otherwise the last two weeks my consult program will be open for enrollment is the week of March 20th and the week of March 27th, the last two weeks of March. I'm taking a month long sabbatical in April. I'm going to be not working the whole month. So this is your last chance to enroll and your last chance to sign up for a consult. On the consult you'll share what you're struggling with, what you want to change.

I share how my program works, how it can help you, where I see as a coach things need to change for you to kind of have the experience you'd rather have or achieve the goal you'd rather have. Whether it's to stop procrastinating, whether it's to accept your procrastination and figure out a

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way of working in your nine to five that really helps with the way your brain optimizes rather than shaming yourself. Whether it's you want to switch careers, whether you want to have more time, whatever it may be.

So you do a consult, we talk and then we both decide together if you're a good fit. And then you get to decide if you want to join. Even if we both think you're a good fit, you don't have to join. You get the final say. You have final authority over your decision on what you want to do. The consult just gives you an opportunity to really understand what needs to change for you to achieve your goal or feel better and how coaching helps you do that. And then with all that information you get to decide.

So head to mckoolcoaching.com/coaching, we'll leave a link in the show notes. You can learn more, scroll to the bottom of that page, schedule a consult right there and I'll chat with you then. Alright, bye everyone.

If you found this episode helpful then you have to check out my coaching program where I provide you individualized support to create a life centered around rest. Head on over to mckoolcoaching.com, that's M-C-K-O-O-L coaching.com to learn more.