You're listening to You've Got This, episode 360.

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 some strategies for staying grounded in times of change.

Now this is a topic that was suggested to me by a listener and I thought it was really perfect since I can imagine all of us are experiencing some level of change and the person who suggested this topic actually phrased it kind of more narrowly and she said, "How do you maintain internal equilibrium and momentum during periods of institutional change?

" So change that is happening at our, our colleges and universities and our institutions.

And so that is what I'm going to focus on today is that kind of more narrow view.

And there are so many different ways that I am sure we have all experienced this change.

So I have either personally experienced or I've had colleagues or clients experience some of the following, uh, the resignation or layoff of a close colleague, uh, no confidence votes for institutional leaders, having something at the institution wind up in the local news and it creates, you know, some kind of change or reaction, significant budget cuts that lead to feelings of financial instability, mergers of institutions or of schools or colleges or departments within an institution, and things like closures of academic programs.

Now I would say that those are all relatively negative in terms of the kinds of examples I'm offering, but I also think there are some more positive or even like neutral examples of institutional change that can still be disruptive, but it's not necessarily a negative thing.

So for example, changes in institutional leadership, like a new president or a provost is not necessarily, you know, a negative thing.

Um, large campus wide initiatives focused on improving learner support or, or something else across the institution that creates change, um, collaborations with industry or community partners, you know, big grant projects and things like that, that can then cause, you know, changes to happen.

developing new academic programs, uh, welcoming a new colleague into your department or unit, and then things like developing and implementing a new multi-year strategic plan.

So whether the institutional change you are feeling is negative, neutral, positive, or maybe even all of the above, um, I would bet you are experiencing at least some level of change.

And I want to acknowledge first that change can be actually really hard and really difficult, especially when it feels like it is never ending and we're constantly being disrupted and distracted by this.

So I thought I would offer some strategies for how to stay grounded during these periods of institutional change.

So the first strategy is just to know that if you are feeling it, everyone is probably feeling it.

And I think that sometimes we can feel like we are alone if we're feeling overwhelmed or frustrated with change, but everyone is experiencing it in different ways at all levels of the organization.

And if you are frustrated or tired, others probably are as well.

So you're definitely not kind of feeling those things alone.

A second strategy I think is to reflect on the values alignment that you have with your institution in the midst of the change.

And this could even be within your discipline or within your department, but often these kinds of values withstand shorter term changes.

So it could be that the values that attracted you to your institution in the beginning are still there and focusing on those values and the larger reasons why you're showing up every day.

I find that to be very grounding and stabilizing in the midst of times that can be kind of turbulent.

A third strategy is to consider leaning into the change.

Now I have had some personal experience with this on several occasions at my current institution at past institutions where I raised my hand to help with something and I found it to be a really useful way to stay connected and also to get access to more information about what was happening with the change.

So when I know what's going on with an institutional level change, and I'm not just experiencing it, but I'm, I'm kind of a part of it.

I'm not being acted upon, but I'm like actively engaging in it.

It can help me to feel more in control.

And also I think it makes me a better leader for my teams when I have that kind of insider view of what's happening.

Now, for some of you might, who might be thinking like, well, I'm not in a leadership position.

So I wouldn't necessarily be able to do that.

I would would say, keep an eye out for things like committees or, you know, working groups or task forces or things like that, that you are asked to join because, or asked to volunteer for, because those are the kinds of things that I'm talking about and sometimes those are open to folks from across the institution, whether your staff or faculty in a leadership position or not in a leadership position.

A fourth strategy is to try and help others.

I find that when times are hard, helping other people always gives me a boost.

And this doesn't have to be anything big.

Sometimes I just make a point to check in with colleagues to see how they're doing.

Now I find that it's really helpful for me to have things like people's phone numbers, so that I can just like text to check in.

Um, and it's easier to get that kind of stuff, like people's phone numbers and their connection information when you're not in the middle of a crisis.

So I would just say, plan ahead.

If you want to do that kind of check-in with people to try to have that kind of like text-based relationship all the time, so that when something happens or when a change is getting really tough, you can reach out to someone and just say like, Hey, are you doing okay?

Do you want to touch base?

Okay.

The fifth strategy.

I feel like this one is super important and the fifth strategy is to avoid the drama of the change.

Now change can bring lots of big emotions and gossip and complaints and just a general increase in, in what I consider to be kind of negative interactions, and I want to differentiate this from like talking through change with other people, which can be useful.

Like this is not to say completely separate yourself from everyone around you.

But I think constantly complaining about it does not get me in the right head space to be productive.

And I try to not be like super distracted by it.

And I find that these kinds of conversations like pull me right back into the distraction and it's distracting me from what I really want to be putting my energy into.

So I try to surround myself with people who are focused and productive so that I can be as well.

And I find that to be mutually reinforcing when I give that to them.

They give that back to me.

Strategy number six is to try and explain what you are experiencing it to someone outside of the Academy.

Now I think that this can help you to talk about the change at a higher level.

And it can unlock maybe some ideas of what you need to do to process the change and stay focused on what matters to you.

When I talk with my higher ed colleagues about this kind of thing, it's super easy to get lost in the weeds.

But when I have to explain it to a family member who's not in the higher ed industry, I get some perspective because I have to kind of pull away and figure out how to explain it in more broad, general terms.

Now the seventh strategy follows from the previous one, which is to just really try to get some perspective.

Recently I was dealing with a significant change and kind of challenge at my work.

And it was the same week that my partner found out that someone close to him was diagnosed with cancer.

And my issue at work did not come even close to the stress that this person was feeling with their recent diagnosis and it just reminded me to right size what I'm experiencing and everything is relative.

You know, I'm not going to say that some of the stress that some of you all may be dealing with is not, you know, as, as important as this other thing, but in my, my life, in my experience, it was not as important.

And, um, it's awful.

It's awful that kind of bad things are happening to people that we care about to people around the world.

And so sometimes when you get that perspective, it just kind of shrinks your own issues down to kind of the right size that they should be.

And it helps you to just like compartmentalize them a little bit from some of these other things that we're having to, to care about and think about, um, that are happening in the world.

Okay.

An eighth strategy is to have something to focus on outside of work.

And I think that this is one of the things I've liked the most about my annual goal setting is that I choose a lot of things that require me to spend time outside of work in order to achieve them and having something that I can devote my time, my energy, and my attention to helps me to reset when I'm experiencing a lot of uncertainty or change at work.

Now this, I think also ties in with things like routines and habits and things that are familiar.

So if you can kind of establish some of that in your life outside of work, it helps to have, um, the stability, you know, outside of an experience where you're having a lot of change.

Now you might also be able to establish some stability inside of your work as well, through habits and routines that would help to kind of ground you and stabilize you when things around you feel very tumultuous.

Okay.

A ninth strategy is one that my partner actually reminded me of just the other day, so frequently on my way home from work, um, because he drives me home from work, we talk through my day and I kind of process, you know, what's going on at work.

And after I was talking through a particularly challenging situation with him, he just said, this too will pass.

And it really did remind me that like a year from now, I might not even remember the things that are stressing me out this week.

So I need to kind of remind myself that change is just that when things are changing, nothing is going to stay that way for too long.

And if there's anything that's feeling especially difficult or distracting, you just have to kind of wait it out a little bit and until you can get back to a place where you can feel more grounded.

Now the last strategy I have is to take a longer term view and put together maybe a three to five year plan to help yourself refocus on what is important to you and kind of what season of life you're in, what season of your career you're in, and it helps you to not worry so much about what's happening in the present moment.

Now, I don't want to say that ignoring a challenge completely or ignoring change completely is, is, you know, always the right move, but I think that temporarily distracting yourself from it can be a good coping strategy depending on what it is that you're dealing with.

So I do have to admit that when I started outlining this episode, I did not think I had much to say on this topic.

And lo and behold, here are 10 strategies that I was able to come up with in a relatively short period of time.

So I hope that at least one of these strategies is helpful to you as you are navigating institutional change in your own context.

And as always, you can share your own experiences by emailing me at hello@drkatylinder.

com.

I always love to hear from you.

And also just a reminder that you can always send in your questions and topics that you want me to address on the podcast to this same email as well.

Thanks for listening.

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