You're listening to You've Got This, episode 395.

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 talk about the concept of guaranteed goals.

Now I first learned about this when I read a recent book by John A.

Cuff called "All It Takes Is a Goal."

I'll link to this in the show notes in case you want to look at the whole book.

I would actually highly recommend it.

There were a number of concepts that I took away and thought were really interesting from this book, and it's a relatively quick and short read.

But one of the concepts that he mentions in this book is called a guaranteed goal, and I just loved this concept.

So basically, a guaranteed goal is one that you are definitely going to make progress on based on how you set up the supports for the goal.

So for example, if you commit to a new habit of doing three strength workouts a week, you will definitely be stronger by the end of the year.

And one example that John A.

Cuff gives in the book is committing to go to the CrossFit gym a few times a week, which he knows will result in being stronger over time.

Now another example might be if you commit to reading one book a month on a topic of interest that you're trying to learn more about, or maybe about a skill that you're trying to get better at, you are very likely to know more or be better at that thing after reading 12 books at the end of the year.

Now I think it's important to know that despite the examples I just offered, guaranteed goals don't have to be just annual goals.

So it's kind of easy to think about it that way.

But I was recently thinking about the last four months of 2024 because we're entering into the last third of the year.

And I wanted to think about if there were any goals that I wanted to set for that time, other than just what I have like remaining on my annual goals list that I'm planning to work on.

And so you can really choose whatever period of time that you want to set for this concept of guaranteed goals.

But because it's kind of like this accumulation, it does need to be a long enough period of time that you can like see some kind of result.

So in the case of this last third of the year, I've mentioned before on the podcast, like probably years ago, that I have had a 16 week run walk plan that I really like doing.

And I'll link to the previous episode where I talk about this and it kind of links the run walk plan that I have found to be really helpful.

And what I like about it is it's just challenging enough without giving me so much challenge that I might get injured when I'm starting to kind of start up a running practice again.

And there's a very specific schedule for 16 weeks that you follow that includes three workouts a week.

So again, I'll link this in the show notes, you know, if you're interested in seeing it.

And this is based on a book of like a Canadian author, I like stumbled across this years and years and years ago.

And I have just loved this plan so much because it just incrementally works you up to more and more running over time.

And it's a really good example of a guaranteed goal because I know I'm going to be running more by the end of the program based on the workouts that it's laying out for me.

Now I do think that sometimes I can, maybe you can too, set a goal for ourselves that are a bit of a stretch.

And we aren't really sure that we're even going to accomplish the goal, but a guaranteed goal is more about the process and what you're going to learn along the way than like the ultimate result.

It's the difference between me like committing to complete this run walk plan versus like setting a goal to run a marathon.

And I think that sometimes we focus sometimes on that end result so much that we are doing dissatisfied with the kind of the progress that we make along the way.

So I don't know that I have the confidence to say that I can run a marathon or even know how long it would take me to work up to that distance without getting injured along the way.

But I do know that I can commit to 16 weeks of this run walk workout schedule that will have me running more than I usually do.

Now I also think it's important to note, and again, like I've certainly fallen into this gap, I wonder if you have as well, that we sometimes set a goal because it just sounds good.

And so I think sometimes like running a marathon is a good example.

But when I really think about it, that's not actually what I want to do.

Like I actually have zero desire, at least right now, to run a marathon or even like a half marathon.

But I do want to get into a more consistent running practice.

And I don't really care what that means in terms of like longer distances that I might run.

And so I think that sometimes it's about like the habit or the routine.

It's not necessarily about some kind of end result because that can feel a little bit nebulous.

Like we're not exactly sure what is going to happen there.

Now I think that one of the best things about this concept of guaranteed goals is that they're about the accumulation of something that doesn't have to take a ton of time, but you're kind of like getting, you know, deposits in the bank over time that add up.

So for example, I might decide to practice juggling every day for a month for 15 minutes a day.

And I would guess that by the end of that month, I'm going to be better at juggling because I've just devoted 15 minutes a day to something that I'm like consistently trying to get better at.

Now, I think that one of the most important things for me, at least when I, when I ran across this concept and I was really, really sucked into it, one of the most important things about setting a guaranteed goal is that you aren't necessarily being strict about a specific end result because you're not necessarily setting a concrete goal to hit a particular milestone.

And that I think is just very different than other kinds of goal setting that we typically do.

You're really just looking to do more of something or to be better at something.

And so the goal is progressive over time.

And this, I think can work really well for goals that we might have where we don't know where we want to stop in our accumulation of a specific skill or a set of experiences.

So it's kind of like how you might level up something over time without like having an end result in mind of like what that might look like.

So as I was thinking about this concept of a guaranteed goal, I was also thinking about all the different kinds of ways that you might approach something like this.

So for example, you could focus on learning something by like reading more books, you know, on a topic or listening to a bunch of podcast episodes on a topic or watching a bunch of YouTube videos to learn something new, like tutorials or something along those lines or practicing a habit like on an app like Duolingo does for languages.

Like all of those things would be accumulating information over time.

And like the ironic thing is for all of us who are in higher ed, I mean, this is basically what you do when you get a degree, like you're, you're like logging learning experiences over time and they accumulate in a degree.

But now that many of us have gotten all of our degrees, like we have to think about other ways that we want to be kind of accumulating what we need to have.

So one option there is like to focus on learning and to think about how can you accumulate learning over time?

I think another way to do this is to focus on experiences or experience.

So you might, for example, commit to a particular kind of movement practice and then increase the difficulty over time.

So I've seen people do, for example, like they want to learn how to do like handstands.

And so they'll like think about all the different ways that they can like build up to doing handstands.

Now obviously the idea of doing a handstand, like you feel like there's an end result of like you do the handstand, but sometimes handstands, like you hold a handstand for longer over time or you build handstands into different kinds of practices that you might do.

You might also choose 15 minutes of your day, kind of like with the juggling example where you devote it to a particular thing.

So I mean, although right now, if I was to try to run 15 minutes a day, I would probably injure myself, but that's an example of something that if I continued to put the time and effort into something at 15 minutes a day, it's going to make a significant difference over time.

Now, the third thing I was thinking of here, so there's like the focusing on learning, there's the focus on experience of just like putting in time.

But I also feel like there's this focus on variety that you could also do for a goal like this.

So for example, you could pick a different recipe in a particular food culture to try each week.

And then by the end of the year, like you would have a deep dive knowledge of a particular kind of food culture and you would know more about how to cook with the ingredients from that food culture.

So I think about like Thai food, like if you were going to do a different Thai recipe every week, you would learn a ton about how to use like lemongrass and coconut milk and all these things that are like very specific to Thai food.

And you would broaden your experience there.

Now you could also visit like a different local landmark every week.

And I was thinking about my experience, which I've talked about, I think on the podcast, maybe it was a couple of years back.

I can't even remember.

But when I visited all the public libraries in Denver, and it was a great way for me to get to know the city after I moved here.

But it was kind of based on like me getting this variety of like driving all around town and finding all these different locations.

And that allowed me to get to know the city.

So it's kind of this way of building up over time.

And all of a sudden you kind of realize like, Hey, I know a lot more than I used to about this particular kind of thing.

Now one of the things that I'm kind of curious about is how you can kind of think about this backwards.

So you might have a skill that you've like built up over time, that when you think about it, you start to realize how you built up that thing.

So I think about like podcasting, it might be a good example of this where I've been podcasting now for like eight years.

And I've kind of figured out how to do it.

I figured out how to be efficient with it.

I know the tools, I know the software, I know the hardware, like I figured out what I need to do to podcast.

And now it's something that like is relatively natural for me to do, but it was based on learning a ton about it, doing a lot of experience with it, like putting in the time to figure it out.

And so there may be things that you can kind of think about where this was like a guaranteed goal for you, even though it wasn't called that.

And you've come to a place of like a lot of deep knowledge or understanding about something.

So I'm very curious if this concept of a guaranteed goal intrigues you.

And if you might have other examples of what a guaranteed goal might look like for you, if so, you can always email me at hello@drkatylinder.com.

I always love to hear from you.

Thanks so much for listening.

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Thanks for watching. (gentle music)