You're listening to You've Got This, episode 396.

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 some guiding questions for the ultimate pro/con list.

Now, you might think that a pro/con list is actually very simple, but I'm going to complicate it a little bit.

And this is really for those major life decisions where you might need to make a big pivot or a big change, and you're really not sure which direction to go.

There's benefits and consequences, and you want to do a really deep dive to understand what is the right direction for you right now in the season of your life.

Now, recently I needed to make a decision and I pulled out this basic tool, but I also ended up approaching the pro/con list from a really broad range of different angles.

And I thought that these helpful questions might also be something that would be beneficial for you as well.

The goal is to see all of the angles of the decision that you're trying to make to make sure that you're fully, fully informed before you make the call.

So here are the questions to consider when you are making an ultimate pro/con list.

Now the first very basic question is what are the benefits that could arise from the decision that you're trying to make?

And then the complementary question to that is what are the drawbacks that could arise from this?

This is the set of questions that I think are the most commonly associated with the pro/con tool.

And I think that this is actually where a lot of people stop.

They don't go any further than this.

They just look at the benefits and the drawbacks.

Now the next set of questions is what are the reasons why I might want to make this decision?

And then the complementary question is what are the reasons why I might not want to make this decision?

Now this set of questions can sometimes dig a little bit more deeper into the rationales for a decision that you might be making.

So it's not just the benefits and the drawbacks of that decision, but it's also kind of like maybe even the feelings behind it or the kinds of things that you're thinking about that are maybe the deeper rationales.

Okay then I might ask what are the possibilities that could be opened up by this decision?

And then the complementary question to that is what are the possibilities that could be closed down by this decision?

Now this gets into the concept of opportunity cost because when we choose to do one thing it automatically may mean that we can't do other things that would have taken the same time, the same energy, the same commitment level.

And so we have to kind of weigh against the other options that are available.

So this set of questions kind of helps you to see the menu of options that are available to you and how this particular choice is kind of being set up against those things.

Okay, the next set of questions are what feels certain about this opportunity?

And the complementary question to that is what are the risks to choosing this decision?

Now while this may seem similar to the benefits and the drawbacks piece, sometimes I don't think drawbacks feel as complicated or fraught as risks and kind of framing it as a particular kind of risk.

So I like to ask this as well just to make sure again I'm kind of getting under the surface and really thinking about it at that deep level.

The next set of questions are what kinds of disruptions can I expect from making this decision?

And then the complementary question is what would stay the same from making this decision?

Now what's kind of interesting about each of these complementary questions is one is typically a little bit more positive, like certainty versus risk and benefits versus drawbacks.

And one is typically a little bit more negative of the pair.

Now disruption I think can be neutral or it can be positive or negative.

Sometimes people feel really negatively towards disruption.

They don't like change, but sometimes people really feel like they need a disruption.

And so that could be a really positive thing.

So even asking these kinds of questions about disruption and what might stay the same could kind of elicit, are you ready for change or is disruption something that would feel kind of negative to you?

Now sometimes I think we might naturally lean or even unconsciously lean toward or away from a decision because of the changes that it might bring.

So these questions about disruption and what stays the same can really help draw that out.

All right, the next set of questions are what alignment does this decision have with my values?

And then the complementary question is what misalignment does this decision have with my values?

And I think that you could probably move this set of questions up toward the beginning if you wanted to, because identifying the relationship between your values and a big decision can be a really helpful reflection point to make sure that you're kind of leaning into the things that are most central and kind of important to you.

All right, so the final set of questions that I think work really well for the ultimate pro/con list is what encouragement might others have about you making the decision?

And then the complementary question is what concerns might others raise about this decision?

Now I very intentionally saved these questions to the very, very end because I think the focus is first on your own thoughts and feelings and what you are kind of thinking about a decision and then taking other people's thoughts or feelings into account.

Now this is something that I think is like a judgment call because sometimes you might make a decision that everyone disagrees with and they think you're kind of crazy for going in a particular direction, but you know it's right for you based on all the other questions that you've kind of responded to in this ultimate pro/con list list of questions.

But other times we have people who really care about us and they're willing to kind of raise their hand and say, "I'm not sure this is the best for you and here's why."

And that's maybe something that we don't want to hear but is important and can actually shift the kind of decision that we're making.

So I think it's a little bit of a judgment call as to how you want to incorporate other people's thoughts and feelings into a larger decision that you're making.

But especially if you have family members, kids, a partner, these kinds of things might actually be very, very relevant depending on the kinds of decisions that you're trying to make.

Now I know that I didn't share exactly the decision that I was trying to make, but I can share the outcome of asking myself these questions.

So first of all, I realized that the decision would have taken more time than I wanted to give and once I really thought through it, that became really apparent to me.

I also realized the decision would have been too disruptive to my habits and routines that are working really well for me right now.

I've got some really good stuff happening in kind of a consistent way in the morning, in the evening, throughout the day, and this would have really been disruptive to that.

The decision would also have caused a pivot with some short and medium goals that I'm actually really excited about and it would have really disrupted that as well.

And that was something that was a big deal for me as I was thinking through this decision because it would have really been taking those things off track and I've really been looking forward to them.

I also realized again when I did a deeper dive that the decision would have cost more money than I wanted to pay.

So there were kind of financial implications to this that weren't kind of sitting well with me as I really thought about it.

The decision also had significant uncertainties that I could not easily resolve and I wasn't willing to resolve in more complicated ways.

So there were kind of ripple effects that would happen from the decision and there were a lot of uncertainties around those ripple effects that made me not feel super comfortable with the decision.

I think the main one for me is the decision had the capacity to be in conflict with my values and I did look at each one of my five values and kind of think about it from that lens and that was something that was really important for me to kind of like work through.

One of the more significant ones in this particular decision for me is my partner had valid reservations about the decision and this is something we kind of talked through and he raised a number of concerns that were completely valid and things that I needed to kind of hear from him.

Now I will say that this sticks out to me in particular because my partner in general if I really want to do something he's 100% behind me.

I may have to do a little bit of convincing but he comes around pretty quickly especially if I feel very strongly about something and so when he kind of like puts his foot down in a way it's very rare that that happens or that he kind of like raises a hand and says you know I have concerns about this and so I really listen when that happens because I take it really seriously.

So overall when I went through all of these different questions and I did some journaling and reflection and I talked this out with a couple different people my partner in particular the benefits of the decision didn't outweigh the costs and so I ultimately decided not to move forward.

So for me this list was very beneficial to look at something from all different angles to think about it at a number of different levels to really help me to understand what was the right move for me and as always I'm curious if you would use any of these questions to help yourself make a decision.

If so you can always email me at hello@drkatylinder.com to share your experience.

I always love to hear from you.

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/podcasts.

If you found this episode helpful please also consider reading and/or reviewing the show through Apple Podcasts. (gentle music)