You're listening to You've Got This, episode 397.

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 side quests.

Now as I started thinking about my 2025 goals, I decided that I wanted to use side quests as an organizing element.

Now I'm not ready quite yet to share these 2025 goals, so stay tuned for that a little bit later this year.

But I did wonder if sharing about this concept might be helpful for you as you think about your goals and objectives and if you might want to organize them in this way.

Now you don't have to wait for 2025 if you want to do a side quest now.

But this has been on my mind because I have been reading these fantasy novels that have different quest narratives and things like that, but I'm also partnered with a long-term gamer.

And so I should mention that a side quest is a term that is borrowed from video games.

It refers to an optional task or mission that you can choose to complete in addition to a main storyline that you're following within a game.

And I'm not a big gamer myself, but my partner certainly is.

And so I've been exposed to a lot of gaming culture in a range of ways over a long period of time.

And basically if you complete something like a side quest within a game where you're following kind of the main storyline, you might get like extra experience points or like if there's like in-game currency or you might have like unique items that you unlock, but they're not essential to completing the game's central objectives.

They're just kind of like extra fun things that you get along the way.

Now you can also take this out of a gaming context and basically think about the concept of a side quest as any like secondary or optional pursuit that you might choose to explore alongside your primary goals.

Now in particular, side quests could be a good fit for areas of things like professional growth, gaining a new skill set, creating some kind of fun experience for yourself, but they are not directly connected to your main objectives in your life or your work.

Now that said, I have had side quests that turn into main objectives.

So I think that side quests are just an incredible structure for exploring new ideas without a lot of pressure.

They take some time and energy for sure, but they can also be paused or abandoned if you need to because they're not completely tied to your central goals.

Now that said, my side quests are often offshoots of my central goals that I want to explore more and kind of test out some things and play around.

And in the past, sometimes they've turned into things that are a little bit more serious that I want to dedicate more time to.

And I'll give some examples of past side quests I've had in a little bit later in the episode.

But I did want to run through some of the key characteristics of a side quest in case this is something that's kind of interesting for you to explore.

So the first thing that I mentioned earlier is that it's optional.

It's not mandatory, but it could enhance your overall experience of just your life or your work.

This also means that you can pick things that you want to do, but don't necessarily need to do for your day-to-day life.

And I think this is why we often feel more invested in side quests because they're wants instead of needs.

The second thing is that side quests are rewarding in some way.

So they provide some kind of value, whether that's material value, emotional value, educational value.

If it wasn't rewarding, you probably wouldn't want to do it.

So there's some kind of reason it is a reward for you behind the side quest in terms of why you're choosing to do it.

The third thing is they are definitely exploratory.

So side quests allow you to explore a new path or a new interest without the pressure of succeeding in your main mission.

So I would offer that when I started a side business, it was definitely a side quest for me because I could use different ideas.

I could explore different products and services that I could offer.

But I wasn't feeling the pressure or the worry that that revenue from that side business had to pay my mortgage or pay my bills.

And because of that, it allowed me to have way more flexibility in terms of what I explored and what I wanted to do within that side business.

Now kind of implied by the third characteristic of being exploratory is that it's the fourth thing is that it's low stakes.

So side quests may have some benefits, but there's usually less pressure to perform perfectly.

You get to play a little bit.

They're a perfect place for you to explore something where you're interested in it, but you're not necessarily wanting to make a full commitment.

And it also, I think sometimes in our kind of higher education environments, we're used to doing things a little bit perfectionist.

I will acknowledge that at least for myself.

And it can be hard to try things that are like not something we're like trying to be really successful in.

And so I think that the low stakes is something that can be very attractive because you can kind of play and see what you think.

The fifth thing about side quests is that I think they can include an investment.

So depending on any materials or resources that you might need for your side quest, these are not necessarily things that are free.

I mean, in the kind of minimal way of that, they are taking up your time.

But I have found that some of the side quests I've done in the past and some of the ones I'm exploring for 2025 definitely include a financial investment in addition to the investment of my time.

So there can be a little bit of planning that's needed to make sure that you can actually resource what you're trying to do your side quest in.

So without really knowing it, I've actually done a lot of different side quests in the past.

When I started to kind of think about what are some examples of this that I've already done, there were quite a few things that I could list that would fit based on these different characteristics.

So they're optional, they're rewarding, they're exploratory, they're low stakes, and they can include an investment of dollars in addition to an investment of time.

So here's some examples of possible side quests that I've done in the past.

One is I was thinking back to grad school where I read extensively in the Nordic mystery genre while I was kind of doing my coursework and my dissertation.

That was like my deep dive and my kind of like escape literature.

And think about around the time that I was in grad school, this was like the Girl with the Dragon Tattoo was like the thing that was very popular.

And so I read a ton of different other Nordic mysteries when I was in that time in my life and just did kind of this little side quest about getting to know all of these authors that are from that part of the world.

The second thing that immediately came to mind was a lot of the credentials that I did during the pandemic and especially my 700 plus hours of yoga and meditation study that I have built into a number of different things in my life, but it's way more personal for me than it was like professional in terms of how I've utilized that.

So even though I'm like a credentialed yoga teacher, like that didn't become like my new career.

It was definitely still a side quest.

I also thought about building my first website and the experiences I had when I was first starting to create my kind of online identity and how I was building out that website.

And then I would go on to build out many other websites.

And I even had a brief period of time where I was offering website creation services to clients and we actually still have some clients that we support their website services.

And so that was definitely like a side quest that was like an offshoot that didn't end up being something that came into like full fruition.

I also of course thought about when we first moved into Denver, how I visited all of the Denver public library locations the first year after we moved into town.

And that definitely felt like something that was more exploratory, but almost like the adventure side of like what a side quest can be because it really got us to know, you know, the different neighborhoods and things like that.

I have been poking away at writing a collection of poetry for like, I don't know, five, seven years now probably.

I would definitely consider that to be a side quest.

It's one of those things that's taking a while and I'm just kind of like every once in a while going back to it and kind of taking a look, but I might put that into the side quest category.

And then the last one that I thought of was for the last several years now, I've been posting videos on books and reading to YouTube.

And this is something that is really just for me.

I mean, I definitely connect with some people who want to do book recommendations and things like that, but I'm not like trying to grow that channel.

I'm just kind of like enjoying the process of talking about books and posting about them.

And you know, if other people watch it, great.

But it's also just kind of this side quest to have fun with like that a little bit of like blogging in addition to the podcasting and the regular blogging that I do.

So those are kind of a range of different side quests.

I've been having a really good time exploring what my 2025 side quests might look like.

And I just think that side quests allow room for curiosity and discovery and fun.

And they don't have to be tied to like major life goals.

They give us a lot of room to just play.

And I think sometimes we really need to have that space.

So I am super curious what a side quest might look like for you.

You can always email me at hello@drkatylinder.com and let me know.

I would 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.