You're listening to You've Got This, episode 420.

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 how you can plan a catch-up or a work-ahead hour.

Now, this is like a magical thing that you can build into your day or that you can build into your week.

And recently, I've really been kind of seeking out where I can do this and trying to think about how I can create opportunities for this.

Now, I will say the immediate thing that comes to mind that allows you to have a catch-up or a work-ahead hour is when you get a time windfall.

So in the past couple of weekends, for example, I have had several different client meetings.

And every once in a while, a client will cancel.

And oftentimes, they will email me and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry.

I woke up sick this morning."

Or, "Something happened and I have this event with my kid and I can't come to my session anymore."

And I'm always like, "No problem.

Happy to reschedule because in a busy weekend when I have a lot going on, I don't mind getting that extra hour back."

And when I get that extra hour back and I didn't have something already planned for what I was going to do in it, I think carefully to myself about whether I want to use it for catch-up or whether I want to use it for work ahead.

So let me kind of define both of those things separately in terms of how I kind of think about them.

So first is, and these are kind of obvious things.

I don't think it's going to be kind of rocket science to think about what these things are.

But first, thinking about a catch-up hour, if you are just completely underwater and you are trying to do tasks at the last minute and you feel like you're behind and there may be something that is like hanging over you that you're feeling really stressed about because you haven't necessarily gotten this thing done, that is the perfect thing to do in a catch-up hour.

So I may have something that I talked about recently.

Sometimes tasks kind of take as long as they want to take, it's not always going to be in the time estimation that I want it to be.

And this is often when I will use a catch-up hour, is if I have a task that I thought was going to take three hours and I'm still not done and I got to move on to something else, I'll think like, "Okay, I think this has roughly an hour left and then I might plug that in when I have a catch-up hour."

So when I get this time windfall, I will often look at the list that I have in front of me of things that I still have to do and I'll try to slam through as many of those things.

Now I've talked before in the past about the concept of a power hour and this is kind of the same idea.

When you have a catch-up hour, the idea is really to get yourself into a place where you can check a lot of things off your list that are kind of hanging over your head or where you can check a big thing off your list that's been hanging over your head that's really bothering you.

And I think that that is kind of the magic of having this extra time.

Now I will also note, if you are thinking, "I need to catch up on rest" or "I need to catch up on fun," you can absolutely build that into your catch-up hour.

So if you're thinking to yourself, "I haven't had very much time, like downtime this week and now I have this time windfall and I just want to kind of like sit for a moment and like look at my tasks or make a plan or just literally like read a chapter of the novel that I've been enjoying," I think this is also what you can do in a catch-up hour.

So it's not always about work.

Sometimes it's also about treating your own kind of self-care and fun as a little bit like a project and building that into your catch-up hour as well.

Okay, so if you have this time windfall, you can always use it to kind of catch up.

But obviously one of the core things that I'm kind of implying here with a catch-up hour is that you know what you actually have to do.

So it is important, I think, to break down your tasks, to have some kind of list, to have some kind of sense of what your priorities are so that you know what it is that you can kind of turn your attention to.

Now, I will say what has been very helpful for me with that is I do have a task management system that I use.

I do assign everything a deadline.

If it is something that I'm holding myself accountable to completing at some point, I put a date on it.

And what that looks like in kind of how it's set up in my task management system is I have a weekly view of any given week, and I have a number of tasks that sit on each day of that week.

Now, if I have to move tasks around because I can't get them done, you know, within a certain time period, or I'm able to, you know, work ahead, which I'll talk about in a moment, it allows me to see the stuff that is like immediately things that I need to take care of.

Now, sometimes, again, when I get to the work ahead, I do look at the following week.

But I typically don't leave any tasks in like the last week's task view.

I pull all of them up into the current week, and then I try to spread them out and figure out like, where can I actually get these things done?

Now, the other thing that I do that is just personally helpful for me is I color code them.

So I can see at a glance what are the tasks that I have that are like personal things that I want to get done.

And that might include like food prep or like returning a package or, you know, something along those lines.

And then I have other tasks that are like content creation for like the podcast.

I have other tasks that are, you know, project related for things that I have going on at work.

I mean, there's just all these different kinds of things.

And it allows me also because I have these colors now like embedded in my brain of like knowing what all these different things mean.

I can also kind of look and say, what is the thing that is maybe more fun for me to work on?

What is the thing that is like stressing me out that I need to work on?

I have a sense of what all these tasks are and where they're landing.

So let's talk a little bit about the work ahead hour.

And I want to be clear that I don't want to always emphasize like we should just be work, work, working all the time.

Like I think that if you have an hour that you get this time windfall and you need to just kind of like rest and recover or take a walk or whatever that is, that is an important like deposit in your own bank of just like health, wellness, self-care, and that's important.

But I will say I get a special kind of energy when I get a time windfall and I'm caught up with things.

And I can look ahead and say, okay, what is my future self going to be really happy with that I did right now?

So I'm going to give you a very concrete example that literally happened today and it is very meta.

So this morning or maybe it was last night, I was supposed to have this as Sunday as I'm recording this and I was supposed to have a meeting with someone and they decided to cancel it.

And that freed up a two hour block in the middle of my day.

One of those hours was my lunch hour because I take a lunch break, but it was like 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

And I saw that come in and I thought, okay, that was the time of my day where I was planning to like record this week's podcast episode.

And like I was going to edit it, you know, later on in Sunday evening.

And I thought, what if I can get all of my podcast episodes outlined for February and just bulk record every single episode for this month?

And that would allow me basically to get a bunch of things edited, scheduled, ready to go.

And then I can like clear out the time that I would have spent on doing the podcast prep work for these upcoming weeks that are ahead in February.

And that clears out time for my future self to do other kinds of things.

That was very exciting to me to think about the opportunity of not trying to embed these smaller tasks, you know, throughout the coming weeks, but to do kind of like a bulk prep and get it all done out of the way.

And figure it out and ready to go.

So that's what I decided to do.

So as I am recording this, this is actually the fourth episode that I've recorded.

I have no idea which order I'm going to release them in, but I'm trying to kind of bulk prep my episodes for February.

And then I have a little bit of time later this afternoon and I'm going to try to get them all edited, scheduled and ready to go.

So when I have this opportunity where I get kind of this free hour, the other thing obviously that you're trying to do is have a clear sense of what are the tasks ahead of you that you might want to use that time to complete.

So the task management system that I mentioned before, I do sometimes look at like the week ahead and I think about, is there something that would like clear out my schedule on a particular day if I was able to do it earlier.

During the day, during the week, I have a lot of meetings.

And so if there's something that I kind of scheduled for like the end of the day or after work, because that was the only time I could do it, I typically try to pick those things off first.

Like I want to try to clear out my evenings if I can.

And so I will try to work ahead on like those tasks to make sure that I have that relaxation time and recovery time.

And the other thing that I'll often look for is tasks that I have planned for myself to do in the future that are like very familiar, very known to me.

And I know exactly how long it's going to take for me to do it.

So podcast recording is a great example.

I typically know how long my episodes are.

I know how long it takes me to outline and record them.

I've been podcasting now for like eight years.

So this is something that's relatively easy for me to kind of plug into my schedule.

But I also have a really clear sense of the time that it's going to take to work on it.

And so you might look at things in your task list and say, okay, if I have a work ahead hour, what are the things that I know I could fit into that hour and get done and be able to move forward.

Now, the other thing that I like to build into these work ahead hours for myself is also kind of like personal tasks like tidying up my house.

If I get like this time windfall, I might like do the dishes, throw in a load of laundry, fold some laundry and put it away.

You know, like other things that I can do that kind of clear out my physical environment or just make me feel like I'm a little bit more in control as I'm moving forward and doing other kinds of things throughout my day.

So if you do have a time windfall, I would encourage you to think about, do you want to use it for a catch up hour or do you want to use it for a work ahead hour?

Or do you want to just use it to have some downtime, which is also a wonderful way to spend that time.

The question I always ask myself is how can I spend this time wisely?

And sometimes that wise spending of time is on myself.

Sometimes that wise spending of time is catching up on something that's really bothering me that I haven't gotten it done.

And sometimes that wise spending of time is looking at my future self and saying, what is the gift that I can give her that it's going to be done and she's not going to have to worry about it.

So I would love to hear if you ever do a catch up hour or a work ahead hour and what that looks like for you.

You can always email me at hello@drkatylinder.com.

I always do love to hear from you.

Thanks for listening.

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