

Ep #37: How to Define Productivity that Feels Good to You



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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And so, I do think, in the midst of this pandemic, it is important to have some goals, but within those goals, to have some grace for yourself. You don't have to accept every single Zoom invitation that comes your way. You don't have to do everything people are asking you to do.

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Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

Hey, hey, everyone. Welcome to episode 37. So, today, we are going to talk about productivity in the midst of this whole pandemic. And so, I am going to go against the grain here. I have read, by far, too many blog posts and Instagram captions about using all of this time that we have sheltering in place to be productive and to do things that we've never done before and to use all of this ample time we supposedly have.

Because it's a great idea, but we're in a pandemic, okay. And that comes with a wide range of emotions. We are all in a collective crisis, wrestling and battling with fear and anxiety and uncertainty. None of us know what's happening next and it starts to create this clenched fist, this nervousness of what happens next.

And so, the biggest thing that you can do for yourself right now is have grace and understanding that we are under shitty circumstances. Now, before you go to the extreme and thinking I'm giving you full permission to just wallow in self-pity, I am not.

So, we are going to break this down in this episode. How do you create balance in the midst of this pandemic? How do you define productivity that feels good to you?

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I think, first and foremost, we have to acknowledge that we are all processing the impact and the effects of this pandemic differently. And it depends on your work industry. It depends on your family life. It depends on what was going on with you before the shit even hit the fan. A lot of us were already dealing with a lot of stuff in our lives before all of this happened.

And so, we want to have a healthy acknowledgement of what is real and what is true in our lives so we can make an educated balanced emotional decision on how we should spend our time. But we need to keep in mind this thing that we're kind of pop-culturally calling pandemic depression, this pandemic anxiety, like all of these situational mental health issues that are popping up are really big barriers from feeling positive and feeling productive and motivated and excited about getting stuff done.

And so, this can be a really big hinderance for people. And so, again, I'm not saying just sit back and allow all of that. It's just an acknowledgment. We're just acknowledging that we need to have some grace for ourselves, that we are all in crisis right now, that you might wake up tomorrow and feel incredibly motivated and ready and organized and label and feel really, really good about that, feel really, really accomplished, just to wake up the following day feeling like shit, like you can barely get out of bed and everything's in slow-mo' and you don't know what day it is.

That is the reality right now. Every day might be different. And that's okay. we want to own our experience and we want to let other people own theirs. I know for us in California, we're on about week 10 of shelter-in-place. And in my county specifically, literally nothing has changed. Pretty much construction and that's about it. We're still heavily on lockdown.

And so, I'm watching all the different personality types respond to this. It's been a very long time. And so, having grace for yourself that maybe one day, what feels really good to you is watching Netflix all day and having no responsibility. But then, the next day, you can't stand the thought of

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watching Netflix anymore. You can't stand the thought of sitting on the couch and doing nothing.

And so, you honor that. Maybe you need to spend the day moving. You need to spend the day connecting with others. You need to spend the day planning and strategizing. So, what am I saying in all of this? It's okay to own where you are in this thing.

I think, when the whole pandemic started, we all had no idea what this was – first of all, what shelter-in-place even was. We didn't really have a concept of that – and how long it's going to last. It appears this is more of a long-term thing.

While restrictions might lighten up and what have you, it doesn't seem like our normal lives are returning anytime soon, at least the way we remembered them. And so, it's incredibly important that we take care of our mental and emotional states in this.

Because I'm sure you guys have all heard, the mental health fallout on this has potential to be big. And so, taking care of yourself now in the midst of it is incredibly valuable and important. And it starts with not forcing yourself to fit into a box of perfection. Not fitting in a box of productivity, but honoring your experience, honoring your emotions, honoring where you are and calling it what it is.

This shit is hard. This shit is hard. I'll say it twice. It just is. You are homeschooling kids. You are working from home. You are canceling travel arrangements. Plans are cancelled. Shit is over. That's what it feels like. It feels like life was cancelled in March and we're all grieving that and we're all dealing with that to the best of our abilities.

And so, I know that there's a lot of life coaches out there, there's a lot of people that are, like, you know, "Take this time to be productive, to do all the things." And what it ends up doing is being a shame message because not everybody is in that super-productive space.

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For a lot of people, you're at home, but home doesn't feel maybe safe, or home doesn't feel structured, or home doesn't feel great. It feels more chaotic than ever. Like, many parents never signed up for homeschooling. That was not something they wanted to do.

And a lot of schools weren't set up to teach online. And so, kids are really struggling. There are a lot of kids that were A students that I have been talking to that are really struggling in their studies. And a lot of it has to do with this pandemic depression that they're feeling.

They're feeling this loss of motivation, you know, why try? Every day is the same, you know, that kind of a thing. But additionally, so, you know, online learning is not the same as in-person learning. And so, if you have a child, especially who has learning disabilities or learns in specific ways, there's a strong chance that some of these online platforms at these schools had to put together at the last minute are not working for them, that they're really, really struggling in it.

And I've had a lot of conversations with parents being frustrated. They're like, "I don't know why my kid's grades are dropping." And when we pull back, it's like, we're in a pandemic, you know. Kids didn't ask to be taught online. Teachers didn't ask to be teachers that were online.

A lot of these schools had to put these lesson plans together in a matter of weeks. Some of them didn't even get weeks. And so, we're all doing the best we can. That is what I'm saying to you. We're all doing the best we can.

And so, I do think, in the midst of this pandemic, it is important to have some goals, but within those goals, to have some grace for yourself. You don't have to accept every single Zoom invitation that comes your way. You don't have to do everything people are asking you to do.

Make self-care number one. Self-care needs to start as early in the morning as possible and so, I did an episode on this where you can start, 15 minutes before your day starts, just if you need some peace and quiet, if

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you need to do some journaling, if you need to just stare at a fucking tree because you're exhausted, that is fine. That is fine.

But taking some time for yourself in those moments helps you feel a little bit in control, that you can count on 10 or 15 minutes in the morning before all your kids wake up, before your husband's awake or your wife's awake, you know, whatever, thinking about how can I pour into myself intentionally? And then, carrying out your day.

I do think because we're all home all the time, and the biggest complaint we're all saying is every day feels the same. Nothing's changing everything stays the same. And especially in counties like the one I'm in, where very, very little restrictions have been lifted. I mean, we're still very much on lockdown and there is fatigue around that.

And so, just considering making a schedule that feels good to you. And so, self-care can be part of that. But who do you want to connect with? And just knowing that it might change day to day, you know. It depends on how you're feeling.

But I do think goals and having a schedule is really important. But the narrative that we carry with that is what's going to make or break the experience. So, I want to transition here a little bit. My core message in what I was saying up until now is that I want you to have some grace for yourself. We are in crisis.

We are in a collective crisis that none of us have experienced before. This is all new to all of us. We're all doing the best that we can. And so, we need to have an inner narrative for ourselves and for others that we're all doing the best that we can and that it's really fucking hard to be productive when you're in the middle of a crisis. Unless productivity is part of your coping skills.

And I know, for a lot of you, that is true. We get a lot of value from putting energy into things. But in a pandemic, guess what, there's limits to that. And so, I'm seeing so many of my high-achievers starting to feel helpless

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because a lot of their old coping skills of being overly productive or overly producing is not available to them right now. It's highly limited.

There are only so many things you can organize. There's only so many courses you can take on quilting and knitting and puzzles and whatever before it starts to get old. And since we're at the 10-week mark pretty much everything feels old at this point. Even kids are getting sick of videogames, I'm hearing which is I mean, who knew? I'm literally shocked over that. And I know that's not true for everyone. I mean, most kids love videogames. But it speaks to every day feels the same.

And so, I want you to create some goals for yourself that feel good. Do you want to exercise? Do you want to connect with people? Do you want to take up quilting? Do you want to learn another language right now? What do you want to do in your off time?

Because, when you're in go-mode, when you're working and you're teaching your kids and you're homeschooling, you're in structured-mode, you're in work-mode. And working together as a team, as a family unit is going to be key to peace and harmony as we get through all of this stuff.

And I will do an episode on that coming up, about how to manage your relationships. But make this time an opportunity for balance, whatever that looks like for you. There are going to be days where it is just difficult to function, you just feel foggy. And so, preplanning that, what do you need to do for yourself in those moments when you're feeling foggy and just kind of sloth-ish?

Because we're at home so much, I think this is one of the common complaints I'm hearing about is just feeling almost numb, like you're just kind of in this space where nothing feels bad and nothing feels good. You're kind of just existing.

And so, here is the dance that we do when it comes to productivity. What does that look like for you? How do you snap yourself out of those moments? Because I don't want you to sit and simmer in helplessness. If

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you sit and simmer in helplessness, it is going to feed a depressive episode.

We do not want that. We do not want depressive episodes. We do not want those things. And I should say potentially. It's not true for everyone. But potentially, it has the potential to create a depressive episode and we want to stay away from that.

So, there is a fine balance. Create goals for yourself. What do you want to accomplish? Who do you want to be when this whole thing is over? At some point, it's going to end. We don't know when and we don't know what that's going to look like. But at some point, it will.

And so, what do you want to look like as a human being. And I don't mean from a vanity standpoint. Who do you want to show up as? How can we use this time to better ourselves while maintaining the narrative that it's really difficult right now? We're up against a lot of things.

And so, sometimes, the biggest thing we can do for ourselves is learn how to change our narratives and have grace and acceptance for ourselves because things are really hard right now. But we're going to keep going. We're going to keep trying. And we're going to keep making this experience the best that we can.

That is where your power is at; not sitting back and scrolling social media and being like, "This fucking sucks. I hate my life." That is a negative mindset that will only spiral you further down into negativity. So, we need to keep goals in mind during this time while we carry a new narrative that it's okay to not feel okay, and having a plan.

So, I would recommend creating some kind of feel-good plan. Like, when you're feeling shitty or you're feeling alone, what are you going to reach for? Who are you going to talk to? Because if you don't have a plan in place and your emotions get the opportunity to just take you down a negative path, nothing about that feels good and it's not going to end well.

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So, I think in this time where we don't get to change much of our scenery, we need a plan on how we can change our internal scenery. How do we change this up? Like, when I start to feel kind of foggy in my brain, do I need to go take a 15-minute walk around my block and go look at trees?

Do I need to take a bath? Do I need to talk to someone that I love? Do I need to do some art? Do I need to do creativity? Do I need to challenge my brain in some way? Do I need to learn a new skill? Do I want to learn a new language? Do I want to learn how to dance? What do I want to do?

And so, I think some of those goals are really, really good, and having a plan in place. So, I strongly recommend creating a feel-good plan for yourself, going forward from when you get into those low moments, where you don't feel good and you don't feel like you're being productive.

So, we want to have a balanced understanding that we're in a pandemic and there's a lot of mental health symptoms this thing is creating all by itself. And we want to be empowered and equipped to move forward in good ways and supporting ourselves. And so, creating a feel-good plan before you feel like shit is a good way to try that out.

Alright, my friends. I hope this episode was helpful to you. And just keep in mind, if you feel like you are slipping into something deeper than just pandemic depression or you've been feeling really down, really anxious, or anything in this episode triggered you, please, please reach out for mental health support in your local state of residence.

You can check out Psychology Today. It has tons and tons of therapists and you can put in what you're looking for in a therapist in your local state of residence with your zip code and all of that stuff. Most therapists are online right now, so I think there's a huge opportunity to continue to work on your mental health right now, in the midst of everything going on.

And it's probably the best thing you can do for yourself. We've all got to keep our minds and our emotions in check, especially now, when we're in a world full of triggers.

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So, anyways, take your triggers as information that something in your internal world needs support. There is no shame or blame in getting mental health support in your local state of residence. It's probably the best thing you can do for yourself.

And lastly, make sure you get on my email list so that you can stay up to date on upcoming episodes, freebies, downloads, all that fun stuff. You've got to be on my email list to get it. So, at any rate, you can check that out at nicolesymcox.com. It's right there on the front page. And I will see you next time.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to nicolesymcox.com.

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