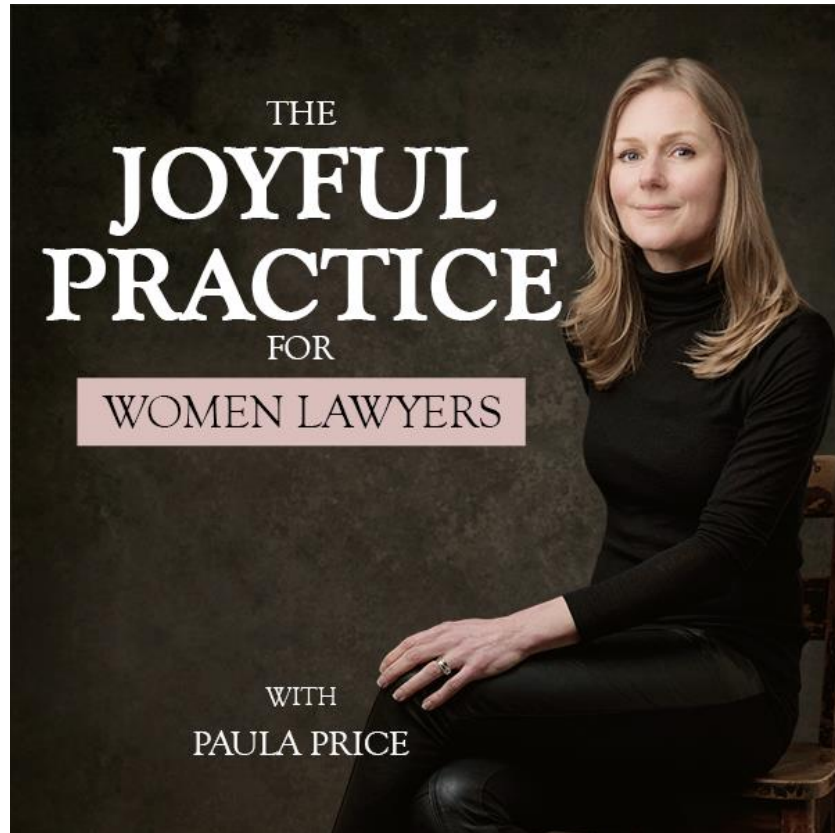


Ep #1: How to Turn Around a Bad Day



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Paula Price

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Welcome to *The Joyful Practice Podcast* episode number one.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, litigator turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. It's your time away from the daily hustle to focus on taking care of you. To see where you're stuck, figure out what you truly want, and learn coaching tools that will help you define and create success on your own terms.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Hi everyone. My name is Paula Price. I am a lawyer turned certified executive coach, and I am the host of this podcast. Welcome. This is so exciting to be finally recording the very first episode of what I hope will be many podcast episodes. I'm so thrilled to have this opportunity to connect with you.

I created this podcast because I wanted to find a way to share some of the tools that I'm learning in my coaching practice with lawyers who are out there who may really benefit from having access to those tools. So welcome. I am so excited to have you here, and I'm really excited to jump into today's topic.

The inspiration from today's topic came from an event that happened last week. It was, not surprisingly, a bad day. Now, I'm sure you can relate. Maybe you are having a bad day right now. Maybe you had a bad day a few weeks ago. Maybe you've had a string of bad days that have somehow become a bad month or something more than that.

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We all experience these things. The question is what can we do to turn those bad days around so that they don't become a bad week, a bad month, or something else? I would invite you as we go through the exercises in this podcast to think about how these tools may be applied to the situation that you're having.

So a few examples of the types of bad days that I coach clients around, that I experienced myself when I was practicing law are those days where maybe you have a filing deadline and it's coming up, and you're waiting on somebody else to provide you with the document you need in order to file the materials. Or maybe it's that you've been trying to reach your client about something, and they are not available, or they aren't giving importance to something that really matters on a file.

Maybe your clients are there. Maybe they're the opposite. Maybe you're inundated with emails from them. Maybe these are unpleasant emails. Maybe they're unhappy with the way things are unfolding, and that can really turn your day around.

Maybe you're having tech glitches. We are now, when I'm recording this podcast, at least where I live. I live in Vancouver, Canada. We're still primarily working from home. We're very dependent on technology for communicating. So that can raise some new challenges for people if they're having glitches or they're unable to send documents or unable to communicate in the way that they want. That can also set you up for having a bad day.

Another area where I see this with clients is lack of support. This can show up in the areas of your administrative staff, those who are there to help support you in some of the more routine tasks that may show up in your practice. Sometimes it's the support of other lawyers who you're turning to, you're relying on to help you move a file forward. When those individuals

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aren't doing the job the way that you need them to do the job, that can be very frustrating and, again, set you up for one of those bad days.

Another example might be firefighting. When you find yourself in the situation where all the things are due all at once or all of a sudden, your plate has become way too full. You find yourself really just scrambling to get everything done. You reach the end of your workday, and you still don't feel like you've accomplished what you need to do. This can also set you up for a series, potentially, of bad days.

Finally, there's the spillover effect of what happens when we start having a bad day. This is what happened to me. I'll describe that in a few minutes. When you start to have a bad day, somehow other things start to also take place.

So, for example, if you're thinking about one thing, you may be distracted. You go to write an email and you accidentally put in the wrong name and you send your email to the wrong person. Sometimes it's totally harmless, but sometimes it's something that is embarrassing or it's client sensitive. So now you have sort of created another situation that kind of snowballs that bad day.

So what we're going to talk about today is to prevent you from getting into that snowball scenario and to really bring things back to where you have control, and you can turn around your bad day.

So going back to the inspiration for today's episode, I had a bad day last week. Now, I don't want to go too far into detail because really what we're here for is your bad day, not mine. But it kind of helps to give a little bit of context to how a bad day might unfold.

For me, it was all about two things. Number one, there was the primary, we'll call it, trigger. I had a filing deadline coming up on a Friday, and it was

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a Thursday. This was for my business. The person that I had retained to help me get my materials together to file had kind of ghosted me. This person has done this before in the past. So it wasn't the first time it had happened. I had a few alternative plans up my sleeve that I thought, "Well I can always do it this way instead. It won't be perfect, but it will be good enough."

As Thursday unfolded, I realized that these other options that I had weren't really viable. So as the day unfolded, I started to get a little bit more nervous. I tried to get in touch, and I wasn't able to reach this person. Now I also had a speaking engagement that day where I was on Zoom. What ended up happening there was kind of this snowball effect.

The event itself was fine. I was able to manage the discomfort of not knowing what was going to happen with my filing deadline. Not that I could attend any present while I was on the Zoom screen. But here's where things started to get a little bit tricky.

I was in a Zoom room. When I logged off, I didn't actually log off the Zoom screen. I didn't know it at the time because the buttons looked very similar, and I was distracted thinking about how am I going to get in touch with this person? As it turns out, I was on my Zoom screen for about 20 minutes as part of somebody else's Zoom meeting without even knowing it.

During that time, I had taken off my blazer. I wasn't wearing the fanciest shirt underneath my blazer. I was googling all the consequences of what would happen if I didn't meet my filing deadline. I was on the phone trying to reach this person I could not connect with.

So I imagine I wasn't sitting on this conference looking all poised and confident and calm. I imagine I was probably coming across as a little bit maybe distracted and stressed to say that word. Although I don't like that word.

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So when I realized what was actually happening, I felt a little bit embarrassed. That was really a signal to me that Paula, you need to take a step back and get a better plan together. So that's what happened to me. Maybe you can relate to those things. I'm sure as a lawyer you can relate to the time pressures, the filing deadlines.

Maybe you've had that experience where you kind of embarrass yourself by sending the wrong email, as I mentioned. Or saying something to somebody where you just feel like, "Oh, maybe I shouldn't have said it that way." But that's what I was dealing with.

Now, let's go back to your situation. Let's think about the steps you can take to turn around your bad day. Now, I will report and as you may be able to tell, I did get through my day. I did manage to turn things around. There were a number of tools that helped me do that. I'm inviting you to try these yourself.

There are five things that I'm going to recommend that you do when you're having a bad day. There are three things that I'm going to recommend that you do not do when you're having a bad day. So let's jump in.

Number one, the first thing that I would invite you to do when you're having a bad day is going to be a little counterintuitive. Well, I would have found it very counterintuitive back when I was practicing law because it involves getting in touch with your emotions. Yes. Your emotions, your feelings.

Now, the reason I say this might be counterintuitive is because when I was a lawyer, I was really, really focused in on the facts. I wanted the facts. I wanted the logic. I wanted the authority, and I wanted to put my case together. That's how I thought. I wasn't so interested about the feelings. The feelings were not relevant to what I was doing. So in my personal life when I rubbed up against those feelings, I had a tendency to kind of push

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them to the side. I didn't really want to get to know them. I didn't really see how they would impact anything.

What I've learned since as a coach is that feelings drive so much of what is going on in our world. The best way to deal with our feelings is actually to learn what they are because they will not only create some discomfort sometimes. They will also fuel us for things we really want to go after.

So the first part here is to get a handle on what your feelings are. Now, this can be noticing what the sensations are in your body. For me, when I was feeling the pressure of the filing deadline, I noticed my pulse started to raise a little bit. I had tightness in my chest. I had tightness in my chest. I could feel my cheeks flushing a little bit. Those are some of the things that I felt when I was feeling under the gun.

So I'd ask you to think about what you feel. When the thing happens to you, and this is going back to your bad day, how did that sensation? What were those sensations in your body? That's kind of the first step.

What I'm going to invite you to do here is to identify what the emotions are. You're going to want to write those down. Now, we're going to get to those in the next part. Going back to identifying how you feel, I want you to take that a step further and ask yourself how you're thinking. I like to think of us as being in one of two modes of operation. The first is the creative mode. The second is the reactive mode. These are the exact same letters, but they spell different words with completely different outcomes.

When you're in your creative zone, that, to me, is when you're in your rest and digest zone. You're thinking using your prefrontal cortex. You are thinking expansively, and you tend to be more calm and thoughtful and creative.

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Contrast this with the reactive zone. The reactive zone is where the more primitive part of your brain is engaged. This often happens when we are triggered by something stressful that has happened outside of us. This is where you're in your fight or flight, and your body will really shut down and focus on survival. This is where you're more reactive. There are some evolutionary reasons to be in that state.

But what I'm going to suggest is that when you are in the zone of having a bad day that you notice where you are. Are you creative? Are you reactive? You're going to want to bring yourself back to the creative zone as much as possible.

So I mentioned that you're going to want to write down your emotions. I think a way to do that most effectively is to write them down. But it's not just the emotions that you're going to want to look at. It's also the thinking that is creating those emotions. So when you are in that zone, ask yourself what is it that you're thinking? What are the thoughts that you're having? You can describe that in as much detail as possible.

If you have the chance to sit down and write it out, that is better because you'll be able to see what you're thinking, what you're feeling on paper. That will give you a more objective lens through which to analyze them. If you are not able to write it down, then I would still invite you to think about what it is that you're thinking. We're going to start analyzing those thoughts.

Now, as lawyers you are excellent at distinguishing fact from fiction. You know this. The fact, the grass was green. Versus the fiction or the story, it was a beautiful lawn. Or it was a not so beautiful lawn. We want to get really down to the facts because the emotions that are running through your body aren't necessarily created by the facts around you. They're created by the story that's running in your mind. So we want to figure out what that story is.

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It's also a lot easier for us to challenge the thoughts when we can see them on paper. So when you have those thoughts, put them on paper and have a look at them.

Now, there is a very wonderful thought leader. Her name is Byron Katie. She has a series of exercises and questions you can ask yourself when you're really trying to explore your thoughts. One of the questions that she asks is, "Is it true?" So I would invite you as you're writing down some of the thoughts you're having and ask yourself whether or not that thought is true.

So, for example, when I was having my bad day, I was looking at this filing deadline and thinking, "I'm not going to get this filed in time." Now as it turns out, I did get it filed in time. So that thought wasn't even true. That could be so many different thoughts. So maybe you're thinking, "I should have started this earlier." Maybe it's true, but it may equally be true that you should not have started it earlier.

Or maybe something goes wrong. You have a trip to chambers. You don't get the outcome that you were looking for. Maybe the thought that you're having is, "I'm a terrible lawyer." Maybe something happens. You may have children and maybe something happens with them. You think, "I'm a terrible mother." Maybe you have a speaking engagement, and it doesn't go as well as you wished that it had gone. Maybe you think, "I'm a terrible speaker."

So really notice what thoughts are coming up in your brain, and what you're making those thoughts mean. Because that is a really powerful place to start when you want to turn around your bad day.

Now the next part of the to-do list is to go back to your goals. Now, for some of you this would be starting from scratch. Maybe you don't have a clear set of goals that are there to guide you. For some of you, maybe your

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goals are much more in focus. Regardless of where you're starting from, I would invite you to think about what it is that you're trying to achieve in that particular scenario. The more clear you can get about what your goals are, the better.

An example came up recently with a client who was having some challenges with some of the support that she was working with. By this I mean she had some issues with her staff where they weren't quite producing them at the level that she needed them to produce.

So in her case, and this is quite common. This happens with a number of lawyers that I've worked with. There are challenges in communicating what is desired from the other person. That usually comes from a place of wanting to be kind and wanting to be gentle and respectful. What happens is it can sometimes be confusing.

So what needs to happen in a situation like that is a conversation that is a little bit more direct where the person who is relying on the other person communicates more directly what they need. I consider myself in this category. When it came to the professionals that I had hired in to help me with my filing, I knew that I was not communicating in a way that was most effective with that person.

So this happens. It usually comes from a place of wanting to avoid an uncomfortable conversation and hurt feelings. But the trouble there is that you may be sacrificing your goal in favor of avoiding that uncomfortable conversation.

So using my example, the goal was a filing deadline. The difficult conversation was the one that I had avoided. There were a few other things going on, but that was one of them. In the case of a client that I was working with recently, the overarching goal was to run a practice that was in alignment with what she wanted for her practice. To do that, she needed

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the support of other people that could take on pieces of the work so that she wasn't doing all of it herself.

So bringing it back to that goal gives you a bit of internal leverage so that you now know that when you're looking at that uncomfortable conversation, you are doing it because you're trying to achieve that greater goal.

So that's your third step is to go back to the goal. What is it that you're trying to accomplish? Part of the reason that we want to do that is not just to situate ourselves in where we are and where we're going. It's also to bring yourself back to the creative zone.

So we mentioned earlier that we were distinguishing between that creative and that reactive zone. When you move into that creative zone, that's really when you're thinking about your goals. You're forward thinking. You're planning ahead. Thinking about your goals helps you get back into that state.

The next step, step four, is to create a plan. Now you're now engaged in your more creative thinking. You've got your goals in place. So I would invite you to write on a piece of paper or wherever you like to take notes is to give yourself a little action item list. So an example of that might be, "Okay, well I'm going to deal with the immediate problem at hand here."

Which for using my example, first there was the filing deadline. So there were action steps I needed to take in order to get that filing done on time. It involved some more phone calls. It involved me doing a few extra tasks. Those were things that would get the things filed on time.

When it came to my Zoom bombing, I also had some follow up steps that I wanted to take. So it involved sending some emails to people and just smoothing over things. Because what was important to me there was my

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connection with the individuals that were still on the line. I wanted to reach out to them and just reconnect with them. So I did that as well.

Now when you are doing this plan, this is a really great time for you to give yourself instructions. I had a very junior lawyer ask me the other day, "How do you work under pressure?" For somebody who is just starting out, that's a legitimate question really. Like how do you deal with it when you have lots of different deadlines? Maybe there's a lot of pressure on you to get something done right away. It's harder for you to get out of that reactive state into the creative state.

The advice that I gave her and advice that I would share with you is really to give yourself a list of bullet points. Small actionable items that you can execute on that will get you closer to the result that you're seeking. So that's your next step is you're going to want to create your plan.

Then finally you want to take productive action. So this, again, may be uncomfortable. You want to have the conversation, for example. Right? We talked before about having that conversation with somebody who is supporting you where it's not working out. You're not getting what you need from them. You need to schedule that conversation, and then actually have that conversation.

Maybe you realize in the event that happened. Maybe it's a filing deadline, and you're just coming in under the wire. You realize that you may need to reorganize the way that you schedule your time so that you're not filing at the last minute. So what is it that you can change in your calendar that would be different? What might you have to say no to? That can be really uncomfortable for people. The idea here is to take action that is productive, that will bring you closer to your goal. Chances are the action that you're going to take is going to be uncomfortable.

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So those are the five steps that I would recommend taking when you're having a bad day. I also mentioned that we would be talking about what not to do when you're having a bad day.

So number one, and this is key. Do not, I repeat, do not beat yourself up. I'm going to give you three good reasons not to. Number one, beating yourself up doesn't help you move forward toward your goal. It never does, and it takes time. It makes you feel terrible. So from now on, please. If you take nothing else from this podcast, please never again beat yourself up.

Number two. Beating yourself up creates what I might refer to as nasty neural pathways. Your brain is hardwired based on what you do repeatedly. There is a wonderful body of research that has come out in the last few decades that talks about the concept of neuroplasticity and how our brains work. In a very small nutshell kind of way, what it means practically is that when you do something repeatedly, your brain forms stronger neural pathways that makes it easier and more efficient to do those things.

So some of these might be things you like. Maybe you are up early every day, and you exercise and that's a routine that you really like. That's reinforced in your neural pathways. That might be something that you may want to hold on.

But maybe your neural pathway is when something goes wrong, you automatically assume it's your fault, and your brain starts thinking thoughts about how it's your fault. Those may be neural pathways that you do not want to keep. Now, the good news is you can actually change your pathways if you do it with intention and on purpose and with practice. We'll talk about that in later episodes. What I really want to enforce today is if something goes wrong, please do not make it a habit of beating yourself up.

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Now the third reason that I will invite you to not beat yourself up is that when you beat yourself up, you're training other people to do the same. You may notice this. If you think back to situations that you've had, maybe it's professionally. Maybe it's in your personal life. Situations where you've started to take things on. You've started to take on the blame for situations even if it had nothing to do with you.

I mean I see this often with individuals, clients, and also people in my personal life where they assume that they are responsible for something that they're not responsible for. What's interesting about that is that when you think that about yourself, you start acting in a way and speaking in a way that invites others to think the same thing. So they start to think you're responsible even if you're not. So I would encourage you to not create that standard, not create that model for other people to follow.

Now the second thing for what you should not do if you have a bad day is if you can avoid it, do not take action while your primitive brain is calling the shots. Now we've mentioned there's this creative side. There's this reactive side. If you're in that reactive state and you're feeling stressed. Maybe you're angry, frustrated. There are all sorts of emotions that we like to label as negative emotions. Whatever those emotions are for you, I would encourage you to not take action from that place.

I would invite you to think about your own life and times where you may have been really angry or times where you were really stressed. And you did something that you later regretted. It just wasn't something that served you. That took you closer to the goal that you were seeking. So if you can avoid it, really try not to take action from that place.

Now, we can go back to the planning piece that we talked about earlier where you create your action plan, and you execute. It may be that you're nervous while you're executing that action plan. I strongly encourage you to do as much as you can to stay in that creative space.

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Now what's interesting here, and I'll just pause on this for a moment, is when you start to notice yourself. When you start to notice whether you're in a more creative zone or in a more reactive zone, you'll be able to sense the difference over time. I notice this myself. When I'm tired, for example, when I've had a long day, when things are frustrating, I feel myself slipping out of my more creative, neutral, energetic state into this stressed, uncomfortable, and easily triggered state.

So I just want to invite you to do that because you may notice that when something happens, you'll realize, "Oh, this is happening. The reason I'm reacting this way is because I'm tired." Sometimes it's not the event itself.

So I would just invite you to notice that when it comes to your work, when it comes to your personal life. If you find that you have slipped into that more stressed out state, notice that. Because that's when things start to snowball. That's when you start getting distracted and the email goes to the wrong person. Or you end up, like I did, in a Zoom room without even realizing it. So pay attention.

The third piece of the things that you should not do when you're having a bad day, and this is really a key piece. I relied on this a lot last week. Is do not argue with reality. I mentioned Byron Katie before. She has this wonderful expression. She talks about how we like to argue with what is.

An example might be the person I retain to help me with my filing. She wasn't there to help me. I might be thinking, "She should have been there to help me. It's her job to help me." It may be true.

Another example might be if you've got small kids at home. I do. Often, I shouldn't even say often. It's always has stuff everywhere. There are socks on the floor. There's pants on the floor. There's toys everywhere. There's drawing paper. I look at it sometimes and I think, "They should clean up after themselves." The fact is they haven't cleaned up after themselves.

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What Bryon Katie says is, “When you argue with reality, you only lose 100% of the time.” So when you're beating yourself up if you do it, even though you know you're not allowed. If you're beating yourself up saying things like, “I should have done this earlier. I should have known this was going to happen.” All those things that you tell yourself. Or “They should have done something different.” If you're looking at your surroundings and wishing they were different, you are arguing with reality. I strongly encourage you to not argue.

What does that look like? Well, in my case it was looking at what was going on around me and saying, “Well, I could have done this earlier. Maybe there's a lesson here. What's the lesson that I can draw from this experience?” It will take some practice because we're so accustomed, especially as lawyers, we're accustomed to allocating liability. Who is at fault here?

This exercise is not at all about allocating fault. It's about simply accepting what has happened and putting ourselves into a more proactive state so that we can do something about it.

Now, that is all I have for you today. I'm just going to quickly recap the points that we talked about when it comes to having a bad day. Now, there are the five things that you can do to help turn your day around.

Those are number one, to really get in touch with what you're feeling, what emotions you're having, and to identify whether you are in a creative state or if you are in a more reactive state. The second is to dig into your thoughts. Really examine what it is that you're thinking about the situation, write down your thoughts if you can. Pull out the facts, pull out the fiction, and think about whether the story that you're telling yourself is true and whether you can tell yourself a better story.

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The third piece is to go back to your goals. What is the big picture here? What are you trying to accomplish? Allow yourself to start thinking in that state because it's going to lead you to be better positioned to the next step, which is to create a plan for yourself. So using your prefrontal cortex, using that creative energy, figure out what action steps you can take to move forward productively.

Then finally the fifth step is to take productive action. So, again, we are wanting to take action from a place where we are feeling creative. We're not super stressed or distracted as much as possible. If you've created a plan and you've got a list, that should give you a bit of guidance. Make it a little bit easier for you to do that.

The three things that you will not do when you're having a bad day. Number one is no more beating yourself up. Number two is to not act from that more primitive reactive state if you can avoid it. The third is do not argue with reality.

So going back to your bad day, I hope these tools have been helpful for you. I hope you're able to see how you could use them to transition your way out of a bad day into a better day, and avoid that day becoming something more than that. As you get through the immediate bad day, I would also invite you to think about what the bigger picture implications are of this experience.

In my case, I looked at there was the filing deadline. There was the distracted Zoom bombing. What was really going on there was something more than that. I had not managed the relationship that I had with this person very well, and I knew that. So part of my learning was I cannot let this happen again. I do not want to let this happen again. So I am taking proactive steps to manage that relationship and possibly create one with somebody else who can support me in the way that I need to be supported.

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Another thing that came to me in that experience was something that I know that came to me in that experience was something that I knew which was that I had overscheduled myself. I knew that I had done that. I had done it consciously. There were a lot of projects and really exciting opportunities that I wanted to be part of. So I agreed to do them. What happened was I ended up with quite a number of weeks where my calendar really was beyond a capacity that allows me to be at my best, to produce as I want, and to take care of my physical health the way that I want to take care of my physical health.

So this was a bad day that was a little bit of a little alarm bell, nothing earth shattering, that I needed to rethink how I was scheduling my time. So that I was making sure to prioritize the things that really mattered to me, and to say no to opportunities that maybe weren't serving me as much as I would like them to.

So those were the two bigger picture things that came out for me. I would invite you to think about when you look at your bad day, what are the bigger picture pieces here that I need to look at a little bit more closely.

Thank you. Thank you, thank you for joining me today. It has been such a pleasure to connect with you. It really has. I am excited to come back next week with another episode. I have already decided on the topic. It's going to be about time management. Something that a lot of my clients come to me for help with.

And something that I think no matter what your level, whether you're just starting out and you don't really have much of a time management practice to people who have very, very developed time management systems. Where sometimes you feel like you're really efficient because you're getting things done, but you're doing more than you're thinking about what you're doing. Maybe you're not executing on the things that really matter to you. So there something in there for everybody.

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I'm really excited to have the opportunity to connect with you again. Thank you again for joining me. I'll look forward to seeing you in the next episode.

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