



Gut Punching Procrastination and Beating Our Inner Bully

Risa is a therapist and writer who starts book projects with gumption and enthusiasm, but struggles to reach the finish line as self-doubt sets in. Stevon offers advice for standing up to our inner bully by building in down time and celebrating our accomplishments.

Stevon Lewis:

What's up, everybody? Welcome to How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything. I'm Stevon Lewis, a licensed psychotherapist. Today we welcome Risa. Risa is an author and a therapist. With every writing project Risa takes on, she becomes really invested and gives it her all. But while working on her latest book series, she's noticing a cycle of procrastination and self-doubt that brings out her inner bully and negatively impacts her creativity. Let's get into it.

Risa:

My name is Risa Williams, I am a therapist and a book author. I also write wellness articles for various magazines, and right now I am in the middle of completing a book series called the Ultimate Toolkit books. So I have The Ultimate Anxiety Toolkit, The Ultimate Time Management Toolkit, and I'm writing The Ultimate Self-esteem Toolkit.

Usually, I get really excited when there's a new project, I have a lot of enthusiasm and excitement and I get charged up to move forward. And sort of right at the beginning I'll hit one of my first bumps, which is I doubt myself. So I get really excited and then there's a crash of, "How am I going to do this? I don't know what the first step is." It's almost like I freeze up at the starting line and I have to break stuff down into small steps and kind of figure out how to get there.

So I'll break things down and say, "Okay, every week I have to write a certain amount of pages." And once I get started, I get the momentum kind of going. And then about halfway through the project, I notice I hit another bump of self-doubt. I start hearing the negative self-talk kick in, which is that, "I don't know how I'm going to do this." The middle one is harder for me to get over than the beginning because I'm already halfway there and I can almost see the finish line but it feels very, very far away.

Risa: So after I pass that middle bump, I get to the end of the project and I've noticed that I have a pattern where I tend to go from one goal to the next and I don't always let myself fully feel the effects of what I've accomplished. So that's something I've had to work on, which is how do I emotionally connect with the success that I've had or with the achievements? How do I sit with that and kind of be comfortable with that?

When I'm moving too fast and trying to get things done in too short of time, I think that's what's triggering my self-doubt, that's what's triggering the inner critic. My trickiest part of the creative process is actually feeling like, "Oh, it was good enough. Okay, it's done." It doesn't come naturally so I sort of have to switch gears manually in my head to allow myself some downtime to process that because if I leave it up to myself, I'll just keep jumping to the next thing on the list.

As a kid, I wasn't really taught to have downtime. I'm from a lower middle-class family, they're both immigrants. My mom is from a Belarusian family and I'm first generation on her side, and my dad is Japanese American, second-generation immigrant. And as two immigrants navigating growing up in Chicago, they definitely instilled in me this idea that if I wanted something, I was going to have to work doubly hard at it.

Risa: I think a lot of people who come from immigrant families, it's sort of like, "We came to this country to do all these things, to have all these experiences," and that's a positive thing, but the way sometimes it gets translated to you as a kid is like, "Oh, there's so much I have to do." It's almost like a fear of missing out, like, "If I don't keep moving, I'm not going to get to do all of the things I want to do when I have such big dreams and so many things on my list."

My kids will say things to me like, "Why don't you take a break before you start the next project, Mom?" I'm like, "Yeah, that's probably a good idea." Even though it feels uncomfortable, I need to take months off in between the next thing just because it's a big thing I put myself through and it takes up a lot of my mental energy, which is what I'm realizing more and more that our mental energy is limited. So I call it a do-nothing zone.

And so a lot of being away from my computer, leaving the phone on the charger for a while, doing things with my family, getting outside, seeing things that are visually stimulating to me, and being around people that stimulate me, getting out of my head as much as possible. I mean our brains need downtime to get ideas sometimes so building in those buffers sometimes fixes the problems you're stuck on, it sometimes gives your brain a way to feel inspired again, to feel motivated again, like here's a little freedom in the creative process.

Stevon Lewis: Thank you for sharing what you're going through, Risa.

While I was listening to Risa's story, the thing that stood out to me most, and it's common for individuals that are creatives and that operate at a level like Risa does, is this idea that she does something, accomplishes it, doesn't really sit with the idea that what she's accomplished and how good it was but it's like this kind of relief that, "Oh, okay. I got through that." And then she pushes on to the next one because I think, for her, success is about always producing and she's kind of seeking after or chasing after the next goal at the expense of acknowledging what she's already done.

So what Risa describes kind of in her story is the imposter cycle. When you struggle with imposter syndrome what happens is that you're constantly worried about being found out to be a fraud, that you don't have the skills and tools and abilities that other people believe you do. And so you work really hard to do a really good job to hide that. And what happens is that people appreciate the job that you did and so they give you kind of more work, more notoriety, and you get put out front more, which causes you more stress because now you have to work harder, in your mind, to hide the fact that you don't have the skills because now there are more eyes on you.

And so I think what happens with Risa, what she's kind of identified is that if she stays still or isn't doing something then she's going to get "caught" or that she's going to be exposed or that she's going to get left behind. And she's kind of seeking after or chasing after the next goal at the expense of celebrating or acknowledging what she's already accomplished.

Lewis: I think this difficulty with being able to sit with our success comes from a place of where I don't think we're taught to celebrate ourselves just as a society. There's this kind of belief that we need to be humble, and part of being humble means not talking about what you've accomplished, and so it's, "Put your head down and just keep going forward and doing great things." Here's a clip of what Risa said.

Risa Clip: It's sort of like we came to this country to do all these things, to have all these experiences, and that's a positive thing, but the way sometimes it gets translated to you as a kid is like, "Oh, there's so much I have to do. I have so much I need to do."

Lewis: You've got to be working towards something. That's how success is, I guess, evaluated or assessed, you got to work really hard and you've got to work to accomplish all sorts of things so that when she finishes a project, she's automatically thinking, "I need to do something more." And so the clock resets. She never looks back to see what she's done, she's only looking forward to see

what she needs to do. And I think that that creates then a false reality about where you are in life and what you've done if you only look at what isn't finished.

Lewis: So something I see often with people that I work with or high achievers is that they don't know how to celebrate themselves and they're kind of baffled at how to go about doing this thing. And what I try to get people to understand is to separate this idea that you acknowledging what you've done is not the same as you bragging to other people about you being better than them or the rest of the world because of what you've accomplished.

And so I'm really big on saying, "Well, let's change how we think about talking about what you've done." It's just stating facts, it's no different from you telling someone your name, no different from saying the color of your hair or the color of your eyes. It's just something about you. And so if you've gone out and you've written three books, why is that wrong to share that you've written three books? It's just a fact. It doesn't mean that you're better than other people because you've written three books and they haven't, it's just saying, this is what you've done. And I think that's the hard part is because people tend to take ownership over others' responses if they're negative or unpleasant.

And so I think getting people to recognize that people can have a reaction that you didn't expect them to have because of what you've accomplished, that doesn't necessarily mean what you did or you talking about it was the bad thing or wrong to do.

The easiest way I try to get people to think about how to celebrate themselves is to not make it rocket science. That "celebration, I have to do some extravagant kind of party or show of appreciation for myself." People are really good about being able to say nice things to their friends or to celebrate or praise the accomplishments of others and have a really difficult time doing it for themselves, and so what I say is very simply, "Just do what you would do for a friend." If a friend passed the bar, would you not celebrate that or not say, "Hey, good job," or "Congratulations,?" You would. You would probably be very happy for them. "This is so awesome! This is so amazing!"

Why can't you say the same thing to yourself? That might look like them taking time to reflect on what they've accomplished. For myself, when I do something that I think is new or I'm pretty proud of I'll say, "Good shit, Stevon. Good job. I'm glad you did that, you rocked it, you killed it."

It's okay to say that sort of thing to yourself and feel proud and feel happy about it and not wait always for someone else to notice or acknowledge that because sometimes people don't and what you think is amazing other people may not think

so. And that doesn't mean that it's not amazing, it just means that you guys have a difference of opinion.

Lewis: I think the major takeaway I want individuals to have that may listen to this episode is for them to understand that maybe it's time to update your definition of success and of progress and update it to include rest as part of growth so that you aren't telling yourself or sending a message to your brain that rest and reflection are bad or things that are taking away from your continued progress, but instead they are things that are aiding in and helping you continue to grow and evolve.

We spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about what we need to do or what we didn't accomplish and we aren't balancing that out with what we did do and what we did accomplish. What needs to happen is we need to train our minds to kind of be different and to focus on something different and we have to be intentional about that process. And so taking 15 minutes, which I believe everybody can find 15 minutes, to sit and really reflect on, "Hey, what did I do today that was good, that was helpful, that moved me forward that I can be proud of?"

And it doesn't have to be the biggest thing because I think oftentimes we'll go to the most ostentatious kind of, "Well, I didn't accomplish anything great today." And it's, "Well, did you? Did you maybe do something small and you're discrediting the impact that it will have over time?" Like connecting with someone who's going to build out your website, you sent the email to start that process.

So your website is not built, but also you've made progress forward. Did you do something small like slowing down, not doing? I think as a creative, there's an awareness that downtime is beneficial and helpful because it allows me to sort things out to sit and see the bigger picture, and to understand more about what's coming along or what it is that I need to do in my next steps. I think we kind of discredit that as not important, and so let's say that's more of a pivotal moment and for us to recognize those little things we do on a daily basis that keep us moving the ball forward, that keep us moving towards success.

And that's a wrap. Thank you so much for listening to *How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything*. We have really big plans for our show, and we want you to be a part of it. We want to hear about your successes and challenges, your sacrifices, the ways you've celebrated, and what's ahead as you grow. Send our producer Virginia an email, and we'll get your story on the show. She's at virginia@lwcstudios.com.

How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything is an original production of LWC Studios. Virginia Lora is the show's producer. Kojin Tashiro is our mixer. Juleyka

Lantigua is the creator and executive producer. I'm Stevon Lewis. On Twitter and Instagram, we're @talktoachievers. Bye, everybody.

CITATION:

Lewis, Stevon, host. "Gut Punching Procrastination and Beating Our Inner Bully?" *How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything*, LWC Studios., September 19, 2022. Talktohighachievers.com

Produced by:



ERASING THE MARGINS