

Ep #9: Indulging in “I Don’t Know”



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Olivia Vizachero

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You’re listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast, Episode 9. We’re talking all about Indulging in “I Don’t Know.” You ready? Let’s go.

Welcome to *The Less Stressed Lawyer*, the only podcast that teaches you how to manage your mind so you can live a life with less stress and far more fulfillment. If you’re a lawyer who’s over the overwhelm and tired of trying to hustle your way to happiness, you’re in the right place. Now, here’s your host, lawyer turned life coach, Olivia Vizachero.

Hello, my friends. How are you? How's your day? My day is just splendid. It is sunny out here and it feels like spring. To be honest, I'm not the biggest fan of spring. But that means summer is right around the corner, and I absolutely love summer in Michigan.

I am so excited for the first *The Less Stressed Lawyer Mastermind* cohort to get to experience Detroit during the summer when they come here for the in-person kickoff event in June. It'll be warm here, the city's so fun during the summer, it's gonna be really amazing. I get to teach them all the coaching concepts for the two days that we're going to workshop together. And then I get to introduce them to a city that I just absolutely love.

If you haven't been to the Midwest before, I want you to know it's pretty fantastic, Detroit especially. I just filmed a little impromptu behind-the-scenes video giving people a sneak peek of downtown Detroit and the venue that the live event's going to be at, as well as the Welcome dinner. It's just so incredible. The outdoor area is beautiful, it's right by the river, there's a couple parks to go walk to. The venue itself, the hotel and where the dinner is going to be are just absolutely beautiful. I really love the decor. So, it's gonna be really neat.

If you haven't seen that already, head on over to my LinkedIn, or my IG and check out that video. I'll also make sure it's linked in the show notes so you can go check it out. Also, if you're getting major FOMO as I'm talking about this right now: A- I don't blame you. B- Stop yourself from having FOMO Best news ever? There's a couple more spots available in the *Mastermind*. So, if you know in your heart that one of those spots has your name on it,

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go slide into my DMs on LinkedIn or on Instagram, or email me at Olivia@TheLessStressedLawyer.com, and tell me you want in, and we'll make that happen.

All right. Now, let's get down to business. Today we're talking about *Indulging in “I Don't Know.”* First of all, I love a good alliteration. But that's not the only reason I gave this topic, the name that I gave it. It's really what we do when we immerse ourselves in what I like to call, “I don't know” thinking.

What we do is we create our own confusion, and then we spin in it and just stay confused. We don't get curious, we don't tap into our own resourcefulness, we don't figure it out. We just keep choosing confusion. I think that's super indulgent because we can opt out of confusion. When we stay confused, when we continue to indulge in “I don't know” thinking we ultimately don't get where we want to go. Okay, so that's why it's a problem.

But it's optional, you get to choose to stay there, or you get to choose to leave. So, if you keep choosing to stay, I want you to know you're indulging in that. That's indulgent behavior. Now, here's what I need you to understand about “I don't know.” I want you to imagine that I just put air quotes around the phrase, “I don't know.” That's a thought that your brain serves up to you.

In most cases that thought is not true. You actually do know, but you're going to have to dig for the answer. Your initial “I don't know” is a defense mechanism. It's a reflex, an easy escape hatch, a knee-jerk reaction that ends up being a go-to for your brain, because when you think the thought, “I don't know,” you begin to feel confused and then you stop the inquiry. You shut down; you give up. You don't move forward through the confusion. You go do something else that's easier in that moment.

Now, this isn't good for you in the long run, because it just creates more of the same result, right? You still don't know; you end up with more not knowing. So, we're going to want to fix this.

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Why is this a defense mechanism? Remember, the primitive part of your brain is always aiming to achieve three goals; it wants to seek immediate pleasure, avoid immediate discomfort, and conserve energy.

So, when you tell yourself that you don't know something, you don't know how to proceed, you don't know what the answer is, you think that thought “I don't know.” Thinking it tends to accomplish all three of those initiatives.

Conversely, when we do know the answer to something, then we normally have to take action. That's what comes next. Now, when I say, “have to take action,” I want to be really clear here. Taking action is always optional. But once we know the path forward, there normally isn't a very good reason to not pursue it. That becomes the logical next step. And taking that logical next step goes against your primitive brain's efforts to accomplish those three goals.

Moving forward requires something of you, sometimes it requires your time and energy. Sometimes it requires you to leave your comfort zone and put aside temporary pleasures that you're used to providing for yourself. Whatever it is, it requires something. Choosing to accept “I don't know” as your final answer to whatever question you're presented with allows you to bypass all of that discomfort.

But again, this is how you stay stuck and stagnant. I told you I like alliteration. So anyways, it's ultimately a problem, right? Staying stuck and stagnant is not going to be what you want to be doing. What should you do when your brain serves you up an “I don't know” answer?

Here's what you want to do. You want to push past it, you want to sit with the confusion for a few seconds or a few minutes, heck, even an hour, or longer. Really, it's however long it takes you to work through the confusion, but you want to work through it, you want to push through.

One of the ways you can do this is by asking yourself better questions to help facilitate the process of finding a better answer. Now, confusion is

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pretty common so it can come up in practically any scenario. But it commonly arises with regard to the following.

You might think that you don't know, with regard to what you're going to do; you might not know what you want; you might not know where to start; you might not know how to fix a particular problem. You might not know how to go about achieving a particular goal that you've set; you might not know what you even need to learn; you might not know how to proceed. And you might not know what to say, in a given situation.

Those are some common areas where your brain might typically serve you up an “I don't know” answer. Now, again, I told you the way to not indulge in “I don't know” thinking is to push past the initial “I don't know.” Work through the confusion and come up with an answer.

The best way for you to learn how to do this is to work through an example that you're currently dealing with. So, I want you to think for a second. What are you currently confused about? What's a problem that you're faced with at the moment that you don't know how to solve? What's a goal that you have set for yourself that you'd like to accomplish? That you're confused about how to accomplish or achieve. What is something where “I don't know” is coming up for you? Where do you have confusion in your life? Find that particular situation, put it in your mind and let's walk through some of these questions.

The first thing you want to do in order to gain some clarity and clear up your confusion is to ask yourself, what exactly are you confused about? Make sure you're being as specific as possible. Our brains tend to serve us up that “I don't know” response to situations that we encounter, and it tends to be pretty broad. So, you want to make sure you're being very specific with what you do know, and what you don't know. What, specifically, are you confused about?

Now another really insightful question to ask yourself here is the question: What does thinking “I don't know” pretend to protect you from? Normally, like I said earlier, we think “I don't know” because it prevents us from

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having to take action. So long as we stay confused, we get to stay idle. We get to indulge in an action when we indulge in “I don't know” thinking. So, get really clear on what you would need to do next if you weren't confused.

What emotions do you attach to that next step, to taking that next move? What flavors of discomfort are on the horizon for you? That “I don't know” line of thinking is protecting you from having to experience those emotions, okay? Getting clear on that, you'll start to see, “Oh, I'm actually not all that confused about how to proceed. I'm just protecting myself from having to experience this discomfort down the road once I clean up my confusion here.”

Similar questions along this line of thinking include, “What would I need to do next, if I weren't confused right now?” That'll help illuminate the path forward, and also clue you in as to what you're avoiding. Same thing with this question, “What does being confused allow me to avoid?” So again, all of that gets at what's next on the horizon. What is thinking “I don't know” pretending to protect you from? Once you become aware of that, can you just move forward, allow that discomfort, and take action despite it?

Another question I ask my clients all the time when they respond to a scenario that they're faced with... with “I don't know” thinking, or I ask them a question and they respond with an “I don't know” answer... I will ask them this question that seems really nonsensical. They tend to not like it when I ask it, but it's a super effective question to push past the “I don't know.”

They'll tell me, “Olivia? I don't know.” And I'll simply respond with, “Okay, but what would you say if you did know?” Sometimes they respond with, “I just told you; but I don't know.” And I just repeat the question, “Okay, I understand that. But what would you say if you did?” And sure enough, every single time, they have an answer.

You can use that coaching trick on yourself. When your brain serves you up “I don't know,” just ask yourself, “Okay, but what would I say if I did know?” If that doesn't work, it should work, but if it doesn't, you can also use these two other questions. “What would I say if I had to guess?” Take

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some of the pressure off when you throw in guessing as an option. You don't have to have the right answer. You just have to have an answer.

And then, I also love this question because it normally illuminates exactly what you want to do when you're indulging in confusion; about what you should do. The question is, “What would I do if this was easy?” And again, I get pushback from clients on this because it's like, “But it's not easy. This situation feels so hard.” It feels challenging, right? But just sit with the question, “What would I do if this was easy?” And normally, the route that you want to take, the option that you would prefer will immediately pop into your mind. From there, you know how to move forward.

If you have resistance to picking that path and moving forward, you just want to ask yourself, “Why am I hesitating? What's preventing me from moving forward in this way?” Typically, you will find... normally, you're concerned about what someone else will think, or there's some type of discomfort on the horizon that's preventing you from picking that path. Again, gag and go through that discomfort, move forward in spite of and despite it.

If you're really stuck in “I don't know,” you can also ask yourself this question. If you're faced with a situation about how to proceed, how to move forward, what you should or shouldn't do, what would your answer be if no one else had an opinion? Because, again, you're probably a little preoccupied with what other people are going to think about the path you choose moving forward. So, get clear. What would your answer be if no one else had an opinion? What you want to do in that moment should probably come into your mind pretty quickly.

Now, a couple other questions to ask yourself. If a situation feels really overwhelming and complicated, ask yourself this question. “What's the problem here?” What's the very specific problem that you need to solve? That will help you figure out what to do next, how to proceed; it'll clear up the “I don't know.”

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Also, when you're dealing with “I don't know,” make two lists. Separate, in a given situation, what do you know versus what don't you know. That will help guide you forward and illuminate the path you need to take. It'll help you figure out your next steps. So, what do you know versus what don't you know, and then start to solve for what you don't know. Again, I mentioned this earlier, but you want to be as specific as you possibly can be when you're indulging in “I don't know.”

Let's talk through a couple examples here. Let's say you're working on a project, and you don't know how to proceed, you don't know what to do next, you're thinking, “I don't know what to do in this situation. I don't know what arguments to make on this motion. I don't know how to respond to this person's email.” You just feel confused, because obviously, you're thinking the thought “I don't know.” And your natural inclination, when you feel confused, is to avoid the task at hand, and to procrastinate on that particular project.

In that moment, again, you want to get very clear on what you don't know, get as specific as possible. You can make that list of what do you know; all the things that you do know in that particular situation with that project. Then get crystal clear about what you don't know.

And from there, start to solve for what you don't know. What information do you need? Where can you find that information? What resources do you have at your disposal? Ask better questions that work through the not knowing, and get you to the point where you can get the answers that you want for yourself.

Like I said earlier, indulging in “I don't know” happens when we don't tap into our own resourcefulness. So, you want to get resourceful here, you want to solve these problems yourself. You want to create knowing, create answers for yourself. You can do that by asking better questions, and then answering them.

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So, what information do you need? Who can you go to, to get that information? Where can you find it? Thinking through that problem, it will help eliminate the confusion.

I'm gonna use a non-work-related example for a second. My dad and I were talking, a couple of years ago, about how I can help someone solve any problem. He didn't quite understand the context of coaching, and what coaching does. So, he was like, “Well, you don't know how to solve every problem.” He used the example: You don't know how to build a deck, so if a client came to you wanting to build a deck, you wouldn't be able to help them. And I said, “Oh, you're mistaken. I would be able to help them build a deck.”

We talked through it, and I said, “The problem is their thinking about it, and their unwillingness to work through confusion.” So, my dad's super handy, and if he didn't know how to build a deck, he wouldn't think, “I don't know how to build a deck and feel confused,” and then avoid the project. He would think the thought, “I know how to figure this out,” or “I'm capable of figuring this out.” And then he would feel resourceful. From feeling resourceful, and probably determined, he would seek out the information that he would need in order to figure out how to build a deck.

So, when we were talking through this example... if you had no idea where to start, if you weren't indulging in “I don't know thinking” and you were thinking, instead, “I can figure this out,” where would you start? What would you need to know? You might need to know what kind of wood you would use to build a deck. You might need to know how you construct it. You might need to know measurements.

If you identify a few bits of information that you would need to have in order to get started, then you can take an educated guess on where you can find that information.

When my dad and I were talking through this example, we both said that he would go to YouTube and watch some videos on how to build a deck. He might search on Google and see if there were any blog posts or articles

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about building a deck. He also said he would go to the local hardware store and talk to some of the experts there and see if they had any suggestions. Those would be his go-to resources to begin with, to get the ball rolling.

And then from there, he would reassess. Is there anything else he doesn't know once he's gathered some more information? The process continues on and on until you finally get to the end of the road where you know how to build a deck, and you go and put that plan into action, and you actually build it.

So whatever project you're working on, you can do the exact same thing, whether it's building a deck, renovating something in your house, solving a problem at work, doing a PowerPoint, anything that you feel confused about. Maybe it's working through social media, learning how to create a TikTok because you want to start advertising your law practice through TikTok.

Whatever the case may be, figure out what you don't know in the beginning. What would you need to know to get started? Where can you find that information? Take an educated guess. Put that plan into action, and then just keep that process going.

Now, another example that I want to give you, is an example that came up for me in the beginning of a pandemic. I put on a virtual summit. It was a five-day virtual event called, *Thrive and Five*. I had over 30 speakers present as part of the summit. As I was getting the whole slate of speakers lined up, I had talked to some people in the beginning and I had promised them longer time slots, 45 minutes to an hour to speak. People were so amazing. They kept introducing me to other people that they knew.

When I would meet those people, I would get so excited to include them in the slate of speakers because they had so much to bring to the table. I really wanted the *Thrive and Five* audience to get to know these people, and to learn from them. So, I kept adding more and more speakers to the schedule. The problem was, I had decided very early on that each day was going to be three hours long, because even though it was early days of the

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pandemic, that's a lot of time to stare at people on Zoom. I figured three hours was plenty. I wanted to constrain to that timeframe.

Now, here's the problem. As I kept adding more and more people, it was messing with some of the time limits that I had originally given people. I needed to now go back to the original speakers I had spoken to, and shorten the amount of time that they were going to be able to speak. I was afraid to get pushback from them because when I had originally spoken with some of them, they had a pretty severe, kind of harsh reaction to 45 minutes that I had originally given them. They really wanted an hour, they thought 45 minutes was too short.

So now that I was cutting it to an even shorter period of time, I was really nervous to deliver that bad news. I overcomplicated the situation. I was thinking about making certain segments the original 45 minutes, and other ones like 35 minutes or 25 minutes; just a really haphazard, complicated, confusing schedule, with really weird start times. The easiest solution available was just to make all of the speakers segments 30 minutes long, it was so easy.

I got coached by a friend of mine on this issue because I was having all this mind drama about it. She asked me that beautiful question, “What would you do if this was easy?” And just like a lot of my clients say to me, I got frustrated and was like, “But it's not easy. This is so complicated. This isn't easy at all.” But I took a deep breath and I sat with the question, “What would I do if this was easy? What would I do if this was easy?” And then the answer became so crystal clear for me.

I said I would give everyone 30 minutes. I would tell them 30 minutes is more than enough time for them to teach people what they need to know. For them to demonstrate their expertise and to add a ton of value. 30 minutes was going to be perfect for them. They're going to be great, it's all going to be fine.

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I would tell them that. It'd be done. I'd have the schedule that I wanted. The start times would be super easy. I wouldn't have to extend the three-hour limit that I had set for myself. That was the simple solution.

Then I asked myself, “Why wasn't I taking that simple solution that was available to me?” And it was simply because I was worried about what the original speakers, that I had spoken with, what they were going to think about me changing what I had originally told them. It was just guilt coming up and a little bit of worry. I can stomach those feelings.

I decided to pick the easy route, to make everyone's time limit 30 minutes, and to gag and go through the guilt and the worry about going back and changing what I had originally told them. And it all worked out fine. So that's a really great scenario where that question, “What would you do if it was easy,” comes up and is super useful.

Now, if there's a scenario that you're currently dealing with feels super complicated, very overwhelming, it would take you like 30 minutes to give someone the rundown and the back story of what you're dealing with. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to think of that situation, all the tangled ball of yarn and complication that comes with it, and I just want you to distill the situation down to a one sentence problem.

If there was only one issue to solve, what would that issue be? What is that problem specifically? Don't allow yourself to say, “I don't know.” Force yourself to get specific. Sit with it, poke around, come up with your answer. You do know, trust that you know, sit in the discomfort of the confusion for a second, and distill it down. And ask yourself, “How do I go about solving for that problem? That specific issue?”

Again, your brain is going to want to serve you that knee-jerk “I don't know.” Push past it. You do know, trust yourself that you know, and come up with the questions that you need to ask in order to get to an answer.

I gave you a bunch of questions that you can ask yourself. Force yourself to answer these questions: What, specifically, are you confused about?

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What does telling yourself that you don't know pretend to protect you from? What would you need to do next if you weren't confused? What does staying confused allow you to avoid? What would you say if you did know? What would you say if you had to guess? What would you do if it was easy? What would your answer be if no one else had an opinion? What's the specific problem here? What do you know versus what you don't know? Separate it and make those lists.

These are the questions that you can always go to when you find yourself indulging in “I don't know” thinking, in order to push past the “I don't know.” Get to a clear path forward, figure out the answer, and come up with the solution to the problem that you need to solve.

Hope this helps you guys. It's what I've got for you this week. I hope you have a lovely week, and I will talk to you in the next episode.

Thanks for listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast. If you want more info about Olivia Vizachero or the show's notes and resources from today's episode, visit www.TheLessStressedLawyer.com.