

Ep #27: Firefighters & Procrastinators



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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You're listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast, Episode 27. Today, we're talking all about two different management styles: Firefighters & Procrastinators. 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.

Hi, my friends, how we doing today? Greetings from Mexico City. I feel like I'm turning into *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego*? One of my clients just called me that. I am traveling a ton, lately. I was just in Florida, I told you guys that, for work and for a little bit of pleasure. Now, I'm in Mexico City. It's my first time here; I am loving it. So, I am recording this episode live from the Four Seasons™, in Mexico City.

And I've been bopping around town here, it's so green and so beautiful. And I love authentic Mexican foods. So, I'm eating tons of that. I had churros this afternoon, they were just delightful. And you know, it's really neat to be able to take you guys with me when I record these episodes, and speak to you from all different parts of the world. I love that I get to bring my microphone and record from the comfort of my hotel room. It's just starting to become like this really fun thing that I get to do.

I've got a lot of travel coming up over the course of the next few months. So, I'm going to be in New York, and then Italy, and then Nashville to speak at Clio® Con. Which, if you are going to Clio Con and you haven't gotten your tickets yet, head on over to my Instagram™, I have a link in my bio that gets you a discount to Clio Con. So, make sure you take advantage of that.

And then, I am going to Charleston to scope out locations for *The Less Stressed Lawyer* Mastermind event; the live event that's coming up in February. So, I'm hopping all over. And then, I'm going to be in Phoenix for a Life Coach School event. So, got a lot of travel and I plan to take you

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guys with me. So, I'll be coming to you, not necessarily live, because I know this is recorded and it comes out on Tuesdays. But I will be coming to you from around the world.

And if you have any recommendations about any of the places that I just mentioned, reach out to me on social media. I would love to hear about them. I'm such a foodie. I love to explore. So, give me all your suggestions.

All right, now that I've told you about my Carmen Sandiego adventures, it's time to talk about today's podcast episode topic. I want to introduce you to two different types of time management styles. Both of them end up being pretty problematic.

First, we have firefighters. And then, we have procrastinators. And obviously, there's of course the third time management style, which is to be very intentional with your time and to manage it well. Which I'm going to teach you over the course of the next several episodes.

We've been going through, as I like to call them, the three P's: people-pleasing, perfectionism, now we're on to procrastination and time management. And I wanted to introduce you to these two different problem styles or problem methodologies of managing your time, to see if you can see yourself in them.

Because we always want to address the problem first, create awareness around it. So, then we make it so much easier on ourselves to make changes going forward. If we know what to be on the lookout for and where our problems are and what causes them, we can create change so much faster.

So, that's a little bit about what this episode is going to focus in on. Identifying these two ways that are problematic, that we manage our time or ineffectively manage our time, is probably a better way to refer to it. But I want to introduce you to them and then we'll get into the nitty gritty, over the course of the next several episodes, on the mindset and then the

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tactics, the actions that you need to take, in order to manage your time really well.

All right. So, let's start by talking about these two time management methods: being a firefighter or being a procrastinator. Being a firefighter looks like trying, with your best intentions, to get all the things done, but multitasking, jumping from one thing to the next, hitting those low-hanging fruit items instead of tackling the big project. Constantly reshuffling your schedule, triaging everything that comes your way, right?

It's a very reactive way to work, rather than being proactive. And it's different from procrastinating, because procrastinating is just putting something off because you're avoiding it. You don't want to do it. This is different. You're well intentioned. You want to do all of the things and you wish you could do them all right now, but obviously you can't. You can only ever do really, one thing at a time, which is a firefighter's worst nightmare, admitting that truth, right?

So, you're trying to do all the things. You're not really able to do anything well. You're not bringing intentionality with you into any of the activities that you are engaging in. Everything just feels like a scramble. You're running around, playing Whack a Mole™, and spinning plates; you know, on the sticks where you run around and one plate gets wobbly, and then you give it a spin, and you run to the next wobbly plate, and you give that one a spin, and you're just in that pattern constantly, right? That's what it looks like to be a firefighter.

Now, the second version of managing your time ineffectively, is being a procrastinator. Where you're constantly putting things off. You're doing what we call in coaching, "buffering", where you're taking some action that isn't normally work related and you're doing that instead. So, you might be scrolling Instagram, watching Netflix®, you can buffer with sleep, you're just really in an avoidant pattern.

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Some people even procrastinate just by staring at their computer screen but not doing anything. So, it might look like “they're working”, but they're actually not completing anything. They're really just spinning out.

Alright, so normally people are either one or the other. Every once in a while, I have someone ask me, they're like, “Olivia, can you be both?” And yes, you can absolutely be both a firefighter and a procrastinator. Normally, it will depend on what people are working on, that determines which methodology they're acting from. What kind of person they show up as; are they being a firefighter, or are they being a procrastinator?

If there's a really big project at work, normally, anytime someone uses that verbiage to talk about an assignment, they're going to slip into procrastination mode. When people are feeling really overwhelmed and behind, and they're trying to do all of the things and do them all right now, which of course isn't possible, they might be in that firefighting mode.

Especially my people-pleasers, probably see themselves firefighting a lot. Because they'll be in the middle of something, and then someone asks them to do something else and they drop what they're doing. And they switch to that something else, in order to people-please whoever asked them. So, you can start to see how all of these things interrelate with one another; the three P's.

Same thing goes with procrastination. My procrastinators, if they're indulging in perfectionism, and I discussed that in the perfectionism series that I just did, that's a reason that we procrastinate. Because we don't want to do something imperfectly, so we think to ourselves; why ever get started? Better to not do it at all, instead of do it imperfectly, right.

So, you can be both; you'll normally only be one at a time. But you can see both of those patterns show up in your day-to-day work life. Now, they may look pretty different, right, one's kind of like overworking, hustling, really reactive, very unintentional, that scramble, that rat race. And the other, is just that total avoidant pattern as far as work goes. Where you're just not doing any of the things that you're supposed to be doing. Nothing

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productive, not even the low hanging fruit, you're just really avoiding work altogether.

So, on the surface, these two behaviors look pretty different. But what I want to offer you today, is that they're actually not. They're actually a lot more similar than you may think. Ultimately, these two different time management methodologies are caused by the same three things.

So, they're caused by thoughts that don't serve you, feelings you don't want to feel, and a desire for instant gratification. Okay, so when it comes to firefighting, now remember, we have a think-feel-act cycle here, right? That's the model at play. So, whatever work is coming your way, you're going to have a thought about it. And then, it's going to cause a feeling, and then it's going to drive an action.

So, with firefighting, the thoughts that drive you to firefight and to play that game of Whack a Mole, so to speak, our thoughts, like; I have to do this, I need to do this right now, I can't say no, I can't put this off, they'll be mad at me if I don't do this right now.

A lot of my clients also think thoughts like; just this one more thing, just one more email, just one more quick phone call, just one more whatever. Or, they'll think to themselves; I can do this really fast. So, they want to just triage it, take care of it right now, rather than being intentional with their time, sticking to the schedule that they have for the day, and staying on course. So, just one more I can do this faster, I can do this really fast right now, this won't take me that long.

All of those thoughts drive us to firefight, when it comes to our schedule. The other thing that will happen with people, is that they get in their heads about other people waiting on them. I have a lot of clients who struggle with the game of tennis or volleyball, that they perceive is going on with the work that they do. So, they're really concerned with; I don't want anyone waiting on me.

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And when something comes back to them, it gets lobbed and volleyed back over the net into their side of the court. Right, the ball's no longer in the other person's court, it's now in theirs. They get really anxious. They don't want anyone waiting on them. So, all of these thoughts drive us to firefight. So, these thoughts don't serve us, they're not going to lead us to intentionally working and managing our time.

The second part of a firefighting problem is the feelings that someone who's firefighting is unwilling to feel. So, firefighting is a reaction to a negative emotion that we don't want to sit with. So, feelings that we want to jump out of.

Our feelings like; worry, or guilt, or pressured, or overwhelmed, right. Other feelings that will let us give up control, or leave us to give up control, our feelings like; resigned, out of control, obligated, all of these feelings are feelings that we react to in one way or another. And we don't take intentional action, in spite of them.

So, you've got the negative thoughts that you're thinking, that don't serve you, that drive you to firefight. These negative emotions that you're unwilling to sit with. You're letting these negative emotions drive the wheel, so to speak.

And then, there's also the third component here; your desire for instant gratification. So, when you're in firefighting mode, you get instant gratification from putting out the fires, from triaging whatever it is that you're working on, from playing that game of Whack a Mole.

It gives you a sense of accomplishment. It makes you feel satisfied, useful, productive, even though it's not the most intentional use of your time, and it leaves you in that scramble, it feels good while you're doing it. So, in order to not firefight, you have to be willing to give up that sense of instant gratification.

Now, procrastination is basically the same exact patterns. It looks differently in your action line, of how you spend your time, right, but it's

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being caused by the exact same thing. So, my procrastinators, they think thoughts like; I don't feel like doing this, I don't want to do this, I shouldn't have to do this, this is going to be hard, I don't know where to start. All of those negative thoughts.

So, those thoughts aren't serving them, and they drive them to procrastinate. Again, that's the first issue that's causing a problem. The second, is that there are feelings you don't want to feel when you're procrastinating. So, it might be feelings like; overwhelm, pressure, confusion, fear that you're going to do something wrong, maybe some shame because you've already put something off for quite a while and you're behind.

And instead of powering through these emotions, you let them dictate how you show up, what you do, what you don't do, right. So again, there's thoughts that don't serve you, and then feelings that you don't want to feel, driving this behavior. There's also the desire for instant gratification, right? Unlike firefighting, where you're doing something else work related, normally, with procrastination, you're not.

You're getting that instant gratification from something that you find more entertaining. So maybe, you're texting a friend, or scrolling on Instagram, or LinkedIn®, or Facebook®, or binge watching a Netflix special or series, or shopping on Amazon®, right?

The list goes on and on, all the different things that you can do. Maybe you clean, when you procrastinate. Like, that'll give you a different sense of accomplishment. It allows you to get out of work, but do something seemingly “productive”, even though you're in that procrastination pattern. Right.

And when we think about not procrastinating, what you'd have to be willing to do is you'd have to be willing to feel deprived. So, that's normally another emotion that people aren't willing to experience, that drive them to procrastinate. They don't want to feel deprived; to do what they want to do.

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They also feel a little entitled or deserving. And those emotions drive them to do the thing that causes them to procrastinate, the procrastination activity. So again, just like with firefighting, it's caused by thoughts that don't serve you. Feelings you're unwilling to feel, and a desire for instant gratification.

Now, just like these two time management methodologies are caused by the same three issues, they're also solved by the same process or protocol. And what that looks like is, you need to change your thoughts. That's always where we're going to start, right. We need to pick thoughts that serve us. Second, you need to embrace discomfort. And third, you need to avoid the temptation to indulge in instant gratification; you have to say no to it.

So, when it comes to thoughts, instead of thinking, if you're a firefighter; I have to, I need to, I can't, that is typically never true. I've talked about that on the podcast before, that there are only four things you ever have to do; sleep, drink, water, breathe and eat sometimes, that's it.

If you're listing anything else and telling yourself I have to do it, I promise you, you don't actually, "have to". There may be plenty of reasons why you want to, because you don't want to suffer the consequences that come along with not doing that task. But you never have to do it, you're always exercising agency, you're always making a choice.

So, in order to get yourself out of firefighter mode, you may want to remind yourself that you're making a choice and that you get to choose. That'll help you dial down that pressure, dial down that sense of feeling out of control or obligated. Right? You might want to talk to yourself and tell yourself it's better for you to focus on one thing; I can only do one thing at a time. If I constrain to completing this task, instead of multitasking, I'll get further faster.

I like to tell myself that multitasking is a lie. It's not a benefit. It doesn't serve us. It doesn't help us accomplish more; it slows us down. I once had a court officer tell me, "Slow is smooth, smooth is steady, steady is fast," or some

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variant of that. Maybe it was, “slow is steady, steady is smooth, smooth is fast,” right. And that always sticks in my head, I love to practice constraint. And I love to methodically go one thing at a time, I get so much more done that way.

So, I teach that to my clients, as well, for them to slow themselves down. I also teach my clients to stick to a plan. So, when they've planned something, and they're in that just one more thought pattern of like, I'm not going to follow the plan, I'm just going to stick with this. Or, I can jump to one thing and then jump back. Right?

I teach them that they want to become someone who follows through, that sticks to a plan. Simply for the sake of sticking to a plan because it's such a vital skill set. So, that may be a way that you want to talk to yourself. When that temptation to firefight comes to you, you want to remind yourself that it doesn't serve you in the long run, it makes you really inefficient and unintentional. And that's not what you want when it comes to how you manage your time, and how you approach work.

You're also going to have to make a deal with yourself that you're going to feel some of these negative emotions and not let them be in the driver's seat, when it comes to how you approach your to-do list, right? You're going to have to feel worried, or guilty, or pressured, or overwhelmed, and methodically approach work regardless, rather than playing that game of Whack a Mole.

You may feel guilty about not answering an unscheduled phone call, or someone emails you and you just want to respond to it, because it's only going to take a second. And you're going to remind yourself to sit in that pressure, sit in that guilt, sit in that worry, and stick to your game plan anyways. You can get to that task later in the day, once you've gotten through the work that you planned.

I teach my clients, and we'll get into this in a future episode, but I teach my clients to build in flex time into their schedule, and also specific time where you're checking emails and responding to them. So, you're able to be

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intentional with whatever task is in front of you. You don't have to be half pregnant and jump back and forth between all of these different to-do list items.

You want to make sure that you're planning, in line, with how you actually spend your time. If you plan differently, you're going to set yourself up for failure, which we don't want to have that happen. So, you need to change your firefighter thought and you need to be willing to feel these negative emotions, and be willing to resist the urge to indulge in instant gratification that comes from firefighting.

If you're a procrastinator, same process that you need to follow. So, you need to change your thoughts, right? Instead of telling yourself that you don't want to do something, or that it's going to be hard, or that it's going to be so time consuming, you want to switch to thoughts that drive you to feel motivated, right?

That might look like, I am not going to put future me in a worse position. That's one of my favorite thoughts to think. I'm following through because I'm someone who does what they say they're going to do. It's not going to take me that long. It's okay that it's going to consume a little bit of time. I tell myself all the time, everything is time consuming, right?

Our brain always offers us up that thought as if it's a problem that something's time consuming. It's never a problem that something's time consuming. Everything we do consumes time, right? So, if you catch yourself thinking that, oh, it's going to take me a lot of time, or that's a really time-consuming task. Just catch yourself, remind yourself that everything consumes time, that doesn't have to be a problem, and then get to work. Follow through with doing that task.

I also like to look at why I think something's going to be hard. Or, if I'm telling myself, I don't know where to start, I solve for that stuff, right? If you can narrow in on what you actually think is hard, chances are, you'll figure out how to work through it a lot faster. Our brain loves to throw that thought up to us, like it's throwing spaghetti at the wall to see if it'll stick or not.

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And if you get really specific, you might find out oh, it's actually not that hard. That's just a lie, my brain serving up to me to get me to procrastinate. And then same thing with, I don't know where to start? If you sit with that question for a second, your brain will actually solve for it. You will know where to start. Just pick one place, take a little bit of action, and then go from there.

So, I like to remind myself, it won't be this hard. I've done stuff like this before. I'm really competent, I know what I'm doing. I can get through this one step at a time. That's the mental rehearsal that I engage in, instead of the procrastination thoughts of; I don't want to do this, this sucks, I hate this stuff, I deserve a break. All of that, right?

Now, same thing, like with firefighting, we need to allow ourselves to feel negative feelings. So, we've got to embrace the discomfort. With procrastination, we have to be willing to feel bothered, bored, frustrated, annoyed, pressured, overwhelmed. Those are typically the emotions that pop up for people. And they are hard to stomach, at first. But I promise you, it's just like a little bit of a speed bump when you're entering a parking lot. It gets easier once you get started.

One of the things that I do myself is, I just tell myself, do something for five minutes, and then see what happens. See how you feel. Normally, we just avoid getting started. That's the hardest part. So, if you can get yourself past that part of it, you'll be off to the races. But you're going to have to embrace a little bit of discomfort in the beginning, to override that primitive, protectionistic part of your brain that just wants to seek pleasure, avoid discomfort, and conserve energy, right?

That's what's driving you to procrastinate. It's what's serving you up those negative procrastination thoughts. And it's what's telling you to avoid all of these negative emotions that you associate with doing the task. You get to decide that you're just going to feel them on purpose.

So, you got to change your thoughts, feel your feelings, and then again, avoid the desire to indulge in instant gratification, that comes from buffering

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and doing whatever other fun, entertaining activity you'd prefer to be doing, other than the work that's in front of you.

All right, we're going to dive in, over the course of the next several episodes, about specific time management strategies. But they're going to be in one way or another, a breakdown, or a more specific solution or protocol, of this general overview that I just gave you.

Three problems, three solutions: Thoughts that don't serve you. Feelings you don't want to feel. A desire for instant gratification; that's what's causing your time management problems. And then, the solution is to change your thoughts, embrace discomfort, and avoid instant gratification. All right.

What I want to challenge you to do, as we lead into this time management series that I'm going to walk you through, is I want to encourage you to identify when am I firefighting? When am I procrastinating? Maybe you do one or the other. Or, maybe you're like some of my clients, and you see yourself in both of those time management models.

But I want you to start to identify when you're in either one of those patterns, and then ask yourself, get more specific: What thoughts am I thinking that are driving me to take this action, right now? This action that doesn't serve me. What are the feelings that I'm unwilling to feel?

One of the ways that you can identify the feelings that you're unwilling to feel, is to ask yourself; if I were managing my time with intention, sticking to my plan, planning accurately, not reshuffling, not playing Whack a Mole, how would I be forced to feel, if I just did this thing right now? If you're procrastinating. Or, if you just stuck to the schedule and didn't interrupt yourself, what's the emotion that you would be forced to feel in that moment?

That'll help you identify the feelings that you're unwilling to feel, that are driving this time management problem, okay? And then, it'll be easy for you to spot the instant gratification that you get from firefighting or from procrastinating, you just want to be on the lookout for that.

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So, go out there, identify this week; what are the thoughts that you're thinking that are causing your firefighting or you're procrastinating? What are those feelings? And then once you've got that information, you're going to be in a really good position for us to take this work even deeper, over the course of the next several episodes, all right?

Okay, I will talk to you next week. I can't wait to dive in to this really intense series. Giving you all my best nuggets, tips, tricks, and tactics for you to become a master at time management.

Until then, have a beautiful week, my friends, I'll 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.