

Ep #74: The Messiness of Learning Something New



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Olivia Vizachero

Ep #74: The Messiness of Learning Something New

You're listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast, Episode 74. Today, we're talking all about the messiness of learning something new. 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.

Hey there, how are you? I hope your week is off to a good start. We are kicking into fall gear over here. I just got back from Dallas. I was there for a Life Coach School event, which is my coaching school. It didn't feel like fall down there. It was 107° while I was down there. But I'm back in Detroit, not for very much longer. I'm getting ready to move south. I cannot wait to get out of here, just in time to escape the winter. But it's a fall around here.

One of the topics that I love to cover every fall is time management. So, if you've been listening to the podcast for a while, you know that I've already talked about what I call "the three P's" on the podcast. I did a whole series about people pleasing, perfectionism, and procrastination. And then, I went and got very specific on the process that I teach my clients for mastering time management.

So, I will link those episodes in the show notes. If you haven't listened to them, you want to make sure that you go check all of them out. It's such a comprehensive time management series. But today, I want to get really specific on one issue that I see come up all the time for people, especially for my perfectionists.

While this relates to a lot of things, not just time management, I definitely see people struggle with this when it comes to managing their time. Quick segue here, or tangent, I want you to make sure that you don't miss this, so mark your calendars.

By the way, speaking of time management, I'm going to host a masterclass at the end of the month on How to Manage Your Time. It's going to be on

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September 29th, which is a Friday, at 12pm Eastern. In order to register for that, you can go to the show notes of this episode, it's going to be hyperlinked there for you, and you can go and just register for the Zoom event.

If you want to type in the URL yourself, you can go to LessStressedSessions.com/signup and you'll have a hyperlink there as well, to register for my How to Manage Your Time masterclass at the end of the month. Okay, so what are we talking about today? How does it relate to time management? You've got all the questions. Well, let me answer them.

I'm going to tell you the thing that my clients hate hearing from me, but this is why we have coaches. Coaches just don't tell us what we want to hear, they tell us the truth. They give it to us the brass tacks version, whether we want to hear it or not, and that's what helps us grow. That's what helps us transform that. It's what helps us learn and develop.

So, I'm going to share this unfortunate truth with you. If you struggle with time management and you want to work on it, I need you to prepare yourself, it's going to be messy. The process of learning how to manage your time is going to be messy.

Now, if you're a perfectionist, a part of you just absolutely cringed and recoiled when I said the word "messy." For so many people, that's the thing that they're most afraid of being. Perfectionists crave order and control, and they don't like engaging in any activities that run contrary to those preferences. Which is why so often perfectionists describe themselves as someone who hates doing things that they aren't good at. Who doesn't like trying things that are new.

Why? Why don't they like those things? It's because of how it feels. Learning something new feels really messy and disorderly to them. For perfectionists especially, messy is very embarrassing. It's the thing that they want to be seen by other people as being the least of, not the most of.

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When you're learning how to do something new, you're going to feel a little chaotic, a little messy, a little clunky. So, today, I specifically want to talk to you about managing the mess when it comes to learning something new.

Because if you keep having this strong aversion to being messy and embracing the mess, if you're reluctant to embrace it, you're not going to achieve the goals that you want to set for yourself, that you want to achieve. If you aren't willing to make peace with the journey that you're going to have to take to get there.

I'm going to tell you again, I really want to drive this home for you, the journey will not be pristine. I'm sorry, it just won't be. It's going to be clunky and paved with failures. I don't even like to think of it as failing, I just like to think of it as learning.

So, it's going to be clunky and paved with learning, paved with nuggets of insight and wisdom that come from engaging in the very messy process of doing something new. You have to be okay with that. You have to uncouple the messiness of it all, from your self-worth, from your sense of adequacy and capability. You can't make the clunkiness mean anything about you.

Truly, it doesn't mean anything about you other than the fact that you're simply learning how to do something new. Okay? So, take a second and think. Think about what you're working on right now in your life. What goal are you wanting to set that you maybe are avoiding because you don't want to get started on it? Because it's probably going to be a messy process. That it's going to be imperfect. That your pursuit of it isn't going to go as smoothly as you might want it to.

Do you keep avoiding getting started on something? If so, what? What are you avoiding getting started on? Is there something that you're working on getting better at, that you're working on improving? What skill are you trying to develop? What habit are you trying to build?

I'll give you an example of this; I talk about it a lot. I have a rule in my business, I don't add any new content creation until all of my current content creation that I've agreed to do is "dialed in." That means I

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consistently hit the deadlines that I set for myself. I follow the timeline that allows me to get that content out when I promise it.

Ever since I added the podcast to my content rotation, I have been working on figuring out the schedule that works for me. So, it's been clunky over here, it's been messy. I typically send out a Friday email, and since I added the podcast in, the availability of content creation space I have in my calendar, it wasn't enough to accommodate the podcast.

So, I've been spending a lot of time figuring out how do I eliminate other things from my schedule, in order to make room for all of the content creation that I want to do, in order to market my business? So, it's been clunky over here.

And I've allowed it to be clunky. I keep learning and I keep iterating and I keep eliminating things, in order to give myself the space that I need to create all the content that I want to create. Do I wish it was less clunky and less messy? Of course, I do. I'd love it to be pristine. But I'm learning how to make space for all of that.

I'm learning what it requires of me; the time involved, the planning, the recording, the production; with everything else that I have on my plate as I've also been launching a group coaching program throughout the past year and a half. That, mixed in with the other content creation that I've been doing, is very new to me. So, it's been messy over here.

I'm just allowing myself to sit in the mess as I learn, as I tweak, as I make changes. Okay, so that's just one example of this.

I want you to think about those questions. What are you working on getting better at? What goal do you have that you might be avoiding? What skill are you trying to develop? What habit are you trying to build?

Think for a second, and I want you to think about this specifically, how do you show up when you pursue this goal, work to make progress, and it doesn't go as planned? How do you show up when it doesn't go as planned? What do you do? Do you beat yourself up? Do you quit? Do you

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“quietly quit?” Man, that was a very trending term for a while. But I haven't heard it in a while.

But do you quietly quit, just get more and more inconsistent as time goes on? Or do you set a different goal, so you can cycle back to the more exciting, non-messy part of goal setting, the planning part, the intention setting part? That's where everything is still pristine and very perfect. You haven't actually embarked on the progress making portion of pursuing the goal; that's the messy part.

So, are these the things that you do when your pursuit doesn't go as planned? Or do you stay the course, evaluate the action that you took, learn from that evaluation, and then get back to work and improve? Do you do that instead?

Now, if that's not what you do, if you do the other things that I mentioned; the beating yourself up, the quitting, the quietly quitting, the being inconsistent, the replacing the one goal with a new goal; in order to distract yourself from the imperfect mess of what you're currently doing.

If you do those things instead, I want you to ask yourself: Why? Why do you do that? More specifically, what is your expectation that you have for yourself that drives you to do those things? What do you expect your learning process to look like? I find this to be such a fascinating question. I bet most people haven't asked themselves that question, and they haven't taken the time to answer it.

So, what do you expect your learning process to look like? If you do those things that I just mentioned, you're expecting yourself to be perfect, much more perfect than the process actually is. So, be honest here. How do you expect your learning process to go? You wouldn't quit or get more inconsistent if you were expecting it to be clunky and messy. You wouldn't.

You'd stay the course, you'd evaluate, you'd learn and improve, if you expected it to be clunky and messy and imperfect. But you don't expect it to be messy, imperfect, and clunky. Instead, you make the clunk and the mess of it a problem.

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Now we've got a disconnect between your expectation and reality. We've got a mismatched expectation. So the disconnect between what you expect the process to be like, versus what the process is actually like, creates this negative emotional experience for you.

Of course, this is just coming from your thoughts, right? Your thoughts cause your feelings. So, if you're experiencing a negative emotion as you're learning something new, building a habit, developing a skill, working towards, and pursuing a goal... If you feel a negative emotion, and are having that negative experience, it's coming from your thinking.

What you're thinking is what I mean by this expectation. Your expectations are just a thought that you have about what the process and experience should be like, what you expect yourself to do, how you expect yourself to perform in this pursuit.

So, if you feel frustrated and discouraged, or embarrassed and inadequate, or incapable, number one, that's coming from your thoughts. And we get to change those thoughts by changing the expectations that you have for yourself. But typically, if that's how you're feeling, then what you're typically going to do from those emotions is withdraw from your pursuit of the goal.

But doing that only ensures that you never make consistent progress. So, if you want to make consistent progress, if you want to reach the finish line with these habits, with these skills, with the goals that you're setting for yourself, we need to change this. Okay?

In order to make consistent progress, we first have to start with changing the expectation that you have for yourself. So, take a second, what do you want to choose to expect of yourself when you're learning something new?

What if, I know this is a wild and radical idea, but what if you expected it to be imperfect and clunky and messy? What if you expected yourself to stumble and fall? What if you expected yourself to fail your way forward and learn with each fail, to leverage each fail?

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What if none of this; the imperfection, the clunkiness, the messiness, the stumbling, the falling, the failing; what if none of it was a problem? How would it change the way that you pursue your goals? That you develop skills? That you build habits? How would it change the way that you will learn and improve? What would be different?

Let me walk you through some examples, because I want you to see how it would be different in practice. So, let's start with, because September is time management month, let's say you're learning how to manage your time. When you resist the imperfect messiness of learning how to manage your time, what you end up doing is you start and you're going to struggle immediately.

Because that is just what happens when someone who struggles with time management starts to work on time management and building the skills necessary to properly manage your time; it's going to be a struggle up front. What happens when you're resisting the imperfect messiness of learning how to manage your time, when you struggle, you give up almost instantly.

Then you end up beating yourself up in the process, and you double down on the behavior that isn't serving you. You just default back to that status quo. It's your expectation that's a problem here. Your expectation is that you make a schedule day one, stick to it perfectly, and never mismanage your time ever again.

Even if you don't think that that's what your expectation is for yourself, if you embark on learning how to manage your time and then you don't stick with it, I promise you, that is what your subconscious or unconscious expectation is. That's what you're expecting of yourself: perfection, right out of the gate.

And then, when reality doesn't match that, because you're learning how to do something new, something you've never been taught how to do before, you're going to struggle and stumble. Then, when you encounter that struggle and the stumbling, you quit.

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So, when reality doesn't match that expectation, you allow yourself to get discouraged. What would be different if you expected the process to look like this? First up, you make a to-do list, you estimate how long tasks take, you put all of the appointments that you have on your calendar. So that way, you have an accurate reflection of the time that you have available and the commitments that you have, that you've already committed yourself to.

Then, you decide start and stop times for work; when's your day going to start, when's it going to end? From there, you see how much available time you have. After you factor in the book ends, with your start and stop time, and you subtract all of the appointments that you put on your calendar, you're going to come up with a number of the time you have available for work the rest of the day.

Then I want you to look at your to-do list, and plan less than what fits in the time you have available. So, if you have six available hours, I want you to plan five of them, okay? Now, when you make that plan, you'll implement the plan by starting on time, working without interruptions, and ending on time.

At the end of your day you can evaluate, you'll take the insights from your evaluation and apply them the following day. So, you consistently get 1% better. That's the process for how to become someone who manages their time well. That's the process that you need to improve in this area.

Now, that's the pristine process, right? The textbook version of what it looks like to manage your time. But in practice, it's not going to be that pristine; it's going to be imperfect, clunky, and messy. You're going to forget to put things on your to-do list.

If you expect perfection there, you're going to stop managing and keeping your to-do list up to date, and because you didn't update at once, you're just going to quit. Or you're going to fail to break up big projects into small enough tasks. And instead of getting better and better and better at that you're just going to quit and stop using the to-do list.

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You're going to underestimate how long tasks take you, and when you underestimate it and you're incorrect with your original guess, instead of continuing to get better at this the perfectionist in you is going to tell you it's not worth it to estimate the time. That you're just bad at it. That it can't be done.

You're going to plan best-case scenario and then feel behind because your schedule won't go best-case scenario. Okay? Things won't go according to plan. You'll learn that you need to plan for the worst-case scenario. But if you're being a perfectionist, you're going to use things not going to plan as a reason to not stick with this. You're going to fail to start on time by procrastinating or reshuffling your schedule, and putting out fires, tending to "emergencies."

You're going to distract yourself. You're going to let other people interrupt you. You're going to people please, not set boundaries, and you'll distract yourself with things that are more exciting than the work in front of you. Maybe Instagram, LinkedIn, games on your phone, TV, snacks, coffee, whatever.

If you let all of this deter you, because it doesn't match the expectation you have for yourself, you're never going to get better at managing your time. If you make these mishaps a problem, and a good enough reason not to go on, you won't be working on time management for very long. You're going to quit quickly.

Because these mishaps and mistakes are going to happen. You can take that to the bank. You're not going to master this right out of the gate. This requires practice. It requires being messy because practicing is messy. But if you adjust your expectations and you expect it to be messy, then you're going to make a to-do list, estimate how long tasks take, put appointments on your calendar, decide your start and stop times, and see how much available time you have in the day.

You'll go to your to-do list and plan in less than what fits, implement the plan by starting on time, working without interruptions, and ending on time.

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Then, you'll evaluate, you'll apply the insights from that evaluation, and put them into practice the following day.

As you do that, in a very, very messy manner, you're going to forget to put things on your to-do list, you're not going to break up project small enough, you're going to underestimate how long stuff takes, and you're going to plan best-case scenario.

Then you'll get behind because it doesn't go according to plan, you're going to procrastinate and reshuffle and distract yourself, and you're still going to get better, because you're going to evaluate and take those insights from your evaluation and apply them the next day.

It's going to be clunky as hell. And you're not going to make the clunky messiness of it all a problem, okay? If you commit to embracing the clunk, embracing the mess, you can solve your time management problems; I promise you.

This is coming firsthand, from someone who used to struggle with every time management problem you can think of; that was me. I committed myself to figuring this out for myself so I could leverage what I learned from doing this work myself, and give my lessons, give my insights, my breakthroughs, to other people. So, they could learn how to overcome their time management struggles, too.

This is just one example of needing to embrace the mess in order to make progress. Maybe you're working on putting in your time every day. And I swear, I've said this already on the podcast, but I swear, I've got an episode series coming out on that topic soon. I know, I keep saying that, but I really, really do.

But let's talk about it briefly here. If you expect perfection of yourself when it comes to entering your time, that's something you want to work on. You're going to make one day of missing time entry send you into a complete tailspin. Then you're going to miss all the other days in the month, and be stuck at the end of the month entering all of your time. Just like you always

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do. Even though you promise yourself every single month, “This month is going to be different.”

Let's say it's September 12th, and you've been doing okay on entering your time since the beginning of the month. Then you have one really busy day, and you don't put in your time. You let that be the reason that you don't stick to working on this goal, to building this habit.

Instead of quitting and getting more and more inconsistent and letting all of your time, the rest of the month, September 12th through the end of September, accumulate and build up, what if you didn't expect perfection of yourself and you let it be messy?

What if you aimed for putting in your time after every task that you complete? Once it's completed, you enter the time. Then sometimes, even though you have the best of intentions, you forget. So, instead of saying screw it, because we're not being perfectionistic, we're letting it be messy. You decide to put in the rest of your time at the end of the day.

So, you've been doing it contemporaneously throughout the day, but you miss one, or maybe you miss a couple, and instead of saying, “Screw it, I'm not entering any more time that day,” or for the rest of the month, you just decide to put it in at the end of the day. And if, for whatever reason, you end up falling asleep without putting in the rest of your time, you just start again tomorrow.

Now, the perfectionist in you is going to want to enter yesterday's time before you give yourself permission to enter the new day's time. Okay? But if you let it be messy, you don't have to do that to yourself. I watch people day in day out, month in month out, do this to themselves because they miss a day, or they miss half a day.

Instead of just allowing themselves to start fresh, instead of giving themselves permission to do that, they have to be perfectionistic about it. They make up this arbitrary rule that is written nowhere. It's not in your law firm's manual. They don't teach it to you in law school, that you can't dare enter today's time before yesterday's time, because you absolutely can. It's

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just going to feel messy as hell. So, you can just start the new day and worry about yesterday's time later.

You can just focus on what's right in front of you by letting your process be messy. But people don't want to do that. They want it to be perfect. They don't want it to be clunky. They want it to be pristine. By requiring that it be perfect and pristine, they don't make the progress they want to make. They self-sabotage, they screw themselves, the rest of the month. Don't do that. Let your process be messy.

Same thing if you're working on weight loss or working out. Be honest. Do you expect yourself to stick to your workout routine perfectly? So, that if you choose to miss a day... and I'm picking that word "choose" very intentionally here, because I do want you to recognize that you're always making a choice, all right?

But if you choose to not stick to your routine, that choice doesn't mean that you should stop working out altogether. Because, "Screw it. What's the point?" All right, that's the perfectionist in you. Instead, if you let it be messy you can pick right back up tomorrow and not miss a beat. That's available to you.

Same thing with weight loss. If you're expecting perfection of yourself, then here's what you're going to expect: You're going to expect that the scale only goes in one direction, the direction you want it to go in. You're never going to build in room for maybe a little weight gain. Maybe you go on vacation and the scale goes up a pound or two. Maybe you have a holiday weekend with family and friends, and the scale goes up.

Now, that doesn't mean that you can't work to guard against those things. But expecting 100% perfection of yourself is going to lead you to quit because you're going to be so discouraged and frustrated. Also, if you expect yourself to only eat what you intentionally decide to eat, and to never splurge, to never veer off course, you're going to set yourself up to fail.

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You're not going to be able to sustain that because you're human. That's not realistic. You're going to have slip ups. You're going to have messy human moments, where you eat a bigger portion than planned. Where you have a snack that you typically wouldn't eat. Or you have an extra glass of wine, or a bite of someone's dessert, or fries or whatever.

You're going to eat off protocol. You're going to make a decision that isn't aligned with the goal that you ultimately want to achieve. If you allow yourself to be messy and imperfect, you're not going to make this a problem. You're not going to let it be a reason to quit.

But this is a choice you have to make. You can learn from your slip ups, or you can weaponize them against yourself; it's up to you. I highly, highly, highly encourage you not to weaponize your learning, not to weaponize your mess.

I want you to really think for a second. Where did you get the expectation that you do everything perfectly right the first time? Who gave that expectation to you? Where does it come from? Now, a much more important question: Do you want to keep that expectation for yourself? And if not, why not? What if you expected and allowed yourself to be messy? What if you wore your messiness as a badge of honor?

I don't mean clutter, I mean unabashed, relentless pursuit of learning new things. The only way humans really know how to learn them, the imperfectly, clunky, messy way. What if you wore that as a badge of honor? As something to be proud of your mess?

You let it show how brave you are, how courageous you are, how willing you are, how determined you are, how dedicated you are, how committed you are, how capable you are, of feeling all the emotions that come along with learning new things.

You know what would happen if you made that your expectation? If you changed your relationship with learning to look more like that than what it currently looks like? You would learn so much more, so much faster, and

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you'd make so much more progress. So much progress. It will truly blow your mind.

So, I hope you take me up on this invitation to really embrace your mess, the imperfect messiness of learning something new. Life gets so much more rewarding, fulfilling, and fun when you do.

Alright, my friends, that's what I've got for you this week. Two quick other orders of business. First things first, at the beginning of the episode, I mentioned that I'm teaching a masterclass this month; it's free. It's all about how to manage your time. So, I want you to go register for that. It's linked in the show notes.

If that's too complicated, and you don't want to deal with going to the show notes, you can just go to LessStressedSessions.com/signup and register for How to Manage Your Time. It's September 29th, that's a Friday; last Friday of the month, at 12pm Eastern, okay?

Tell your friends to come, tell your work besties to come, share the wealth with your colleagues. So many people, low key, struggle with this issue. Be the person that really helps them overcome it. They will be so thankful that you were the one who helped them get a handle on this issue, I promise.

Now, number two, if you are just loving the podcast, and I really hope you are, if you're loving the podcast, can you do me a favor and leave me a rating and review? My goal is to get in front of as many people as possible to help them start living lives with less stress and far more fulfillment.

As a part of that plan, I've set a really extreme goal for the number of people that I want to have register for the How to Manage Your Time masterclass later this month. When you leave me a rating and a review, it helps me get the podcast in front of more people. It gets more eyeballs on what it is that I'm doing, so it helps me achieve this goal that I've set for myself, this really outlandish goal.

It would mean the absolute world to me, if you get value from what I teach on this podcast, if you could help me out with this by going and leaving a

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rating and review. Now, as a thank you, because I really do appreciate this more than you could possibly know; it means the world to me. I'm going to do a giveaway, because I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy day to leave me a rating and review.

So, I'm going to do a giveaway. I haven't done this before. I'm so excited about it. At the end of October, I'm going to randomly select five listener reviews, and I'm going to give away a prize to each one of those reviewers. Get your reviews in before the end of October, so I can select, and hopefully you will be one of the lucky winners. All right?

That's what I've got for you this week, my friends. Thank you so much. I hope you have a beautiful 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.