

Ep #48: The Real Key to Consistency



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Ep #48: The Real Key to Consistency

This week, we're talking about consistency.

You are listening to *Love Your Job Before You Leave It*, the podcast for ambitious, high-achieving women who are ready to stop feeling stressed about work and kiss burnout goodbye forever. Whether you're starting a business or staying in your day job, this show will give you the coaching and guidance you need to start loving your work today. Here's your host, Career Coach, Kori Linn.

Hey, y'all. We are talking about consistency this week, and I just want to say it might surprise you which direction I'm going with this. We'll get to that in a minute though. First, I want to just mention, I have a fly flying around my office and I'm hoping you can't hear it on the podcast recording. But maybe you can, and if so, that's what's going on over here. Just got a fly buzzing around. I tried to usher her out. She did not want to be ushered. So, that's just what it is today in the world of Kori Linn. We have a fly.

Okay, let's talk about consistency. Here's the thing. I see a lot of stuff on the internets and the Instagram and all over that basically says that consistency is the key to all the good things that you want in your life, in your work, in your relationships—all the stuff.

And here's the thing: consistency is great. I do talk often about how small, consistent changes can create big changes that change your whole life. I talk about how consistent effort creates expertise. Things like that. I am a fan of consistency, but what I actually want to talk about today is the fact that it's not required to have a big, beautiful life and to have a happy, satisfying, meaningful, successful career.

One thing that I see is that a lot of people kind of approach the idea of consistency with a perfectionistic lens. Like, "Oh, I have to be perfectly consistent, and if I'm not perfectly consistent, then it's all terrible and ruined and I may as well give up." So, I guess what I'm trying to say—to say it a different way—is that consistency is excellent, but if what you're calling "consistency" is actually just perfectionism, then that shit will backfire.

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When we put this pressure on ourselves to be perfectly consistent, then any little thing that goes wrong we're going to see as a big problem and potentially a failure, and that's when we get into what I call the "fuck-it headspace." I see this with my clients a lot. I've seen it in my own life a lot where, when I want something to be a specific way—and for consistency, a lot of it's around habits, right?

Like, I have a habit that I talk about sometimes of taking a walk first thing in the morning. And some days, I don't do that. Like, I didn't take a walk on Sunday this week because when I woke up, the air quality was already pretty bad and it was the weekend, so I woke up a little later than usual, so the day was already pretty warm. I chose not to take that walk. So, I was inconsistent in that habit. But that didn't mean that anything had gone wrong or that anything was ruined or that my walking habit was broken. It just meant I didn't take a walk that day.

So, I think this is an interesting topic because let's break it down like there are kind of two ways of doing things. Way one is that we're just kind of not consistent about anything, and if that's the headspace we're in, then learning to flex the muscle of consistency can be really valuable. And I would vote that the way to do that is to use the "too-small-to-fail method," where you're committing to something super tiny so it's easier to be consistent because what you're doing is doable. Like, extremely doable is what we would like to aim for.

But there's another way of being where we're mostly pretty decently consistent, but then when we're not, it becomes this big, mental, emotional drama, maybe a full meltdown, and again, we get into that fuck-it headspace. So, what the fuck-it headspace is, is kind of exactly what it sounds like. It's like, "Oh, it didn't go exactly the way I wanted it to, or, It didn't go exactly to plan, so fuck it." I'm just not doing the thing and giving up on the practice. I'm basically throwing away whatever I've done heretofore and doing whatever the other thing is.

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So, what “fuck it” could look like with my walking habit would be like, Oh, if I missed one day, my brain could be like, Well, fuck it. I’m not doing any of the stuff I normally do in a day—all of my little habits. I missed the walking habit, so the whole day is ruined. Or, “fuck it” could look like, Oh, I missed one day of walking, so now I’m just not a person who walks in the morning anymore. So, those are two different ways that the fuck-it mentality could play out there.

I see this a lot when people are trying to set up a new habit, is that they will try to do it super perfectionistically, and then they’re not able to or life interrupts and gets in the way. They’re not as consistent as they planned to be, and then because they’re not as consistent as they planned to be, they go directly to “fuck it,” and it’s like they just blow it whatever progress they’ve made because it’s no longer perfect.

So, instead what I would like to offer to you is the idea of inconsistent consistency. So, you might be thinking like, What the fuck does that even mean? What? What? What? But what I mean here is kind of like, another way to put it is “imperfect consistency.” Consistency is—like I said—it’s effective. That shit works, but sometimes we’re not able to be completely consistent, and that doesn’t mean that you can’t use this tool.

And for some of us, consistency just isn’t how we work or how we operate. Like, I love to think that it’s a tool you can learn to use that can go in your toolkit, but there are also some people who like to work and do their progress in bits and spurts, and that can be useful too. I do think small, consistent changes build really strong muscles for habits, but that doesn’t mean you have to work that way. It’s only one way to work. And if you’re able to work in kind of blurts and spurts without burning out, that can be a viable way of doing things too.

So, to explain a little bit more about what I mean, sometimes people, when they are working only in what I’m calling “blurts and spurts,” which I just made up or maybe it’s already a thing that I heard somewhere else—I don’t know. I think I made it up. We’ll find out. When they work like that, it can be

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for a couple of reasons. Now, if it's because you're procrastinating and putting it off and feeling really anxious, and then like, Oh, fuck, I've got a deadline coming up, and you just hurry up and do the work, that is when I think you're more at risk of getting into burnout from that behavior, and that's where I think learning to break things down into smaller chunks that you can do in these little, tiny tidbits consistently—that's useful.

But if the way your brain works and the way your flow of work is is that you think about something for a really long time and then just sit down and you're able to write the whole thing, or if you work in this different kind of flow state where you are working in the blurts and spurts, there's nothing wrong with that.

I think what I'm worried about and why I wanted to do this podcast is a lot of us have learned very specific ways of being successful from a very young age, and then we're just trying to kind of force ourself to use those systems even when those systems aren't working for what we're trying to do or aren't working with who we are and how our brain operates. So, what I want to offer to you is that you have this whole toolkit, and what I want to do as your coach is to broaden your toolkit to broaden what's available for you to use.

So again, if consistency works for you, then it's a wonderful toolkit, but if you're trying to do it and it's not working for you, you don't have to force yourself to do it. You have complete authority and agency over how to do your work and how to get it done. As far as I'm concerned in our relationship with each other, you have complete authority and agency. As your coach, I'm going to offer you teachings and ideas. You get to decide what makes sense for you and what fits into your life and what you want to try.

Now, there may be some truth to, when you're at your workplace, there may be some rules about how you are supposed to work. But I think even those—when we get to know ourselves and our own working style—we can navigate those. And when we learn the other tools that I talk about, like

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knowing how to ask for what we want, knowing how to set boundaries, knowing how to work with people who have different working styles than us... We can kind of, I think, find a way to build our own path there, even if it looks a little bit different than how people typically do that job.

So basically, I think the overall thesis of this podcast episode is consistency is great, but don't be a fucking perfectionist about it, because when we're a perfectionist about it, we tend to blow it up, wind up in fuck-it mentality, and it doesn't work. What I want you to take away from the idea of consistency actually is more about—let's call it “accumulation.”

Whatever the habit or kind of thing you want to be able to do is, if you do it—and I would have previously said “consistently,” but in the spirit of this podcast I'm going to say if you do it many, many times, over and over... It doesn't have to be every day. It doesn't have to be in this very particular cadence. But if you do stuff over and over, you tend to get better at it. You tend to get further along. And if you let yourself revel in delight in the accumulation of that, then you will get somewhere and you will see your own progress.

Even if you miss a day here or there or you miss a week here or there, you will get somewhere, whereas when we're being a perfectionist about being consistent, it's kind of in our head. It's about having that perfect record. It's about never missing a day. It's about the perfectionism of the consistency rather than the accumulation of the consistency.

So, if we take some breaks here and there—if we're inconsistently consistent—it might take us longer to get to wherever we're trying to go. It might take us longer to get to our goal. Here's the thing though: I read this quote once in a book—I think it was a Tim Ferriss book—and it said, “The imperfect method you follow is better than the perfect method you fail at.”

I'm going to say that again. “The imperfect method you follow is better than the perfect method you fail at.” Being perfectly consistent would be great if it were possible. Over the course of a life though, I think you may find that it's not always possible and it's not always realistic, no matter how excellent

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we are at calendaring and breaking our tasks down into doable chunks and all of that.

Life is wild and full of surprises and interruptions. And whatever methodology we use that actually works with that and allows us to work with life the way it is—our lives—that's going to get you there. And yeah, your brain might be like, "Okay, but I could get there faster." But really, you can only get there faster if you can do the method that would get you there faster. If you're not actually able to do the method that would get you there faster, then the idea that you could get there faster is a lie.

Okay. So, to recap, consistency is a great tool when we can separate it from perfectionism and when we can allow ourselves to be consistent in a way that's also human—in a way that also fits in with our wild, surprising, human life that's full of interruptions and distractions and all kinds of interesting shit. And when we think that we should be perfectly consistent, we tend to slow ourselves down, because then we go into that fuck-it mentality any time we step out of the consistency.

So, the fastest way to get anywhere—the fastest way to get to your goal—is the way that you can get there that you can actually do. It's not the imagined fantasy version in your head of how a person could potentially get there. That's not real. Maybe someone else can do it. Good for them.

If you can't actually do it that way, it's not a real option, and I would invite you to let that shit go and think about what way you could get there. What way could work for you. What way could be inconsistently consistent or what way could be accumulative. Or if you, like I was talking about before, are one of those people who works in spurts, how can you work in the spurts in a way that helps you get to where you want to go while also allowing you to be who you actually are along the way?

Coaching tools can allow us to up-level our behavior and up-level our mindset and up-level the way that we engage with the challenges in our lives, but they don't turn us into unfeeling robots who can just be perfectly consistent and never have an interruption in our life. And I think that's really

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important to know because if that's what you expect from yourself, you're going to be disappointed a lot.

Also, who wants to be a fucking unfeeling robot? That does not sound fun to me. Listen, if you're like, Actually, I do, I get it, because on the one hand, some days my brain does think that would be very convenient, but like, do you really want that? Probably not.

So, whatever goal you have that you've been thinking you just have to be more consistent to get there, I'm going to invite you to think about it differently and to think about like, "How can I get there while being inconsistently consistent? How can I get there while being a human with a human life with surprises and interruptions?"

What's better than consistency? Maybe what's better than consistency is you showing up even after you've been inconsistent. Maybe the thing that gets you there isn't taking all those tiny, perfect steps, but maybe the thing that gets you there is you coming back to taking tiny—or big—steps after a moment when you didn't take any. I think you'll be amazed and delighted at where you can get to and even how fast you can get there while being human and inconsistent when you do things this way.

And if you love what I teach and you want some help taking things a little bit deeper and figuring out how this all applies to your own life, I've got good news for you. I've got space for a few new one-on-one coaching clients starting this month, so let's hop on a call. I'll give you some coaching right away to help you get going, and if it seems like a good fit, I will share with you how we can work together. Just head on over to my website and click on the "Work with Me" button and get started there.

Also, bonus: my coaching offering is totally virtual so as to better serve my global audience, and yes, I do work with people who are not native English speakers, and we've had great success doing that. There's even a testimonial on my website with someone in that category, so you can check that out on the testimonials page.

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All right, y'all. Have a lovely week and I will talk to you next time. Bye.

Thank you for listening to *Love Your Job Before You Leave It*. We'll have another episode for you next week. And in the meantime, if you're feeling super fired up, head on over to korilinn.com for more guidance and resources.