

Ep #120: Entertain the Opposite Thought



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With Your Host

Kori Linn

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This week we're talking about how to entertain the opposite thought.

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.

Hello, hello, hello. Happy Wednesday. How are you? I'm doing really well. It's been sunny for the last few days, so I'm really enjoying that. And this past weekend, I went a few out of town to Sonoma County, where there are redwoods. I think I was in Sonoma County.

Anyways, I went to the redwoods. There are a lot of those in various places, but the ones I went to were in Guerneville and Occidental, Sebastopol, and Forestville. And if that sounds like a lot of places, it's really like one area, but we drove around to see different trees and eat at different restaurants.

And that's like my favorite thing ever is being in giant, beautiful redwoods with like beautiful ferns down on the ground level. The big, big evergreens and the ferns on the ground level and that moist, damp air really reminds me of the trees that I loved in Seattle. So I really love getting to have the experience just a few hours outside of Sacramento.

And then as you all know, I'm sure, because I talk about it all the time, I love to eat and drink. So I had some amazing food. Alex took me on this fancy tasting menu, which was actually a Christmas present from 2020 if you can believe it.

Originally we were going to go to this fancy place on an island outside of Seattle. And the first date we had, we had to reschedule. And then the second date we had, we had to cancel entirely because we moved to California. And the move to California, it kind of went from like, "This is an idea we have," to like, "Okay, we're doing this," pretty quickly.

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So we didn't have time to go and have that tasting menu. And then we moved to California. And it was like something that I had in the back of my head to schedule, but I didn't know that many restaurants down here. There was a restaurant I was interested in, but it was like we had reached out to them, and we weren't having any luck getting on their calendar.

So when I started sort of falling for that area near Guerneville and the trees that are over there and wanted to spend more time there, I actually discovered that there was a really fancy restaurant over there. So that's where we went, and we had some really amazing food. I had a really spectacular champagne, which I love.

And we had some great food not at that restaurant too. We had a great lunch where we got this grilled cheese that had like spare rib in it, which I was like, "Do I want spare rib in my grilled cheese?" And the answer was yes. It was really, really yummy.

Anyways, now that I've made you hungry and want to hang out in trees, you're welcome. Go have something delicious and hang out in some trees near where you are if you're into that. And let's also take some time to talk about a really cool skill that's going to help you have a better experience at work and in all the other areas of your life too.

And that skill is entertaining the opposite thought. So this is something I teach, and I've probably even talked about it on the podcast before. But I was talking to a client a few months ago, and I asked them something, and the client was like, "Oh, entertain the opposite thought."

That was what they had said back to me about either like that's what had worked that had made a situation better or that was the skill that they were going to use. I don't really remember because we had this conversation a while ago.

But I wrote it down that I was like, "Ooh, I want to for sure do a podcast about that." And I think it's such a powerful skill. So we talk all the time on the podcast about how the human brain has a negativity bias, and our brain

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gives so much more attention and so much more weight to things that aren't working.

And so what that can look like in our career is if sometimes we're confident about our work and sometimes we feel self-doubt about our work. But the brain gives so much more attention and so much more weight to negativity, then we're going to be feeling like a lot more of that doubt than the confidence. Because again, the brain is like, "Oh, this is really important, and that confidence is less important. Pay less attention to that." Right?

So when we have this tool of entertaining the opposite thought, what that allows us to do is it allows us to get out from under the negative story. And so what I really want to point out here is a lot of times in life, you're going to have both. And probably both thoughts could sound true. Like you could have the thought, "I'm actually really not sure if I can do a good job on this project." But you could also have the thought, "I've done a really good job on some projects before."

And so, with the negativity bias, your brain will probably want to fixate on, "I'm really not sure if I can do a good job on this project." And so, "I've done a good job on some projects before" is not exactly 100% opposite, so it doesn't have to be 100% opposite. But it can be opposite in spirit, or it can be 100% opposite. The opposite of "I'm really not sure I can do a good job on this project" is "maybe I can do a really good job on this project, right?"

So just like "I'm not sure I can do a good job," it's not like, "I'm sure I'm going to do terribly." So we don't have to be uber positive. We don't have to be like, "I'm sure I'll definitely do the best job, and I'll get all the awards." Because sometimes that's too big of a leap. And then it feels kind of fakey, and it doesn't actually help us get going. And sometimes it makes us feel more upset because we don't believe that at all.

So when I say to entertain the opposite thought, let's be really clear, it's like taking the thought you're thinking that's bothering you. And then think about different versions of it that could be the opposite. And then you want to find one that you can sort of like get a foothold on, right? So if it's this project is

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kind of scaring me, then it's like maybe I can do this project. Or maybe there's a part of this project I know for sure. Or I've done other things that scare me in the past. Maybe it's possible I can do it.

So it's pretty simple, right? It's basically figuring out what you're thinking that's creating negative outcomes for you. So like, figure out what you're thinking that's causing self-doubt. Figure out what you're thinking that's causing fear and you're not taking action. Figure out what you're thinking that's causing a blocker of some kind. Figure out what you're thinking that's making it difficult for you to have an open conversation with your boss, blah, blah, blah.

Figure out what you're thinking, and at least entertain the opposite thought. And by entertain, I really love entertain here because it's not like getting married to the opposite thought. It's not like building an altar to the opposite thought. It's just asking you to be willing to create space for the possibility that there could be some truth in the opposite of this.

And I think this is really interesting because this is also going to help you step out of that all-or-nothing thinking. So all-or-nothing thinking is like either I'm great, or I'm a piece of shit, right? I laugh when I say that because I would like never talk about myself or y'all, but that is the kind of stuff our brain says sometimes, right? Our brain is like, "I'm the greatest, or I'm terrible," right? That's that all-or-nothing thinking that our brain sometimes wants to get into.

And all-or-nothing thinking is one of the key thought errors that can create a lot of problems for people in their lives and careers. And so entertaining the opposite thought, it's like you don't even have to convince yourself that the thought that you were having is untrue. It's just like, what else could be true?

And I love the idea of the opposite thought. I call this, it's a Missy Elliott reference; put that thought down, flip it, and reverse it. So like, what's the opposite? But you can also do this sort of like points of a star, right?

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So I just think about like the star that I draw the most easily is like a five-pointed star. So if this is one point on the star, what are four other points that could be on the star? What are four other ways of looking at this situation? So you can entertain the opposite thought, or you can just entertain alternate thoughts.

Again, what I like about the opposite is it's that 180 degrees. It's that full flip. But sometimes, for some situations and some people, just coming up with like a bunch of different thoughts can also be useful. Another way I talk about this sometimes with clients, or I think about it myself, is like looking out windows of a house, right?

So if I'm looking out the back window, and then I see a view from there, that's like one view from the house. But what would happen if I looked out the front window? What would happen if I went upstairs and looked out the upstairs window? What would happen if I looked out the side window? What would happen if I went all the way out on the porch?

So every view that you have from the house is true in a way, but it's not the full truth. It's not all the options. And so when you think about entertaining the opposite thought, it's like looking at it from the opposite perspective or go from a different vantage point. What can you see? How is that different? And which of the ways of looking at it are going to allow you to show up in the way you want to show up and to create the results you want to create?

Okay, so up till now, we've been kind of, and I don't think I said this explicitly necessarily, but we've kind of been thinking about this through the lens of you're having a shitty experience, and you want to be having a better experience. You're feeling self-doubt, and you want to feel self-confidence, right? That was the example I gave, was like, maybe I can't do this to maybe I can do this. Or what's some evidence that you've done similar stuff in the past? Or what's some evidence that you've overcome difficult things?

Now, let's also just take a minute, and this might make y'all's brains hurt just a little, but let's go there, y'all. You can also use this the other way. So

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if you're feeling really good about something and really confident about something, first of all, congratulations, that's super fun. I love it when I'm in that headspace. And also, if you want to be really strategic and you want to think about things that could go wrong, you can also use this tool there, right?

So I want to be really clear, I am not inviting you to go into a headspace where you're just obsessing about everything that could go wrong and worrying. This is not an invitation to worry. It's not an invitation to doubt. It's more about what's that full picture knowing that multiple things can be true, right?

So Stacey Boehman, I've heard her teach about this, and she calls it strategic pessimism, which I think she actually mentioned that she learned from someone else. But I could not find out via Google search who exactly she learned it from. But the basic idea is when you're going to do something, sometimes you want to think on purpose about things that could go wrong so you can plan for them, okay?

So if you are having an amazing experience, like let's say you're applying for a new job and you're thinking about how confident you are, you're certain you could do a good job, you're certain you have all the best experience. And it's like, you're going to crush it, right? You're just feeling so good about it.

First of all, that's super fun. Congratulations, I love that for you. But let's say you're like, okay, but just to be super prepared for this interview, I also want to entertain the opposite thought. So if there were a way I'm not a good match for this, what would that be? If there were concerns that the hiring company could have, what might those be? If there were a question that could trip me up in the job interview, what might that be?

And again, we're not brainstorming this out so we can feel shitty and doubt ourselves. We're brainstorming this out so that we can answer that, right? So if you do this in that direction and you're like, "Oh, how would I not be a

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good fit?” And then you can come up with a really compelling answer to overcome that.

Let’s just say in the job interview they would say, “Hey, are there any ways in which you’re not a good fit for this role?” Now you’ve already thought that through. Or if they say, “Hey, it seems like you have this experience. Can you explain how that’s relevant?” And you’ve done this thing where you’ve strategically thought through the ways you wouldn’t be a good fit, you can answer that.

And you can answer it like both about like if there are ways you think you really wouldn’t be a good fit, you can be clear about that because I actually think it’s really beneficial in job interviews to be yourself and tell the truth. Because once you get the job, then you have to be in the job, right? So when we sort of pretend and act differently to get a job, then you get more of what you signed up for, right?

It’s like if you pretend to be someone else and you get the job, are you going to keep pretending to be someone else? Or are you going to come clean? I just don’t think it makes sense. But again, that doesn’t mean we’re not strategic and excellent storytellers in explaining how we’re skilled and a good fit for something.

So I’m kind of saying a lot of different things at once here, which is sort of always the way that I do things. But basically, if you are having negative thoughts about yourself, your capacity, your capabilities, and your ability to create a life and career that’s satisfying as fuck to you, you can entertain the opposite thought to figure out the ways that you do know how to do it.

You do know what to do. You do know things you’ve done powerfully in the past. You do know things you can be confident about yourself. And you do know a few things you could do to get started. You do know ways that you could make yourself a more powerful candidate. Or you do know ways that you can tell a better story about how to get a raise or a promotion, et cetera, et cetera.

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And if you feel really confident, you can use this skill set in the opposite way to brainstorm out and plan how you would handle hiccups, disruptions, objections from other people, et cetera. And as always, this is a useful skill in so many other areas also, right?

Like if you're having an interpersonal conflict with somebody and it's not a work thing, and your brain has a thought like, "We'll never work this out," then you could entertain the opposite thought, and it could be like, if we were able to work this out, how could we work this out? What might it be like to work this out with this person?

Maybe it's possible I could work this out because I worked this other thing out. Maybe it's possible we could work this out because I've done this other hard thing that I didn't think was possible. Even if it's an example that isn't 100% relevant, you can still use this to like bolster and galvanize and tell a story that's powerful about your capacity.

And when we do that, options become obvious to us. It's like this is going to sound silly or like magic, but it's not. Whatever headspace we're in, those options will become obvious. So when we feel despair or overwhelmed or like it's never going to work, then our brain is like, well, you need to quit your job, or quit this relationship, or move to a different country.

Listen, I know that maybe it sounds melodramatic, but I spend a lot of time with my human brain. I mean, like, all of my time, I guess, obviously. And my brain says stuff like this all the time. There have been so many times when my brain is like, "Well, this is hard. So I guess you have to quit your business." And I'm like, "Thanks, brain. We're not going to do that. And so, yeah, it's hard, but what if we can figure it out?" Right? So that's entertaining the opposite thought.

I'm not even like always arguing with my brain about its assessment. If my brain says something's hard, I tend to just be like, okay, yeah, it's hard. But maybe we can do it. So what? Hard things can be fun. Hard things can be things we still do, and they can be powerful, and we can do them, and then

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that becomes evidence that we're capable of doing hard things. And then that's going to help us do other hard things in the future, and it's great.

And then, again, the opposite, like if you have really great and powerful thoughts about something, but you want to set yourself up to be resilient around that thing, you can explore opposite thoughts. Not to wallow in them and build a house in them and live in them and move from confidence into despair. That's not what we're doing.

But just so you can plan for, like, oh, I feel so good about my relationship today right now. I feel so confident. But if I didn't feel confident, how might I want to handle that? Or what might I want to keep in mind? Or how do I want to plan for that? Because humans we're variable, right? We are changeable. And we're not always in the same mood.

And even when we do coaching, and even when we do therapy, and even when we do all these things to set ourselves up to have great lives and be successful, some days we feel amazing, and some days we're fucking grumpy and shit. And so being able to use this tool both ways, and using it both ways but still to create a wildly satisfying life and career for you, is extremely powerful.

As I'm always saying on this podcast, I believe so deeply in your capacity to have a wildly satisfying and delicious, and incredible life and career. And I believe that you are the one who will create that for yourself. And I'm so excited to see you do that.

And also, we're having like a wonderful party of a time creating that in my one-on-one and group coaching practices. And I want to be clear; I don't think that my coaching is the only way for you to have these things. I think you are the magic in your life. And also, this work is hard sometimes, and it's not always easy to do alone. And if you want to come have like a party experience of doing it, and if you want to like laugh and cry, and like do little Zoom dances and have an exceedingly good time, I think that this program could be a magnificent fit for you.

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And I think if you can have fun doing this work, why not have fun doing it? And if you can do it with a community, whether it's one-on-one with a community of me and you, or whether it's part of my group coaching program where you're meeting all these wonderful humans and building fantastic lifelong relationships with them, I think that's just a spectacular way to do this work.

And if that sounds like something that would just make your 2023 delicious as fuck, I want you to come sign up for a consult call with me, and let's talk about how these programs could benefit you and whether they're a good fit for you.

All right. I would love to see you there. And I'll see you next week. Have a lovely week, and I'll 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.