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## SPEAKERS

Hailey Thomas, Jessica Abel



Hailey Thomas 00:01

Welcome to the brain space optimized podcast. This is the place where creative entrepreneurs get the insight and inspiration they need to become the best versions of themselves. I'm Haley and I run brain space optimized where I help establish small business owners execute on their goals while keeping their sanity intact. This week, we're talking with cartoonist, author and coach Jessica Abel about practical visioning and goal setting. I love this conversation. Because while everyone might like the idea of goal setting, it's hard to pinpoint a method of execution that really works. There are lots of options out there frameworks, calendars, programs, and math to make your head spin. But in this episode, Jessica and I get really practical about a simple process to help you distinguish between vision casting goal setting and actually achieving your plans. Specifically, we dropped some knowledge on how to translate your vision into actionable tasks, and how to navigate a few of the major roadblocks to accomplishing your goals. If you're someone who gets a little turned around and stuck on the planning portion things This episode is for you. Heck, even if you don't, this conversation will help you create a simple plan of attack that you can start using today. So without further ado, my conversation with Jessica Abel. Right, Jessica, welcome to the show.



Jessica Abel 01:22

Thanks for having me. Yeah, I'm so psyched to talk about what is one of my favorite topics and probably yours based off of what I know about you, but about goal setting and

about execution.

**H** Hailey Thomas 01:33

To start, I realized we might be in the minority about people who like this. I like talking about goal setting. So why do you think that is?

**J** Jessica Abel 01:42

Oh, I don't think we're in the minority. I think people love setting goals. They just don't like making choices about goals. Yeah.

**H** Hailey Thomas 01:50

Very different things. So I mean, I don't know about you, but I've been making all kinds of crazy goals for life and mostly not fighting following through on them or really thinking about what they meant for me in the long run, like, did I want to have achieved this goal in the long term? You know, all those things are kind of new to me in the last. I mean, it's been this gradual ramp up over many, many, many years to the point where, you know, I feel like now I have some sense of alignment with my goals. Yeah. Do you do you make any kind of distinction between like, goals and visions, because in my mind, and I just recently been doing this own work of figuring out, you know, like you said, people have goals or ideas or visions about where they want to be and who they want to be and how they want to operate in the world. But do you make do you make any sort of distinction between like visions and goal setting

**J** Jessica Abel 02:45

100% I think that's a super important thing to get control of, because the problem is, with most goals is that they actually more like visions. They're more like this is a direction I want to go or thing I envisioned myself having Done. Not here's what I want to be doing over the next few months. So when I work with my own clients, I, we have a thing that we do called vision quest, which is sort of a dorky name, but it's like little thing where you sort of think about where you want to be in five years. And it's really about, you know, who you want to be with, where do you want to be working, what kind of style of working you want to be doing those kinds of things, as well as the literal work, you know, is if there's specific things you want to have achieved by then that's also part of the vision and you create a statement and one of the things I do is have them write a bio for themselves, and five years, but that's really a it's a vision, and it's intended to change. And that's, I think, big

sort of pieces the wrong word, but like a piece of permission, sort of element of permission that people need, which is like, when I say I'm going to do that, I want this, it doesn't mean I'm going to do exactly this. It means this right now is my vision for the direction I want to go. And it becomes kind of guard rails for the choices that you're making. Now if you can kind of pull yourself in the right direction toward that lodestar, then you can make decisions that make more sense in the present term. But I really actually don't recommend anybody makes goals, actual goals that run past about 90 days. Because I don't think our brains can wrap themselves around any more than that.

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Hailey Thomas 04:18

Yeah, I agree with you on so many points I want to like pick up. But I think one of the things that I kind of want to do with our conversation is put some loose frameworks around goal setting and goal execution. And one of the big pieces we just identify identified was the vision piece, right, that goes first. And it's totally fine that it's not wildly, you know, in depth or wildly, like complicated, right, it's a general direction, it's guardrails. And I like the way that you had said that. And the most important part is that it's likely to change, right? Like, that's, that's the thing that's, that's going to change and so it's okay. I know when I was in corporate, I used to be an HR, right and so, we would do these like visioning things with employees and like, I feel like I was a type of person that wanted to have it so specific and like, and then not want to move any element of that right? So if I said I was going to live in x town then like, I better end up in x town like I was way too intense for what should be kind of this lighter, more general visioning portion I actually

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Jessica Abel 05:22

say that people should expect them to change and want them want their vision to change because, you know, one of the biggest things that happens once you start achieving goals that may last anywhere from like a week to, you know, three months or whatever, and you're, you're sort of churning through stuff that you want to be doing is that you learn a lot. You learn a lot about what you like and what you don't like, and what you're what you feel comfortable with and what's inspiring to you and you develop new passions that have to do with your new expertise, you know, and that is going to change the direction of your vision. So in your example with like x town, it's like, well, what if you went and visited x town? You're like, Yeah, not so much. You know, now I know, this isn't what I want or that the industry that you suddenly are interested in has no footprint in x town. And so why would you want to go there? And so looking and sort of testing your vision against like, has this changed? Like, does it change in reflection of what's actually happening in my life? It Am I being flexible with this is actually I think, a good stress test for it.

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Hailey Thomas 06:26

Yeah, I think that's an excellent component. I think, generally speaking, when, when we are I'll even say myself a couple years ago with think about this whole process of, you know, visioning goal setting, setting up little projects, there wasn't a lot of flexibility, like I didn't allow myself a lot of flexibility to it, or a lot of ability to change nor did I view it as an experiment, you know, like as pay the these are thoughts or visions that I'm having, and I should expect for them to be tested

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Jessica Abel 06:53

and some of them might fail the stress test, and that's fine. But I think that comes with I don't know, maybe like a perfectionist Do you feel like your clients struggle with that? And in what ways do they struggle with that concept? The idea of trying to stick to things too firmly? Yeah, well, there's a concept that I talked about called idea debt that the name comes from katha shoes a really great cartoonist who's done this big seven volume book called amulet and we're gonna TV show like he's done a lot of stuff, right. But he's, I did an interview with him he talks about this idea, this this concept of idea debt and what he kind of meant by it is, so he gave me a metaphor, which is was snowboarding so he used to go snowboarding a lot and he would see these young guys like hanging out and you're the big jumps. like as if they're studying them to like, get it right. But he's like, as they're standing there, they're getting colder. You know, they're physically getting colder, their muscles are not warmed up the same way they were but also the idea of how they have to hit that jump is getting more and more overwhelming. You know, they're getting it's going larger and larger. And so I took that idea. And he was basically, in his own case talking about perfectionism. Like, if you think too much about the end result of something and how it's going to hit the world, then it's going to stop you. And I can't let that happen, because I'm doing something really big. That's what he kind of meant by it, but actually broke it into two pieces, which is that's one piece of it. And I certainly have plenty of people who feel that way about their goals. But the other piece, which has more to do with your question is what I call idea to type n for nostalgia, which is like things you decided you were going to do your projects you're going to do in the past that has to do with a past version of yourself, you have not altered your vision, enough to reflect your current reality and you still feel like you kind of owe it to your past self to do this thing to finish this project. So you know, like, my clients tend to be people who mean I work with a really broad variety of people, but they come to me because they have creative work that they want to do. It can be professional work, it could be something more personal, but they want to do something that feels really big and overwhelming. And they're just continually not doing it. And it's always on the back burner, and it's driving them bananas, and they want to be doing that thing. So like, some of my clients as one of the things they

do, will not, usually they're not coming to me because they want to not do that's not the but I'm just as an example. Yeah, you know, they have like a thing that's unfinished, and they're like, I have to finish this thing. Well, it could be completely out of style by now or can be like an a color they don't like or it could be that they're not interested in knitting anymore. Because what they really want to be doing is writing their novel, you know, and how much time do you want to devote to knitting versus writing the novel, you can just unravel that thing and not do it, or you could give it to somebody else to finish or you could just throw it away? Like there are many options with this thing. That if you look at them openly and think, you know, what are my options and how do I feel about each of those options, then you can make a real decision about it. Whereas if you just think I should I should I should you just feel miserable, you don't do it and it stops you from doing everything else too. So it's



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a trade off and I think that is one of the things that can help. That is To see, okay, because I'm continuing to pursue this or or just hold on to this project in my brain or whatever. What am I losing? Right? What's the trade off there? I think that's completely legitimate. Do you have suggested rhythms, and we talked about 90 days and I want to talk about goal setting or project planning, kind of in those 90 day sprint, because that's what I work with my folks on as well. But do you have rhythms or help people set rhythms for identifying or like going back and combing through those things? How does that look for you and your clients?



Jessica Abel 10:29

I do. I recommend a 90 day review, like when you're doing your planning session that you review what you've done over the previous 90 days, but that's actually made much more robust if you follow, I think, an even more important rhythm that I suggest, which is the weekly review. So I have a course called the creative focus workshop and I do group coaching, involved with that. I also do individual coaching and I have a membership and in the membership and in all of those different all of those formats. I am currently harping on this idea of the weekly reflection, what are you going to, you know, the end of the week, find a time, find a time when you can actually sit down with yourself and think about how does your week go? You know, there's specific questions you go through, like a little format for that. And you know what happened, you know, what are you happy about? What can you celebrate and be really, you know, excited about what totally went off the rails? Can you identify why, what would you like to do differently next, you know, next week and and then actually doing some planning at that point, some strategic planning for like, what are your top priorities for the next week, and you keep all of those

and when you're doing your quarterly review, you read over them, and you get an arc of history for yourself and get a sense of like, you know, I was working with a person recently who when she finished her quarter, she had seriously done all her reflections and she had them all so she could review them. And she'd had a super difficult quarter like just a lot of personal stuff had happened. She was felt really, really overwhelmed by all kinds of things in her life. totally legitimate. You know, she was not making anything up. But she looked at it and she said, Wow, I actually took care of XYZ, like all these different things that had been sitting with me for years and had to get done. that had to do with, you know, resolving things in my life and getting my, you know, systems in order and making my, you know, making it possible for me to work on my novel, you know, and she felt really good about that, instead of feeling like I have failed again. So those, you know, and the other piece of this is reflection is how you actually learn. I mean, you can study all you want, but if you don't think back about how does this then apply to my life? How can I implement this in my life, then it's just wasted time. So I work really hard to get people to implement that weekly reflection. The quarterly thing is, I like people to plan, you know, quarterly quarter at a time sort of in larger arcs. But really, you know, we don't even think and in amounts of time that are that long. You know, it's really more like a few weeks at a time that we're really need to think about and focus on. And I also help people work through startup routines and shut down routines for their day that help people sleep better, you know, resolve anxiety and stuff because if you're doing some strategic planning just even five minutes in the evening for the next day, then you're able to put that stuff down and not

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Hailey Thomas 13:14

Yeah, actually rest actually rest Yeah, I want to talk a little bit about the weekly reflection so so when I was a virtual assistant and was sitting with like CEOs like I would make them meet with me every week and kind of do some of the things that you talked about and you know, specific questions that I work through myself and like we would do this thing together. And it was without a doubt the thing that people always when I would go to like a testimonial interview, they would go oh, this was the best part of working together. I was like, oh, not not all the other stuff I did. But they were like just the the habit getting in the habit of having that conversation mind you. This was with with me and not necessarily with themselves but just the the space to every Thursday at two o'clock. Haley's gonna call you and she's got these five questions and you know what they are, and then us together, being able to capture that and like help people move through that. So that's like, a piece for my virtual assistant time that I've brought over for that exact reason that you that you've said, is that it kind of creates a history for you that you can review and you can understand, and then you can go and do your planning. So let's

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Jessica Abel 14:23

say if you're an executive, and you have an assistant who can do this with you pay them to do this with you, like 100%, most of us, including me, don't have that, like, we don't have that luxury of having somebody else that we can sort of, you know, brain dump it too, and sort of, you know, have a little jam session on this stuff. And so that's why it's so important to try to find a way to do it individually, you know, and in my membership group, in the autonomous Creative Collective, we have a weekly post where people can share what they're thinking about. So it's one way to help make it a little bit more have a little bit more, not just accountability, but like, you know, reflection and feedback in it. Yeah, but it is I mean, it is something you have to learn how to find something in it for yourself, you know, for most of us

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Hailey Thomas 15:05

well, and like you said, it's, it's what I love about your offering is kind of that it gives a framework for you to practice, right? Because if this is new to you, you're probably going to be fairly bad. So it is accountability. But mainly, it's just like practicing right and figuring out what what things do I need to take down? How do I feel about this? It's just that practice. It's super important. So I fully agree. Yeah, totally

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Jessica Abel 15:28

agree with that. And if I don't do my own weekly review on Fridays, I feel like grubby, like things are wrong, you know. And so but like, you need to get with a habit, you need to get to the point where that is what you feel like if you don't get to the habit, you just feel like oh, that's not right. And because until you get to that point, you're going to be like, it's going to be optional.

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Hailey Thomas 15:47

Yes, that's another part of you know, visioning goal setting habits are kind of their own category as well. Right. And I think I was reading one of your posts that just said, was kind of making the case for habits versus goal setting and based off of this idea that we've talked about, right, which is kind of having this vision tells you kind of a general direction you want to go, the habits are the you embodying are like living out what that vision is that vision you have for yourself is, can you talk a little bit about how habits fit into the goal vision framework for you are set up for you?



Jessica Abel 16:21

Well, I mean, the habits are, that's how everything actually happens, you know, so you can set all the goals you want. But if you don't have the habit of sitting down to your work, if you're not able to, you know, implement that, then you really, you've got nothing, you know, you're not going to get make any progress on it. And so you can almost skip that middle particle setting. Like if you know, which way you want to go and you know, big picture what the projects are you want to work on, you can basically just sit down and work on those things. And as long as you have the habit of doing it, you're going to get where you want to get. Now I think that setting goals is important and it is really helpful, but it can undermine you too because you can get too hung up on the idea like I think said I was going to get this done by November. It's not done. What am I, you know, what's wrong with me? You know, there's all kinds of other things that can happen that can screw you up with goals. I think in some ways, the purpose of goals more than anything else is just to break down the big steps toward the vision into smaller chunks so that you can kind of just implement habits having to do with that, yeah. But the big thing with with my people is generally that developing the habit, and this is I think this is true with almost, I mean, basically I work with, as well as creative people who are writers and, you know, visual artists and cartoonists, and audio makers and all that other stuff. I also work with lots of people who are entrepreneurs, and they're, you know, consultants and coaches and things and basically, anybody who is everyday has to sit up set, you know, sit down and invent their life. You know, life has to figure out what to do, what to choose how to move forward, has to create offerings for people and, you know, do various kinds of writing and processing of information in that's all consistent with what, what I talk about. And I say that because I I know that some people in your audience are going to be like, oh, Jessica doesn't, you know, she doesn't know what's going on with me. But it's like me and my own business. This is this is what I deal with. Right? So I am a creative in the sense that like big secretive, and I'm a cartoonist and an author. But as a business owner, I deal with this all the time. Also, these still have to develop that habit of sitting down to do the hard stuff and ignoring reactivity for a certain period of the day. Because reactivity is our main default mode. Anybody saying I want something I need something is going to overrule your own priorities. So if you haven't set priorities, that's the goal setting part. If you haven't made decisions about what's important, what's not important, if you haven't decided what you're going to do, what's your most important thing to do today? And then, making that habit like implementing that habit where you sit down and focus on the things that are most important to you is not going to it's not going to gel, and you have to feel like you have the right to do that, like you have the right to take your time for yourself and your own priorities and put Other people aside, and that's really hard.

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Hailey Thomas 19:06

Hey there, we'll get back to the episode in just a minute. But first, I have a quick question for you. Are you running your business? Or is it running you? You've gotten to where you are, because you've been willing to put in the hard work and the long hours, you've said yes to opportunity and have tried things even when you felt uncomfortable. And now, well, now you might find yourself feeling pretty chronically over committed. The clients want a piece of you, team members want a piece of you, and those lingering projects and last month, they want a PC, YouTube, and all the while you've got a much bigger goal in mind. The problem is finding the space to turn that goal into a reality. All this month, we're talking about carving out the space you need to focus on high level priorities. How would your life in business be different if you had the space to step out of your day to day activities, and devote yourself to making significant progress on the projects that really matter to you? I want to help you Make the space to turn your goals into a reality. I want to help you carve out your very own white space and take a big leap forward with your small business. That is what the CO work treat is all about. I'll be your personal guide for a three day all inclusive working retreat, you bring your most important high level projects, and I'll bring my skills as a coach and project manager. I also bring my own team along to help you make extraordinary progress towards your goal. By the end of our time together, you will have worked on three of your most high priority projects. You have taken the time to recharge and have fun and encouraging environment, new rafal massively in control and accomplished. To learn more about working with me on a co work treat and schedule a free consultation. email me directly. I'm Haley at brain space optimized calm. That's h Al le y at brain space optimized.com. Okay, back to the episode.

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Jessica Abel 20:57

What do you hear from your clients is the challenge With that, because I agree, I find I usually work with those entrepreneurs and are having similar conversations. What's the challenge for people when it comes to investing time or money and working with someone like one of us to do those things or to learn how to do those things? I mean, I think it varies a little bit. There's a range and but I would say the top things are struggling with being a real pleaser, somebody who really, really oriented towards other people's needs, and it has a really hard time honoring their own priorities. That's one thing. So how do you learn to say no, and make healthy boundaries, people who struggle a ton with distraction, and just can't stay off the Twitter or whatever, you know, like, how do you how do you make that hat, you know, and again, that's about prioritizing what's really important to you because you know, it's more important to you than those distractions. But being reactive feels more rewarding in the moment like facing your own stuff feels emotionally really fraught and difficult. So and then You know, perfectionism, so fears

about where it's going to go, you know, and so much of this is social, you know, so many of these things have to do with our feelings about what people are going to think about us what people feel about us, and really not feeling like it's okay for us to just want what we want, you know, to make the things we want to make. It's weird, because I got into this initially, into this sort of coaching piece and teaching out of helping people to do project planning, like how do you break down big project? Yeah. Which is a big deal when you're trying to make like a huge graphic novel, and it's going to take several years, like doing project planning is, you know, it's hard. But what I realized immediately, basically, is that most of it sits in the emotional side, you know, having incredible amounts of sort of insecurity and self doubt about an anxiety about, am I doing enough? What are people going to think of me? How can I spend time on my thing when other people need me, you know, that whole constellation of stuff. It's really, really difficult.

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Hailey Thomas 22:58

That's exactly what I'm finding what I'm seeing Where my business is situated as a project planner. So I definitely see all of small business or at least like solo printer shopper when you're when you're creating anything feels like it's also this, you know, self help journey, like the self discovery journey, right? It's all like wrapped up into one and you're constantly learning about yourself and learning to overcome or to, honestly, sometimes just like, Listen to yourself and work with the way that you actually work, which I think is a big deal and a big piece of it. People will say like, oh, which project management tools the best and which, you know, what should I use for my to do list and my task and yada, yada? And I feel like some people are surprised when they find out that I'm a project manager. And also, I do not care about tools pretty much at all. So I love tools. Don't get me wrong. I mean, I love all Yeah, I like them. But I'm not like I'm not like, I don't think there's a tool that's going to solve the thing. You know what I mean? It has much more to do with the individual and the particular of the project and the team and what the outcome suppose To be, but I don't feel like there's like a tool to rule them all. If that makes sense. It's going to like magically make things better. I feel like usually the conversations that I end up having are around their current rhythms for creating and writing and communicating and their current rhythms for, you know, doing their strategy time and that like, all those can be put into any any of the tools. But okay, but have you tried notion because it's amazing. Yes. So great. Okay, so here's, well, actually, let me back up

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Jessica Abel 24:26

now. But let me just say quickly, that was a joke, because I agree with you that the tools are not Yeah, not the key that I put tools at the very end of my training, you know, the end of my course. It's like, once you've already figured out all this other stuff. Okay. Well, let's

put it someplace and we start with what you have, you know, you already have systems you already have, you know, I call it operating systems. You know, what, how do you run things now, okay, well, some of these things are broken, so let's fix those. But it's not about implementing some brand new fancy shiny dashboard. Yeah, unless this notion like notion in which case?

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Hailey Thomas 25:02

Well, so here's the funny thing about notion, which I think fits into this conversation. So I have some clients that are fairly creative, and they're in the UX and the design space. And I've got a couple of, you know, different clients in that, that, like, usability is super important to them. And, you know, flexibility is super important to them. And then like notion comes up, and everyone is like, so pumped about notion, but I almost feel like when you flip around kind of the the, the setup that you just described, in which you put tools on the front end, it waste so much time, actually, because you're trying to like notion lets you design how you want your workspace to be, which I feel like can almost be a distraction to actually doing the work. And so I had this whole conversation about like, yeah, we can, or, you know, for one team, I was like, yeah, let's use notion. We're going to use it in this way, in that way, and that's fine. And then for another person, I was like, actually, we're not going to use this because it actually is giving you way too much freedom right now. And this is not the thing. The other thing is doing the things so let's just pick a tool that has some frameworks that we can just, you know, put our stuff into versus like, let's build one in ocean. So anyway, that was my like,

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Jessica Abel 26:06

I'm like somebody who really started on ocean totally. And I absolutely agree with that. I mean, I, to me, I'm working with who his team is in Asana and, and it's a total distraction for him. He goes in there and he gets lost. I mean, I don't like Asana very much anyway, so I sort of like, Sure, it's very functional for certain kinds of things. But I totally understand that that mindset, but I'm like, okay, you need to not be an Asana. Like, right, you need to go in, like the day before and get the three things out that you need and put them on a post it notes, you don't have to look at this thing. So it's the same kind of thing where it's like, you can get lost in the tech up so easily. You can just be, you know, noodling forever, you know, and one of the things I, I try to say often is to upgrade these things opportunistically, so when you need something, make it or fix it. You know, like, you're going to spend some time on it at that point, but don't go back into ancient history. and fix all of your stuff from 20 years past like, I would do that I'm just saying I have done that right thing. But like don't do that don't be me because it doesn't it does not serve you to

try to like retro actively get everything you know, and the research you did you know, 10 years ago on this topic may or may not be relevant, if you find you need it, then you need to upgrade it and get it into current format. If you don't need it, it never comes back again. And just permission to not look at all of those piles of things that are sitting around and just never, never do anything with them.



27:35

Yes, and all the various tools and things.



Hailey Thomas 27:38

Um, so talk to me a little bit about how this these ideas that you have around, you know, vision and goal setting and execution and habits. How have those developed over time for you like, it seems like they were kind of sort of happening and then you started getting pretty intentional about you know, digging into this stuff and kind of creating your own thoughts around it. How it This transformed over time.



Jessica Abel 28:03

Well, I'm a cartoonist originally. And so doing graphic novels and long form stuff. And in the mid aughts, I was my career was going well, I had a lot of good stuff going on, but it was totally overwhelming. It's so much stuff. And I and I'd always had lots of lists and lots of whatever's and you know, five year plan type things and whatever, but they just were kind of all around and but I was looking and I don't remember exactly how this played out, because it's a long time ago now. But like, I was looking actively for, you know, a new tool, basically, how do I manage my stuff, and I came across, getting things done through 43 folders, which was Merlin man's blog, and through from that through to me focus eventually. And so the idea of the brain dump and kind of the open loops sweep and finding all this stuff was life changing for me because suddenly I didn't have to think about everything all the time. So the level of sort of Moment to moment tension and anxiety that I felt dropped normally at that point and then it kind of went along with that for you know model you know modifying that a little bit year in year out and implemented the weekly review that's you know, the Getting Things Done style, I still use Omni focus as my main thing even though it doesn't integrate with stuff and I want you know, I love it so I can't get rid of it yet but like, I'd like to have been one place but I'm so that basic task management orientation I got a long time ago and I'm actually really still trying to shed that now. And I feel like the the getting things done. methodology is really I incorporate some of that into my own stuff. You know, it's it's a really important piece of the overall

picture but what you do is you lose sight of your bigger goals and visions when you're in that pile of stuff. And my impression and you know, he does talk about doing a David Allen does talk about doing these kind of like, reviews at like higher altitudes and kind of getting a sense of, you know, the big on various areas in your life, but my impression from his basically like if you get everything into your system and you keep chipping away at at all, and you just look at whatever is your next action available, you're just looking at the next actions view and you're just doing next actions. Eventually you'll do everything. Like eventually everything will happen. You know, that's kind of the impression you get, or I got any way from the book back on, which is just bananas. Like, it's totally, I was looking for the right word here. I don't know what to say like it is not right. Like you are never. I'm sorry to tell your listeners this. You are never going to finish your to do list. Oh my gosh, Jessica, are you kidding me? Never. It's never it never ends never going to happen. And so the idea that you would be working towards finishing a list as a goal is ridiculous, and it's going to waste your life. And so having this constant view of like, all the things that you want to be doing is one of the things that actually I think prevents people from getting work done. That's why I talked about picking topics And all this other stuff. I myself, I'm still in my list all the time, because I've been doing this now for whatever 1213 years, you know. So it's like a long, there's a long process there. But as I've done more research and taught people, especially as teaching, because like I started teaching the creative focus workshop in 2015, like the first pilot version was in 2015. And I've taught a whole bunch of cohorts, live cohorts, now it's going more evergreen, but with this, you know, robust membership support. So I'm talking to people who are doing this stuff all the time. And every time I talk to them, some of the same things get echoed and I learned new stuff every time and so a lot of what I feel now with the my ideas now come out of conversations with people who are struggling with these issues. So me coming into this initially, I'm like, Okay, well, here's how here's products versus tasks. Here's open loops here did it and we go directly into mindset, we go directly into what I call the should monster, after somebody something that a client post it, you know that she had a monster that drawn. And the idea that this is a sort of hovering, like I should be better at this kind of idea. And so my evolution sped up as soon as I started talking to people about this, you know, I did even I wrote a couple of textbooks about comics. And in the end of the arts, kind of the one came out in 2008, and one came out in 2012. And in there, there's some project management stuff, which is sort of basic stuff based on getting these done and how is working at the time. And it's kind of a snapshot of where I was at that point. But as soon as I started teaching people, everything changed, you know, my whole sort of attitude towards this stuff changed. And still now trying to not over schedule myself on a given day and to not look at my list all the time. And like, I really think I probably do need to get out of me focus even though I love it, because the format of it is such that you still see all that stuff and you lose sight of what your real priorities are, because you're looking at the little atomized tasks. All the time.

H

Hailey Thomas 33:01

Yeah, I appreciate you sharing that because I think, you know, as someone who teaches this stuff, right, like, you're still continuously in progress, right? Like you're always working on this, you're always and I don't even want to say improving because that I am improving it's okay for a while, but but that's what that means that, but evens using the word improving means that there's like a level of perfection you can get to, if that makes sense, which when really it's more like iterating you know, like your, your as your life demands different things and you're changing your your iterating on it versus like, moving into one direction to be the master because that's never going to happen, right? It's always going to be growing. So,

J

Jessica Abel 33:37

yes, agreed. And I think I am improving and I mean, I feel like my level of alignment with my true life goals like how I want to be living my life is so much better now than it was when I started doing this. And I think my students and clients for that, you know, they're the ones who've taught me and I've been able to, you know, my my focus and my synthesis my ability is to synthesize these these ideas into writing, you know, into my book growing gills and into what I do. And I put on my blog. And in the future, I hope you do another book. And it's like, that's what I can give back is, I'm hearing all these different voices, and I'm able to pull them together. And to give some kind of overview of that, but it changes me to do that. And, like we were saying, reflection is how you learn. Right? So I'm reflecting on this all the time. I want

H

Hailey Thomas 34:26

you to to answer this next question is if you're talking to somebody who is gonna, you know, take out their headphones from listening to this incredible episode, but like, take out their headphones, right? They're about to go about their day, and they're saying, Man, I really want to be better at this because mainly because I really have this goal or this vision that I'm moving towards, not just to be better at this for like the hell of being better at this, but because I really have this vision of what I want my life to be my work to be. Where do you tell them to start? What do you tell them to do as like a very first thing?

J

Jessica Abel 34:58

Honestly, my first step is People hate it. Perfect. Let's hear it. It's time shocking.



35:09

People people do hate them. I'm cracking.



Jessica Abel 35:12

Yeah, but I can tell you that I've had several clients who've stuck with me for like long periods of time, where that was the one the only key thing to everything else like that was the thing that unlocked everything. And for everybody, it's I try to treat time tracking in a light way where it's not about it's for you, right and and it's not about judging what's going on. It's really for data. And so I talk a lot about a I'm like the anti woo coach, I talk a lot about data and scientific mindset and you know, testing and changing and stuff like that. And the biggest piece of this is to say, okay, pretend you're a social scientist, and you're doing a time you survey of yourself. So every half hour you ping your And you're like, what's going on now? Fascinating. Instead of like, Oh my god, I can't believe I'm still on Facebook, you're like, you know, just take notes. Just interesting. That's so interesting. And just kind of take note of it and gather the data. And I usually say do two to three weeks of this, like half hour intervals. You don't have to do it. Like, if you're like, at work, time isn't a problem. Don't worry about doing that. But do it whenever you have control over your time, when you're making your own choices, and do it on papers, you can carry it around with you. And then at the end of that time, you really can draw some conclusions like what are your trigger points, like what's happening with you? Where are you going off the rails, when you intend to do one thing when what is happening instead? And this kind of it parallels like, I have people doing that while they're also doing an idea inventory list, which has to do with idea debt. The idea that concept is like writing down all the things you think you want to do. And then sorting through those things. They're doing a vision quest activity, where they're thinking about where do they want to take their lives. And in the background, there's time tracking going on. So those things go in parallel, because then they are much more mindful and cognizant of what's actually going on in their lives in that moment. So it's really hard to figure out how you can change something if you don't know what you're doing.



Hailey Thomas 37:17

Yes, I fully agree. And you're right, people absolutely hate it. But it's like, the thing that you do forever,



Jessica Abel 37:23

doesn't have to be forever, like, it's just a period of time you're doing a study, and then

you're going to be done. And if you find later that you are then you need it again, then you can do it again. You know, like, if something's going off the rails and you're like, why is everything weird? Then do time tracking for a week or two and figure it out? I love

 Hailey Thomas 37:40

that. That's an excellent place to start. Okay, so we're going to transition into the lightning round of questions. Are you ready?

 Jessica Abel 37:45

I am ready.

 Hailey Thomas 37:46

Okay, question number one. What are you reading right now?

 Jessica Abel 37:50

Nothing. I'm not reading anything right now. I finished a book and I'm in the middle of trying to do a whole bunch of work and I can't let myself worry because if I do, I will only do that. So

 38:01

Hundred percent Hear that?

 Jessica Abel 38:02

Yes, I hear I'm reading the new york times in the morning and that's it. Yeah, that's fair. And even that just headlines.

 38:09

Yeah. Oh gosh, that's rabbit holes everywhere. Okay. Question number two. If you got to make up a superpower based off of the things you're good at, what would your superpower be?

 Jessica Abel 38:21  
Future casting? like creating a future?

 Hailey Thomas 38:27  
Yeah, that's super cool. Yeah. Cool. That's a good one. Okay. Third question is zombie apocalypse. You need to leave your house, but you have a chance to gather up three things. What are three things you would take with you as you go to flee the apocalypse? And we have the standard caveat that our family and friends are safe, right? Yes, everybody's fine. Yeah.

 Jessica Abel 38:50  
Is there electricity in the future?

 Hailey Thomas 38:52  
Oh, I'm going to say

 Jessica Abel 38:54  
yes, but it's spotty. I probably want my laptop because everything's in there. All my writing. Everything, all the stuff and even though the internet's probably dead, I still would want it all my contact information Everything is there. So I want that. I know that's boring but truth that's that's the truth.

 Hailey Thomas 39:14  
Yeah. Yeah.

 Jessica Abel 39:16  
God What else would I want it from here? survival supplies maybe a large knife from my kitchen. Oh all right yeah, I've got some tools I could bring like a like a crowbar that would work that'd be

 39:28

really listen this is just an interview for who I'm gonna get you know came up with after

**J** Jessica Abel 39:32  
the apocalypse happens I'm really good at like physical stuff I can build things I'm like I know woodworking like I'm you know. Oh nice yeah so all right I can cook

**H** Hailey Thomas 39:41  
be fine I'm

**J** Jessica Abel 39:42  
garden I'm a gardener that's how I got all those things oh I actually have a survival like settlers Handbook of different skills I would definitely bring that.

 39:53  
Yes. Oh, that's super smart. I should probably get one of those books.

**J** Jessica Abel 39:56  
Yeah. On paper by the way.

**H** Hailey Thomas 39:58  
Yes, exactly. Exactly. Paper edition carry it with me. Now that's a great answer. Awesome. Okay, so last question then tell us about an exciting mission or, or anything you're excited about, that you're working on in your business.

**J** Jessica Abel 40:13  
Well, I've actually just opened the autonomous Creative Collective, which is this new membership group that I'm running. And it's really just for people who have been through the creative focus workshop. So we all have a common language to work with. And we all have very consistent goals. And it's so far just been amazing. It's been sort of open for a few months, but like, I just now opened it to all the alumni and I'm getting a bunch of new people in and it's been so exciting to see old students and clients and people, you know,

seeing meeting each other again and like getting excited about their work and it's a warm, fuzzy feeling for sure.



40:54

That is awesome. That's so great. And if people want to get in there first they have to go back into the workshop



Jessica Abel 40:59

right? So I'm actually going to work open the workshop. And I don't know when this episode's going to air, but it will open in November, where you can get in most of the time, most of the time, you'll be able to instead, it's always been cohorts where you can only get in once or twice a year. So it's going to be open more often and more available. And once you join that, then you are part like it's in it is in the collective. It's in the autonomous, Creative Collective. So you're in and you're, you're a part of this group immediately, and you get this really great community like right away. So I'm pretty excited about that. It's not, you know, there's obviously going to be some stuff you want to do where you're spending time with your own your own work and your own thinking through what the CFW means to you and what you can get out of it. But meanwhile, you can get support and companionship from all these other people who've done it and they understand you want to ask a question, everybody knows what you're talking about. It's a really, so far. It's been just a A very robust connection between those things.



Hailey Thomas 42:02

Awesome. Well that's exciting. Where can people find out more about that and about you online?



Jessica Abel 42:09

Well so my my websites at Jessica able calm so it's je SS ic ABL calm and in there there's a tab called workshops you can find out about the creative focus workshop at the moment it's a waitlist but the waitlist won't be long. And the the other thing is that I wanted to offer your listeners a worksheet which is not time tracking. First thing to do I have I have a worksheet worksheets called at one goal so the the idea with this is to do basically your idea debt inventory and think through what are these ideas and what is actually important to you and start making choices about that. So if you're interested in that and you want to check that out, it's at Jessica able comm slash OG



Hailey Thomas 42:55

Nice. That is awesome. Thank you so much for making that available to to my community. It's gonna be super helpful. Jessica, thanks so much for being on the podcast. I've really appreciated learning from you. And it's been awesome talking to you.



Jessica Abel 43:07

Yeah, you too. Thanks so much.



Hailey Thomas 43:11

A big thanks to our guests for being on the podcast this week. Thank you to our producer Melanie Scroggins. And to keep details about anything we referenced in this episode, you can go to [brain space optimized.com slash podcast](https://brain.space/optimized.com/slash/podcast). We will see you in the next episode.