

## Ep #9: Future Self Planning



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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One of the lessons that has been move life-changing for me comes from cognitive behavioral science. It's that we have thoughts based on our history, our experiences, our socialization, our fears, worries, and our thoughts create our feelings. We take action based on our feelings and those actions create our lived experience in this world. The results of our thoughts that make up our daily lives.

If you keep having the same thoughts, you will continue to live the same life. Your life won't change because you quit your job, get a divorce, pull a geographic and move to a new town if you're having the same thoughts. As the old saying goes, wherever you go, there you are.

Your life changes when you change your thinking. Your relationship to all the life-ness of life. And the best way to do that is to become your own watcher, to clue into your preprogramed ideas and reactions, and to choose new thoughts ahead of time.

This week, we'll be talking about how to change the way you think about yourself. What an old teacher of mine called future self-planning, and it's an absolute game changer, so stay tuned, my loves. Here we go.

You're listening to Feminist Wellness, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching, and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health! Here's your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, Herbalist and Life Coach, Victoria Albina.

Hello, hello my beloved kittens. How are you today? I'm doing so well. I want to give some big thank yous to all of you sharing the podcast in your communities and on the web-ernets, and all of you who send me DMs and emails to tell me how much the podcast is helping you in your day-to-day lives. I am so grateful for that feedback and it means the world to me truly.

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Oh man, I'm getting a little weepy over here. Good thing I'm okay with feeling my feelings. So speaking of feeling your feelings, last week we had a conversation, you and I, about analysis paralysis and constraint of thought and how you - yes you - can manage your own mind.

You don't need to let your socialization, your parents, your teachers, your ex, your boss, your own previous assumptions and thoughts rule your current thinking. Your yesterday doesn't have to define you today. You can choose the thoughts you want to think at any time, to decide how you want to feel.

And last week, we talked about choosing your thoughts around an external situation. For example, if you're at the top of a roller coaster and you're sitting there thinking, "Oh my god, this is the worst thing ever, how did I get into this little metal car of death?" You're going to feel fear.

And the action you'll take when you feel fear is to clench your body, to protect yourself, sending a panic signal down your vagus nerve, through every system in your body, which tells your adrenals to release adrenaline, to help you save yourself from doom, which causes your cortisol to spike, activating your sympathetic nervous system and once again, triggering the old vagus nerve, messing with your digestion, your mood, your energy, your sleep for hours, or even days.

Your thoughts about the roller coaster ride and not the roller coaster itself created your physical feelings about the experience. You feel stress, which causes you to take the action of panicking, which flooded your body with those chemicals that made you feel amped up and then exhausted.

Alternately, you could choose the thought, "I'm not sure what dark magic put me in this metal car at the top of this roller coaster, but here I am." Instead of tensing, I'm going to accept that I'm here and that in two

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minutes, this will be over, or distilled down, this is what's happening and I cannot change the situation.

That thought, when I say it out loud, is calming. It's an acceptance of what is. Life on life's terms versus a fighting of reality. When you feel neutral, accepting of the situation, you can relax your body. You can close your eyes and breath and you can get through those two minutes without sending your body, mind, and spirit into overwhelm, panic, or freak out.

I want to be clear. I'm not talking about some bullshit positivity in which you lie to yourself and say, "Oh my god, I love this, I love being at the top of this rickety wooden roller coaster about to hurdle into uncertainty. It's the best," because your brain won't believe you and your body won't believe you.

That sympathetic nervous system activation will continue to happen because our genius bodies know when we're lying to them and you'll continue to tense. What I'm saying is that you can choose a neutral thought, this is what's happening, and can do your best to find acceptance there before the roller coaster starts rolling on down those rails.

One of the best ways to start practicing this is not to wait until the moment you're at the top of the proverbial roller coaster of life. Don't wait until you're called into your boss's office or until your partner says, "We need to talk," to practice what you're going to think and thus feel. Start by practicing choosing a new thought ahead of time about life and the things that happen in it.

I've talked before about how our first thought is the automatic one. The one that comes from a trauma response or from a conditioned response, and may not always be immediately changeable. But we can begin to take notice of these automatic thoughts and how they make us feel, so that we can choose the next thought and the next response that we want to have in

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our lives by moving out of the victim place of reacting and into the thoughtful, present, aware place of responding.

This week, we're going to shift the conversation inward to talk about future self-planning. A way to manage the way we think about ourselves so we can choose on the daily how we want to feel about ourselves. Humans socialized as women are often taught not to trust ourselves. Our symptoms, our emotions, our pain, our experience of the world.

We're told that we don't know what we're talking about or we talk too much, we're making a really big deal out of something that doesn't matter. We can't be the CEO because it's not what's done. We don't have control over our bodies. We must just be hormonal if we have a problem to talk about, as though that somehow made our concerns less real. Garbage. What garbage.

When we start to pull back and become the watcher of ourselves, as creatures within our culture, our society, our moment on this planet, we get to see all of these lessons we've been taught and we get to choose the ones we want to believe in. We then get to work on building up our self-confidence on the daily by managing our thoughts about ourselves.

We can learn to put all these lessons aside and we can take the bold, decisive, brave, and courageous actions we need to take to get the results we want in our lives. So, I fancied myself a poet in high school and I was in a youth slam poetry troupe called Raw Voices, which is maybe the most 90s name ever created. Old people, can I get a shout-out? That's so 90s.

And we had the most amazing mentor for our group, a woman named Sam, who was my earlier teacher about the power of vulnerability and having an open heart and compassion for self. One of the things that she taught us was this concept of future self-planning, which is also taught in a number of different ways by a number of amazing teachers.

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The way she taught me was this; to sit down every day for 10 minutes or less if you want to get started with two or five, don't get daunted here, and to free write, with no judgment about my hopes, dreams, and wishes for my life. As though it was a statement of fact. That is not writing, "Gosh, I hope someday I'll be happy," or, "Jeez, maybe someday I'll have a perfect life."

Being really vague. But rather, she modeled and taught being brave and writing a daily list of the things in our lives that will be, that we are. As concrete, spelled out fact in the present tense. For example, I am a success in dating, regardless of what the people I go on dates think. Or, I have the job of my dreams, working from home half the week, working one on one in a beautiful office space half the week. Or, I am in love with my partner. I communicate clearly and directly and don't hide behind resentment, fear, or defensiveness.

And I have to tell you, this practice has been life-changing. So, the nerdy part of me wants to speak up now and ground this work in geekatry and science by bringing in the concept of neuroplasticity, which I've touched on before and it was episode three. Episode three, anxiety.

So neuroplasticity is freaking amazing. This is the concept that our brains are plastic, malleable, changeable, and that we have the power and capacity to create changes in our brains like, our actual legit brains, like the firing of neurons, the transmission of neurotransmitter chemicals within our bodies are changeable through our thoughts.

This is some seriously mind-blowing business, my kittens, isn't it? I remember my 20s thinking well, this is just the way I am. I'm a person who panics in x, y, or z situation. And I made that thought habit feel so real with statements like, "Oh, I'm just an anxious person," and it's just not real. Those stories about self as a concrete, unchangeable thing, it's just not real.

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We can use this principle of neuroplasticity to train ourselves to think the best about ourselves. We can achieve what we want to do when we manage our minds and choose thoughts that lead us to feel good and confident about who we are and how we're living. So when you habitually think, "I suck at this, I'm not good at math, I'm so needy, I'll never get that raise," you create this belief in your brain that whatever thought you're thinking is actually true and real.

So at that very moment, you get to choose the thought that you're going to practice believing. You can choose to stay in these old thoughts that don't serve you, or you can choose to shift. To be clear, as a scientist, as a healthcare provider, I'm not out here being like, you can think your cancer away without chemo or anything.

I mean, that's preposterous and frankly very dangerous. And there are studies that show that folks who have a more positive outlook on whatever their medical condition is actually have measurable improvements in their health. The science doesn't lie, my loves, and this is good stuff.

So future self-planning is super simple and it has been this huge, huge gift in my life. This is an intentional practice for connecting in with yourself in a new way and building confidence in yourself. So what I do is I have a notebook and I sit down every morning before my meditation and I write out I am statements. Positive, affirming statements about the life that I am creating.

So for example, in your life, it might look like I am powerful, I am strong, I am successful. Or I am healing, I am digesting my food at each meal. My thyroid is no longer attacking itself. My lupus is in remission. I am asking for what I need in a calm and peaceful way. I am at peace if I don't get what I want in a given situation. Do you see what we're doing here? You're telling your brain to have these new beliefs, not in some ridiculous fantastic way, but in a way that's simple, clean, clear, and that's in line with your goals.

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You've likely spent most of your life replaying those old thought cassette tapes. This is just another tool to put a new cassette tape in the deck. Repetition creates success and those neurons in your brain that fire together do indeed wire together. And what you think about yourself creates what you feel about yourself.

I like to think about Olympic athletes. You don't get good at the pommel horse whatever by just doing it once. You repeat it again and again and again and again. And through that process of repetition, your body learns to trust you and to believe it when you tell it you can actually do this thing.

I have a patient who is a gymnast and she told me that if they were injured or if the gym was closed or they were traveling or whatever and they couldn't work out, they would go through their routines in their head, like the full routine, with the belief I can do this. She told me that she actually saw improvements in her routines when she would do this visualization regularly; a visualization of her doing the thing that she was trying to do with grace and skill and speed and agility and doing it well.

And she would talk about how a really important part of this was telling this positive story about herself, her capacity, and the bravery she had to throw herself from bars to bars in midair. If this can work for a gymnast, if she can visualize her routine and therefore have improvement in it, can't we think the same thing for our everyday lives?

My dear and beloved friend Becca shared a really great example of this with me. She was able to use her own version of future self planning to stop her insomnia. She realized that she was getting into bed expecting not to sleep, expecting to have racing thoughts and anxious feelings and that she had to work to interrupt those thoughts by changing her story about herself as a sleeper.



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Every night before bed she would write, “I am a great sleeper. I am a champion at sleeping. I fall asleep when my head hits the pillow and I stay asleep until the morning.” She did this writing every night before bed, and in just a few weeks’ time, she had completely shifted her relationship with sleep and was living what she had written. Pretty amazing, right?

I use this technique so much in my own life. When I was building my business having been a primary care provider and working for other people for ages, I knew I had to tell a new story about my own capacities in an area I knew nothing about, owning and running a business and being an entrepreneur.

I started each day with journaling, “I am smart enough to make this work. I am patient and won’t rush to thinking I’m a failure if I’m not making X dollars in Y months. I am kind to myself as I learn how to be a business owner. I am confident enough in myself to ask for help when I need it.”

That daily I am journaling was so transformative. Every time I felt a block or came up against something that made my brain play that old panic song, I would pause, breathe, I would write out the solution with a focus on myself. I am calm when things feel overwhelming. I am never overwhelmed. I have a to-do list and I’m working my way through it with peace in my heart.

We can harness the power of neuroplasticity by writing what we are choosing to believe about ourselves over and over and over again. And I encourage you to do this practice using pen and paper. All the technology available to us is completely amazing, but there’s something beautiful about going old school and physically writing hand to paper, engaging our kinesthetic learning capacities.

Studies show that students who take notes with pen and paper retain more information than those who take notes on the computer. So I really want to encourage you to write down these future self plans. Each and every

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morning, set an alarm on your phone, put a Google alert, whatever it takes to remind you to do it each and every day as a way to give your brain a positive anchor for the rest of the work that we're doing.

li also want to pause to warn you that your brain is likely to try to fight you on this. And that's because brains do not like new things. They see new things as scary things because you haven't survived through it before, and you may not survive it this time. And that's okay. Sorry, I was sort of surprised by how creepy my voice sounded there.

It's okay for your brain to be like, "Don't do it, don't do it, don't do it, do something else, check the Instagram, do something else," and to just pause, breathe, and accept that your brain is doing this. Your brain is likely to start wandering to all the things on your to-do list, all the stress thoughts it's used to thinking the minute you sit down to write, "I am."

Meet those thoughts with kindness, gentleness, and love. And invite them to take a backseat to your highest self, and in a nice way, please. We don't scold our inner self in this family. We recognize it with love and caring and ask it to please give us the space we need to write for 10 little tiny minutes each and every morning.

Your homework this week is to try it out, to sit down in a cozy, preferable quiet spot for just a few minutes every morning and to write it out using I am statements. I am a person who speaks her truth. I am a person who believes in herself. I am powerful. I am honest. I am loved. I am drinking less coffee, alcohol, soda this month. I am eating less sugar. I am emotionally generous with myself. I am confident in my abilities.

Give it a solid month of doing it every morning before you decide it doesn't work for you. And I must say, I have yet to find someone who really does this every single day and doesn't feel better in their life. You can plan for and create the you you want to be. I know you can. I've done it myself and

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it takes daily dedication and practice to get yourself there. Isn't your one human lifetime worth the effort?

Thanks for listening, my loves. It's such a pleasure to be able to share these teachings with you and I hope you find this lesson helpful. If you liked what you heard, please head on over to iTunes and leave a review, subscribe, share so that other people can find these teachings.

Take a moment to head on over to my Instagram where I'm always sharing more about this. We'll put a link in the show notes and it's @victoriaalbinawellness on there. And yeah, that's it from me. Gosh, I hope you have such a beautiful week. Be well and remember, when one of us heals, we help to heal the world. Talk to you soon, my love.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you like what you've heard, head to [VictoriaAlbina.com](http://VictoriaAlbina.com) to learn more.