SESSION TRANSCRIPT · THE MISSING PIECES OF PERIMENOPAUSE

Your Capacity Changed, Not You: How to Stop Blaming Yourself and Plan Around the Energy You Have Now

with Janelle March · Day 2 · Tuesday, October 27 · The Unnamed Losses

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All right, ladies, I'm here today to talk you through a new method for your weekly planning that really honors the new capacity you have. Let's dive right in.

Here's something I hear a version of just about every week working with women: "Oh, I fucked it up again." Oh, I'm just noticing now. Look at the typo in my slide. How perfect is this timing? I'm not going to edit it. Okay, perfect.

I hear this: "What is wrong with me? Why can't I just get it right?" Over and over and over again. These are typically really small issues. You forgot about a doctor's appointment, or making dinner was just not in the cards today. You forgot to buy someone a gift, and that's never been you. You always remembered the card. In the moment, little changes like that might feel like some moral failing, but they're actually completely to be expected.

So before I say anything else today, I want you to hear this. You're not imagining it. You're not being dramatic, and you're not a problem. Perimenopause has changed your capacity. It's smaller than it once was, and maybe you just haven't learned yet how to work with that. I hope I can help a little with that today.

With that in mind, let me introduce myself. Hello, I'm Janelle, and I'm an executive function coach and late diagnosis doula. I typically work with late-diagnosed women who are neurodivergent, ADHD, autistic, or the whole deal, and we work through issues with productivity and, in general, being lower capacity human beings.

I myself was diagnosed with ADHD and autism at 28. What happens when you receive a late diagnosis is you look back on your whole life with new clarity: anger, grief, the whole batch. And what you realize is that all these systems you've created over the years, the ones that held everything up behind the scenes, turn out to have really just been ways to seem normal. And that all kind of falls apart once you get the diagnosis. I say you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube.

A lot of women find out they have ADHD during perimenopause, which is why I'm talking to you today as a 33-year-old woman who feels very lucky that I know what's coming with menopause but haven't experienced it myself yet. There's a huge overlap in this audience. And while I might not know what it feels like to have hot flashes just yet, I do know what it feels like to suddenly not

be able to do all the things you could, and to be really fucking frustrated. I've worked hard to figure out ways to work with my lower capacity, and I spend a lot of time training other women to do the same.

So here's a point I want to make to you. Admitting that you have lower capacity also means saying no. And it's a real bitch, because there are times when there are things you totally want to do and can't, because you can't do it all. This isn't just some theory. You really do have to take actual things off your list and lower the bar on purpose, or you're just going to spend every week feeling crappy about what doesn't get done.

The other part that comes with this change in capacity is maybe a change in support needs. And I want you to understand there's nothing wrong with that. My fellow hyper-independent girlies, we need to hear this, okay? There's nothing wrong with needing reminders to check your calendar now, or needing prep time and a packing list and all this stuff to keep yourself organized, or just, in general, getting some dang help. There is nothing wrong with it. But it is wrong for you to deny yourself what you need.

So today I'm hoping I can give you a framework for a weekly planning process that helps you feel like everything isn't slipping through the cracks.

The framework I teach, I call SAFE planning, or really, capacity-safe planning, and I've got this lovely acronym here. When there's less room, when you have less energy than you once did, how do you decide what gets to stay on your to-do list, your calendar, and in your life, and what you're letting go of on purpose?

The way we do this is first by getting it all out in front of you. The first couple of times you do this, it might take a while. I know for me, if I sit down to do a real meaty brain dump, it's amazing all the crap I can come up with that's been rattling around in this head, all the things I want to do. So the first couple of times, this whole process might take an hour. But you'll get to a point where it's much faster, and it will make you feel much better. It's worth the time, I promise.

So the first step is getting it all out on the table. That means all the things that are already on your calendar: a doctor's appointment, driving your friend to the airport (I hope you do that, that's nice of you; we all take Ubers too much now, right?), taking your kid to practice, a deadline at work. These are all the things that have fixed deadlines attached. They're going to happen. Then there's all the crap on the random to-do lists scattered all over the house: the back of the envelope in the kitchen, the notes app on your phone. Gather all of that too. And then, of course, a nice brain dump to get everything else.

One thing I want to highlight specifically, and I gave you a little teaser by skipping a slide, is the load nobody counts. As women, we're really, really good at being that silent labor behind the scenes. We're really good at keeping all of the loops running, spinning all of the plates all the time,

keeping our family's life afloat. We do it so effortlessly that when our capacity shifts, when we get a late diagnosis and no longer mask, or we're going through perimenopause, or something traumatic happens, or we're grieving, whatever it is, when what we can do changes, suddenly all this crap bubbles to the surface.

These might be the things you're currently fighting about in your relationship, or that you're feeling shitty about not getting done like you used to. In your weekly planning process, I want to make sure you're thinking about these things, because they take real energy. It's super easy to get to the end of the day and think, "Oh crap, I didn't get anything done off my list," and feel terrible about yourself, like your life is this huge wreck. When in reality, you probably did a lot of things just like this. You did get a lot done. It's just that these are things nobody is accounting for.

So I want you to intentionally put stuff like this on your list, and to understand that there's only so much energy. Imagining your capacity as spoons is a common method in the neurodivergent space. But you can even think of it as cash on hand. Imagine the energy you have when you wake up in the morning is cash. There's only so much, and then you're broke and lying on the couch watching TikTok. So we've got to be strategic about it.

The reality is that not all of these things can happen at 100% all the time. There's nothing wrong with getting the groceries delivered. There's nothing wrong with putting your bills on autopay. There's nothing wrong with asking the neighbor to mow the lawn, if that's what has to happen.

The next step in the SAFE planning method is anchoring what's fixed, and this has two categories. The first is the things someone else is waiting on you for: deadlines, appointments, fill in the blank. But I also want you to be cognizant of the prep time involved in those things.

In my world, we deal with something called time blindness a lot. You see it with a lot of ADHDers. We aren't necessarily aware of how long things will take or everything that's involved. For instance, I have a really great habit of having, say, a 2:00 appointment. If I stop and think about it, I know I live in the suburbs of Chicago, and traffic can get pretty brutal. It might take 30 minutes to get places, but sometimes it takes 15. So, okay, my appointment's at two, it's one, there's still time to take the dogs for a walk, and I still need to brush my teeth. The list goes on, right? And suddenly I'm driving like a madwoman trying to get there on time, super high cortisol, freaking out the whole way, because I didn't prep ahead.

Same thing with vacations. "Okay, I've got to get all these workouts done because I'm about to go on a trip." Oh, right. Someone has to literally pack a bag. And that's how I end up doing these things at 2 a.m. the night before I leave and then having a crappy first day because I'm exhausted. So planning ahead and thinking about the prep work makes a huge difference in how your week flows.

But that's not the only thing I want you to anchor. I also want you to think about the things that keep your engine running. This is where I so subtly bring up the importance of self-care, loving ourselves, and doing things for ourselves, and being realistic that you can't work from an empty tub. As much as we might try, as much as we'll just drip, drip the dregs right out of us, there are things that make us feel better, that help us run better, that help us get things done. Think of spending time with your friends, or hitting a yoga class, or carving out time to stay up late at night reading a romance novel. I don't know who could possibly be doing that. Surely no one, right? But whatever those are for you, those are the only other things I want to see on your calendar at the end of this.

This planning method is about taking what absolutely needs to happen, putting that on the calendar, and letting everything else be flexible. I call this fluid rigidity: some structure, because we need it, and because there are some things in life that are just non-negotiable, plus plenty of flexibility to deal with the fact that you don't necessarily know who you're going to be every day. Your energy is no longer something you can predict, if you ever could, to be honest. I just want to make sure you have that flexibility.

Next is F: filter it honestly. This is how we tackle everything else on the list, and I'll get to that in just a second.

The final step is E: execute joyfully. I named it that way because that's really the whole point. For everything that's left, we make sure the bar is lowered as much as possible. We have grace with ourselves. We accept that we can't do it all. We're not Superwoman, and we're doing it for the freaking joy. Because what's the point of this life, if not happiness?

So, on to filter it honestly. Here's a decision matrix. This is for all the other crap: the stuff that came up in your brain dump, the organizing project you've been putting off for two years, everything that's left. You put it through this matrix and ask two questions. First: does it need to happen, or does it fall into the category of "the sky wouldn't fall if it didn't"? And second: are you dreading it, or does it feel doable?

If you're dreading it but it really does need to happen, like it's got to happen this week, I want you to take this time to write down the good enough version. The minimum viable product. The half-assed version, for those of you who need a little spice. The point is to accept that you're dreading it and that it still needs to happen, and to make the decision early, during your weekly planning. We know we only have so much energy, and deciding is expensive. So the more of it you can do once a week, the better you'll feel as the week goes on. For those things, give yourself permission right at the jump to do a little less, the not-so-good version: a text instead of a phone call, buying a cake instead of making it, whatever that is for the situation. Accept that this is what you've got to give, and give yourself permission.

If you're dreading it but the sky wouldn't fall if it didn't happen, either say no or delegate. That's hard for us, I know. But again, hyper-independent girly, we've got to hear this.

If it needs to happen this week and it feels doable, great. That's the shit that ends up on your to-do list. Wonderful. Ideally, that's most of your to-do list.

And finally, if the sky wouldn't fall and it feels doable, put it on your parking lot list. It's not going to happen this week, but we don't want to lose sight of it completely.

Once you've gotten everything through that matrix and made your decisions, here's what I want a functional week to look like with this method. On your calendar, paper, digital, both, whatever works for you, you've anchored the things that absolutely have to happen and the prep involved with them. That might look like a time block to pack lunches, or drive time, or, if you have something you want to get dressed up for, time to get ready. Whatever it is, you have that time carved out.

Everything else lives on a master to-do list of stuff you want to get done this week. So as you go through the week, if Tuesday ends up being a day when you can't get off the couch, that's okay. Nothing but the anchors had to get done on Tuesday. Wednesday is right there waiting for you. And if it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen. That fluid rigidity, that flexibility, just helps you feel better about yourself throughout the week.

And finally, the parking lot list is something you'll maintain all the time. You'll pull from it when you plan next week, and maybe something will move up the list.

Now, as a trained project manager, I see a lot of value in having someone help you with this kind of thing: overseeing your projects, helping you break things down, helping you figure out that good enough version. That used to be a person. That used to be me. And it's really valuable, and I do encourage it if you like that kind of accountability.

But I also see a lot of value in doing this with AI. To be honest, it's my drug of choice on that one. I love using it to help me plan, and one of the ways I've made mine a lot smarter is with the free tool I'm providing for you in this summit. The Capacity Translator can train your AI, or just yourself. It's really a quiz that walks you through what's draining your capacity, what protects your capacity, and what's costing you behind the scenes: what's taking way more of your energy than you realize. You'd be surprised how much we don't understand about ourselves. So I'm really excited for you to see what that tool does. It's a quick quiz that only takes a couple of minutes, but it can make a world of difference.

That's what I've got for you today. I hope you can go into your weekly planning feeling a lot more secure, and I'm here for you if you have any questions. Thank you.