



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 234 – Simple Living, Part II – Professional Life
December 6, 2023

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[00:00:05] Kathy Robinson: Welcome to The Athena Wellness Podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

[00:00:30] Kathy: Hello, and welcome, friends. Thanks so much for joining me today.

As I mentioned in the last episode, there's something about the holiday season that gets me thinking about simplifying my life. And each year I find ways to make a little more progress. It's this feeling that inspired me to create a podcast miniseries on simple living.

Last week, I shared an overview on the concepts of minimalism. Today's show will focus on your professional life. If you're currently not part of the business world, you can think of your professional life as activities that bring purpose to you outside of your personal life, things such as volunteering, caregiving, or community work.



[00:01:20] As we learned last week, simplifying your life is not about deprivation or austerity. It's about reducing physical possessions and mental clutter in order to create a more intentional and meaningful life.

By making conscious professional choices, we can feel reduced levels of stress and anxiety, increased clarity and focus, improved relationships, improved finances, and an overall sense of ease.

This all makes perfect intellectual sense. But how do we bring this into our workplace where we can feel stressed and overwhelmed by the sheer volume of email and meetings, along with our responsibilities and deadlines?

As I reflect on my career, I was on the brink of burnout just before I decided to leave Wall Street. I was on such a relentless treadmill of project deadlines that the thought of trying to work less hours not only seemed unattainable, it caused me more stress. And when I was able to take a few days off, I found myself worrying about work.

What's interesting is that the to-do list that ruled my life, that I felt such responsibility for, that I did everything in my power up to the moment I left to bring as many things to completion for an easy handoff - once I walked out the door of that company, it was just a list, a piece of paper with some scribbles on it. At that point, it meant nothing.

Of course, on the first day of my new job, what did I do? I created a new to-do list. But now I had perspective. There's a difference between using a list as a tool



so you don't forget something versus one that's an endless funnel of activity and stress.

[00:03:23] What gave me the most insight into my habits at the time was a quick review of my beliefs about work. Coming from a blue collar family with a value system shaped by grandparent immigration and the Great Depression, hard work, I was taught, was the way out - that's how you advanced.

When I got my first job on Wall Street, I knew I couldn't match the pedigree of my colleagues, but I could sure outwork them. And 18 years into that career, having scaled the ladder to heights beyond my wildest dreams, I was barely hanging on. And I knew it was time to leave.

So I invite you to take a look at what's driving your professional habits. Where do those beliefs come from? Are they true for you today? Perhaps there's another way. Just hold those questions for now, and we'll come back to them later.

In the meantime, just know that this process will take time and it will morph and shift along the way. What I found through trial and error is simplifying my work life takes discipline, something I'm still mindful of today. It's easy for me to revert to old work habits when I need to get something done. But now I'm very deliberate with how I spend my time and energy and what can impact my focus and well-being.

[00:04:57] I've found three areas of my professional life that I still revisit quarterly. They are:



1. Getting clear on my professional intention, which includes what I'm trying to accomplish and why;
2. How to best manage my time, which includes setting boundaries; and
3. How to take care of myself throughout my work days and during my time off.

[00:05:25] Let's take a look at each one.

- **Professional intention clarity.** What's your overarching professional goal? For me during my time in corporate, I wanted to climb the ladder. That was my choice. And it significantly impacted my daily routine and its complexity.

How this has shifted for me. I'm no longer ascending the corporate ladder. In fact, I chose to descend it. But while I was on it, especially toward the end of my career, I was clear on the trade offs, which impacted my personal life and my sleep, which was not plentiful in those days. But because I was clear about my choices, I stressed less.

And now it's fair to say that I chose a new ladder. I want to build Athena Wellness into a thriving company. And while I still work hard and sometimes put in long hours to meet deadlines, I'm clear on my intention, and how it aligns with my life. And I continuously adjust as my life unfolds.

For you to consider. What do you want to get out of your professional career? Are you aiming for a promotion? Do you want to expand your knowledge or skill set? Perhaps for you, it's about collaborating or leading



a project for the first time. Once you have a good understanding of your long-term aspirations, you can begin to make decisions about your path and daily routine to align with that vision.

- **Time management mindset.** This is the key to creating a simpler professional life. And it's not just about having an effective time management system. It's about the gateway of what activities make it on your to do list and what appointments get scheduled on your calendar. Simplicity resides in that discernment.

How it shifted for me. As I mentioned, during most of my corporate career, I was ruled by my to-do list and calendar. But later on, I found workarounds. I scheduled time in my calendar so I had the first and last hour of each day blocked and my assistant knew, to the extent possible, not to book meetings during that time. This allowed time for daily preparation and wrap-up. I also made sure before I left the office at night, and many times it was nighttime, that my calendar for the next day was set and all the materials I needed for those meetings were ready to go.

Another thing I learned very late in the game was not to raise my hand every time a volunteer was needed. For years, I had an almost instinctual response of taking on additional roles for projects and volunteer efforts without first assessing if I truly wanted to do it, along with the impact to my schedule, and well-being.



And now I've simplified even further. Preparation and routine are still key, but I focus on what's essential for what I'm intending to achieve. I structure my work week so that mornings are for creative work like writing podcast outlines or articles. And there were three blocks of time each week that are client-facing for coaching, teaching and meetings. The last thing I do each week night is write out a few priorities for the next day and gather the related materials. I've also gotten much better at gently saying no to anything that doesn't resonate with what I love to do.

Things for you to consider. What does the current gateway to your to-do list and calendar look like? Is it serving you or do you need to tighten it up? You may need to reestablish your work hours, find ways to focus during the day, or to say no to additional projects or activities that will take you away from what's most important to you

- **Workplace wellness.** What are your non-negotiable wellness activities? For me, during my time in corporate, I knew my day would flow better if I was up early, had a few minutes of quiet time, exercised, packed healthy meals to take with me, and was mindful of taking short breaks throughout the day. That said, most days, I had maybe five quiet minutes in the morning, followed by a workout, taking my first meeting in the car as I drove to work. And my breaks were either for a cup of coffee, or taking the long route to the ladies room so I could walk a bit after sitting in back to back meetings. Sound familiar?



I share this because in those days, it was the best I could do. I moved my body, ate as well as I could, and extended my bio breaks with five minute walks. If that's all you can do with this time, that's fine.

How it shifted for me. Wellness is now my business, but the same things are important to me. I'm still up early, I start the day with a brief meditation, I still work out, I eat well and move my body throughout the day. And yes, it's easier when you work from home. That said, without the structure and routine I put in place, it would be easy to forget to do any of those things.

Things for you to consider. What makes you feel well in body, mind and spirit? What are your wellness non-negotiables? Once you know what they are, how might you create a structure or routine to keep it consistent? How can you make wellness a part of your day rather than something you write on your to-do list?

Of course there are many other simple living strategies that you can implement, things like optimizing your workspace, eliminating distractions, delegating, outsourcing and automating. And there were plenty of resources to help you with those tactical approaches.

[00:12:20] What I'd like to leave you with as your takeaway is to revisit the questions I posed at the beginning of this episode:

- What's driving your professional habits?
- Where do those beliefs come from?



- Are they true for you today?

As I mentioned, for decades, I equated hard work with success. It was a long held belief. And my professional life became less complex when I stopped relating my busyness and travel schedule with achievement.

It's not just business professionals that can be ruled by this belief. Volunteers and caregivers can fall into the same trap. And I've since learned so can entrepreneurs. I fell right back into this mode when I started my business a few years ago and it took me a while to even realize I was doing it.

Now a metric of success for me is saying yes to the thing that excites me most and no to everything else. It's putting my well-being first. It's aligning my schedule with my natural rhythms. It's enjoying ease and enthusiasm throughout my workday, while continuously growing my business.

[00:13:42] As we wrap up this episode, I hope there's at least one idea that you'll implement to begin simplifying your professional life. It's been said that you change your life when you change your daily routine. I agree and suggest that you start with clarity on your professional intentions and then make your decisions and organize your days in alignment with that vision. I've found this to be the best way to eliminate the extraneous.

And here's a secret. As a leader in my last company, our board appreciated when I could provide updates that were comprehensive yet easy to understand. Conversely, I appreciated it when someone on my team was able to explain an issue they were having succinctly so I could support them appropriately.



How does that impact you? Simplicity can be a powerful business tool. You may not be able to remove corporate complexity, but if you can streamline your work without cutting corners and explain how things work in simple terms, that demonstrates a depth of understanding that's truly valuable to your colleagues and your company.

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[00:15:07] Kathy: Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

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Until next time, be well!

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[00:16:09] [END OF AUDIO]