

Episode 005



Control in Chaos

January 30, 2021

Well, hello friends.

I hope you had an AMAZING week.

Mine was SUPER productive. And I LOVE it when that happens.

And I'm not just talking about being productive in my business or work. I was.

But even better, I got a TON of stuff done around the house. You know, the kind of stuff that lingers. Things like going through boxes or closets and drawers. And deciding what to keep, toss or donate.

It always makes me feel amazing.

What's interesting though is WHY I had that amazing burst of activity this week. And that's what we're going to talk about today, which is **Control in Chaos**.

So, let's dive in.

That burst of productivity that I experienced this week is a bit unusual. Well, THAT type of productivity anyway. Cleaning closets and organizing things isn't really my favorite past time.

But what's interesting is what inspired that burst of productivity.

Basically, you can blame cable news and 2021.

Let me explain.

I've been a news junkie for like the past 20 years. I've always loved having it on in the background. I have my favorite news anchors and all of that.

I just liked staying up on things and I liked hearing different angles and opinions on the stories of the day.

But for me, that's changed.

Granted there are a lot of reasons for that, most of which I won't go into on this podcast because there's not time for it all.

But the main thing for me is the unrelenting news on the pandemic.

I've noticed that when I watch the news, my anxiety increases. I start to feel helpless and hopeless. And I go from being able to deal with the isolation and the uncertainty that this virus has brought into all of our lives, to barely hanging on.

Why?

Some folks would say, "well, it's because of the circumstances. There's a pandemic going on."

Others might say, "the news is just toxic and always negative."

And I get that these explanations FEEL true.

But they're NOT true.

The truth is that what was causing me to feel helpless and hopeless is the **thoughts** I'm having about the coverage. Not the actual coverage itself.

So now, when I leave the news on too long, I start thinking: "Will my family be okay?" or "When will this virus EVER end?" and "What happens now that there are more contagious strains appearing? Will the vaccine work?"

When I'm thinking those thoughts, they cause me to feel "anxiety", "uncertainty" and "sadness."

And when I'm feeling anxious, uncertain, or sad, what do I do? Nothing productive. That's for sure.

They make me want to numb out by binge watching Netflix or Hulu. Or having a brownie. Or a glass of wine.

Can you relate?

There are all sorts of these numbing behaviors we can take part in. We call it buffering. It's the process of trying to self soothe, or numb negative emotions by taking actions that bring comfort.

But the problem is that these sorts of actions make you feel better in the short term but probably lead to even bigger problems down the road.

And as I said earlier, they keep you stuck. So instead of taking productive actions that would lead you to the results you want, instead, your thoughts and emotions make you take actions that focus on self-soothing behaviors that make you feel better in the short term but that probably lead to even bigger problems down the road.

This is super important to understand.

It's a non-virtuous cycle. And it's easy to stay stuck in that cycle, especially during chaos.

Because the acts of self-soothing make you feel...just a little bit...in control.

Because when we're all dealing with something like a pandemic or...let's take it to the workplace for a moment – if there's a huge layoff coming, or a reorganization or if you just lost a few big clients – it's easy to look at those situations and say that THEY are responsible for how you feel and the fact that you feel stuck.

Not your thoughts.

Your brain will argue with you and tell you that your thoughts aren't optional here. That THE WORLD, YOUR world is in chaos. It's unsafe. You're in danger. That this is a fact...that it's just true.

While it IS true that most of us would agree that a once in a century pandemic, or a layoff or losing a few big clients isn't a positive thing, it's important to remember that what we CHOOSE to think about those things is optional.

Our thoughts are the ONE thing we CAN control when everything feels out of control.

It's important to understand that this is the way our brains work. And that our thoughts are the key to feeling better even when logic might tell you that you are in danger of potentially losing your job or catching a virus or whatever.

Now that doesn't mean that we should live in denial.

We must stay grounded. Observe what is happening. Anticipate what might happen so you can be well prepared and ready.

But the KEY to not getting stuck is to change your focus.

I call this tool Selective Focus.

And I use this with my clients who are dealing with situations in their career, business, or life that they classify as chaotic and out of their control.

Here's how it works.

Step one is what I call: Acknowledge and Prepare.

In this step you acknowledge what is happening or what you believe MIGHT happen and assess its potential implication on you.

It's important here to be as dispassionate as possible. No catastrophizing.

Just look at it logically and assess the potential implications.

Then, choose a thought that will inspire a productive emotion and lead to actions and results that will have you prepared.

Maybe something like "I'm glad I know what is going on so I can be prepared" or "I'm going to do everything I can to take precautions and be ready for whatever comes."

So, if the chaos you're worried about is about the pandemic, these thoughts would cause you to feel something like "focused" or "determined" and this would lead you to take actions around following protocols to keep you and your family safe.

If the chaos you're worried about is rumors of a potential layoff at work, these thoughts would again cause you to feel "focused or determined" and would lead you to start making preparations. You might update your resume, start networking, set up informational interviews or research potential opportunities.

See the difference?

In these scenarios, you're not staying stuck worrying about the pandemic you can't control or the upcoming layoffs that you can't control.

You're deciding to focus on doing what you can to "best deal with" the chaos.

But once you go through the first step and have done (or are doing) what you can to be ready for that chaos, it's especially important to move into step two.

And step two is about choosing something different to focus on.

While step one was about being prepared, once you've done that you need to shift your focus. You're your attention to something that YOU DECIDE that has nothing to do with the chaos.

And that brings me to my burst of productivity this week.

When I recognized that the news was making me feel uncertain and worried because it brought up thoughts of "is my family going to be okay" and "what if this virus thing just keeps going", I did an immediate shift.

I decided to think "I'm going to do something that makes me feel better."

I turned off the news. Got up off the couch and went into my master closet.

Five hours later, I had three piles – keep, toss, and donate.

As I looked around, I felt something different.

Pride.

Satisfaction.

CALM.

Why? Because I decided to focus on something I COULD control.

Something that was important to me and something I alone could make happen.

When everything around you feels crazy, doing something that you can control feels amazing.

It's called selective focus.

It's a mindset technique that lets you DECIDE what you want to focus on.

Because see...just because some crazy things are going on – like a reorg, or a layoff, or a virus – you don't have to constantly focus on them.

You must SEE and ACKNOWLEDGE those things. That way, you can be smart about preparations. That's what step one is all about.

But you can also decide to focus on something that you choose.

For me it was about cleaning out a closet. Which made me feel satisfied, organized and in control.

For you it might be spending the afternoon putting some structure around the side hustle you've been thinking about.

Or it might be about starting to write the book you've been dreaming of.

Or maybe it's about baking a homemade cake.

Or painting a room.

I like things in this step two that deliver a strong and tangible result.

Because when you are feeling like your world is out of control chaos, it's helpful to do things that give you a strong sense of accomplishment.

Like cleaning out a closet.

Or finishing that report you put off.

Or researching courses you can take to help with your next step.

The accomplishment will give you a nice little dopamine hit.

For me, when I was feeling off the chart's anxiety around the virus, my closet cleaning gave me CONTROL IN CHAOS.

Sure, the virus is still out there and, according to some reports, gaining strength. But I'm taking precautions AND I have faith in our scientific community.

And sure, I don't know what the next month holds for my family or my business or work. But you know what?

I accomplished something.

I didn't sit around and worry.

I didn't consume hours of news reports saying we're all completely screwed.

And I didn't call my friends, family or co-workers to gossip or speculate or enlarge the problem.

I just walked into my closet and start making decisions on what to keep, toss or donate.

And now? I have an Insta-worthy closet complete with organizers, matching hangers and if I must say myself, artfully arranged shoes.

And it feels damn good.

Dusting off and updating your resume will do the same.

So will setting up 5 networking calls in the next week.

And for entrepreneurs, so will launching two new funnels or a new A/B split test on email.

The point here is you don't have to focus on the crazy.

You can CHOOSE to focus on what you can control.

And feel the satisfied, calm sense of pride that comes with doing something that moves you forward. Whatever that may be.

So for this week...stop focusing on the external stuff you can't control – the CHAOS.

And instead, when you feel that anxiety amping up, stop, take a deep breath, and ask yourself what you CAN control.

And then do it.

Until next time, make it a great week my friends.