

Pockets of Pleasure Episode 8

Hello and welcome to episode 8 of Pockets of Pleasure.

In this episode we're going to explore why life tracking is a key tool in our search for pleasure, joy and meaning.

As the new year begins we're being bombarded with messages about becoming a new and better version of ourselves - whether that be our weight, our physical or mental fitness, our work, business or family roles - marketing fingers point at every element of our lives, feeding us stories of greener pastures, if we just follow their systems and transform into better versions ourselves.

It can feel like a personal attack when we're bombarded with these messages day after day. My email inbox is fit to burst with all the ways in which, if I JUST follow this new programme or buy this new product, my life will change beyond my wildest dreams. But somehow the promise never lives up to the reality, no matter how good the programme or product is.

Before we can make changes that stick, we have to have a baseline understanding of who we are and what makes us tick because, whilst it's true that brain plasticity means we are capable of learning, growing and changing throughout our lives, we are never working with a truly blank canvas. Who we are today is the result of all of our experiences and, whilst we may have similar experiences to others, how we experienced them can be very different indeed because no one else has or will ever live a life that's exactly the same. Even twins brought up by the same parents, seemingly in the same way, experience their childhood differently.

This is why I believe that one of the most dangerous phrases any well meaning coach or teacher can utter is: 'if i can do it, anyone can.'

The danger lies in what happens when, despite the teacher's very best efforts, we don't manage to achieve whatever the thing is they're teaching. For so many of us, this perceived failure becomes further proof of our own inadequacies, we might blame the teacher, but generally we blame ourselves. Sometimes the teaching might genuinely have been rubbish, but more often than not it's simply a lack of alignment in learning or communication styles, a disconnect with the teacher's personality, modality or world view, a misjudgement of timing, really, any number of unknowable and unseen factors, that mean we come away not having achieved the advertised results. But we keep on looking for the magic product, the one that really will work this time. This continual search is rather like that saying about having to kiss a lot of frogs before you find a prince. We throw our time and money at one new thing after another, rarely

achieving the results we desire, all the while growing more frustrated with our self, whilst our self belief and confidence continues on a downward spiral.

One of my pet peeve motivational phrases that I see bandied about in female entrepreneurial circles is:

'you have the same 24 hours as Beyoncé'.

Erm, no, none of us does. We all have 24 hours in a day, but mine are different to yours and they are all different to Beyoncé's. This, to me, is toxic motivation, likely shared with the best of intentions, but failing badly to achieve anything other than adding another lb of self abuse to our already overburdened psyches.

None of this is to pour cold water on your hopes, dreams and ambitions, they are all there for the taking, but you stand a better chance of achieving them without destroying your health and sanity in the process, if you meet yourself where you are, from a place of self knowledge, understanding and compassion.

This is where life tracking comes in, but before we get into the nitty gritty of that, let's take a moment's break.

MUSIC

Welcome back. Before we get into the how of life tracking I want to explore the why in a bit more detail.

Life tracking by its very nature requires you to notice what's going on within you. It's about getting to know yourself on a deep level. It has self compassion built into its core. You're spotting patterns and looking to see what's behind them in a gentle, loving way. You're not trying to change anything about yourself, rather you're embracing and accepting yourself, often very profound ways.

This is a slow process, it's not something that can be hurried. Our personal cycles and rhythms tend to exist in a state of flux. Changing seasons - of the year and of life - can bring with them changes in how we experience the world and ourselves. This is part of the beauty as well as the frustration of being a woman. Men can also experience changes in these experiences too, but they tend to be much less noticeable in day to day life as their natural rhythms play out across 24 hours, not 28 or so days. The bigger, seasonal shifts are more likely to be where men might notice changes in how they experience themselves and the world around them.

So what exactly is life tracking? On the face of it, it's pretty simple - you track elements of your life to help bring clarity, self encouragement and accountability.

We're quite used to tracking fitness data, whether it's the simple use of a pedometer to track your steps, or electronic devices that track everything from sleep patterns to heart rate. There are apps that can help women to track their menstrual cycles. Apps to track finances, time spent on devices; you name it and there's probably an app to track it.

About 3.5 years ago I started to make brief notes in my daily journal about things I was noticing about my mental and physiological state. After a while I began keeping a more detailed daily diary just for menstrual cycle related tracking. It was enlightening.

In the 18+ months I was doing the menstrual tracking, I realised that I was having, what I called 'existential angst days', on a very regular (monthly) basis. It was enlightening when I saw that these days, when I was feeling at absolute rock bottom, were following a pattern. It meant that, when I noticed that was how I was feeling, I could check back through my journal, and see if it was the same point in my cycle. Low and behold, it was. This then enabled me to realise it would quickly pass, and that I wasn't sinking into the depths of depression - it was simply a hormonal response, not an unchangeable aspect of my personality.

About 6 months after this I started to read more around menstrual cycle tracking, and the idea that women live in cycles and seasons within our cycles.

Suddenly everything fell into place, especially when I started noticing how this played out on a fairly predictable schedule, month after month.

I think this information is something that every young girl should be taught. I think it should be part of the discussion around women's mental health. It's something boys should be taught too. For too long women have been expected to fit into the non cyclical ways of a man's world. We've been mocked for our PMS moments. Where there should be understanding, there has been abuse.

The underlying assumption that women are unstable creatures continues to pervade society, including the healthcare world. I could talk at great length on this subject, but instead I'll just pop a link to a post in the shownotes which you can find at thesensorycoach.com/shownotes where I talked a little about how women are often dismissed by the medical profession.

As Gina DeVee says:

'A woman is a naturally dynamic, fluid, unpredictable force.'

This seeming unpredictability can make our lives problematic in a world that's been built around the more stable 24 hour male cycle, but with tracking we can begin to spot our own patterns, which takes some of that unpredictability away, allowing us to work with the world we find ourselves having to live within.

If we all understood the beauty of a woman's cycle, how we have seasons, just like the planet, imagine the world we could be living in? We've denied our connection to nature, arrogantly thinking we can control Mother Nature, in the same way we've assumed we can control the workings of a woman's body. We have to see the correlation between the two things if we're to stand any chance of repairing the damage we're doing to our home.

How do we do this? We start with us, as individuals, tracking our days, getting to know ourselves and the way we interact with the world.

Instead of just tracking the hard metrics, we can track the 'soft data' of our days. We can track our moods and feelings - there are apps for that. But we can go deeper and uncover so much more information about ourselves.

How?

We can track our sensory responses throughout the seasons - I created the sensory coach's 28 day sensory journal for this very reason.

We can track our trauma responses AND our joy responses too.

Searching for your Pockets of Pleasure has been a gentle introduction to the creation of a library of self knowledge. Life tracking builds on this in a more structured way.

Once we have more data about ourselves, we can dig deep into why we do the things we do, and when we do them. **Self knowledge** unlocks so many opportunities to feel different, which in turn can lead us to creating the lives we've always dreamed of.

As women we have an extra opportunity to gather self knowledge through tracking our cycles.

Even if you're in the post menopause phase of your life - you still exist within cycles and seasons; you're still part of the beating heart of the earth. And, you have the wisdom of having lived through all the seasons of a woman's life - share your wisdom, it's your gift to the world! Those of us who come after you need your knowledge and experience.

In my opinion it's important to make life tracking part of your self care and compassion routine, track what you're doing just for you - not for your job, your business, your family or friends, but purely for you.

A really easy way to spot patterns is to use a year to view wall calendar and coloured sticky dots.

I had a packet of sticky dots from when a psychologist friend suggested they might help me to organise tasks in my chocolate business. That system didn't work for me, so the dots had just been gathering dust for a few years.

Back in 2014 I'd taken part in an Instagram crochet challenge to create a mood blanket for the year. I'd been using that blanket on my bed and suddenly made the connection between colours associated with moods used in a linear fashion and the sticky dots and a wall calendar.

I created a key, assigning a coloured dot to each different thing I wanted to track.

Over the past 2 years this has been the system I've stuck with. It's so much easier to spot patterns than flicking back through a journal, and, as I go further into the joys of perimenopause, it's been incredibly useful to see at a glance how my cycle is shifting.

I wish someone would've told me how to do this when I was in my teens!

Tracking this way makes patterns become really obvious after a couple of months, which means you can start to work out all sorts of useful info about what's going on for you in a relatively short space of time.

It's quite easy to track moods and energy levels like this and, once you see how you function over the month, you can more easily arrange your life and business to work with your own energy cycles.

Ultimately, it's trial and error finding what works for you. In my first year of using the dot system I made it much too complicated so I scaled it right back in the second year.

How complex it is depends on what you want to track - if needs be, you could have different calendars for different elements, it really is up to you, but I'd strongly suggest keeping it simple to begin with.

I struggle to stick with things if I over complicate them, but other people thrive on unravelling their own complex data. The key thing is to experiment and go with what works for you. It's not

set in stone and can be adjusted or changed as and when you decide. This is a system you can use for the rest of your life, there's no need to get it perfect right out of the bag. Truth be told, it will never be perfect, just like life!

When I've talked about this system previously, I've been asked for a bit more detail of what it looks like in practice, so after the break I'll go into that a little more, before I share this week's Pocket Challenge.

MUSIC

Welcome back.

This is how I started my sticky dot life tracking practice:

I'd sit for a minute before I went to bed, think about my day and, if anything felt worth noting, I'd stick on a coloured dot, according to my predetermined colour coding key, for that day. I stuck with a very simple system - red for my period starting, black for existential angst days etc. But if you wanted to track your mood/energy levels on a daily basis you could perhaps do that with numbered stickers using a 1-10 scale.

I find colours make it easier to see patterns so you might want to assign a different coloured dot for each number on your 1-10 scale. That way it'd be easier to see at a glance if a particular mood or energy level was happening on a regular basis or was random.

If you used this system in conjunction with a daily journal, that could help you to quickly pick up greater details about any triggers.

For instance, I have lots of food allergies and GI issues, if I wanted to track those, I might assign dots for say indigestion, heartburn, stomach pain etc, and keep a food diary in my journal. That way, if I noticed any patterns, I could quickly refer back to my journal to see if there were any common foods that were causing a problem.

The possibilities are only limited by your imagination.

You could use this system as a streak tracker for things like meditation, sleep, exercise, business goals, sales, learning outcomes, reading, creative pursuits, literally anything you want to track and that would benefit from having a quick reference visual pattern. But as I said earlier, keep it simple to start with as complicated systems tend to fall by the wayside pretty damn quick.

OK then.... this week's Pocket Challenge, if you haven't already guessed is

To start tracking one thing.

Take a few moments, listen to some soothing music, enjoy a cup of something delicious, and allow your mind the freedom to ponder before making any decisions.

Giving yourself that space may just bring a conundrum you've been puzzling over to the surface, if it does, consider teasing out what aspects you could track and make a note in your journal.

If you want to go into full scale calendar tracking, you'll need a year to view calendar (A2 or A3 size work best) and some coloured sticky dots, and half an hour or so to create your tracking key.

Alternatively you will find a glut of tracking apps in the apps, and, of course, you could use my 28 day sensory journal which is available as a printed book and a PDF - links to both will be in the show notes.

Right then, that's it for this week, next week's episode is going to be all about The Sensory Types, you won't want to miss it.

Don't forget if you have any questions you can find me on instagram @thesensorycoach and all the further info mentioned in this episode can be found by going to thesensorycoach.com/shownotes and clicking on episode 8.

May your week be filled with beautiful pockets of pleasure.

Bye for now