

SURVIVING THE MESSY MIDDLE

**HOW TO GET
REFOCUSED WHEN
YOU'VE GONE
OFF TRACK**

It's August. We are in the thick of Summer, the kids are home from school and for many of us, this is the time a year where it feels like everything pretty much falls apart. Our routine gets all out of whack and our best intentions go right down the drain.

It's also the time of year where all those goals we set back at the beginning of the year no longer feel very relevant, and we're tempted to just call it a day, especially if things have gotten hard or stressful. We might even start asking ourselves, "what's the point?"

There's actually a name for this phenomenon. It's called "the messy middle."

It's the period in the middle of a project where the shiny newness and enthusiasm has worn off, and where the roadblocks and headaches have begun to crop up. It's the part of the project that just doesn't feel like very much fun, and where we struggle with feeling completely burned out. And it's usually the part of the project where you want to quit.

Believe me, I've been there. More times than I can count. And if I'm being honest, I'd say I'm probably in a bit of a 'messy middle' phase right now. The temptation to throw in the towel is strong.

But here are two things I've learned about the messy middle: First, if we quit, it stops being the messy middle and instead becomes the messy end. Nobody wants to go out on a low note. And second, our biggest breakthroughs almost always come from breakdowns. If we can push through the frustration and come out on the other side, we WILL be better for it.

So how do we push through without making ourselves crazy in the process? Here are a few ideas that usually work for me—they might just help you too!

TAKE A BREAK

A break is not quitting. It is pressing the pause button so that you can come back refreshed, with a clear head and renewed enthusiasm. We all need breaks on a regular basis, because without them we become distracted and unfocused. We start spinning our wheels, feeling more and more stressed, when really the best thing we could possibly do is walk away altogether for a little while, and just recharge.

So make sure to give yourself some breaks this summer. Take a day off to go hiking or to the beach. Spend the weekend reading a novel in the backyard. Take your kids to the water-park. Have fun. Enjoy the sunshine. And stop feeling guilty when you do—breaks are good for you!

REGROUP

The messy middle is also a good time to revisit your goals to make sure they are still worth pursuing, and to tweak and make adjustments accordingly. It's very possible that something that seemed important 6 months ago no longer does,

or that a new opportunity has come up. That's okay! Regrouping is not quitting either, it is making sure the path you are on is the one you still need to be on.

Take some time to look at your big goals, but also to do a brain dump of everything on your plate right now. Get those tornadoes out of your head and onto a piece of paper, where you can sort them.

PRIORITIZE

From there, you'll need to prioritize! Give every single item on your brain dump list a number in order of importance. There can be no ties! If everything is important, nothing is, and that is why you need to force your brain to choose what matters most. The rule of 80/20 says that 20% of our efforts will result in 80% of our results. If you can start with the most important things, you'll feel a whole lot better a whole lot faster!

GIVE YOURSELF GRACE

If summer is throwing you off, know that you are in good company! Almost everyone feels that way. It's okay to take it a little easier this time of year, to take more breaks, and simply enjoy the longer days and better weather. Give yourself the grace to not do everything, at least not right now.

Robin Sharma pointed out that, **“all change is hard at the beginning, messy in the middle, gorgeous at the end.”** Winston Churchill said it a little more bluntly: “If you're going through hell, keep going.”

In other words, **the messy middle is almost always just that—messy.**

Sometimes the best approach is just to accept a season for what it is, then do the best you can! After all, once you know the middle is going to be messy, and that it is totally normal to feel this way, it makes getting through it just a little bit easier.

And so, my challenge for you this month, if you are going through your own messy middle, is to look for the breakthrough in your breakdown. How can you push through and come out better on the other side? Take a break. Regroup. Prioritize. And above all, give yourself grace!

You've got this, I promise!