

# MARGINS

## Season 4, Episode 1: “Organizing Your Life”

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**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** From Managing Editor Magazine, this is Margins. And if you've got content in your job description, we've made this podcast for you. I'm your host, Mary Ellen Slayter. In this season of Margins, we're exploring what it means to be organized.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** And I'm your co-host, Elena Valentine.

### The Big Idea

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** So there's organizing, right? Like when you organize your life, literally you look at your calendar and you're like, "I'm spending X number of minutes doing this and X number of minutes doing that." So there's that aspect of organizing your life, but there's also the big picture thing, those kinds of things you have a lot of ability to move those things around, other things like how many children you're going to have if you're going to have them. Are you going to get married or not? Are you going to go to grad school?

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** For me, I think of my life as buckets. I choose one of these four areas as a focus. And so, in any given year, it can either be a work year, a family year, a community year, or a personal development year. I have found in my 43 years that you can't have all of those in the same year. And so I pick one, and this is a work year for me. The year that I got a divorce was a personal year, and then the year after that was a work year.

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** So that's how I anchor it and that's how I say yes and no to things over the course of a year.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** Does that choice ever change throughout the year?

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** It can evolve depending on the circumstances, right? So the pandemic, I would have told you at the beginning of last year that it was going to be a work year, instead, what I got was the gift of a family year that I hadn't necessarily planned on. So in that sense, yeah, it can definitely change. If I had kept trying to have a work year last year, I would have been very disappointed.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** And how would you say it's been going?

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** So I don't necessarily set out to have an achievement because it's not really about the achievement, right? It's like I need a framework to know what to say no to. It's not like, "Oh, I had a family year last year. What was my achievement? I kept them all alive."

**ELENA VALENTINE:** How would you define your own wellness? Because I think that to me was a big, it wasn't even an insight, but it was very clear, for example, in my conversation with Smudge, your wellness, how you organize your life, it's so deeply personal, to the point that there's just a level of nuance in all of us individually that makes it very challenging to subscribe to any one thing.

# MARGINS

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** This actually intersects really well with the idea of organization. Wellness to me means not feeling like I am pulled in too many directions at the same time. Multitasking is like a fact of life here, right? I'm running a business, I got these kids. We've got all these community activities. There's just always a lot. There's 15 chickens in here now, y'all, and two dogs.

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** So for me though, wellness means not feeling like I'm pulled in so many different directions that it's like the anxiety and the stress. It's like I can feel it in my chest, right? I know when things are not good. I joke with the kids, it's like, "Uh, uh, uh, I can do two things at the same time, but not three." The less I feel that feeling in a day, the more well I feel. And that means feeling like I can go take the dog for a walk and enjoy it. It means being able to sit down and play chess with Izzy and enjoy it and not be thinking about all the other shit I'm supposed to be doing. That is good organization to me too, good life organization.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** I've started to approach organizing my life differently in the sense that it's pretty simple. I'm either in low vibes or high vibes, and every day it's attempting to always continue to move up the scale to stay in high vibes.

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** What's a high vibe versus a low vibe?

**ELENA VALENTINE:** Well, high vibes and low vibes is being in positive or negative, right? It's what's the soundtrack that's playing in your head? I know that I'm in a high vibe space when I'm feeling optimistic about my day, about myself. That I can say, "Hey, I love myself," or I'm exactly where I want and I need to be. And I think feeling really, really good with who I am, right, at any moment. And that to me is high vibe.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** And how I get there? It could be a lot of things. It could be working out. It could be me chanting for my Buddhist practice. It could be me sending my morning inspirational texts. It could be me kind of talking to a friend and connecting one-on-one. Those, to me, allow me to stay in high vibes.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** A low vibe activity, for example, could sometimes be someone cuts me off and I allow my energy to get there, or I go on social media, which after a long time can really put you into some low vibes for a myriad of other reasons. And so I've just started, I think, to be a lot more intentional about is this a high vibe activity or interaction, relationship, or is this low vibe?

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** You and I both have these systems because I think that we know that if you don't take control, if you don't set that intention, then the world sets it for you, and in ways you may not like. I mean, it doesn't mean we're rigid, but you have to roll with whatever you get. But if you don't start off with at least some direction, you definitely won't get what you want.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** And it's really the manner by which you approach these challenges which makes all the difference. It has everything to do with the heart set and the mindset. I think when we feel like we're out of control, I think we realize that we have so much power in owning how we show up, be it for that interaction or that relationship or whatever that is. And you're right, sometimes it is allowing it to be, which can be very, very challenging.

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** When we think about organizing our lives, our jobs are often a big part of that, but creating a fulfilling career is easier said than done. A few of us are lucky enough to stumble into a good fit, but for most of us, it requires more intention. Enter Jennifer Turliuk. She is the CEO of Maker Kids and the author of *How To Figure Out What To Do With Your Life Next*. We started our conversation by discussing the genesis of her book.

# MARGINS

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** I was super dissatisfied in my career. After university, I joined a large corporation, but I quickly found myself quite dissatisfied and not sure what I would want to do next that might make me happier. I realized that I'd done all sorts of career testing and counseling and none of that had really helped me figure out what I wanted to do next. So I decided to go on a bit of a self-education journey.

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** I flew to Silicon Valley and cold emailed all these entrepreneurs, investors, and professors there to ask if they would meet with me, then I could ask them questions about how they figured out what they wanted to do, and a bunch of them said yes and that was super cool. I learned a lot from them and it really helped me figure out what I wanted to do next.

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** And then I ended up writing a Forbes article about the process that seemed to really resonate with people. And so I decided to put it into a book, and the book contains everything I learned on that self-education journey and a career design process that I developed involving principles from quantified self, lean methodology and design thinking that people can use to help find a career that is more satisfying to them.

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** What does design thinking look like to you when it's applied to how you're organizing your career and your life?

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** Design thinking starts with empathizing with the user of the product you're planning to build, but in this case, the user of the career effectively will be you. So it starts with getting to know yourself better. And you might think, "Oh, I already know myself pretty well," but have you identified your purpose, your mission, your core values? There's lots of different ways that you can get to know yourself better, like meditation and career testing and so forth.

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** And then once you've done that, establish what your options are, what sorts of careers you're considering, and then figure out a way to prototype them in small ways with what I call a minimum viable commitments. And these are things that could help you get to know whether a certain job is for you or not, things ranging from a small commitment like reading an article about something, to a higher commitment like doing an informational interview.

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** It's really cool to be able to do this sort of work, because that way, instead of, for example, just like going to law school without ever having experienced a day in the life of a lawyer, investing five years of time and money to do that, and then finding yourself in the job for the first day and realizing, "Oh shoot, I don't like this," and it's all about prototyping ahead of time, doing informational interviews with lawyers, seeing if you can spend a day in the life to see if it's something you want to invest time and money in.

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** So what were some of the minimum viable commitments Jennifer used in her career journey?

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** So when I flew to Silicon Valley, one of the first people I met with was a professor at Stanford named John Krumboltz, who teaches people how to be career counselors. He had had over like 20 different careers, including being a postman, professor at Stanford, all sorts of things. And I said, "Hey, I'm not sure if like what I want to do next. What should I do?" And he said, "Well, figure out ways to test them each out."

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** So what I did was I figured out people and organizations that I might be able to learn from in those different areas and I cold emailed them and asked them if I could meet with them for coffee or shadow them. And I was surprised that folks said yes. So for example, I went for coffee with one of the founders of Airbnb. I also shadowed for a day the CEO at the time of Kiva, which was really cool. I got to go to all his meetings and just be a fly on the wall. I also spent a week sort of helping out with work at a couple other different companies as well, such as Causes, Dojo and the Stanford Design School. And the work range from admin work to strategy work, all sorts of different things.

# MARGINS

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** Hold on. I know what you're thinking. It cannot be that easy to get a founder of Airbnb to go out for coffee with you. I had to know, what was her secret?

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** So I made a cold email format, which I share in my book, but essentially it was like, "Hey, I'm a young recent graduate. I'm not sure what I want to do with my career. I really admire what you do and I wondered if you'd be open to speaking with me for about five minutes to help me figure out what I wanted to do next." Of course the meetings ended up being longer than five minutes, but yeah, I was surprised a bunch of people said yes. A bunch of people said, "How'd you get my email address? Not many people know it." I guessed it.

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** I think what happens is a lot of people think, "Oh, why would I email that person? They get so many emails, why would the answer me?" but if everyone thinks that way, then the person doesn't actually get that many emails. And that is the case for a number of people. Or even if they do, a number of people are willing to give back and to take the opportunity to reflect on their career choices. And for those that are fearful about it, I would just ask yourself what's the worst thing that could happen? When I went through that exercise, I thought the worst thing that happens is they delete the email, and that's actually not that bad a scenario.

**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** To me, this seems like an even better framework for as you get older, right? Because you don't want to waste time. But I find that, I don't know, people are scared. They're scared of what other people will think if they don't have it all buttoned up. That's an assumption we used to make about people having multiple gigs and jobs and careers, that they were somehow not adults. Did you ever encounter that idea?

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** I think people have been worried about having multiple careers or what that looks like, but it's interesting. Some of the most successful and happy people I've met have made what others might consider wild pivots in their careers. One of my friends, she was an actress for a long time. And one day I saw her, she just had this effervescent glow and happiness about her that I'd never seen that much on her. And I asked her what's up and she said, "Well, I became a software engineer." And I was like, "Oh my God, that's really cool." So she had gone to a nine week boot camp and became a software engineer and she absolutely loved it. She wasn't finding the success she wanted in acting, but she found it in software engineering.

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** Another friend of mine went from being a lawyer to owning a series of pole and dance studios. She still does law on the side, but she's super happy with what she's doing. And it's like, imagine if those people had stayed stuck in some box of their own making where they thought they couldn't make a change or worried they'd be judged for doing a big career change. They wouldn't have brought these amazing services or work to other people or to the world. So I think just because you've done something, like a certain career, it doesn't mean at all that you need to stick with it, especially in this day and age where you can teach yourself almost anything through the internet.

**JENNIFER TURLIUK:** I mean, there are some careers where, yeah, you need to go to med school to be a doctor, you need to go to law school to be a lawyer, although fun fact, in certain parts of the world, you don't need to go to law school to be a lawyer. But most careers, you don't need a formal education to succeed in it. To become a graphic designer, who cares where you went to school? Let's see the portfolio. Same with coding. Same with writing. A friend of mine writes for The New York Times. He never studied journalism. He never took a single class in journalism. You can literally do anything.

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**ELENA VALENTINE:** You've organized your career, but that's just one third of your daily life. What about the rest of it? To help myself wrap my mind around such a big topic. I turned to Lara Corey and Luigi Aldon. They're the co-founders of Smudge Wellness, a spiritual wellness company that uses curation to help its clients organize their lives.

# MARGINS

**LARA COREY:** I think that for us, we kind of start with the premise that life, even if you're trying to organize it, is fundamentally quite messy, and that that in itself is something that we should be acknowledging and embracing, not running away from. And that can co-exist with this concept of wellness that is very personal, one of a kind to you. And the goal is not necessarily to meet within this definition of what being organized is or what will is, but it's really finding that intention and that overall purpose that's fundamental and core to you. And that is the starting place to organize your life and guide your behavior and your actions from there.

**LUIGI ALDON:** Isn't that such a freeing thought, right? To know that there isn't this one perfect version of organizing your life or of spiritual wellness. In fact, knowing that actually frees up all this space. There's now all of this possibility.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** And that's the conundrum, right? Is that we're here talking about a theme of organizing your life when inherently, life is messy and it's accepting that as the baseline first.

**LARA COREY:** We often talk about the fact that people, like our customers, and for us certainly, we came to spiritual wellness from a place of real disorganization, sometimes even trauma, things that seemed very much outside of our control and maybe a failure of certain systems like family or government or education, whatever it is that brought you to wanting to create a spiritual wellness practice. And from that, it's tapping into this internal power and finding that you might not have control over the things in your life, but you can look inward and find and access that power within yourself in order to navigate and find meaning and purpose in how you interact and connect with the world.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** The most difficult moments of our lives are often when we need to be organized the most. Seeking out curation expertise can do more than help you in the moment. It can also help you build habits for years to come. In fact, that was the inspiration for Smudge Wellness.

**LARA COREY:** People that are trying to heal don't necessarily always are most equipped to have the time and bandwidth to really have a lot of organization and way of formulating all that. So it's almost like out of survival that you're accessing this information and you're trying to take as much as you can. You're don't necessarily have the luxury of a 40,000 feet view to kind of get the big picture.

**LUIGI ALDON:** So much of it is about a feeling, right? A connection that you have. And it's so hard I think for people to take those feelings and that energy and organize it in a way that makes sense to everybody. It's so deeply personal that it's almost like doing it a disservice to put it into these little boxes.

**LUIGI ALDON:** But what we were saying was what if we looked at all of these tools and these energies as a whole and we said, okay, what if people could decide what kind of power they wanted to tap into? What if they had that optionality and they had that ability to kind of really hone in on what they were working on? Wouldn't that make sort of the path to getting to these tools a little easier?

**LARA COREY:** And so it's kind of a large task, and it's not just for a company to try to distill all that information and tools that are out there and the products into one digestible piece, but it's also hard for the consumer and hard for someone that wants to navigate all that. So a lot of what we do is we really try to simplify and we try to present it. And you don't need to do this all at once. Every day does not have to involve like five hours of meditation with a huge crystal grid, but there are actually little bite-size pieces of a spiritual wellness practice that you can easily and simply integrate into your life, and those become your routines and those become your life.

**ELENA VALENTINE:** The Smudge team has done a fantastic job of helping people create their own spiritual wellness practice, but what about when it comes to organizing their own lives?

# MARGINS

LARA COREY: A lot of times I think I approach organization or just thinking about things from that lawyer brain, from back when I was a litigator, where I kind of have this dual approach where I kind of gather all this information and then I kind of step back and see what is the big picture? What are the themes? What's the big takeaways? And then from there, the other aspect of that is really drilling down to what are the bite-sized pieces that you can use to build that bigger picture.

LARA COREY: And so I think we often think of things, Luigi and I, just as a company and personally very thematically, and then we figure out from there, how do we break this down? And so that I think approach, that is everywhere from when we try to create a new product, like what are we going to do for holiday this year, what's our big theme, and then we come up with our like bite-sized pieces and try to approach it that way, and down to how we're going to build our company internally, like hiring and everything in between. We really do have that kind of same systematic approach, which I think has been really effective and helpful for us, and then that filters down into the way that people interface with our products.

LUIGI ALDON: All along with that, constantly checking in with ourselves, using our intuition, right? That's one of the powers that we have on the Smudge website, using our intuition to really just check in like is this where I want to be? Is there somewhere else that I need to be at this current moment? Do we need to be shifting our attention and focus elsewhere in order to create that organization that we were talking about? It's that check-in piece too along the way that I think is super important.

ELENA VALENTINE: Or maybe you just need a deck of cards.

LARA COREY: One of the things that we have is this core value deck, and it's really just a deck of cards that have words on it that each represent a different kind of core value. So it might be gratitude, courage, joy is another one. And we use that as a tool to just be an easy check-in and reminder of yourself of like what is the lens through which I'm going to guide my behavior and action and live that day, that week, that month. This is a very simple way to make sure that you're remaining true to your goals and your purpose that you've identified, and that you really are using that word, that core value to then navigate your life and your behavior from there. And that's something that's super simple, but is a way to just check in and make sure that, at that high level, is my behavior organized according to that big picture core value.

LUIGI ALDON: And it's almost like it provides that lens, yes, and it's organization, but without rigidity. For example, this quarter is gratitude, and that's up on our window right here. I'm constantly being reminded is this coming from a place of gratitude? Lara's is curiosity. This is her word, I'm looking at it right now, and she's the same. Everything we're doing, the way we're speaking to our customers, the way we're speaking to our staff, the people that are on our team, is it coming from that place?

LUIGI ALDON: And that's to say like, okay, that's the filter, and if some things happen that maybe aren't within that or don't come off like that, okay, great. Let's reset, take a breath and move from there, right? Nothing's going to happen if you don't do that too. I think that's a freeing thought too to think of in terms of when you're trying to organize your life.

LARA COREY: Yeah. Organization doesn't need to be set in stone. It needs to be intentional and purposeful, I think is our motto.

LUIGI ALDON: Boom. Put that on merch.

MARY ELLEN SLAYTER: So that's it for this episode of Margins from Managing Editor. You can find us on Apple Music, Stitcher, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts. Make sure you get organized and subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

# MARGINS

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**MARY ELLEN SLAYTER:** And a special thanks to the two oracles of organization who made all this possible, producer, Rex Nu, an audio editor, Marty McPadden. We'll see y'all next time.