

Bonni [00:00:00] I've had these lyrics from a song stuck in my head for a week or so now got to get it together. Got to get it together. In today's episode how to get it together.

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Bonni [00:00:23] Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. This is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to increase our personal productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

Bonni [00:00:50] I've had a couple of compliments from people over email about that theme music in the beginning but I should note that there has been at least one complaint since I launched the podcast about a year and a half ago that that song really really gets on somebody's nerves.

Bonni [00:01:05] And this episode is much more musically centric than any of the episodes I've ever done before. It certainly is eclectic in terms of the musical tastes Although somehow I seemed to be going back to the 90s in hip hop.

Bonni [00:01:17] So I should caution people if that's particularly distasteful you should keep in mind though that I won't be playing any more than 15 seconds of any of the songs and I don't dislike the song Let It Go from Frozen.

Bonni [00:01:28] But I do listen to it about five or six times a day now with two small children who that is now their favorite song and I'm realizing that 15 seconds of any song would be just plenty even if we didn't like it so much.

Bonni [00:01:41] So in this episode I have had this not not necessarily a song but some lyrics that come in the middle of a 90s hip hop song that go half cat to get to.

Bonni [00:01:52] We've got to get to him I went to the source I went to Facebook because usually if we're talking about songs from my growing up there's at least somebody out there that will know what I'm talking about but as I have my recording this I have been unable to figure out what song that stuck in my head.

Bonni [00:02:10] But I do know that it's been stuck in my head for about a week now and a lot of that has to do with this time of the semester it gets really busy and I have a few ideas for those of you listening who just want to get it together a little bit.

Bonni [00:02:22] I'm not going in depth on this episode on any of these particular ideas but just a few thoughts that I have around how we can get it together during this time in the semester that I also have at the end of today's episode a recommendation that I'm really excited to share with you that I think is really helping me get it together.

Bonni [00:02:38] I might be able to do the same for you. This first song that I'm going to highlight around the theme of getting that together with some advice that I have for you will be recognizable to many of us.

Bonni [00:02:50] And the theme of the song of course is a big part of what I try to keep in mind during this time of the semester. *Celebration plays*

Bonni [00:03:09] Of course celebration taking the time out to really celebrate what has gone well really helps me keep it together.

Bonni [00:03:15] I've mentioned before that a long time ago someone recommended I keep both a manila folder but I also extended that to be a digital folder of encouragement those things from students that really nourish my soul and help me connect with the deep significance that I feel of being a teacher.

Bonni [00:03:34] And sometimes it's as important for me to have that available that I'll actually have it within my field of vision when I'm working at the computer I'll have a letter there that I can just take out and look. Something that really has shown me over a long arc how I've had an impact on a student that is just so powerful and speaks to me so much.

Bonni [00:03:53] I would say that during the times when you're feeling overwhelmed it can really be helpful to celebrate what you're doing. And one

of the things I'll tell you you're doing right now is listening to a podcast to help you improve your teaching and your personal productivity.

Bonni [00:04:06] And I commend you for that. And if you're doing that you can't be so bad because learning is just such a powerful thing for us as educators to make sure that we're continuing to learn and then being able to pass some of that on to our students.

Bonni [00:04:20] We are going back to the 90s again with what might be familiar to some of you. And we're just going to hear the first lyric line of lyrics from this again recognizable song for those of us listening to apparently lip sync. Oh no this wasn't the lip sync guy that was Milli Vanilli. Anyway. Here is. A line of lyrics I'd like you to hear. *Ice Ice Baby plays*

Bonni [00:04:49] That's it right there. All right stop collaborate and listen. That was Vanilla Ice. For those of you that really want to go out and get that added to your music collection I'd like to take it to one of these ideas separately.

Bonni [00:05:01] First of all after reading the book Essentialism it has really helped me to stop and to take stake in what's really important. And the author Greg McKeown really challenges us to think about saying no to more things and to therefore allowing ourselves to say yes to the things that really are essential.

Bonni [00:05:23] So the first part of this is really to stop. And sometimes when we get busy we can just become almost where we're spinning where we are convinced that the way to solve this puzzle to unravel all of this is to try to get as much done.

Bonni [00:05:40] And if you're like me try to get as much done at the same time which we actually have seen the research ends up slowing us down instead of speediness up like we think it's going to. So you want to make sure that we stop and have those times for. It really is reflection.

Bonni [00:05:54] And I've talked before on prior episodes about doing a weekly review and I since then have added in a mechanism for doing a monthly review.

Bonni [00:06:03] And if you're interested in hearing about that I'd like to know because I'm thinking about maybe doing a show on the Monthly Review. In addition to that one that I did on the weekly review but I find that makes such a difference for me to do that and if I let that go everything else just ends up

spending so much more so never succumbing to the temptation to say I don't have enough time to stop. That's that's the first part of this.

Bonni [00:06:27] And then when we talk about collaboration that is another thing that some of us will tend to do or then we become we're spinning we think we have to do everything really quickly and try to do it all at the same time in some cases.

Bonni [00:06:41] But without the collaboration we miss the opportunities to assess priorities and see if what we're working on is really the most important thing we should be working on.

Bonni [00:06:52] And then also there are so many opportunities for getting resources that might help us be able to do it faster. It potential for maybe delegating it to someone else that's not always possible but we'll never have that opportunity if we're not collaborating and finding opportunities to do this and then that reminds me too of just the way that technology when we use a collaboration tool just how it speeds things up.

Bonni [00:07:17] Instead of emailing back and forth emailing back and forth finding a way to get whatever it is we're working on together in some sort of a collaborative space.

Bonni [00:07:26] So we don't have to worry about if we have the right version the most current version and we can. Much more likely get others to engage and make sure everyone is looking at the most current version as I said and then we want to listen. I was thinking about listening so much and how this might just be the most important part of our jobs.

Bonni [00:07:45] And when I allow myself to get so busy that I start to think it's about checking the items off of my task list and not about listening. I really have to stop collaborate and listen. Listening really is just so key.

Bonni [00:08:00] And sometimes when I truly take that time to listen especially to what a student has to say and to ask even more questions from them to help clarify I can wind up building more of a relationship with trust with that student so that I can then speed up in other ways where where having that kind of a relationship allows me to speed up the stuff that makes sense to speed up and life and to slow down for things that can be done and no other way through the slowness and richness of human relationships.

Bonni [00:08:37] Next up we have this. This song cracks me up because I play a lot of different kinds of music as students are coming into the class and it's really fun. Everything from a wonderful memory of an entire class busting out of a song Build Me Up Buttercup that oldie.

Bonni [00:08:57] And just how fun it was that randomly they all seem to know the lyrics to that song and just really belted out quite a tune together. Sometimes I'll play hip hop like I'm playing a lot of on today's episode sometimes I'll play country and this is a country song that I didn't realize was as popular with the students as it is.

Bonni [00:09:18] And I'll explain why I am playing this particular song in just a moment. But here you go. Just a few minutes of a few seconds of this song. *Are you gonna kiss me or not plays*

Bonni [00:09:36] No there is not any kissing that goes on in my classroom but there is just this idea of a yes or a no. Of a look in my case of having a list of projects which I have I have mentioned before on the show I use a task management system called OmniFocus and having that in front of me as a guide.

Bonni [00:09:58] And having the list of projects continually updated and David Allen who is the author of the book Getting Things Done he talks about the idea of a project being anything that has more than one step in it that has some kind of a defined outcome.

Bonni [00:10:16] And when I'm working within my task management system within OmniFocus [00:10:22] I [0.0s] am very considerate as to how I word projects. They all have an active verb in the front of it such as produce: Teaching in Higher Ed podcasts, write Teaching in Higher Ed blog posts and consult.

Bonni [00:10:39] I'm doing a little a few hours a week of consulting in online learning for my institutions. So I've got consult online learning and then I'm going to be presenting at a couple of conferences coming up here in 2016 and that is something that definitely needs to be a project of its own in my case because I need it to be in front of me otherwise I wind up procrastinating until way too close to the conference.

Bonni [00:11:03] And what's odd to me about that is even though I do procrastinate and therefore could not have spent every night working on it any

way I end up spending more time because when that cramming happens I don't get just that natural reflection and creativity that ends up happening.

Bonni [00:11:20] I was listening to a podcast. I wish I could remember which one it was but they were talking about the importance of boredom in our lives and how right after boredom comes those creative insights and that sometimes if we're so worried about entertaining in this case are students that we will miss the opportunities for them to have those creative insights of their own.

Bonni [00:11:42] And I know for me that I want to have those creative insights and that comes from careful reflection over a longer period of time. So I've got present Lily Conference 2016 present.

Bonni [00:11:53] OLC Innovate Conference 2016 and so on and so forth. I won't be reading off all of my projects to you I won't be leading reading the entire list. It's approximately right now 20 or so projects and then as I look to the next semester I will be adding another probably 10 or so projects because as I've mentioned on prior episodes I have the checklist that I use a checklist for a new academic year.

Bonni [00:12:20] A checklist for a new academic semester a checklist for class prep for each one of the classes that I'm teaching that semester so that again gets us up to about 10 or so different projects that get added and once they're complete such as once the preparation for the new academic year is complete then that project goes away and comes off of that project list.

Bonni [00:12:42] But I do have it stored as a template so I can bring it back anytime I want and add to it if I start to realize there's things that need to happen every time at the beginning of the year that I don't want to forget.

Bonni [00:12:53] So in the case here are you going to kiss me or not. Is what are we going to get done. What. What are our list of projects. And once a week I go in and review each project for those next actions. What is the next thing that needs to happen to move this thing forward and particularly for more undefined and complex projects that can be a hard thing to identify.

Bonni [00:13:17] But once you've identified that it can really let go of some of the bottlenecks that can start to happen or just some of the stagnation that can start to happen.

Bonni [00:13:25] Another key thing I want to mention here is that when we have whatever system it is you use not everyone is going to like omni focus. First of all it's only on a mac. Second of all even if all of you listening were on Macs it may be too complex for you and you might want something a little bit easier as we've talked about before the paramount factor here is that it needs to be a system that you trust.

Bonni [00:13:49] And I love that because as I start to get a little bit overwhelmed I put my attention back into this reflection and back into this process of capturing what needs to get accomplished and prioritizing.

Bonni [00:14:02] Then I just find myself going back to relaxation and find myself going back to you know it's a lot to get done but it's all in there and I'm able to at the start of every day or the end of every day in preparation for the next day to say what are going to be the most important things that need to get done during that day.

Bonni [00:14:23] It's not all going to get done but what the most important things and making sure that I'm communicating to other trusted colleagues when things might be delayed or making sure I'm not making commitments that I'm not able to fulfill. So that's a big piece as well there.

Bonni [00:14:39] This is the last musical interlude I will be doing this really takes me back. *Back to Life plays.

Bonni [00:15:06] That's a really hard song for me to turn off back to life back to reality back to the here and now. And in this case that was Soul to Soul by the way soul and then the roman numeral 2 soul back to life in this case we want to talk about getting real with your aspirations.

Bonni [00:15:24] At this point in the semester I've mentioned to you previously I am teaching one class that's brand new for me and we talked about back on a prior episode teaching what you don't know and I'm certainly feeling that although I'm also fortunately feeling that I know more about it than I realized that's been a nice a nice addition to the semester. But it is still tough when I don't have any of the tools I would normally have built up over 10 years of teaching.

Bonni [00:15:49] It's starting from scratch and a lot of cases are repurposing things from other classes. But it's it's tough work. And then teach in another class that I've only taught once before.

Bonni [00:15:58] And so it's a this is a tough semester and I have all these great ideas of things I want to do in fact I have great ideas of things I want to do with the class that I've taught for 10 years now.

Bonni [00:16:09] It is definitely I have no shortage of creativity but what I do have a shortage of is time to be able to execute on all those creative ideas.

Bonni [00:16:20] So in this case when we get back to life back to reality it's getting real with my aspirations and taking stock and saying you know you had this idea but it's probably not going to work or at the very least you need to back up a bit take a few steps back. How can you make this smaller.

Bonni [00:16:36] Because we talk about things being scalable a lot of times we're talking about something that small now and couldn't get bigger. Well in this case this big idea that I had how can I make it small but then it's still small but it still has that essence.

Bonni [00:16:50] And if it still has that essence then can it still have a contribution to the class without being as grandiose as my ideas were back when it was either the summertime or the winter break.

Bonni [00:17:01] And there was a lot more time for creativity than there is during a busy semester. So that would be my suggestion to people who are listening as just during this time in this semester is getting real what their aspirations are things we need to cross off that list of ideas or at the very least make them small and make them a little bit more doable.

Bonni [00:17:22] This is the time in the show when I do recommendations and I have an app to recommend that I've been excited about recommending to you actually for a few weeks now. But it didn't necessarily tie in with the topics that we were we are talking about those weeks I'm saving it until now.

Bonni [00:17:38] It's called the Due app and it is available on Android devices or on iOS devices. And I mentioned that I use omni focus as my main task manager. I also put things that are scheduled where I need to be at a particular time at a particular place in my calendar and I would have thought that those two tools would capture all of my needs as far as task and time management but they actually don't here's what often happens.

Bonni [00:18:09] I might say that I need to have written my weekly blog post by Mondays at 3:00 that's when it's due. Well there's a couple of problems with this

by the way one is that's not really when it's due. There is actually no time that it's due during the week in the sense of the earth will stop rotating if I don't post a blog post during a week.

Bonni [00:18:31] I've like most weeks to have them post but if I miss a week here and there it's not a big deal. I feel stronger about the podcast. I have posted a podcast once a week since this podcast launched in June of last year but the year before I feel really strongly about that commitment.

[00:18:46] The blogs I feel less so because regularity in the blogging isn't. If we miss a week it's not anywhere near as crucial as it is as it seems to be in podcasting.

Bonni [00:18:55] At any rate so there's one problem with that is just that's not truly a due date and getting things done principle that David Allen great great book that I've recommended previously he talks about when we put due dates on things that aren't really do then then we are contributing to having a system that we don't really trust and we get the snowball effect where we take all of these things that we're saying or do then but they're not really do then.

Bonni [00:19:19] But we just wanted to have our attention then and we end up bumping them because we can't get all of them done on the day that we say they were due back when I used to use a Franklin planner a written one.

Bonni [00:19:29] I would try to rewrite the ones you know down the days farther on and it just really got to be super sloppy. So again I actually should pick something different that that really does need to happen at a given time and that would be an example actually to give a home example would be that when you needed to take the trash out if you don't take the trash out by the time the trash collectors are going to come by to get it then your trash isn't going to get collected.

Bonni [00:19:56] So that night before is pretty crucial. But if the reminder would come up on your calendar or it came up on omni focus or whatever tool it is you're using you might take a quick look at it and say I don't have time to do this but I'll do it after I'm done with whatever it is I'm working on I'll grade these next few papers or whatever.

Bonni [00:20:15] And then out of sight out of mind you may very well forget about it entirely and go to bed. And then the next morning have that feeling of panic. I can hear the drugs coming up. Better go down and maybe days and

get those cans out to the curb. I've actually been working on eating healthier and I'm excited that that's been really successful for me so far since about mid November of last year.

Bonni [00:20:38] And one of the things that really works with my personality is to track what it is that I eat while the only way I'm going to track what it is I eat is if I do that a few times a day because otherwise it's just going to go out of my mind. I'm not going to remember what it is that I ate earlier in the day.

Bonni [00:20:54] And so I've set up in the Due app and that also works on my Apple Watch by the way too so it's very very close to having those little taps on my wrist. Hey have you logged your food yet. Have you logged your food. Have you logged your food.

Bonni [00:21:08] And just those little gentle taps and it's completely customizable for how much you want to bug you about something and how much you want it to bug you would probably depend if it's something like taking the trash out.

Bonni [00:21:22] Maybe it's every 30 minutes. I mean the default setting is every five minutes and there are some things some times of the day. But I would like to be reminded every five minutes until I actually do it.

Bonni [00:21:32] And for me that is working well for me to have that be tracking what it is that I eat. There are other examples as far as my teaching. We have the opportunity sometimes at our university if we're unable to Proctor an exam for a student who has academic accommodations.

Bonni [00:21:49] Our Disabilities center allows they will Proctor the exams for us. But I always like to be sure that I get their exams back from their office so I can grade them with the other students exams so that I can know that I'm not going to be knowing whose exam it is that I'm grading I've talked about that in prior episodes to as far as being fair.

Bonni [00:22:12] And I'll have a little reminder go pick it up from the disability center go pick it up from the disability center until I go pick it up from the disability center and I don't forget.

Bonni [00:22:21] So if you would like something that goes beyond the reminders that are in most of the task management system if you want to be pestered a little bit more I think do. The new app is a really good thing to check out.

Bonni [00:22:36] So again I have stopped some stuff that are set up in there on a daily basis and then there are some things that I just set up. Oh there's an exam coming so I want to make sure and pickup so and so's exam for that one super easy to set up a new reminder super easy to customize it for how often you want to be reminded and on what day it's going to happen and all of that.

Bonni [00:22:57] They really have taken every precaution for making it very fast to set up and very easy to use and it is a beautiful design. It's a really nice looking app so I'd highly check out. I highly recommend that you check out the Due app as it can really help you get it together on this show.

Bonni [00:23:17] I've talked about getting it together making sure that we take the time out to celebrate to stop collaborate and listen to have that system that we trust and looking at that list of projects and reviewing them for actions and then getting back to life back to reality back to the here and now.

Bonni [00:23:35] And that leads to getting real with our aspirations. Thanks so much for listening. And I really would encourage you if you just even have a minute. Speaking of getting it together to leave a review for the podcast what that does is it helps other people discover the show.

Bonni [00:23:51] And I'm so excited because I mentioned I'm going to be speaking at a conference. I'll talk more about this on a future episode perhaps but I'm I won an award for the podcast. I get to give a little highlight of the podcast and share it with people at the OLC Innovate Conference and so if any of you are going to be there I'd love to catch up with you in person.

Bonni [00:24:11] But I would love before that conference happens if we could have more reviews up there about your experience listening to the show and you can just rate it or read a review whatever you prefer.

Bonni [00:24:21] And that just helps other people discover the show and we can just continue to build this community get larger and as always if you have suggestions for future guests you can do that at teachinginhighered.com/feedback.

Bonni [00:24:36] And lastly I just want to remind you to be sure if you have not yet subscribed to the weekly updates that's where you don't have to go up to the show notes in order to get to the links to all the things that we talked about.

Bonni [00:24:49] It'll come just one email per week into your inbox. Get all the show notes and most often a blog post about either teaching or productivity written by me and you can subscribe at teachinginhighered.com/subscribe that was teachinginhighered.com/subscribe. And just thanks so much for listening. And I look forward to seeing you next time.

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