

How to Have More Energy and Focus

Season 4 Episode 3

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:47.4] AS: Welcome to Insatiable Season 4, Episode 3 with Mia Scharphie; *How to Have More Energy and Focus*. This is really an important issue when it comes to health because when we don't have enough energy or can't get it all done, this is when we tend to turn to food and alcohol. So, it's a root cause of overeating and over drinking, and I wanted to have Mia on because she has a really creative perspective in that she looks at our energy, time and focus from a holistic perspective.

So, today's conversation was so great. I had this big A-ha myself about part of why my energy sometimes gets like too high and then I crash and I think you guys are going to really start to understand based on her model calendar how to better organize your days so that your energy and focus feel more consistent and you are in charge of them versus feeling like you're at the mercy of waning energy levels.

We're also going to get into how to have better sleep hygiene or sleep habits by making the most of your creative energy. We're also going to talk about some tactics to push back on people who want to break your boundaries, especially as women, without triggering bias against women. This is probably my favorite part of the conversation where we kind of joke in the episode that you want to blame everything on the patriarchy, and some stuff for sure is true. However, we have some agency and wiggle room within that and Mia is going to give us some tips on pushing back when we want to preserve our energy and focus.

Lastly, we get into some rituals to stay productive and balanced including her favorite herbs and one that I'm actually experimenting with and an easy way to get that in.

You will really enjoy today's episode. It's pretty out-of-the-box with the ideas and the topic and I really enjoyed it.

A little bit more about Mia, she is a creative career coach, a designer and an agent of change. She founded Build Yourself to help women in creative fields move past the obstacles that hold them back in their careers. She's a trained facilitator and has worked on women's advocacy for over 15 years. She's run a research effort on women in social impact design for the Harvard Business School; is a founding member of the Equity Roundtable at the Boston of Architects; and, was named as one of the Impact Design Hub's social impact design 40 under 40. You're really going to love her energy and perspective and hopefully walk away with more time, energy and focus. Enjoy today's episode.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:03:20.9] AS: Thank you so much for being here, Mia [pronounced Maya]. I really appreciate you taking the time to chat with us.

[0:03:26.8] MS: Yeah. I'm so excited to be here.

[0:03:29.2] AS: Wonderful. So, as you know, this season of Insatiable, our Season 4, is about clarifying issues so that we can move forward in a more powerful way. One of the biggest challenges I see that comes up with my clients is what they think of as time management and trying to fit it all in, while also it often feels like our health conflicts with the rest of our lives, right? Fitting it all in. However, you have this really different approach and I think of it and I'm always telling my clients to think of life in terms of **energy management versus time management**, and I feel like you have the expertise to really make that concrete for people. So, I'm so excited, because I can't think of a more pressing issue than energy management both globally and locally. Are we going to get it from like unsustainable sources? But also, how we do that in a personal

level, because the macro reflects the micro. So really looking forward to talking to you today.

[0:04:20.4] MS: Yeah. I'm so excited to talk about it because I think there's time, there's energy, there's focus and all of them relate to each other but they are definitely not the same thing. So, getting really – I know your theme is really about getting clear on what the actual issue is, clarifying the issue, and I think getting a more specific read on, "Okay. What is the issue here for me? Which one of these three do I need to optimize?" – is really helpful stuff.

[0:04:46.4] AS: And you have – I mean, I want you to share a little bit about your story of how you even came to realize these three distinct differences between focus, energy and time in your own life, because I am a big believer that everything's broken and we need these new frameworks coming out of personal experience often to see what's healthy.

[0:05:05.2] MS: Yeah. So, I'm a designer. I'm a creative. I think the first place to start is that everything for me is about the kind of creative lens. I'm trained as a designer, but I also – I think like your official professional background is one thing and just how you approach the world is another thing. So, I got the skillset always knowing that I wanted to probably apply it in a different way, but just knowing that I really, really wanted that skillset, but I went through design school. If any of your audience has ever been through architecture school or knows folks who've gone through architecture school.

[0:05:39.5] AS: I have a client who's going through it, but just – I'm going to send this episode to her, like stat.

[0:05:44.6] MS: Yeah. I mean, not only is it crazy like in terms of intensity of time, but we've got this horrible, horrible culture of martyrdom. I can't tell you how often people just stand around in the studio talking about how busy they are and like, "Oh! I stayed

up till this time last night." "Oh! I stayed up till that time last night," and then basically just like spend their time talking about how hard they're working.

It just felt like in that experience, I think we talk a lot about how our culture really idolizes businesses and I felt like I got that just so, so extra concentrated through my design training and I think it was through that process and recognizing that that culture, which is all about like nose to the grindstone all the time, which was supposed to be a creative culture, was actually not very good for me to be creative in.

[0:06:39.7] AS: Yeah, because I think about, to be creative, you need space, you need like a chance to play, but if you have all these deadlines and intensity and are supposed to be working all the time, how does that feed creativity?

[0:06:51.6] MS: Yeah. I mean, I think the school that I went to, it's very much about like you're always at your desk, you're always working on something and if you're not there then you don't love design and you don't – Because I think it can be hard to make it in the creative professions. There's the sense that if you're not totally dedicated, you will never make it.

Even so much so that – So I studied landscape architecture, but there were people in my school who are studying architecture, and the architecture folks are even more intense and sometimes the professors will come in on Saturday night just to see who's actually sitting at their desk so that they know the ones who are like actually committed, which is totally, totally crazy. Yeah. So intense.

[0:07:32.5] AS: How did you start to get out of that? Because I think it's one thing to say like in theory, yeah, but then when you're the one who "looks like the slacker", at least at first, but you may produce a better output down the road, but then you have that risk before you get the reward. So how did you – One of the things you had mentioned when we're talking about this was like you had really unhealthy work and

sleep habits, and I feel like sleep is such a foundation to our health and no one – I mean, I get enough sleep, because I'm a 90-year-old woman inside. I need my sleep. But how did you reconcile sleep and something that's so – For our listeners, I also want to just expand the definition of creativity. A lot of my clients are leaders in their field and leadership takes a certain – To your point, the lens that you bring to the world. If you're trying to do good work in the world, usually you're having to bring a counterculture lens to what's "normal." So, this is like for anyone whose work occupies a lot of the way they see the world and etc.

[0:08:33.7] MS: Yeah. Okay. So, there were like maybe three points over the course of my time I like figured it out, and two of them happened in design school. So, the first was that I had this crazy studio that was really, really creative and it was actually focused on Walden Pond. So, we read Thoreau, and I am based in Boston, so I would go to Walden Pond like every week and they're just like, "Walk through and like just experience the landscape," and it was so, so different than the very kind of intense, like you do your best work by chaining yourself to your desk. We actually had my dean of the school or of my program at the time was like, "I don't understand why people are going on field trips. You can learn everything you need to know through Google these days," and it is just like, "Oh, God!"

[0:09:22.6] AS: Just kind of an asterisk, I know the theory is that Thoreau was like by himself, but my dad said there's truth that like his mom brought him cookies.

[0:09:31.2] MS: Oh my God! You know what? I was just there this weekend actually, like actually yesterday, I was just there and I was there with my good friend and we're like, "You know? We kind of – Yes, he was in the woods, but I kind of think he brought his laundry home on the weekends to his mom."

[0:09:47.4] AS: And she apparently brought him cookies. I wonder if he was an emotional eater.

[0:09:52.3] MS: Oh my God! That's awesome. Yeah.

[0:09:54.6] AS: I'm not saying he was. That's my question.

[0:09:56.4] MS: Yeah. No. It's so, so funny. Yeah, so I had this very different studio and they like actually wanted us to experience things and be listeners to the world around us rather than just like constantly create and produce, and it made me realize that when I took this like white space away from just chained to your desk, that's when I had my best ideas. It's like the way people talk about having like great ideas in the shower or really good ideas on a walk. For me, I've realized that – And I think this is true for a lot of people. I've got to do these things where I like create something I push, I produce, and then I actually have to step away. It's funny, because I know a lot of your listeners are probably thinking about in their lives issues of food and exercise are really central.

I started exercising not for the physical benefits, because I realized that when I was working on a problem and I would like hop into the gym and get on the elliptical, that's where I would have my A-ha's. So, the time at the gym actually became part of that creative process where all the things in my subconscious come together and like clicked.

[0:11:00.9] AS: I love that you bring that up because that's one of the ways that I've been able to be consistent with exercise or movement, is when I'm working on like a book or a program, like I know I do that in the morning and then I literally go work out and I imagine like all the ideas just kind of like jumping around and like kind of – Because then you get like clarity from – Because your first draft is always a shitty draft or whatever. But I'm like, "Oh my God!" That would really be one of the things that made me stop working and get to be outside or move was like, "I'm going to get more creative ideas and clarity."

[0:11:34.1] MS: Totally. Yeah, it's an essential part of my creative process, and then it's great because then I never have to motivate myself to go to the gym because like, "Oh, I got to workout." So, the other piece of it was that, for religious reasons, I was taking off a Saturday every week. When I first started – and like no phone, no computer, no anything. I mean, it's actually going to be my 11-year anniversary of this practice. So, like I've been doing it for a good long while, and actually last year I had a 10-year anniversary party and it was super, super fun. But when I started design school, it was like this thing like, "Oh God! I have one-seventh less time to work than everyone else."

But what I started to realize was I have one-seventh less time. I have these great ideas when I step away and also it means that I spend my time in the six-sevenths better because I've got to come up with ways to work smarter, not harder. So, I got really, really good at triaging and being like, **"Well, here's a list of all the things that I would do to make a perfect project," but this is like the 20% that's actually going to push it over the edge, so I'm going to focus on that.** So, I felt like those restrictions helped me – I mean, I use that skill all the time in my business now and I feel like I'm a great prioritizer because I have that self-restriction.

[0:12:48.2] AS: Yeah. Well, creativity thrives on constraints, right? You tell someone, like, "Write a book about anything," and then – I'm picking writing, because I'm working on a book proposal, or like do anything. It's like, "Oh, I don't know where to start," but if someone's like, "You have to do it within this and this," it's all of a sudden. So, you get clearer because of those constraints.

So, are you saying that then you focus on the 20% of what's going to make your output? Whether it's work, food, etc., different?

[0:13:17.6] MS: Yes. Yes, I do, and when I work with women and I work with them as a creative coach and a career coach and I used to think that my challenge, my obstacle was patriarchy, and then I realized that the bigger challenge is actually busyness. It was actually kind of disappointing because I was like, “Oh! I can get to the patriarchy monster until I can get to the busyness monster first.”

[0:13:41.4] AS: But don't you think it's kind of the same thing? Because, to me –What I mean, capitalism is kind of this nesting doll of white supremacy, which is a nesting doll of patriarchy. But that idea that we're widgets and only worth what we can produce, which is why we have to be busy, is part of kind of – It's not so much patriarchy, but it set the system up, I think.

[0:14:03.1] MS: Yeah, but I think that there's a special intersection, which is a lot of women are used to being people pleasers, are used to doing things like the right way. It turns out that in the classroom, teachers actually discipline girls who speak out of turn more than they discipline boys. They're like, “We are rule followers and we also are people pleasers,” and part of that, there's this great quote by Tara Mohr who wrote the book *Playing Big*. She says that centuries of women's exclusion from political power, financial power, all of the powers, it resulted in people pleasing behaviors, because if we wanted something, we had to go ask our husband or ask our brother or ask our father. So, we developed these kind of avoidance habits and these habits to kind of like do everything right according to the rules because we didn't have direct power.

So, what it means, and I see this a lot when I work with women who are in kind of like that midcareer area where, Oh, listen. They're super busy. Maybe they're managing a couple of people and they're like really struggling with the idea that they're not getting it all done the way they used to do or maybe they're managing a home-life and a business-life, and it just feels like they're like a Tupperware that like [inaudible 0:15:14.5] you can't actually put the top on.

So, part of what we work on is I say, "Okay." Literally, one of my assignments is right down everything that you need to do. Highlight 20% to 30% of the stuff on the list that's the most important. I want you to start on that. If you don't get to the rest of the stuff, I'm not saying you will never get to. I'm saying it's later on the priorities list and getting to it is a bonus, right? Because I find that sometimes when we restrict ourselves, it's super – It's really hard. But saying like, "Do the 30% on the list and then like get up and like cheer and be like, "I did it!" and like that's what 100% completion looks like." Then the other stuff is gravy, right?

So it's like literally applying that mindset of: at the end of the day, if you only do have a certain amount of time, there are ways that you can kind of trick your mind and so focusing on the things that really matter and making those choices without feeling like you're like chopping off, like, "I'm not going to do this," and you're just like, "Hopefully I'll get to it one day," right? It's on the someday maybe list.

[0:16:15.7] AS: Well, and I think it starts by doing that exercise you also start to see like what can I delegate? What do I actually not care about? But maybe has just been carried over. I think about – Like one of the things we do in Truce With Food[®] is simplify food and people are like, "Oh my God! Now I don't feel like I have to meal plan." I just know basically how to improvise, and this is just as good. So, I can actually take that out of my buildup of food anymore. I don't need to even like go on Pinterest and find recipes. Maybe once in a while, but like simplifying things is so important, because I think – This is part of the avoid pattern that I talk about and the stress responses. You build up all-or-nothing thinking. It's part of like, "It has to be perfect," or whatever.

So often, if you're looking at that, you can even look at your list and think about how to simplify, like, "I have to reach out to this person." "Well –" If you're better at phone, pick up the phone rather than saying, "I'm going to spend an hour crafting the perfect email."

[0:17:16.4] MS: Right. Yeah.

[0:17:17.2] AS: It gets you in that troubleshoot mindset, I think as well, rather than, “Oh my God! I should be busy forever.” I love that. I’m kind of like – Not devil’s advocate, but curiosity. **What if you don’t know the 20%?** You’re so used to doing everything.

[0:17:34.8] MS: Yeah. So, if you don't know what the 20% is, then – I actually am a big fan of involving other people in your process. So, I think, rather than overthinking it yourself, like write this stuff down and like bring them to, whether it's a coworker or a partner or a friend and being like, “Here’s what I got on my list. If you were to pick three things on this list, what would you pick?” and it's a place to start, because at the end of the day, this is like a rapid prototyping process, right? You don’t know what the most important stuff is on your list. But even just starting to like run an experiment Tuesday and then try something different Wednesday, will start to sharpen your experience for your sense of what's right.

So, for me, I think in design school there's this – You’re like making these drawings like totally perfect and you're zoomed in on your computer and then you zoom back out and you print it out and you have it at your critique. You realized that that thing you spent forever on, no one’s even going to see it. But you didn’t know that until you went through a critique, right? You didn't know that. So, over time, I find that just asking yourself that question of like, “What's the 20% going to be?” and then understanding – Then seeing like how it plays out. That will sharpen your perspective.

[0:18:47.8] AS: Yeah. What I’m also thinking about, you can think about what worked before. I’m thinking of a client I have right now in [Truce With Food®](#) and she’s an amazing designer and she’s looking for like a career shift in terms of – Because her and her boyfriend might move. I’m thinking she could just look back in the past and say, “Okay. What helped me get these jobs before?” Rather than thinking I have to do

social media and I have to do this and that, because you can't do all the things. But if you start to get clear on what actually moves the needle for you. **For my clients listening, this is what we do in Truce With Food[®]. What metrics actually matter?**

People often wonder, ask me, "Should I get this blood test or this or this?" I'm like, "Is that going to help you change your behavior?" If not, then maybe save your money and work on the basic stuff of sleep, more sleep, more water, vegetables, the stuff we know works that we've been trying to fine tune if you can't do the foundational things. So, I think, for you, it's like what you're saying is, "Find that 20%," which is going to create momentum too. Because the big thing is once you're started momentum, you kind of want to keep going.

[0:19:49.7] MS: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. The last thing I'll say, because I know that you're always thinking about how people can expand their power, is that practicing doing that means that we get out of this cultural thing like – Like the cultural busyhood is a cultural victimhood, like, "Oh, I'm so busy," blah-blah-blah, and when we work for other people, sometimes they say, "Oh! There's meeting tomorrow. Now do 8 hours of PowerPoint," and you're like, "Ugh!" But there are a lot of ways in which you can – Even if you can't take full power back, there's a lot of ways you can take some power back.

So, like, "Does the PowerPoint really have to be 8 hours? Can you use what you did before?" **That mindset of like, "How can I...?" rather than "Can I..."**, I think, is a way to take back at least some of your agency in a world where you may not have 100% control.

[0:20:38.7] AS: That is such a great tip. I want to emphasize that. That actually just came up in Truce With Food[®], is one of the new behaviors someone is practicing to transform their story is like not thinking they have to prove that they need to – Like prove why they're there. Just assuming this is why I'm at the table here in my work. Not

proving – Like having to people please or anything. It's like, "No. I'm just here." And you bring a different energy and you don't feel like you have to say like, "Hey, look at me. I'm over here working so hard." You can just say – This is my idea. It's such a different energy.

So, did that help you with your sleep then? Is that –

[0:21:12.8] MS: Yeah. Okay. I think that **there's two things that made sleep work for me**, and you and I are kind of like picking up on them already. So, thing number one is that we have goals for ourselves. I know that if I get to bed around 11:30-ish, it's just the right time for me. I think you and one of your guests, Juliet, I think, were talking about how sometimes you can get really wound at night and then you like stay up stressing. I know that there's a sweet spot that my body has found of like the right time for me to go to sleep and it makes it easy to wake up in the morning and that I feel more excited about life.

But it's really hard. It was really hard to meet that, like to get there. So, the big A-ha for me was realizing that it's not just about what happens at 11:30 p.m. It's about what happens before 11:30 p.m., and there are these gates that I kind of got to make it through in order to arrive at 11:30 p.m. to get in bed, to be in bed and be ready to sleep. So, **one is that I actually need wind down time**. I need an hour or maybe even an hour and a half to chill and think and read a book. So that means that I actually have to start thinking about getting ready for bed around 9:45, which if you told that to my like 18-year-old self I'd be like, "Oh! So lame." But like, "Hey, that's it."

Then in order to do that, it means that I can't be eating dinner at 9 p.m. For me, that previous gate that I need to hit is like starting to shift towards dinner at 7 p.m. and make sure that I'm done by 8 p.m. So, I find that if I can hit my dinner time and then hit my getting ready for bed time and sometimes it means putting up some boundaries. Like my partner and I right now are long distance and being like, "Hey, I cannot talk to

you after 10 p.m. because otherwise I will not wind down.” I have to hit these milestones in order to actually feel excited and happy the next day and using my allies and helping me meet these. “Hey, friend, I would love to eat with you. I need to have dinner done by 8 in order to feel good and feel healthy.” That’s what helps me arrive at 11:30 and be ready to go to sleep.

Now, **the other side of it is** exactly what you and I are picking up on, which is that if I flip out and start holding a temper tantrum if like I’m still halfway through a burrito at 8 p.m., then I just stress myself out. So, **I try to aim for 80% perfection on those milestones, and if I don’t achieve perfection, I don’t get mad.** I just – And there’s enough kind of redundancy in the system where if I have one night that’s like a late night, I know I can handle the next day. So, it’s about knowing where I need to be when and then also having **a sense of permission** that it just doesn’t ever align to that, because life is complicated. So as long as I can hit it 80% of the time, I know that I’m going to set myself up to feel optimistic instead of pessimistic and have those creative breakthroughs.

[0:24:12.0] AS: I love that. So, setting the expectations, because what you’re describing is if you do it 80% of the time, your body is going to have the resilience to be able to handle that 20% of oops. For people listening though, 20% leverage of what’s going to give you the most impact, but then 80% with your self-care, energy, health rituals are like don’t aim for perfection and have the expectancy of 80% rather than – Because a lot of my clients, a lot of our work is getting out of that all-or-nothing.

I’m laughing as you were like, “I’ve got to put the burrito in your mouth.” It’s like, “Curse the portion size at Chipotle.”

[0:24:50.8] MS: Totally. It’s like, “Drop that burrito right now.”

[0:24:55.1] AS: But the burrito, I like it. So funny. So, I love that. Realizing that sleep has its own preparation and that you have to wind down. I mean, I can hit the bed – Carlos is so jealous – and I can fall asleep. But he watches these shows. He'll probably kill me. I don't even know exactly what they are. But he's a writer, so he's always looking at like – whereas I'm looking at the content, like, "Oh! That was a great story." He's like looking at like how they did or whatever. But he watches these shows. He's like, "They ask nothing of me. They're like these like cartoon superhero shows. I need something that asks nothing of me. That just turns my brain off." So that's really important for those people who are struggling with sleep to think of your day and your energy and all that stuff not just when you hit the pillow but before.

So, tell me a little bit about then – we're talking about the evening – but you have this model calendar.

[0:25:47.3] MS: Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[0:25:48.1] AS: ...used to align your energy states, but also organize your time.

[0:25:53.1] MS: Yes. So, I got this idea from Rachel Kirk who's a business coach who I listen to her podcast. I really admire her. I first started listening to her because she used to be a high-powered consultant. She was super, super burned out. She started working for herself and then she decided that she wanted to work from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. so that she could be around for her kids and she still wanted to make her previous salary as a high-powered consultant.

So, she has this calendar, this model calendar, and I've built my own that makes sense for me. **I think about, "Okay. What are the things that I know drive my business forward?"** I didn't know what they were when I first started, but I came up with my working theory, right? Then over time I whittled it and adjusted it.

So, for me, I work when I'm with clients. So, I need to have time to work with them. I need to have time to develop program materials. I need to have time to talk to potential clients and then I need to have time for marketing. Then I need to have time for – I ran a small design consultancy – so I need to have some time for marketing and I need to have some time for the work itself.

So, then I started thinking like, "Okay." **We talked about time is somewhat divisible. Focus is not really that divisible, and energy – Like sometimes you can actually generate more energy through what you do.** Energy is trickier, right? It's a little wiggly. So, I know that I'm an extrovert. So like right here right now, during the afternoon I'm like doing exactly what I love to do, which is talking with someone else and brainstorming and feeling like we could talk about 7 million things. That is a good thing for me to be doing in the afternoon.

In the morning, if you and I were having this conversation in the morning, I would get like riled up and then I could never come back down to like sit down, like if I needed to write a blog post or if I needed to like put together a career roadmap for one of my students. I couldn't do that, because my energy has been like turned on and I can never kind of pull it back into the genie bottle.

[0:27:53.0] AS: It's almost like you're starting out with high energy, so like the extroverted, "Oh!" It lifts you so high up versus the afternoon we all tend to have energy dips. So, this is bringing it back up.

[0:28:03.7] MS: Exactly. So, I'm going to get off this call with you and I'm just going to be like fired up and like having these new ideas and whatever and then I'm going to like eat my dinner at 7. Then – Whatever.

[0:28:15.3] AS: Have a smaller burrito so it's done by 8.

[0:28:17.1] MS: Exactly. Tiny burritos.

[0:28:21.8] AS: Could you find those in America? I don't know. Maybe in Boston. New Englanders are a little bit more – Have more restraint. The puritans.

[0:28:31.0] MS: We're like the capital – Not only are we the capital of Dunkin Donuts, but my friend was on the train with some people who are coming in to a sports game and they were like, "Okay. If we get split up, we'll meet at the Dunkin Donuts." She was like stressing out to them. She was like, "There's two Dunkin Donuts at the train station. How will you ever find each other?"

Yeah. So, for me, I know that like all the exciting stuff that I generated in this conversation with you, when I go to the gym in the morning, I'm going to be like thinking through it. Then when I come back to like get my work done and write a proposal or write a blog post, that incubation and that kind of like the A-ha and then the sleeping on it, which I think really helps and like the whitespace of the gym means that like I'll be ready to get started on heads down work tomorrow morning.

[0:29:24.9] AS: For people who are trying to think of their own energy lulls, because you and I are extroverted, but a lot of my clients are introverted. So, I'm thinking they probably need what you're calling whitespace after presenting or being out in the world, making sure they have those buffers so that they can kind of come back in to themselves so that their battery doesn't – **Because when the battery gets super low, everyone has a different threshold. That's when people tend to eat for energy, tends to eat carbs. They tend to then not want to get to the gym.** Or a different – For a lot of people, what you're describing, and why people often don't work out is they say they're tired, but they're really feeling stagnant. Kind of like, "Oh my God! I haven't had any energy," especially for our extroverts, I'm sure. We have to – Pay attention to the extroverts too. Although I'm sure the introverts are like, "Oh God! The whole world pays attention to the extroverts." But I'm thinking about – So people should just get in tune

with – Or do you think people who have certain symptoms? Like, “Hey, in the morning, if you slept well, we’re all kind of good to go,” and then at lunch time, like I know I need to work out at lunch time, or I’ve come to accept that I usually will not work out in the afternoon. I just don’t have the energy, because I don’t love working out.

I mean, I’m kind of in a group where I like it right now, but I love it when I can push myself, and I just can’t push myself in the afternoon. So, it’s like I’m creating that like natural low for me as an extrovert to get that back up. So then in the afternoon, that’s when I book my clients, because I like can be more inward and listening and sharp as well.

[0:31:03.5] MS: Yeah. Well, I wish I could give this is how you should do it, but I know just based on how you teach, **there’s no one answer for one body**. So, what I recommend is to keep a journal, like a keep notebook, keep your iPhone out, whatever it is, for a week and just note down what you do over the course of the day and how you’re feeling about it. So, if you’re an introvert and you realize that you schedule back to back meetings and it’s not working, and you don’t feel good about it, then you’ll know. Let’s say you’re an introvert and you have a meeting first thing in the morning and then you feel awesome because there’s nothing else you have to be on for, like, “Okay. Great!” Have your meetings in the mornings.

When it comes to the gym, they say that we have more willpower at the beginning of the day than we do at the end, and it’s kind of a finite resource. But I know – The time that I started working out was when I was in a design studio when I was so stressed out that I just needed – You know like the movie Hook where he goes and like smashes all the clocks?

[0:32:06.2] AS: I’ve never seen it, but I trust you.

[0:32:08.6] MS: If there was a clock smashing room, like that would've been fine and I would have gone and smash clocks and felt better about my day. Instead I just hopped on the elliptical and it helped me get out my aggression. So that felt right for me at that point. So, the key is to, yeah, give yourself – Like if you actually, even if for three days you just write down what you're doing and how you're feeling about it, **you will have at least three or four ingredients for how you want to organize your time moving forward.** I work with women who are business owners and women who work for other people and sometimes we have this sense that especially when we work for someone else, "What control do I have over my time?"

Again, there's not full agency but partial agency. So, one woman who I worked with, she was feeling stressed out all the time and busy all the time and I said, "You've got folks you're managing. Why don't you say my office hours are in the afternoons from 2 to 4?" or if she has a client meeting, she'll move things around, but like that's when I'm not only available, but I'm here to be totally present and helping you out with the issues that you're running into on your projects and the things you're trying to get through. It doesn't mean you shouldn't interrupt me if there's something super, super important or a complicated conversation you're having with a supplier. But that's when I'm 100% available for you.

Then it meant that her reports are like getting their act together and anticipating when she's free so that they're not interrupting her every moment, and it doesn't mean that someone will never come to her in the middle of the day, but it's like taking 80% control. There's that number again. **80% control over the resource of your time, not being a perfectionist about it, but like giving some guidelines** so that then you actually get to have uninterrupted time, which is super important to getting your job done.

[0:34:02.3] AS: Yeah. Well, this brings up an interesting point though, because a lot of the work we do with my clients is I get them out of these like accommodating patterns,

which we're talking about. Kind of like just open, and we talk about getting to collaboration where it is that win-win perspective. Again, **if you guys want to know your predominant stress response pattern, go to alishapiro.com and you can take the comfort eating quiz** and give you some tools for this.

But we talk about like framing these things as a win-win rather than like, "Oh my God! It's me versus them," or whatever. However – And I know that because you're obviously like socially justice-informed, there can be triggers where you can be called a difficult woman, or you can be called – Usually you're not. There's 80% – I would say 80% of the time it's a perceived sense that you'll be called that and you're not. I find that people actually really like clear boundaries because it makes them feel safe of like, "Oh! This is when I –" It helps them get organized to your point.

But what are some of the ways that we can do that without triggering bias against women who put these boundaries in place or say no?

[0:35:06.9] MS: Yeah. So, I've got some strategies that are good to use and I'll share them in a second, and I just want to preface and underscore what Ali is saying, that it's not always easy to say no, not just because it's hard to say no, but because we can actually get push back on saying no if you're a woman.

There's a study, and I teach it in one of my workshops, and when I teach it it's like I get mad every time I teach it. It's called – it showed up in Sheryl Sandberg's book – it's the gender discount theory which shows that when we ask a man for a favor and he says yes, we're like, "Oh! He's so nice." When he says no, we're like, "Oh, he was busy." And when we ask a woman for a favor, if she says yes, we also feel neutral because we like we expected her to do it and if she says no, we actually can feel kind of like niffed or that she's being selfish. So, men can only stay neutral or win, and woman can only stay neutral or lose.

[0:36:02.6] AS: You know what's really – On that tangent or on that point, when they looked at family leave, like when people were allowed to leave early for their families, when men left they were like, "What a good dad. He's taking care of his kids." When a woman left it was like, "Ugh! This is like why we can't have family practices." It's like she was just being like – Not difficult. It wasn't the correct word. But to your point, it wasn't looked at favorably. It's such bullshit. Women, we have to stop doing that to other women! We have to stop. I mean, it's tricky, but I'm so glad you brought that up because it's not that you just can't say no. It's that there are sometimes costs to it.

[0:36:41.9] MS: Right. Yeah. So, there's a concept in anthropology called **code switching**, which is like let's say you grew up in the Black community but you're working – Like the profession you're in and the leaders are all white, you sometimes need to learn how to speak white in order to succeed in that world, but you're not getting rid of your identity. What you're doing is code switching and understanding that these are the rules that I need to play by in this game.

I still bring my inner core with me and I also bring a commitment to changing the rules of the game, A, when I get greater power, and B, along the way, right? I think that there's ways that we can all manage differently, we can all amplify other women's voices. We can all say, "Oh, it's so great that she's an involved mom." So, there's ways we can do it as we do it and not just when we get to the top, but sometimes it means that we need to understand the rules of the game in order to navigate, like supporting yourself and being able to get to the decisions of power and influence. So, what I recommend –

[0:37:43.5] AS: I so appreciate that you said that though. No, because this is the real world, right? Sometimes we feel like we're selling out if we do this, etc., or whatever. But it's like, no, there are certain rules and you can't shift away at the injustice of our systems overnight. You got to play the long game.

[0:38:01.0] MS: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, 100%.

[0:38:04.8] AS: Even though I want it fixed yesterday.

[0:38:07.0] MS: Me too. It's like impatient for change. There's a great graphic novel I just read that I recommend called *March*, and it's about Congressman John Lewis's process of growing up in the Civil Rights Movements, and like my takeaway was like impatient for change, like patient to be there and be ready to push it along and to be ready for the moment when – Find those opportunities and to make those like cracks in the system bigger.

So, okay. **Here's what I recommend. First of all, don't say no, because you get pushback. Say not yet.** There's a lot that you can do through making conditions to your no or delaying when you can say yes. So, to say, "Oh, I would love to do – I love to do the meeting notes or do the PowerPoint or whatever, but unfortunately I have like blank, blank, blank and blank to do until next Thursday. Do you want to come to me then if you still need it?"

So, then what we hear is like friendly "Yes, under these conditions," but what functionally happens, because the PowerPoint needed to be done like, yes, tomorrow, is functionally to know. So, it's a way to kind of like get the bonus of no without actually having to have the social pushback of no.

[0:39:23.1] AS: And it's also letting people know everything on your plate so they're not like, "Why can't she do it?" It's like, "Okay. Now I see why," because I find that a lot of times women aren't as vocal about everything that's on their plate, but it's just assumed that they'll – Women do a ton of free labor, emotional labor for free, like mothering for free. It's like – Ugh! That's a whole other podcast.

[0:39:44.9] MS: Totally.

[0:39:46.1] AS: So like a conditional, it's like not yet.

[0:39:49.0] MS: Exactly. It's not yet. I think **it's tied to the second strategy, which is to really have something proactive that is taking up your time.** So, I'm working actually with two women right who have landed in positions in their company where they're the like get-it-done women, like they save the day when things go wrong. It's all about the emotional labor. They're filling in the gaps and they're feeling resentful and frustrated because they don't feel like their contributions are being recognized.

On the other hand, it's also – It's like do we really even want those contributions to be recognized? Because I don't think you want to be doing that work anymore. When we really work together, we find out like, "I don't actually want to be the fill in the gaps woman. I want to be doing like this proactive stuff."

So, I'm working with them to define proactively, "Here is my new role. Here is the value I will add to the company, and in order to do this I am going to need to spend 75% of my time on this, which means that I need to free up 55% of it that's currently on these things." So that means that how as a company are we going to get these done? Maybe we hire and maybe we develop systems. Maybe we decide this just isn't important anymore, but to lead with a proactive vision means that when you say no, you can say like, "If I do that, I'm not going to be able to get out those marketing proposals that we talked about, which won't be an issue next week, but will be an issue 6 months from now." It's almost like a bait and switch. It's like, "Yes, you want me to do this thing, but actually here's the long game and here's what you're really choosing between."

[0:41:25.3] AS: I love that, and that also I think forces us to take a step back and say, "What vision am I driving? Am I here just to check the boxes every day of my work?" or "What direction do I genuinely want to head?" which is so – **This is so important to**

how we eat, seriously, because we often eat when we feel powerless, like we have no choices. If we feel stuck in our career – You may not call it stuck, but we find ourselves not feeling fulfilled from it.

I always say there's an 80% pivot when clients get done working with me in their career. Some people do have a drastic career shift, but others are just shifting the way they lead or manage or how they're being proactive, and it makes such a difference of like, "Hey, here are my ideas. Let me throw those out." By doing this, it's taking away from that and then people understand.

Because I find even though – I love how you like, "I wanted to play in the patriarchy." I do find that most – At least, again, I also probably with – I don't know if I could have said this when I was in the corporate world, definitely not commercial real estate, because a lot of the men there are very privileged. I mean, you can't be in commercial real estate unless you usually come for money, because you don't have a salary for the first couple of years.

[0:42:42.1] MS: Right. It's all like commission. It's feast or famine, right?

[0:42:44.9] AS: Yeah. However, I would say that I think at least the men that I interact with, I know Carlos' friends, I feel like they're really open. People really are – In the corporate, and I'm thinking of the executives who are in my master's program, they were really open-minded people and that was kind of maybe you don't have total agency, but there's a lot more agency and power than I think we get, because we aren't taking a set back and saying, "What's going on here?" I can be self-driving versus just reactive.

[0:43:13.8] MS: Yeah. Well, and what you've said about like where people get stuck, it is totally about getting stuck. We get stuck when we don't how to say no. We get stuck with stuff on our plate that doesn't feel so great and isn't exciting or meaningful or

doesn't bring growth, but we also get stuck when we aren't tapped into what our true yes is. So I find that like saying no and saying yes often times go together.

So, I actually have a guide for any of your audience who's interested. I pulled together **the five places where I most commonly see women get stuck**. You can get it at the buildyourselfworkshop.com/insatiable and it's just like – I'm totally a less is more person. It's the five places that I see women most commonly get stuck. You can go through it and say like, "Okay. Which one is the one where I'm getting stuck," and each one has one prescription for a thing that you can do to get unstuck that way. I'm all about simple-simple, like let's not make it too complicated, and I think if you are feeling like stuck in your career, **it's a simple tool to help you kind of rebuild that momentum and get back on track**.

[0:44:18.5] AS: Could you use it too if you're like stuck, if you just feel like your energy is flat or you feel like you don't have the focus? Because you talked about there being time, energy and focus. So, if you're depleted in any of those, I bet that would help.

[0:44:32.2] MS: Yeah. I think the cool thing about this work, and I know that it shows up in your work too because you think about your work as like an ecosystem, is **that when I help people focus on saying yes, right? Here's what you want to say yes to. Automatically it kind of impacts the way they say no**, because they realize, "Oh, I have to actually say no to forget this energy to say yes." When I help someone with self-doubt, it helps them get more comfortable making pitches, or if I help someone with making pitches, then it actually helps – It turns out, one my favorite quotes ever, is that confidence is the willingness to act. Confidence is really more a verb than it is like a state of being at least in my mind. So, when you work on one of these intervention points, you automatically see, I think, ripple effects in the other areas of your life.

[0:45:21.1] AS: I'm so happy you said that, because the nerd in me, anytime we hear people say like, "You just have to have the confidence." I'm like, "You get confidence

from self-efficacy," which is like doing things successfully, and no one talks about that. They think that we should just have confidence to begin with, but you have to act and then you have to evaluate and learn. So, I'm so glad you brought that up.

For you guys too in the show notes, we will have a link to that as well, but go to [build yourworkshop.com/insatiable](https://buildyourworkshop.com/insatiable), because I'm all about minimalism and simplifying, because this is very profound.

Okay, last question then. We think about time, energy and focus, and I love those differentiations, because, yeah, sometimes you just don't have the time. Sometimes you don't have the energy, and a lot of times I know, with my clients, the focus isn't there, because eating the wrong foods or just so depleted. So, we have to get into our own creative flow based on our energy patterns and padding our energy and learning to say no and everything, and then how do you sort of ground this? **What are the rituals you do so you can actually make all of this happen, so you stay productive and balanced?**

[0:46:34.9] MS: Yeah. So, I mean, **the first thing is really that model calendar is super, super helpful for me.** So, I don't have to rethink. What do I do today? Because I know where I need to show up and I just show up when I don't have the mental energy to like figure it out. I figure it out beforehand. I figured it out the night before. I figured it out while I was on my gym, like on my elliptical doing my whitespace. So, then I just hit the ground running.

I also, **when I'm feeling a little bit like a need a restart**, I'm a little bit of an amateur herbalist, and so **I make myself a cup of tea.** Part of what I love about it is like I may not be a landscape architect practicing anymore, but I still think plants have so much to give us and teach us, and so I like to invite them into my life when I need a boost.

Then, **the final piece of it I think is just, again, it's back to 80% perfection.** If you are having a bad day, if you are having a day where everything goes off the rails, **give yourself permission not to have to get it back on track.** If you missed – If you were supposed to put in two hours of focus time, da-da-da-da-da. If you only put in one, be like, “Okay. I give myself permission to not have to like get myself back on track, but to go to bed tonight and to recognize that tomorrow is a new day.” So those are the three things. Honestly, those are like my – Yeah, along with the sleep stuff. Those are guardrails and that keeps me like generally feeling pretty good, feeling pretty grateful and feeling like I'm showing up to do the work that I can do.

[0:48:09.2] AS: I love that. What you're saying is guardrails, is I think of sort of like everyone has like three things that when those things are going well, it like gives them the resilience, right?

[0:48:19.3] MS: Yeah.

[0:48:20.5] AS: **What's in your tea?** What kind of herbal [inaudible 0:48:23.6] – we're talking about tea!

[0:48:23.9] MS: Yeah. We are nerding out, because it totally depends on the season. But **a tea that can lift your spirits is holy basil. It's also called tulsi.** It's like – Yeah, holy basil is like so, so important for me. I bring out the big guns in winter because I always feel the winter blues, and there's an Aztec aphrodisiac called damiana. So, in the winter tulsi goes away and damiana comes out to play. But like for the most part, holy basil is just like a tea that I love. There's a great book that I can recommend. It's by Sarah Farr. I'm blanking on the name right now, but it's – Oh! Healing Herbal Teas and she's got just so many great recipes and **it's not just about healing ills, but I think it's really about like mind states** and recognizing that – Like there's a herbalist I like who talks about herbs as like your herbal allies. Like, yeah, plants are on this journey

with us and they can be our friends and we can invite them in to like our mental and emotional and spiritual lives.

[0:49:25.9] AS: I always think – We had Katie Hess on the podcast, the flower elixirs and stuff, and just like her book, it amazes me how potent plants, like herbs and flowers are. They're very potent and **it's like bringing part of nature into our nature-deficient lives.**

It's so funny, I really have to look at this holy basil. I actually was – A couple of weeks ago there was a flower show, and my mom and I went, and we each got a holy basil plant, and I have one and I'm like tending the water to it. But one of the herbalists there said that you can also just take off the leaves and put it in water and it can – Because this is spring and summer time in the northern hemisphere, that you can like just put it in your water as well, right?

[0:50:09.4] MS: Yeah, totally. I mean, a lot of those – Yeah, I mean, there are so many ways that we can get the active ingredients out of it. The thing that I'll say is that it's not just the active ingredient, it's also that active ritual, right? A cup of tea tells my mind it's a reset. Even just a few minutes to like go on your front porch with like your iced tea of holy basil and just be like, "Hey, the sun is shining. Life is good."

It's not just about literally – And this gets a lot of the stuff you do. It's not about like the inputs and the outputs and the calories in and the calories out. It's about like a whole social experience and ritualistic experience that we put to it.

[0:50:47.4] AS: Well, yeah. I'm thinking for one client, something that really helped her. Transitions are really hard for people after meals. People tend to overeat often because they're trying to slow down or because they're trying to fuel up for the next thing. My client was doing a decaf espresso, because that's what she likes. But I think taking that time to, again, bring your energy back in and kind of gather it again before

you head off, using herbs can be like double potent, the ritual of it, and then also the replenishing that it gives our stress system and all that stuff. Wonderful.

Thank you so much, Mia. Where can people find more of you?

[0:51:27.3] MS: People can find me at buildyourselfworkshop.com. If you go to buildyourselfworkshop.com/insatiable, you can find that guide, and I'm also on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) at @MiaScharphie. It's super un-phonetics, so just look at the show notes to see how it's spelled.

[0:51:46.0] AS: You need to change your name so it'd be an easier brand to remember. No, I'm just kidding.

[0:51:51.1] MS: Yeah.

[0:51:52.9] AS: No, I'm totally kidding. Well, thank you so much for your time. This is super helpful. I'm going to go get that worksheet, because I love minimalism techniques.

[0:52:05.1] MS: Cool. Yeah. Thank you, Ali. This has been super fun.

[0:52:07.9] AS: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:52:12.4] AS: Thank you, health rebels, for tuning in today. Have a reaction, question or want the transcript form today's episode? Find me at alishapiro.com. I'd love if you leave a review on Apple Podcast and tell your friends and family about Insatiable. It helps us grow our community and share a new way of approaching health and our

bodies. Thanks for engaging in a different kind of conversation. Remember always, your body truths are unique, profound, real and liberating.

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