

**Full Episode Transcript** 

**With Your Host** 

**Leah Badertscher** 

Recently, I had the pleasure of doing an introductory coaching session with a brilliant woman; a prolific author who has published nearly 40 books. Her books have won many prestigious awards, and she manages an impressive speaking and writing schedule.

She's written, in her pre-work responses to my intake questions that one of her goals was to increase her monthly income by \$10,000 a month. I thought that sounded like an awesome goal and entirely within her reach, especially given her platform. But when we spoke on the phone, she brought up right away that she'd changed her mind and wanted to redact that money goal.

She said she'd decided she'd rather focus on decreasing stress and cultivating more joy, and that making that much more money a month would just add more work and stress to her already full plate, and she just couldn't see how she would handle that. So, does this sound familiar to you; you have a goal you'd like to achieve, a vision of your future and yourself that is so beautiful, amazing, and compelling, but then you start to think about making that happen and how much work and stress and pressure that would require and you talk yourself out of it?

You tell yourself, "Never mind, I don't want that anyway. Money, success, it's not everything." And most people around you will nod sympathetically and vigorously, and no one questions the assumptions that are there in plain sight. But they should, because if that assumption is flawed, then you have just made a poor tradeoff.

The assumption is that working harder and longer, struggling, stress, and burnout are the ways you achieve your dreams. But what if there were a way to live your fullest life that didn't require you sacrificing yourself to burnout and overwhelm along the way?

What if, rather than giving up on the dream in order to preserve your sanity, and what if rather than burning out in order to achieve your goals, what if there were another way? What if there were a third way? Well, there is. And in today's episode, you will hear all about the third way, and also the rest of the story about how this conversation went with this amazing author and her 10K goals.

You are listening to *The Art School Podcast*; a show for artists and creatives who want to become the next greatest version of themselves. Learn how to cultivate an extraordinary way of being and take the mystery out of making money, and the struggle out of making art. Here is your host, master certified life coach, artist, and former lawyer, Leah Badertscher.

Hello everyone, and welcome back. I hope you are doing amazing, and also staying warm wherever you are. We are doing amazing and trying to stay warm because it is sure cold here in Michigan. For instance, the other day, I went outside and grabbed a few eggs from the chicken coup to make my kids scrambled eggs for breakfast before school, but then, when I went to crack one into the pan, out clinked an ice egg. So I teased the kids that this was just like a fancy nouveau cuisine. But they weren't buying it, so I made them oatmeal instead while my eggs thawed.

And that is just one example of how cold it has been here in Michigan. Although, when I check the weather in Iowa, where my parents live and the high is negative six and the low is negative 30, I remember not to complain too much.

So, onto the topic for the day. I have been planning for a while that this episode's topic was to be around the theme of cultivating ease and fun while moving through challenges and difficulties you might encounter on the way to creating your dream and reaching your goals.

So, with this in mind, this past week, I posted a few relevant quotes and thoughts to Instagram, including a quote from my main man, one of my main men if my husband's listening, Albert Einstein, because it's so on point for this week's topic of ease and fun. And the quote was this, "Creativity is intelligence having fun."

I have always loved that quote and I wanted to share it this week because I think it could also be one of our mottos for *The Art School*; really smart people having a really great time, building their dream creative careers and lives. *The Art School* really is a life-changing program and a very exceptional special community.

So, if you're interested in having more fun while you become more creative and successful, you'll want to apply for one of the remaining spots for this winter 2019 session. So, we start February 12<sup>th</sup>, and if you go to <a href="https://www.leahcb.com/the-art-school">www.leahcb.com/the-art-school</a> and that link will be in the show notes — and you'll also see a link on my homepage to *The Art School*, you can learn more. And on *The Art School* page of my website, there is also a link to book a free discovery consult with me. so you can book a call and we can hop on that call and find out if *The Art School* is the right fit for you and what you're looking for.

So, back to our topic today of allowing fun and ease to be a part of our creative process, both at the macro and micro levels. So, as luck would have it, I had committed to making this the topic of the podcast this week, and then, as it happens, all sorts of stuff broke loose, and it turned out to be a doozy of a week here.

Now, I don't know whether to give the super moon credit for all the craziness, but between everything that went awry for me this week and what I heard from clients and friends, I felt a little bit like that man in the

moon was taunting me and saying, "Oh yeah, this is the week you had planned to talk about how it gets to be easy and it gets to be fun. Let's see you have fun and ease with this." And then whoosh, all sorts of things didn't go as planned, or unexpected things happened like our pipes freezing, so no water in the house for a while, and then the electricity going off, kids being sick and home extra days because of the weather, tech issues.

And then, in the grand scheme of things, I know other people close to me having much bigger problems, like one of my close friend's mother had a stroke, so she is in my thoughts and prayers. So all the things happened this week, as they do in real life, life happening. And for a moment, I had the thought, maybe this is not the week to talk about how it gets to be easy, it gets to be fun. And that thought lasted for a split second before I thought, oh no, this is precisely when we need to talk about ease and fun.

Because the thing is, anyone can talk about ease and fun, anyone can have ease and fun, when life is easy and fun, but it takes a Jedi master mind ninja to do ease and fun when life gets real. And don't you want to learn how to be a Jedi master mind ninja? Because the thing is, despite a lot of wrenches and things not going as planned, the fact that I know things can be hard, but through self-coaching and knowing that my thoughts and emotions don't need to make them any harder than they are, I've also had a good solid week.

There was definitely the invitation plenty of times to think, this is so stressful, there is too much going on, how will I get all of this done? But I didn't go there because I've made a discipline out of not indulging, even when I have PMS, which is saying something, because I don't know about any of my female listeners out there, but this, to me, feels like the triumph of all triumphs. And this is not to say I'm perfect, but this is me, like, acknowledging progress where there has been progress. And I would

encourage you to do the same because it's the foundation you need, that self-acknowledgement and appreciation, that's going to help spur you on to continue to do this work.

So despite the challenging circumstances this week, I've still had a creative week, a meaningful week. I spent great time with my family, with my friends. I had some amazing sessions with clients old and new. It was a growing week for me. It was a productive week. And I feel even prouder of all of that knowing that it happened because I kept my mind in a good place with coaching, I kept my body in a good place with exercising and moving, and my spirit was definitely nourished by friends, family, and also my alone time and my creative time.

And as I mentioned, I have had this topic planned anyway for a while because I've known that we've been talking about moon-shots and big dreams and becoming a creative force of nature and massive action. And when that happens, when we are committing to our own growth and evolution and bigger contributions in the world, the tendency can be for us to go into overwork and overwhelm and anxiety and burnout mode, rather than shift into a gear that allows us to be more prolific and more powerful, more of a creative flow mode.

And so, while it is absolutely important to show up and do the work, it's also like that T.S. Eliot quote, or the line from one of his poems. It's that paradox of how to be still and still moving. So for you listening out there, I want to make sure that you don't get so caught up in getting to the dream that the journey towards it starts to feel like this kind of punishing death march to success; something that you inflict upon yourself, and pretty soon, you start to wonder why you ever wanted to get there in the first place.

I want to remind you that your goals and dreams are not something you use to punish yourself for not being good enough yet. You were more than perfect and complete and whole to begin with, so these goals and dreams are not meant to be weapons you use to inflict harm and dread and overwork on yourself. I want to remind you that your goals and dreams are something you do for yourself and not to yourself.

So, how do you do this? As I mentioned in the intro, I think one way is what I call the third way; a way of being that makes desirable results inevitable. As I also talked about in the intro, so often, we assume that to go for the dream and the goal will be more difficult, more stressful, and more work, when really, we have the opportunity and choice before us at every step of the way to mature our ability to manage our thoughts and emotions as we expand our capacity for what we are able to create and experience.

If you are someone who wants to be more creative, more prolific, more successful, and live a life you envision is possible for you but without the strain and burnout to get there, if you're someone who wants to stop grinding and hustling, I hope today's episode helps you to discover how to shift into your own third way by sparking your imagination about how to find your flow more frequently and consistently and what that sweet spot is for you where the work and energy you put in actually gets traction and moves you forward.

There are many ways to do this, and we have talked in previous episodes about creating and evolving your life from a place of love and kindness. And this will be along those same lines, but with more specific examples and anecdotes from my own life, and a few practices too. And we'll round it all out at the end with some great coaching for you, some ways you can take these concepts and put them to use to make your own leaps forward with your creative process and with your goals and dreams.

So flow, just to kind of lay the foundation, flow, from the research of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who was a positive psychologist in flow research, from him and his work, we know that flow is the state of complete emersion in an activity. He describes it as, "The mental state where you're completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved and you're using your skills to the utmost."

Other people have defined flow as being that state in which your skills are a match to the challenge. I will return to the concept of flow and also research about optimal brainwaves for creativity in future episodes, but with today's episode, I wanted to give you less abstract theory and concepts, and instead more of my personal stories and creative and meditative practices that I've created and used.

Some of these things might seem just very particular and very peculiar, even to me, but I think these things, more than just being idiosyncratic, may actually help you and they'll shed some light on how you can find your own unique third way, your own path forward, as they've been helpful in that way for my own private clients.

I want to begin by emphasizing that one of the main things my personal stories point out, in summary, is this; that when you are undertaking to create anything, to do anything that you've never done before, things can and will be challenging. But – and here's what's really important for us to remember – be aware of the difference between something being truly hard and your thoughts about it being hard. Because something can be difficult and challenging, but your response to it is completely within your control, even if it doesn't feel like it, you can develop that growth mindset and decide to bring that response back within your control.

You can choose to move through it with strength, or you can indulge in overwhelm, self-doubt, self-criticism, and self-pity, which will just heap needless suffering and extra difficulty on top of the challenge that is actually there. And I know that it can sound easier said than done to not engage in that kind of spiral of self-pity and self-doubt, but that's why I'm going to tell you and share some of these personal stories for today, because at one time, I found that so difficult myself and I had searched far and wide to find help with how not to do that, and a lot of times, came up empty-handed.

So I found some solutions for myself and I hope they'll be useful for you too. This is something I have been and continue to be vigilant about myself because so often – and by so often, I mean pretty much every time I undertake to grow and do something challenging in an area I really care about, so for instance, writing, art, my coaching career, raising my children – I can find my mind slipping into a mode of making it so much harder than it needs to be by the way I'm thinking about it.

So it's as if a part of me just reflexively kicks into a gear of believing that I'm demonstrating, somehow demonstrating, greater care and devotion and love by fabricating and heaping extra needless suffering and difficulty upon myself, overcomplicating, over-thinking. It makes no rational sense why anyone would do this, except that it is our primal brain trying to keep us safely within our known and familiar comfort zone. But it definitely is a pattern my mind has had, and I work with enough people to know that I'm not the only one who resists what comes naturally and who instead can go off into over-thinking and over-complication.

Sometimes, I wonder if this is a byproduct of the way a lot of our education system is set up, but that's another conversation for another episode. So, because of this tendency of my mind, I have had to learn how to tone down

my hyper overdrive work ethic. I could see that it was actually blocking me rather than supporting me in making my art, writing, and enjoying the process of creating. So I started to look for answers, I had to read all these books on how to write books, how to be an artist.

And so many of them, while I found a lot of valuable wisdom in many of those books, for the answers I was looking for, a lot of times, they just kept talking about showing up and doing the work and putting in the hours and the time. And for sure, for sure, that is a part of it. But the thing is, I know I can out-work anyone. I was an endurance athlete, and if success was putting the hours in, then I was definitely succeeding. Except that I wasn't, because I wasn't getting the creative results that I wanted.

I wasn't getting the traction that I wanted. I wasn't improving as a writer, as an artist, as an entrepreneur, and I definitely wasn't feeling better. So I do absolutely believe in the discipline of showing up and doing the work. I think consistency is one of the greatest ways to build your imaginative, creative, and plain and simple, humble, constructive muscles. But I wasn't feeling connected to my creativity in just sitting down for so many hours and pounding out a word count every day. I also experienced this frustration when I would take painting or drawing classes, like at the local art museum, and I would learn something new about the mediums and the crafts and some basic principles about art, but I wasn't finding that connection to my creativity; that ability to plug myself into and tap into that potential I could feel just pulsing inside of me.

It's like I could feel its heartbeat, but I felt like I was racing, wandering around blindly in the dark, spinning my wheels in vain to look for it. And working harder and longer didn't help. The struggle of all of that didn't help. It just fueled the fires of my frustration and then a lot of terrible miserable self-loathing kicked in, like how could I be so smart but not figure this out?

When was I ever going to figure it out? Why? Which is not a useful question, people, don't ask yourself why can I not figure this out. Ask yourself instead, what can I do? That's just a side note.

But people also would say, you know, really pithy things like, work smarter, and get out of your own way. But all that would do was frustrate me further because if I knew how to do that, of course, I would have done that by then. So, what I ultimately decided to do and found my way into doing is trusting that whatever was in me, the art, the stories, that they would help me discover how to create them. And that if I had a vision of them coming to life and if I really believed in that vision, then that vision assumes a way to create them, and that this would be the third way; not the easy path, not doing nothing, but also not a path of constant self-recrimination and pushing and forcing.

Instead, the third way would be a path with full engagement, absorption, but also self-forgiving and self-forgetting, and a path with so much more ease and joy and vitality. So, by following my own intuition — I've got to really abridge the story here otherwise this will be like an epic podcast episode, may hours long — I created a couple of practices and approaches to creating that really worked wonders for me.

One is a drawing meditation that I continue to do, and I sometimes teach this to others in workshop settings. And it was something I stumbled into by this semi-accidental intuitive way and process that I was playing with. So I was in this period where my children were all really little and I didn't have as much time to spend with making art as I wanted to anyway, but I told myself that if I could just spend 20 minutes to an hour every day drawing, that I'd make it my goal to first of all really enjoy that, and second, that I'd also fill up a few sketchbooks.

I gave myself just five minutes to do one drawing per page, and when the five-minute timer went off, I'd move to the next page. I thought the combination of enjoyment plus having a goal of sheer quantity within a constrained time — because how can you expect perfection from a fast-five-minute drawing — would help me stay out of perfectionistic paralysis. And it really did. It worked. It worked amazingly well. And this practice also helped me fall more in love with drawing and, incidentally, what I didn't anticipate was that it also would make me feel like I was falling in love with whatever subject I was drawing.

What I discovered as I began to draw and I was drawing from still-life, from life, and also figures from photographs I'd taken, was that once I'd placed my attention on enjoyment of drawing and made that my priority and I'd lightened up on the quality of the drawings and made that not a priority at all, I began to notice that my mental process and experience would get quieter and also slower, and objectively visible to me, a lot like when I'd practiced mindfulness meditation and I would watch my thoughts. But this time, they were a lot more clear and they did feel separate from me.

And when I did this, I could tell the difference between when I was simply just seeing whatever I was wanting to draw, and then translating that by moving my hand across the page. It's like I allowed my eyes to take in the experience and my body to take in the experience and then I allowed my hand to move in response to that experience. And I also noticed that I kept it very simple. My eyes were seeing myself, my being was experiencing something and my hand was moving the pencil.

I could tell, in these moments, that the quality of my attention was different. I was quiet, peaceful, grounded, settled, awake, and alert, and it felt very different in my physical experience. It felt open and clear and just good in my body and in my mind, versus when I would unintentionally slip back into

a mode of over-thinking every mark and criticizing, second guessing, judging every move and mark.

When I was in that over-thinking critical mode, I noticed that it was almost as if I was having these small nanosecond blackouts where, even though I was awake and my eyes were open and looking at the subject, I wasn't really there. I wasn't really seeing. I wasn't really drawing from a connected place. It was much more just going through the motions, like I was thinking about drawing instead of actually experiencing what I was seeing and actually connected to it and drawing.

And also, interestingly, everything in my body in those times, including even the inside of my head, my mind, would feel cramped, confused, lost, dark, closed, overwhelmed. What was also fascinating to me was that the state of being or the drawing was enjoyable and flowed and felt effortless was something I recognized from other times of my life when I could be deeply immersed in something and working hard, and yet it was also seemingly effortless and there was a simultaneous feeling of being more at home in the universe than ever, feeling more like myself than ever, and also this blissful self-forgetting.

It was a simultaneous self-finding and a self-shedding. So I know this mirrors a lot to the way people – they would describe it, define it as zone or flow, but the reason I'm sharing it with you is because the things that I have found most helpful for myself were when I read accounts from athletes, from artists, from creatives, from musicians, from people who experienced flow, because it's like, when they describe their experience, it was like they left breadcrumbs for me.

So I also want to leave a breadcrumb trail for you, because my way may not be your way, but I do think it can be very helpful in your finding your

way. So I'd experienced this a lot in physical training and sports, and also sometimes, but less often, in my creative work. And I knew again, that this was flow or zone, even though it wasn't talked about as much as it is today or wasn't as common. And I kind of stumbled my way into it.

It was something that I just intuitively named the third way, even though I've since met and known other people who have also called it that. and I wrote about it in my journal and I would write about it and make a point of writing about it over and over again because I was leaving a breadcrumb trail for myself, because it was crazy to me how soon I'd forget how to get there, because it seems like it was more easy for me to go back into these two modes of being that seemed more dominant in the world and seemed like the ones I knew best, which were either mode one, work really, really hard. Grab life by the horns and wrestle it to the ground, overwork, over-think, overachieve, over-deliver.

And all of this felt like such a strain, such a constant strain, and so unnatural at the same time, like I was always just innately doomed to be inadequate to everything I really wanted to do or achieve, and so I was constantly striving and straining and unnatural, and again, doomed to do this because I'm just innately also not somebody who settles or gives up. So then, there was also this second mode, number two, which was not doing anything. And I was never good at number two, so I was mostly in that mode number one, unnatural perpetual straining and striving at least there for a couple of decades.

But then, I would go to ride my bike or run, swim, paint, write, draw, and I'd find myself slipping into this sweet reprieve from straining. I'd be working hard, but again slip into this place where I felt natural and where things flowed and where I felt in the flow of all things. And every time I'd

experienced this crazy sense of disbelief that I would ever try to do anything any other way than the third way kind of way.

So, I've played since then with additional ways to find my own way, to the third way, especially in my creative work. Interestingly enough, it comes to me most naturally with coaching, which I do think of as part of my creative work and an art form. I've always been a deep listener and intuitive, so with coaching, I feel the way to the third way is to relax, be present, and listen.

And I never doubt that I'm going to be able to understand or help someone. I just know and I trust that the answers and words always come. But with art and with writing, I found that I need a little more work at finding ways around myself. But if I reference what works for me in coaching and in sports, relaxing, listening – that's more for coaching – trusting, and I remember how that feels in my body and I remember how simple, clear, and deliciously void of self-consciousness and self-absorption my thoughts are at those times, then these are good guideposts for me in finding my way back to that third way in art and writing as well.

Another way, another example of how I find that way of ease and joy with my art and with my writing is by something I think of as coming in through the back door, or coming at it sideways. If I find myself blocked or feeling a lot of resistance to working, I'll tell myself I'm not working at all. I'm not intending to make art at all; that I'm just going to mess around and play with some things around the edges. I'll do some studies or open my sketchbook and make some marks in there.

It's an approach I touched on in earlier episodes about how lowering the stakes by lowering your standards can actually elevate your creativity. Also, when I'm coming at something sideways, what I'm doing is telling myself,

"Hey, there's nothing going on here, no art going on here, it's really no big deal, it's just pain, it's just play."

And I'll do this with writing too because nothing chokes up my writing and creativity more than thinking I have to sit down and complete a formal writing project, whether that's a blog post, a poem, or a book. And these circumstances too, I'll tell myself, hey, you can relax, Leah, there's no real writing going on here. So I'll collect my ideas on Post-it notes because who writes real writing on Post-it notes?

Whenever I have forced myself to sit down and dutifully write out, chapter by chapter, the great American novel or a, quote en quote, real poem, I just choke. I get paralyzed and I have spent hours forcing myself to work that way. But all I end up with are tens of thousands of words of nothing; just a long trail of words left by my scared mind racing along the surface, checking that word count and hour box, but to no real satisfying conclusion.

So, if I expand instead how I think of the creative process in every possible way so that the long walks outside in the country that I just love to take, where ideas and scenes and images and fresh energy just seem to flow into my mind, like spark out of nowhere, where that is every bit as essential and legitimate a part of my creative process as is sitting on my rear in my chair to meet a word count or finish a chapter.

If I expand my idea of how creativity happens, then I love the process so much more and I also then, again, identify once again as a creative and an artist and it's something inalienable to me, not something I have to work to prove or earn. And that helps me move out of the grinding frustrating mode and into a naturally prolific channel mode. And also, when I allow myself this kind of time and space to let things come, I can tell that I'm in that space by the way it feels to be in my body and in my mind.

And different kinds of creativity and inspiration feel different ways to me too. So this might sound strange, but again, I think for many of you it might resonate and it may again be those useful breadcrumbs. But I want to share it with you so you can be alert and watching for the relationship between your own body states and your creativity.

For me, it feels like, for instance, one way it feels is that there are doors open in my body, in my mind, in my consciousness, and there are even very different and specific special locations for these doors. And when I have that feeling, I know I'm onto something and that something is coming and something is happening. And the overall experience is that I am still working in a very focused and a very absorbed way and I'm giving full effort. So whether that's like running along at a good seven-minute mile or whether I'm painting or whether I'm working on my business, in addition to working, there is also this ease in the process and there is an enjoyment of the process. And what is once again so deliciously absent is the needless suffering and strain caused by the hyper self-consciousness and those constant judgmental thoughts.

Now, we have arrived at the part of the program where I want you to do more than just listen. I want you to take this information and use it to make a big difference and to take a creative leap in your own life. I want you to take the time to stop, lean in, and really work with me, coach with me. So remember the amazing author I told you about in the beginning of today's episode? The one who was ready to give up her additional 10K a month goal because she assumed it would burn her out? My response to her was, but what if you're wrong about that? What if the way to 10K more a month doesn't require more work and more stress? And then I asked her, what if it gets to be easy and it gets to be fun to meet that goal? So why not keep that goal, but then also consider having a simultaneous goal of allowing it to be easy and fun for that money to come to you?

And now, I want to offer you a version of the same coaching I offered her. I have prompts and questions for you here that are examples of the ones I often ask clients, but I also regularly ask myself these things and they're also the things that I asked myself back when I was looking for more consistent and reliable ways into that third way, when I was looking for ways to help insight that powerful and enjoyable creative place for myself as I went about creating my own dreams.

So make sure you stop what you're doing, don't skip this part, stop what you're doing, grab a journal, and answer these questions. We're going to help you find your own third way. So first, I want you to call to mind your big dream or goal, the one that you really cherish, the one that is just so important to you. And now, I want you to think about your biggest obstacle or challenge in relation to that goal. Think about where you are struggling with it or where you find yourself getting stuck or frustrated or at a seeming impasse.

So now, with that dream and those obstacles or challenges in mind, answer these following questions; first, what would it look like if this were easy? Second, what would it look like if this were fun? Third, what would it look like if you knew your desired results were inevitable? How then would you go about the process of creating this dream or achieving this goal?

Finally, rather than thinking there is a right way or a wrong way, a good way or a bad way, what would it look like if you trusted that whatever way you go, that it also gets to be easy, it gets to be fun, and that this is the way that will help you to become unstoppable?

Thank you so much for listening to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. I really hope you enjoyed today's show. I also want to send huge thanks to all of you who have taken the time out of your day to write a

review for me on iTunes and to have shared this podcast with your friends and on social media. I really appreciate it and it really helps.

And, today too, I wanted to give a special shout-out to one of my listeners out there in Wyoming. Betsy Pearson has been spreading love for *The Art School* all over social media, and for part of her iTunes review, she wrote this, "After just the first episode, I feel different. This episode is inspirational, entertaining, and educational, yes. And it would be so worthy just for that. But then, this extra step where Leah got me to, dare I say, change everything in a moment over the airwaves – remarkable. I feel like a kid in the candy store that there are more episodes waiting for me."

And she writes, "Update, after each episode, I think this is her best one." So, thank you, Betsy, so much for these kind words. Betsy also emailed us with this review to register for the drawing for a creative audit session that we've been giving away to those who email us at <a href="leah@leahcb.com">leah@leahcb.com</a> with their reviews. And she is also our most recent winner. So thank you again, Betsy, for all the love. Thank you to all of you who have been writing reviews, and, Betsy, I'll talk to you soon with that creative audit session.

Until next week, I hope you all have a beautiful week. I hope you find ways to let it be easy and to let it be fun and I look forward to talking to you really soon. Take care, bye-bye.