

## Ep #83: Constraint of Thought



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Do you ever feel like you're just exhausted from spending the day making decisions? Whether you're going to exercise in the morning, do your meditation, thought work, movement, what you'll eat, what you'll wear, which glasses you'll wear for your Zoom call. Maybe that one's just me.

Do you feel like you don't trust yourself to get things done that you'll say you'll get done because you're so busy doing everything else for everyone else? My love, I've been there a thousand times myself and none of these scenarios lead you to being in a cute place.

The remedy, my darling, is simple. Constraint of thought. Deciding what you'll do for you ahead of time, committing and not giving yourself the space to go back on your promises to you from a place of allowing, not restricting.

This simple practice has been life-changing for me and it's helped me so much with my personal life and in building my business. Intrigued? Ready to make your life so very much more simpler? Keep listening. It's going to be a good one.

You're listening to Feminist Wellness, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching, and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health! Here's your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, Herbalist and Life Coach, Victoria Albina.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. My goodness, it's sort of surprising that it's already the end of the summer. 2020 has been a fascinating year for all of us and time has felt, gosh, sped up, slowed down, it's been fascinating to pay attention to my own experience of time from

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moment to moment and how it shifts and how it shifts for the people I love and work with.

Anyway, I sure do love summer. I'm a summer baby here in the US. I've grown accustomed - I'm a winter baby back home in Argentina because August is the winter, but this lion sure does love the heat and the humidity. I love it all. But fall is lovely too and I just got my alliums, so onion, garlic, leeks, et cetera, in the ground. So that's a lovely fall thing.

And oh wait actually, that's a perfect segue into today's topic. I didn't even plan that, but nature provided. So today's topic is constraint of thought. So I don't plant garlic bulbs in June. That's not the right time for them, so I don't do it. I constrain myself until the fall because that's the appropriate time for that plant.

And that is totally an example of constrain of thought. I also don't plant tomatoes in December, which is not a great move here on occupied Lenape territory, New York. The corner of New York I'm in. So yeah, it's not a great move if you want your plants to survive.

Look at that, nature provided a segue. Because you know I'm not great at those. I'm like, here's what's happening in my life and cut to the lesson. Whatever, we all have our strengths, right? We get to love ourselves for it all, through it all.

So constraint of thought simply means reducing the number of choices that you make and reducing the number of thoughts that you decide you'll engage with, versus letting roll on through your consciousness, mucking up your day. Instead, you decide ahead of time using your gorgeous and brilliant prefrontal cortex to decide for you on your own terms what you will think and what you will do.

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Understanding that you can make choices whether you use constrain of thought or not, and you do it all day, versus the alternative, which is what I did for the first 30 years in my life or whatever, which is waiting until you're wickered overwhelmed by choosing between one of 473 options every five to 10 minutes in our modern life, in which there are always 473 options.

And when you make that decision, not to plan things ahead, not to decide what you're going to think and do ahead of time, you're pretty much waiting for your lizard brain to get in your way and to keep you from making the decisions you actually want to make, which are the ones you would make in a calm moment.

When you are not in that calm moment and you let your brain start spinning and spinning and you get overwhelmed, that is when the lizard brain will pop up and make a mess of it all. Oh lizards.

So if you think about it, if you pause, really, all of us constrain our thoughts like a bajillion times a day. That's a scientific number. JK, not at all, bajillion. And you get to decide that you're going to do this, to constrain your thoughts and your choices on purpose, to move your life forward.

And if you don't already trust yourself, if you don't feel safe with yourself, within yourself, this process of constraining your thoughts is a great way to practice to build that trust in yourself in combination with the perfectionist thought fantasy busting minimum baseline, which is way back in episode 78.

My beauty, you get to choose to build trust with yourself on the daily and to learn to be honest and real with yourself that you have agency in most of life's situations and circumstances to make a choice. And you're making a

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choice when you choose restriction, indecision, overwhelm, or when you choose self-loving allowance and constraint. Last week's theme.

And that's why we're talking about constraint of thought after talking about restriction and allowance because after understanding that it's completely so very super-duper human to have urges, impulses, and desires, and that there's nothing with that, because without that framework, your brain is likely to tell you that constraint is stupid and mean and that you are a free spirit who wants to feel free.

Or your brain will feel so overly restricted that you'll be prone to rebel and to throw all that gorgeous constraint thought thinking right out the window if you aren't allowing yourself to be a human with impulses and urges. I mean, who amongst us has not felt that overwhelm of having too many choices? Be it in the haircare aisle, and seriously, why are there so many shampoo options? Just give me the one shampoo.

Or the overwhelm of being at the salad bar, or when you're thinking about your business, your career, your relationship, on and on. Your brain offers you all sorts of pros and cons for any decision, which can send you into analysis paralysis in a major way as you wrestle with all the possible scenarios rolling around in your head.

My brain, just like yours, used to be a pro at this kind of overthinking. And it was, as one might imagine, overwhelming. Overthinking leads to overwhelm. Makes sense. These days, by lovingly constraining my thoughts, choices, actions, I don't let myself get overwhelmed when picking a shampoo because I know what I'm choosing.

I've constrained my thinking there. Same with my business. It behooves me to narrow my focus so I can provide excellence and support tailored to the

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folks I serve. Every episode is about our mind-body connection, about polyvagal theory, about the nerdery, the science, and the woo. Let us not forget the witchery of our self-care, of healing, of wellness.

I focus on codependency and perfectionism and people pleasing because I'm a pro at all of that. So it would be weird if I didn't constrain my thoughts and you opened the show one week and I was like, okay, we're going to talk about prostate health. It's probably not what you come to this show for, so it's not what I offer you.

Instead, I use constrain of thought, I know who you are, I know who I am, and I talk to you to share the lessons that I know we need to hear. Constraint of thought. I don't check my email, my Instagram, my texts, nothing pings at all while I'm preparing an episode for you because that's not what I'm doing in that moment.

I'm focused and efficient, and I don't introduce a ton of new inputs and decisions into my mind when I want to do one thing and do it well. Create a show for magnificent, amazing you. I don't decide every morning if I'm going to exercise. It's just what I've decided to do.

So I don't spend my morning debating, negotiating, questioning, contemplating. I just get up and step right into stretchy workout pants and away we go. I have decided that I don't take other people's thoughts, choices, behaviors personally because I have constrained my thoughts to not do that, to not make things about me that aren't.

And I can hear you thinking that all this constraint of thought will make you into a robot who just sticks to some super strict schedule and doesn't feel the flow of creative energy. And it's just the opposite because, and you guessed it, science.

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So nerd alert. Columbia University psychologist and creativity science expert, Dr. Patricia Stokes conducted a study in 1993 in which a group of rats with whom she was working were only allowed to press the bar that provided them with tasty snacks treats with their right paw.

With a little time at task, not only did they adapt to that constraint, these wonderful little rats who are very, very smart, developed more creative ways to push the bar than the other rats in a separate cage, who could do it however they wanted with no constraints.

What this shows us is what nerds call little C creativity, which means the creativity needed to solve practical problems using your resources in new ways, which to me is just so fantastic and opens up this new way of seeing ourselves as super-duper creative and able to be so much more adaptable and resilient than we ever could have imagined.

So, not unlike our genius rat friends, the goal here in using constraint of thought is to focus your energy, your brain, to reduce in-the-moment decision making, to bring in more ease, more creative problem solving, more gentleness. Because let's be real, the decisions we make from overwhelm are not always the most self-loving or loving towards others.

To bring in more success, whatever that looks like for you, no one but you gets to define that ever. And the goal is not to make you feel wild amounts of FOMO, the old fear of missing out. Because when you constrain your thoughts, you're not constraining your life. You're not limiting yourself.

Honestly, quite the opposite. By not giving my brain the space to ramble around about the things that don't matter at all, I have so much more free emotional and energetic time for the things that do. Instead of pondering every evening what's for dinner and picking between infinity options,

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instead, I look at the week's meal plan, which I use my prefrontal cortex to put together in advance and while not hungry.

Instead of finding myself in the middle of a workday wondering what my work focus is and feeling like infinity things are equally important and urgent and needing of my time and energy, I know exactly what I'm supposed to be doing and when because I chose it for me. Wrote it down, put it on my calendar and committed to it for me.

So I don't ever find myself on a Wednesday afternoon saying, "Wait, what am I supposed to be doing?" For all the entrepreneurs and coaches and self-employed folks out there, and people who work in a job too, how often have you had that moment when you're like, wait, what?

Your brain is spinning in that overwhelm and there's so much to do, it's almost like you don't know what to do. So constraint of thought has helped me to short-circuit that whole waste of time and energy. I simply look at my calendar and I know what's what. It's 4:30 on a Wednesday, I should be recording a podcast, for example.

And I don't let my brain do anything else at 4:30 on a Wednesday for example, because that's the time when I calendared record a podcast. And I love you and I know that you are waiting for this show, and I love me and I know that I want this show recorded, so I do it because I've constrained my time and I've constrained my thoughts, and I love myself, so I do it.

Which isn't to say that if you don't follow your calendar you don't love yourself, my goodness gracious, but I'm just saying, this is one way that I've come to show me, to evidence for me self-love and self-care by following my own calendar.



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I also don't spend the kind of time I used to spend ruminating about things that don't matter. A snarky email, these days, it's just deleted and actually gone. A goof-up by someone on my team is lovingly addressed and is actually over with in my mind when it's over. A time I misspoke is amended, an apology is offered if needed, repair is offered, and then offered one more time, and then that mistake, it's released. On and on.

And a decade ago, oh my goodness, without the practicing of constraining my thoughts around dinner, my schedule, work focus, other people's thoughts, I was so super scattered. If I was writing something and I got a text, I would stop and look at it. If I got an email, same same. And everything seemed to take ages longer than it needed to.

I felt like I was always behind and stressed and overwhelmed, and I didn't realize that I could just decide I was going to give myself focus time and that I could commit to it. And that sounds so funny now because it's so my norm, but it was like, five minutes ago that I would give projects and tasks, endless time.

Like all of Thursday I'm going to write this one blog, and then I would let other things come up to distract me, and so of course things like a 1000-word blog that I now give myself an hour to write, those things would take all day. I wasn't focused or constrained. I hadn't fully committed my time to me and the thing I wanted to work on or build for myself.

I recognize now that my beautiful human mind can't handle working on eight things at the literal same time, once again, because science. And when I'm half thinking about a ton of things, I'm producing half-assed results for myself because duh, that makes sense.

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Give yourself a small portion of your brain and you'll get a proportional result. Focus your full mind for one hour a day or whatever your minimum baseline is for it, and you'll create a result for yourself beyond anything you could have imagined by allowing your brain to really focus.

And that is the core of constraint. It's about clearing away all the gunk so you can truly allow yourself to be your most focused, creative, abundant self, and it feels amazing. Like so good, my sweet angel baby. It is so seriously, seriously relaxing to not be asking myself, once again, what do I need to work on today or right now, like ever anymore.

I set my calendar for the week and then every day I just look at it and I know that what past me decided that present me should be doing right now for future me is just the thing to do. How amazing is that? And it's so easy and simple to just decide that I'm going to trust myself.

And yes, it's another thing to do the practice, that daily practice of coming to believe that you yourself are trustworthy. I'm not saying easy or simple, but it is both, but it is time at task. And so for me, a big part of that has been not second guessing myself by changing the calendar just because. And it does that thing that I'm so dedicated to, which is it helps me to continue to build that trust. So there's a thousand levels of winning here.

One of the things that comes up a lot for us humans with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits is that we spend our lives focused on making sure everyone else is okay, everyone else is pleased with us and approving of us, and we contort ourselves, our lives, time, to attempt to meet those goals, which is just exhausting because it leads to a lot of second-guessing ourselves and making a lot of decisions multiple times because we, A, number one, don't trust ourselves, B, number two,

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trust everyone's opinion more than our own, and C, number three, are so focused on other people and their whims.

Constraint of thought really helps to reduce that decision fatigue. It also helps me in boundary setting, which is a kind of constraint of thought really. And when I set a boundary, I trust myself to uphold it because I've shown myself that I can stick to the plan that I created for myself, which for me, starts with the smaller things and becomes about the bigger.

I decide my calendars, my meals, so many things for the week and I don't doubt it. I can change it if I like my reasons why, like a spontaneous outdoor dinner invitation I'm excited about, but I don't change it just because. This also means that you don't go changing your plans because you're trying to attempt to keep someone else happy, to attempt to people please.

If your partner wants to eat dinner at that time you've blocked to workout, you've already made your decision. This is my workout time. You don't have to agonize over what you should do. You just do it. If you think about it, so much of what we talk about here on the show is about constraint of thought.

Not taking things personally, not making other people's opinions or thoughts mean anything about you or what you should do in your own life, how to prioritize yourself in a new way. Me first, you second, with love is a way of constraining your thoughts.

This process of recognizing that you even can do this, can actively decide for the next day, the next month, the next year, my focus is x, y, z, for the next three years I'm building this base of knowledge or thing or whatever in my business, this whole concept of really pausing to look at my life and

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plan it was actually mind-blowing for me because I was so skilled at putting everyone else and their wants and needs for my life first.

I was really good at being in school and doing what I was told to do there, but I was less skilled at deciding these things for myself on my own terms because I never had. It was a huge shift to recognize that I could pause, put my focus on me, and work towards a goal for myself that didn't include anyone else's approval or input. Seriously mind-bending kind of thing.

So perhaps you are saying to yourself, "That's great Vic, but what are the remedies? How do we do this? How do you constrain your thoughts and actually do what you decided to do?" Well, as always, start small and start with your mindset.

If you're thinking of constraining your anything as a restriction or a limitation, you're not going to stick to it. If you think of it as a chance to live more expansively by reducing stress and overwhelm and time spent ruminating, then your brain is much more likely to give you the chance to work it out.

So I'll invite you to start with something tiny. A five or 10-minute period of the day where you want to be focused on something that nourishes you and only you. Something that your brain is unlikely to object to too hard, like reading a poem a day or deciding that you'll do four pushups every morning, or that you'll only scroll the social media or whatever distracting, palm-computer activity you fall into for a set amount of time at set times during the day, which will help you to bring more awareness to your scrolling habits, so you can constrain yourself there and can put your efforts into something that really moves your life forward.

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Another technique I love is to think about the area of your life where things are the most frustrating, annoying, messy. Perhaps your business, your finances, your relationships, boundaries, calendaring, whatever it is. And you can set some loving, gentle constraints for yourself. Start with one. Write it down, write them down, and commit to it the way we do with our minimum baseline. Make it small and doable.

Frustration and overwhelm live on when we're not really clear what our goals are and where we're going. And so commonly, our brains, because of their negativity bias are like, I see all the problems, but we don't stop to think of the solutions.

So give yourself some time, think of those solutions, the goals, even if you don't know the actual solution for whatever problem you have, you can start to brainstorm some ways you could move forward.

So make a plan and stick to it. Pick the thing to work on, brainstorm those solutions, plan it out, and then put it on your calendar. Decide ahead of time that you're committed to the plan and the solution and that you matter enough to really do it, even for just five minutes a day to move forward towards your life's goals.

So now let's say that you've decided that you too are going to calendar and you're going to stick to it. And remember, as you're doing all of this that you are deciding you want to do this for you. No one else is making this call for you. No one else is forcing you to stop spending two hours a day mindlessly scrolling, for example.

If your brain is used to feeling restriction and rebellion, this may feel like that and that's okay. You get to remind yourself that it's not a restriction at all. You made this decision for you with love and care. Once again, there's

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no need for FOMO here. Let yourself have the freakout to feel the discomfort of your brain trying to buffer against the constraint. Totally fine.

And when I feel that, that's when I turn to myself and say, "Hi brain, you're upset. I see you. You want to distract us, and I love you for that because you think you're protecting yourself, but you're not. Adult me and prefrontal cortex, we got this. We're like, on it. But thank you inner children, thank you lizard brain, I'll take it from here. As you were, my darlings."

So I will have - I just actually do this. I talk out loud to different parts of my brain. I will talk to my body. I have these conversations out loud or in the shower, in my own head sometimes. Mostly out loud. And so when my brain is like, but I want to keep doing that buffering thing, I don't want to calendar, I let it know that it's okay for it to feel that.

Totally, totally fine, and then I let the adult part of me just frankly take over. Remember my commitment to me that I've minimum baselined and I just go ahead and do it because I matter enough to me and this matters to me, to have this kind of constraint of thought.

And if that doesn't work, one of the things I do when I'm working towards a goal and my brain starts to distract me is to move out of that restrictive thinking once again and to use one of three choices. So those three choices are one, do what I plan to do, stick to my commitment. Two, do thought work on why I don't want to do that specific thing, or three, stare at a blank wall.

And it may sound mean to be like, okay, you have to stare at a wall, but what I'm doing is reducing that dopamine hit that we give ourselves when we feel, oh, this is challenging, I don't want to do this, I have fear here, I

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have worry here, and so our brains want to buffer, to turn on the TV, to take a nap, to make tea, to pee when we don't really have to pee.

And instead of giving myself that quick dopamine reward of doing something else, I invite myself to just pause, breathe, stare at the wall, and there's something about it for me because it doesn't give me any of that dopamine. It's like the spell breaks after a second and it allows me to, well, it allows me to step out of it.

And part of doing this is knowing that my perfectionist mind historically loves to worry, worry, worry, future forecast, get into analysis paralysis, and it's actually unkind to me to let my brain do that, so I don't. Three options. Constraint of thought.

I'm pretty much like, 98% of the time, I just shake it off and recognize, oh, you're buffering. Or I'll do a little bit of thought work, like I'll write down the circumstance and my brain's like, come on Vic. But not in a mean way, in a loving way like, oh Vic, come on, and I'll just get back to the task at hand.

But it does take some internal vigilance from me, a lot of being my own watcher, which is - and I say vigilance, not in a mean sort of authoritarian way, but like, standing vigil, which can be a beautiful thing. Being aware.

And less often - well no, sometimes it does involve staring at walls, but usually just for a second or two. So before we close up, I want to share a couple of examples for you. One of the places that this was really, really, really helpful for me was many years ago when I got a puppy and I recognized that I was not using constraint of thought because I was letting her on the couch when I thought it was cute to have her on the couch and she was very confused.

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She was one of those dogs - you know some dogs really want to follow and keep their human really, really happy. Her name was Frances Bacon. She was the best dog that I've ever met. And she really wanted to keep me happy, so she would sit there on the ground staring at me and she'd put one paw on the couch really tentatively.

I realized it wasn't kind to her or to me to be wishy-washy. To sometimes let her on the couch but then to be annoyed when she was on the couch when I didn't want her on the couch, when she was just coming in from the woods and was muddy or filthy. I mean, come on, don't have wishy-washy rules with a puppy, but also don't have wishy-washy rules with yourself.

That's when your brain will push back because there isn't constraint, which means there isn't clarity. So instead, give yourself those clear parameters and then honor that commitment. That's how we build self-loving discipline and honor our relationships with ourselves.

Another example is from the pre-COVID times when I was working from home already and I was learning how to calendar, how to manage my time as an entrepreneur, how to have my own business, and I realized I was stepping into this really yucky cycle in which I had this whole workday planned from nine to five or nine to six with a lunch break, and I would just sort of not calendar the day and not constrain my thinking.

And it'd be two o'clock on a Thursday and I'd be doing the dishes, and then my partner would come home at five or six on that Thursday and I'd be like, oh no, I really want to spend time with you, I want to go for a walk, I want to hang out, but I would have to tell them that I couldn't because I hadn't done my work while I'd been doing the dishes or folding the laundry or doing some other domestic something that was not what one does when one's at the office.



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So I got to constrain my thinking to say yes, you are in your home, but you're also at the office. So pick one. Be home and consciously say I'm taking a break to do this domestic task or to talk to a friend or to exercise or whatever, but don't pretend you're at the office. Does that make sense?

Again, it's that confusion of not constraining. It means that you're not doing either thing well. And I really could go on with a thousand more examples of when constraint of thought is so helpful for us. But I think you get the point.

And I'll also talk more about similar issues coming up because really, constraint of thought touches on every aspect of healing codependency, perfectionism, and people pleasing. So my love, I hope that this has been helpful for you. It's been a delight to share with you.

There are - last time I checked, there's one, maybe two spots left for my upcoming masterclass, The Feminist Wellness Guide to Overcoming Codependency. So you can head to my website, [victoriaalbina.com/masterclass](http://victoriaalbina.com/masterclass). If the application form is still up, go ahead and fill it out and we will be changing that when we go to a waitlist for the next offering of the course.

So if you want that last spot, hop on it right now. Alright my sweet beauties, I hope all is beautiful for you. I hope that this learning today around constraining your thinking is supportive and I really look forward to talking with you soon.

If you haven't subscribed to the show, rated and reviewed it on the iTunes, which is now called Apple Podcast, please do so. It really, really helps me to get the word out. This show is a public service, it's how I give to the world, and so I'd love your help to spread the message, share it on your

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Instagram, give it some ups on the Apple Podcasts and let's get the word out.

Alright my beauties, let's do what we do. Nice slow deep breath in and out. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well and I'll talk to you soon.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you like what you've heard, head to [VictoriaAlbina.com](http://VictoriaAlbina.com) to learn more.