

Ep #264: The Work That Makes Spring Look Easy



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This is episode 264, and I'm talking about the work that makes spring look easy. Let's get into it.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen, then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Alright, folks, welcome to the podcast. It is currently very cold in the UK. We've had some temperatures that are around zero degrees and minus one. The other day I watched Nelson play football, and it was minus one, but the feels-like temperature was actually minus nine. And do bear in mind that I am in the mild southeast. It has been far, far colder up north.

But being in winter has got me thinking about all of my work around the seasons, like the seasons of the cycle, and using the seasons as a structure for goal setting, which is what I do in the membership.

So I've often spoken about taking it easier during winter. And it's always interesting to see how that is received and interpreted/misinterpreted. And what I've observed is that it tends to get oversimplified or misunderstood, especially in personal development spaces.

So today I want to talk about how effort actually works in winter because if you're in a season where everything's maybe feeling a bit heavier, or where progress looks smaller than you think it should, given how much you're putting in, and maybe where it's just requiring more effort for you to feel motivated, then I really want to help you reconsider how you relate to things like effort, discipline, and momentum in a way that really supports long-term change, rather than you burning out or just questioning yourself and giving up on your goals.

There's a quote that I love, and I actually used it at the start of the Inner Winter chapter inside *Period Power*. And I'm often reminded of it on rainy, cold, muddy days. I first saw it on a chalkboard outside a pub in Brixton many moons ago in January. Maybe it was around the time of Blue

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Monday. And I took a photo of it, and I even used it on my blog on my very first website. So me and this quote have a long history together.

The quote comes from George Herbert, and it's "every mile is two in winter." And I actually think that two is conservative. I think three's probably more accurate, possibly even more depending on what's going on with your life. So this can show up in a couple of ways that I've been really thinking about, especially because I've been thinking so much about goals and setting goals at this time of year, what the reality of goals can be like at this time of year, given our varied experiences.

But specifically with this quote, "every mile is two in winter," I think the first way that this can show up is you just can't be arsed. Just that motivation might not be there in the way that it is in other seasons of the year, other seasons of your cycle, or other seasons of life.

And then the other way is that the effort that you are putting in is resulting in what appears to be marginal gains, or can even feel like your efforts are costing you without any obvious return. So let's say you're doing your thing, you're showing up, you're following through, you are taking action. And yet the visible return seems modest at best, and it might even appear like nothing at all, which is exactly where a lot of people understandably start to wobble or second-guess or, you know, just decide that it's simply not worth it.

And this is also where a lot of the more motivational messaging that people rely on starts to fall apart because so much of it assumes that when you put effort in, it's going to be instantly rewarding and you'll get that feedback loop that energises you and inspires you and there's some kind of dopamine emotional reward in the moment. But winter effort doesn't usually feel like that.

Winter effort can feel quite flat, or like there's not much going on. It's certainly unglamorous. You know, when I'm trudging my way through the mud to get to my horse, it's definitely not giving equestrian lifestyle. I see lots of brands using that on their social media. I'm like, yeah, that is not my

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life. I've got so many layers on that sometimes it means I sacrifice my ability to move because I want to stay warm. And, you know, I'll have rain blowing into any available openings in what I'm wearing and just biting cold wind coming up against me.

So that sense of forward momentum that I might feel at other times, it just takes a bit more effort to get to that point, and I have to use mindset and all sorts of different approaches. Thankfully, I have all that in my toolkit. But we are so used to equating progress with some kind of positive emotional feedback that reinforces that you're doing well. And it's not that you aren't doing well, it's just that you're more predisposed in winter to think that you aren't, especially when you don't have that positive emotional feedback and especially when you're not getting some kind of instant reward that lets you know you're onto a good thing and that the effort you're putting in is worth it and that you are achieving things.

So because of that, winter can make you think that you're stagnating when you're not. And I see this really clearly in some of the assessments that my clients do. So this is a big part of why I'm so big on doing assessments. Those of you in the membership know what I'm talking about. Because it's not usually even true that you are stagnating. That's just the lens that you're looking through in that moment.

So this is why actually assessing things and actually looking at the data and the evidence base is so important. We can't just rely on how you are thinking and feeling about things. And that's why the idea that every mile is two in winter matters so much, because if you keep measuring winter effort with your summer metrics, you'll always underestimate what you're actually doing and what you are building.

Now, of course, winter can mean the literal winter season, like it is here in the UK right now, but it's not just a date on the calendar. And it isn't something you automatically exit just because a period of time has passed. I like to think about winter in terms of capacity. So it can be a literal winter, where light is low, routines might feel harder to maintain for various reasons, and your body is just working harder to keep you warm. Like on

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the most basic level, your body is having to work harder. That doesn't have to be a problem.

But there's a physical element of bracing that goes on and being tense that you might not even notice is going on in your body because it's just gradually become your default. But pretty soon, like once we hit March, a few months away, a couple of months away, then you might notice that as there's more light, as the temperatures increase, that you feel your body start to soften and open. And it's only then that you realise how much you've been holding and what kind of tension might have been there.

But sometimes it's an internal winter, so it could well be the summer season of the year, but you experiencing an internal winter of some kind. And that could be related to what's going on with your hormones, a phase of your cycle, your reproductive hormones across the course of your lifetime. It could be that you're recovering from burnout of some kind, or that you're experiencing grief or illness, or a period of introversion where your energy has just been turned more inward, whether that was something that was deliberate and intentional or not.

And sometimes it's a winter season of your life, you know, seasons of pressure, caregiving, emotional labour, financial stress, or just competing demands where your available capacity is a bit narrower or a lot narrower than usual, or that capacity is being challenged in some way. And while it's not totally down to those external factors, of course, they still matter.

So winter is really any context where your capacity and your margins are a bit smaller. And the effort might cost you a bit more. And your output is constrained in some way. As I said, that doesn't have to be a problem. We just work with it. This is why it's so important to have these things in your toolkits.

But it also deserves a different strategy, not necessarily a softer one where you just take it easy. And I think that's where some of my work, particularly to do with the cycle, has been misinterpreted. So we're not necessarily talking about that, but what I will say is that any of the work that you do in

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winter compounds faster than other seasons. And I know that might sound surprising, especially if you're someone who feels really alive in the various summers of your life, like ovulation in your cycle, the summer season of the year, and just seasons of life where everything's feeling great, and things are happening.

But winter, this is how I want you to see winter. Winter is a high-leverage season because the work that is done in winter compounds faster. Part of that is because it is a bit harder, so you're flexing different muscles. But it's also because of what is building underneath the surface. So in winter, you're building skills without everything feeling great. You're following through without the emotional payoff of excitement. And you really are flexing muscles that you didn't even know existed.

It's like if you're used to going to the gym, but you usually train your abs and your quads and your biceps, but then you start training the muscles that we don't usually talk about. So there's a little-known muscle called the serratus anterior, which is a muscle covering your ribs. It's actually referred to as the boxer's muscle because of how it pulls your shoulder blade forward and around the rib cage when you throw a punch.

It stabilises everything, but it's almost never trained directly. And when you try to train it, as I once did in a yoga class, my yoga instructor, who was also a good friend, was just cracking up laughing at me. You won't even feel the muscle doing anything. It's this precise aspect of training, and so to begin with, you'll be working that muscle without the reinforcement of visible results or like feeling it being activated. And that then requires you to strengthen your belief in what you're doing and the impact it will have. There has to be that belief work involved.

So when I say take it easier in winter, I don't mean disengage and do nothing. It's more that it's about reallocating effort towards the work that is going to compound, to do some strategic accounting and make some decisions and start doing some of the work that is going to add up over time. And it might not feel like you're doing a lot, but I guarantee you're doing more than you realise that you are.

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So what we often label as ease in the spring is usually a result of the winter labour. So the person who's looking disciplined and confident or consistent in a lighter and brighter season is often standing on the work that they did when nobody was watching, and that they weren't recognising themselves doing at the time. And so part of this is you learning to recognise your efforts and giving yourself props along the way. Because the effort you put in during winter will pay off tenfold.

So, to go back to my muscle analogy, it's the difference between working out when you feel good already versus working out for rehab purposes or working out when you really can't be arsed. So you're flexing literal and metaphorical muscles that can't be seen, but you will feel the difference from them in the spring and even before that. So you will build your core, and you will be standing taller, and when you look in the mirror, you will see your serratus anterior and feel so stinking proud of yourself as you should.

So this is where you build self-trust that isn't dependent on great mood or fantastic results, and that gives you leverage because once you've proven to yourself that you can stay engaged when the conditions aren't ideal, everything else becomes easier to execute later. So this is why winter effort is high leverage effort. It doesn't always move the needle massively or visibly, but it radically improves everything.

But in winter, maximum output can look very different to maximum output in the summer. And you definitely don't need to pressure yourself into pretending that it's summer and that it should all be fantastic. You know, I'm not a fan of that attitude of endless summer. And I am going to go into this in more detail in next week's episode, but for now, this is just your reminder that winter isn't a write-off, and it doesn't have to be some kind of waiting room where you're just waiting for spring to roll around. This is the foundation for what looks like ease later on.

So if you're in a season right now where progress is feeling slow and like effort is requiring more than other times, please don't assume that means it's not working. It might just mean that every mile you're walking right now counts as two or three or five. And that's not a reason to stop. It's just a

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reason to choose your next best step and keep going. It all counts. It all adds up. I promise you.

All right, folks, that is it for today. I will be back next week. I'll catch you then.

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