

Ep #296: Future Focus and How Far Ahead to Look



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

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This is episode 296 and it's all about how far out in front you need to focus in order to be effective.

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*.

Hello, folks. Oh my gosh, it is so good to be back.

I have had an interesting summer. Not a bad one by any means, but I had some challenges that I wasn't expecting that have just made things harder than I had anticipated. There was a lot of adjusting on a practical level, but also adjusting internally to the shifts that were going on in my life. As I said, nothing bad, but just additional things to be considering, which meant far fewer work hours, way less.

Nelson's friends all seem to have family that they can go and stay with, like grandparents that they go to for a week or so, and families that have options for child care. And we don't have that. So we rely on camps, but the main one that Nelson usually goes to closed down after the Easter holidays, which meant that I figured out that, on average, we had 10 hours a week of child care, which I am grateful for. That is enough for me to keep things ticking over, but it's not possible for me to do much more than that. So I had to reduce my expectations.

But I did have a lot of fun hanging out with Nelson this summer. I really enjoy his company. And at the same time, I can also appreciate that as an only child, he does really want the company of his mates too. So there's a lot of organising his social life. That's what my parenting is at the moment, a lot of messaging and organising things.

Anyway, moving on to today's topic, which is actually somewhat related to what I've just spoken about in terms of hanging out with Nelson, because there's a lot of chat online, books, research, etc. There's a lot of chat about being present in the now, and that's certainly something that I aspire to and appreciate when I'm spending time with Nelson, for example. For me to be

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with him and just chat about stuff, mainly football. My knowledge about football is way more than I ever expected it to be in my lifetime. I've actually got quite into it now.

Or we drive around listening and singing to the latest playlist that he's put together. We go for walks and point out our favourite houses. We talk about the brickwork and the colour of the doors and the windows, all of that kind of stuff. So being present with him in all of those moments means that I am experiencing connection between us and also in our shared experiences of whatever it is that we're doing.

It's the same as when I'm with my horse. I'm very in the moment with him. And in fact, when I first started riding as an adult a few years ago, I was really astonished to discover that when I ride, I don't think of anything else. It's a holiday for your brain, which is really weird for me because usually my brain is thinking of multiple things at once, and it's very active. Autistic people's brains are very, very active. And so it was really surprising to me to have this experience whilst I'm riding, where I'm not thinking of anything else.

So there are certainly times and places and relationships where being connected and being present in the now is fantastic.

But for the rest of the time, I'm a big fan of being future-focused. And over the years, a lot of you have asked me about how I hold the vision of large goals for the future whilst also working in the short term and the day-to-day. And those of you in the membership will have a good idea of that already because Design Your Decade, and then working with seasonal goals in the way that we do, is the exact process that I use in my life. And I created that method because of all those questions. That's why I teach it. It's why I created a process that you can all learn and use in your lives.

And today, I want to focus on the idea of being future-focused, specifically how far out in front to be focused on, because that can vary too. So in Design Your Decade, we start off by visualising what you want your life to look like in 10 years' time. Then we look at the three-year picture and then

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the one-year plan. And then we boil it down into what the goal and the work is for this season of the year. What result do you want to have created within the three-month period of a season? Who will you have become along the way?

So we go far out in front and then bring it down to the next three months. And of course, from there, it's looking at each month and each week and each day. But the idea being that by the end of it, you're doing your day-to-day. You're bringing your goals into the here and now, but your focus is out in front enough that you have a sense of direction and you can see where you're going, where you need to get to.

And as you move forward with your plan, you're continually seeing far enough out in front of you, knowing that eventually that will bring you to your destination. It's just like driving a car. There is a natural place for your eyes to go. And it's not the steering wheel or the bonnet. It's beyond those things, but it's also not so far out in front. You're not fixed on the hills way off in the distance either, because if you do that, then you lose your sense of the road that you're on and what's going on around you.

I know the idea of looking at the end of the bonnet when you're driving sounds ludicrous. Why would you do that? Because if you did, you'd be in trouble very quickly. But some of you are doing the equivalent of that in your lives, which is what happens particularly when you feel stressed and overwhelmed.

It's your amygdala's job to scan for threats, and when things feel uncertain or overwhelming, your attention is understandably going to go to whatever source of stress is loudest or most persistent for you. So that row that you had, or the one that's maybe brewing inside you, or your inbox, or just whatever's bothering you. But you're also more likely to then perceive non-threatening situations as threatening.

So how when you're already stressed and then someone makes a comment or asks you a question, and you snap because it's just pushed you over the edge. But then once you're on the other side of that stress

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response, you can look back at the scenario, think about what they asked you, think about what they said, and realise that they weren't actually criticising you. And that the question they asked you was maybe them just trying to help you or to understand what's going on. And that's what happens when you're looking down at the bonnet. And when you do that, you just lose your sense of the road and of where you're trying to get to.

So this is why you need tools to deal with the day-to-day stresses, for you to work on your mindset, to tend to yourself in those emotions and those stress responses. Because when you have a toolkit of ways to do that, it's not that you won't have stress responses because you absolutely will, but they won't be as frequent or as severe, which means that your prefrontal cortex, the part of your brain that can imagine, dream, and plan, will be engaged more of the time.

And the more that you imagine and dream and plan and do, because the doing part matters as well, don't forget about that part, and the more you celebrate, the more you'll be able to engage this way of thinking and being.

So having a destination or a horizon in mind gives you something to look at. Having a vision for your life isn't manifestation nonsense. I know a lot of people are dismissive of manifestation stuff, but whatever your thoughts on it are, it is useful to have a vision. It's a strategy that helps you navigate stress.

When you've got a horizon, you organise yourself around it. Your body has somewhere to direct the energy that might otherwise just be spent circling the immediate mess and stress of your life. And it gets you out of that reactive state that isn't serving you and gives you a focus and a plan. That is very useful.

So you can think about fear and vision being a seesaw. So when fear goes up, vision goes down. You physically lose the capacity to see anything past the immediate, the next five minutes. And the reverse is true too. So if you really come up with a vision and spend time in that and tend to it, you're going to limit the spaces that fear has to operate.

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So you need a point far enough ahead that you can see what's coming, and close enough that you're still able to respond to what's going on right now.

During the summer, Nelson and I went to Betteshanger Park, which is a country park that a lot of cyclists go to because they've got a road track and they also have mountain bike trails as well. So we took our bikes and we've done the easier trail in the past, though I will say I didn't find it that easy. I'm not very good with speed. My body struggles with speed and heights. So going on a mountain bike trail goes against what my nervous system thinks is wise.

But this time, we did the more challenging one and it wasn't just steeper, the ground was also a lot rougher, and in one section, Nelson told me that he was struggling to stay balanced. And his instinct was to look straight down at his front wheel because that's where he perceived the wobble happening. So that's where it felt like the danger was. So I saw this and I said, "Instead of looking down, find a spot on the trail a couple of meters ahead instead and just focus on that. That is going to help you to balance." And that's exactly what happened. As soon as he switched where he was looking, he found his balance.

And this applies to how you're thinking about your goals and how you are approaching them as well. Because if you focus too much on the now and you end up looking down, things stop feeling so possible. And you get pulled down into problems and the perspective you have isn't a useful one. You get thrown off balance and you get stuck or maybe you just give up entirely.

But when there are dreams and goals that you want to achieve, it really helps to be looking forward and to be upright in your body, and to be convincing yourself on a cellular level that this is possible, which is what happens when you're upright and looking forward.

I'll give you one more example of this that I love.

Those of you who are familiar with the legendary TV show *Gladiators* will already know about the travelator. If you don't, *Gladiators* is a show where

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members of the public, the contenders, take on a cast of professional athletes, the gladiators, and they have a whole series of physical challenges to do. And then in the final, which is called the eliminator, the two contestants, I think they're called contenders. Do they call them contenders on the show? I think that's what it is. But they compete against each other. And after they go through this whole series of really gruelling obstacles, racing each other the whole time, and then right at the end, they have to summon the energy and determination to run up this iconic steep walkway, the travelator, that is going to take them to victory.

And what I have noticed, this was a show in the 90s, by the way, and it's come back recently and Nelson loves it and Paul and I still love watching it. So it is our family show. But what I've noticed is right at the end, when they're running up the travelator, the folks who make it to the top all do one thing. They look beyond the end of the travelator. So they're running up at 45 degrees, but instead of looking at the top of where they need to get to, they look beyond. They keep their head high, and they keep travelling forward. Whereas every single person who falls flat on their face, they all look down towards the end of the travelator, and they don't look any further than that.

And in the moment that they look down at where they need to get to, they actually increase the gravitational force of their head. So I looked this up, a 45-degree tilt takes the weight of the head from 5 kg on average to 22 kg. That's a massive difference. You've got to remember that next time you're looking down at your phone, what that's actually doing to your body. So when they look down, that degree change increases the gravitational force and it just pulls them down and they never get to the top.

So what I want you to think about this week is where are your eyes pointing to right now? Are you so deep in today's mess of the inbox, the row, all the things that are going on, that you've actually just lost your sense of the road entirely or lost your sense of direction and of what matters to you? And everything's just started to feel a threat and you're stressed and overwhelmed. Have you tipped your head down so that everything feels heavier and harder than it actually needs to be if you were to just raise your

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head, raise your eyeline and look in front of you? Because what would be different if you did lift your vision like that? How would your posture change? How would your thinking change? What would be different?

Or are you on the other side of things? Are you daydreaming about the life you want in 10 years time but doing nothing about it? You've taken your eyes off the road, you're not even driving anymore, or you just kind of staring at what you want and doing nothing that's actually going to get you there. So that would be like standing at the bottom of the travelator, looking at the top, but not doing the run to get you up there.

So instead, what is your version of the point that's a couple of meters ahead of you right now? That is what I want you to focus on. So look beyond the end of the travelator, keep your head up, and keep moving forward. And I will be back with you next week.

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