

3 Strategies to Accomplish Goals and Resolutions



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Keri Martinez

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3 Strategies to Accomplish Goals and Resolutions

Welcome to the *Perfectionist Professional Woman* podcast. This is Episode 5, “3 Strategies to Accomplish Goals and Resolutions.”

I’m Keri Martinez. I’m a wife and mother of three children and three bonus children. I’m also a certified life coach and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For a good portion of my life, I equated perfection with happiness and success. I thought that striving to *be* perfect and *do* things perfectly was the key to feeling happy and to being successful. I’ve since come to realize that perfection *isn’t* necessary to achieve either one of those--quite the opposite, in fact--and that has made such a difference in how I think, feel, and experience life. So if you’re a professional woman and you’d like to know how to release perfectionism so you can trade self-doubt for self-confidence, stop beating yourself up, and start enjoying your life more, then come with me. Let’s do this together.

Hello everybody. Welcome to the podcast. Welcome to episode five.

In this episode, I’m going to talk about New Year’s resolutions and goals – how to achieve them and what to do if you’ve stalled out or are feeling like you’re not making progress. If you’re listening in real time, you may be wondering why I’m talking about New Year’s resolutions right now, four months into the year. It’s toward the beginning of April 2022 when I’m recording this episode, and you might think it’s a little late to be discussing this topic. Like, why didn’t I do this podcast toward the end of December or at least the beginning of January, right?

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Well, I think now is actually a perfect time to talk about New Year's resolutions because this is the time of year when people tend to fall off the resolution bandwagon, when motivation and commitment lags, and the collective pile of abandoned resolutions starts to grow exponentially. If you set any New Year's resolutions in January, there's a decent chance you've already slipped up or abandoned them completely. So if that's you, this episode can help you get started again and keep going until you accomplish them. And if you didn't set any resolutions but just want some help accomplishing goals, then this episode will help you do that, too.

Sound good?

OK. I'm going to talk about three obstacles that stop us from accomplishing resolutions and goals, and for each one, I'll share a tool or strategy you can use to overcome the obstacle. If goals and resolutions feel overwhelming or heavy or frustrating to you, if you don't like setting goals and resolutions because you feel like what's the point – you never accomplish them anyway – you're definitely going to want to keep listening because I'm going to share a different way to think about what's been holding you back, a way you probably haven't heard before, that will make it easier and more fun to achieve them – regardless of the time of year you set them.

All right. Let's get started.

I'd like to start with a question – do you personally set New Year's resolutions? When I was doing some research for this episode, some websites said a high percentage of people set resolutions, and some said the majority don't, so I don't really know what the stats are. I am currently pretty neutral about New Year's resolutions – I could take them or leave them – but that wasn't always

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the case. I didn't set any for years and I was actually pretty anti-resolution for a while. I used to set them when I was younger (like in my teenage years and early 20's), but as I got older, the idea of setting New Year's resolutions really lost its appeal for me. So what about you? Do you do the New Year's resolution thing, or not?

Now, whether or not you set them, I'd like you to ask yourself why. Don't filter or judge or try to come up with the "right" answer (quote unquote), just ask yourself why and then see what comes up.

When I asked myself this question - why I stopped setting New Year's resolutions - I identified three reasons. The first reason was that I resented the "supposed to" aspect of New Year's resolutions. I felt like I was *supposed to* set resolutions, and they were *supposed to* be about things like weight, health, finances, and religion. Second, over the years, the process of setting New Year's resolutions morphed into an expedition to find and fix everything that was wrong with me, and that felt pretty terrible! I really didn't enjoy thinking about a massive list of things that urgently needed fixing. And third, every year, even though I'd start out strong, it wouldn't take very long for me to slip up on one or more of my resolutions. And then one would turn into two, then three, then five, and I'd get discouraged and start telling myself I'll never make it, and I'd eventually give up. And at some point I decided it was pointless to even bother with resolutions since I never accomplished them anyway.

So those are my resolutions, the obstacles that got in the way of resolutions and goals for me, and I point them out because I've noticed they're fairly universal. In reading books and articles about goals, in talking with friends, in coaching clients, and in just observing other humans, I've seen these things

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come up time and time again. If you're a human with a human brain, you've probably experienced some flavor of what I just described at some point in your life; and what's more, you'll probably experience them again.

Now that may not seem like good news, but it actually is, for a couple of reasons. First, it's good because if you have experienced something similar – if you've had similar thoughts and feelings – it means you're a normal human with a normal human brain. Having those kinds of thoughts and feelings is not an indication or indictment that something is wrong with you. Second, it's good because you can learn to manage your brain. And managing your brain is a learnable skill, and that's actually the best news because learning to do that is what gives you leverage and power over your life and how you experience it.

So let's dig into each of the obstacles I identified a little bit so you can better understand what might be holding you back and what you can do about it.

When I coach my clients, I always start with building awareness of what's going on inside the brain. Understanding how something works is what enables you to effectively tweak elements to get desired results. This is true if you're trying to repair a car, treat a medical condition, debug computer code, or create a beautiful design. If your car is making a weird noise, for example, understanding the different systems in the car will help you properly diagnose what's causing the noise. If you don't know what's causing the noise, it's going to be really difficult to fix it, right? You might hear a squealing noise and think the brake pads need to be replaced when actually it's a fan belt. If you're trying to improve the look and feel of a web page, understanding principles like contrast, repetition, alignment and proximity will help you know what to tweak to create a more pleasing aesthetic. So,

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whether it's a car, a web page, or something else, if you know how things work "under the hood" so to speak, you're much better able to diagnose and troubleshoot issues.

OBSTACLE #1

OK. So let's get going with obstacle number one. The first obstacle I listed was that I started to resent the "supposed to" aspect of resolutions. Why was that? Well, I don't know about you, but I typically don't like being told what to do. Whether it's the clothes I wear, how to vote in an election, how to parent my children, the food I eat, or whatever, I like to decide for myself what to do. And I often resent it when people tell me I *should* dress, eat, parent, vote, or express myself a certain way.

Now mind you, that's not always the case. Sometimes I *do* like being told what to do, like when I want help learning something new or doing something I'm not an expert at. For example, when I was first learning computer programming years ago, I wanted and even welcomed my college professors telling me what to do, teaching me about the structure of code, how to write efficient code, and how to do it in multiple programming languages. Another example, my husband and I are getting ready to file our taxes, and I very much want our tax guy to tell us how and what to file.

But sometime in my 20s, my brain started responding to the "should" or "supposed to" aspect of New Year's resolutions by rebelling and then deliberately *not* setting resolutions. You think I should do this? Nope, I'm going to do the complete opposite just to prove that I don't have to.

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Now, as I say that, I'm fully aware of how childish and immature it might sound. We typically associate that kind of behavior with toddlers and teenagers, right? It's certainly not how we think mature adults should think and act, right? Well, maybe it is...at least sometimes. I used to think that kind of rebellious behavior was a problem, that it was something that needed to be chastised, corrected, and eventually outgrown. And I still think chastisement and correction are appropriate at times, but I no longer view resistance to being told what to do as being a problem, at least not in a wholesale way.

Please don't misunderstand me – I'm not espousing anarchy. I firmly believe in the value of and need for rules, laws, and structure. But, I don't think questioning or resisting ideas, beliefs, rules, or "should's" is a problem in and of itself. It's normal and natural to question and push back. We're supposed to do that. We're *supposed to* choose for ourselves how to act, because God gave each of us personal agency, and baked into that agency is a desire to act for ourselves and not to be acted upon by others. So feeling resistant to authority or to other people's ideas of how you *should* live your life is normal and natural. It's normal and natural for you and me, for our spouses, our children, co-workers, friends and neighbors – literally everyone on the planet. Indeed, making our own choices and experiencing the consequences of those choices is a critical component of how we learn and grow in this life.

STRATEGY #1: CONSCIOUSNESS

Which brings me to the first strategy for achieving resolutions and goals, and that is consciousness. Now, what do I mean by that? Well, consciousness is a vital precursor to lasting personal change. It involves awareness and

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acceptance of what's going on in your brain and what you truly want. When setting a goal or resolution, you need to give yourself time and space to consider what you want to accomplish and why. Does the goal you're setting align with your personal values and what you want for your life right now? If not, give yourself permission to let that go and choose something different.

I've heard Tony Overbay talk about what he calls "socially compliant goals" numerous times on his podcast *The Virtual Couch*. Tony is a licensed therapist, and he says socially compliant goals are goals we set because we think others want us to, and we worry that if we don't set and achieve them, others will be disappointed in us and possibly reject us. In [episode 238 of The Virtual Couch](#) Tony said, "...Research shows that such socially compliant goals give rise to motivation that is weak and ineffective. We may try to drive our own behavior with such external goals, but we also secretly resent them because they undermine our own process of unfolding." I like that last bit of how we resent them because they undermine our own process of unfolding. We resent them because they're not our goals, they're someone else's. They don't align with what we really want and value.

Now let me give you an example. Let's say you've heard a host of experts talking about the health benefits of cooking more meals at home so you set a resolution to cook more meals at home. But because you work full time, have young kids, and don't really like to cook, you do it only half-heartedly, if that. You don't put much thought into how you'll do it; what you'll cook; what you'll need to buy; how much time you'll need to shop, prep, and cook the meals; what help you might need; and so on. You keep thinking, "I should cook more meals at home," but your job and the kids and everything else keeps getting in the way. In the end, you really don't cook any more meals at home than you did before setting the resolution. In fact, you might end up cooking *less*

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because you get so frustrated with yourself that you give up. Can you relate to any of that? I know I can.

Now, how would your experience be different if, when you think about what the experts have said about cooking at home, you also consider other demands on your time and your aversion to cooking? When you think about it, you realize you really *don't* want to cook more meals at this point in your life, and you consciously choose *not to* set that resolution. You give yourself permission to set that goal aside, at least for now. And I think it's important to note that just because a goal isn't right for you right now doesn't mean it will always be that way. You can always come back to a goal.

In both scenarios, you end up not cooking more meals at home. But just imagine how different your life experience would be in the second scenario where you owned what you wanted and then consciously chose versus just blindly followed someone else's "shoulds." Can you see how much more empowered you would feel in the second scenario? Can you also see how much less likely you would be to beat yourself about not cooking more at home in the second scenario? Can you imagine how much better you would feel and what a different life experience that would create for you?

The irony is that you're far more likely to make progress on healthy eating in the second scenario than you are in the first. Does that seem a little crazy? In the first scenario, you make little to no progress in healthier eating and you end up with a heap of frustration, guilt, shame, and maybe some self-loathing thrown in for good measure. But in the second scenario, when you consciously give yourself permission to let that goal go and focus on what you really want, you free up a lot of mental bandwidth. When your brain is no longer occupied with telling you what you that you *should* be cooking more,

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that you *should* be doing better; when you're no longer feeling guilt, shame, and frustration; all the energy and mental bandwidth that used to go to those is now freed up for other things. And that's when you're able to see other possibilities like maybe selecting healthier eat-out options, or looking for a healthy meal delivery service, or paying an older teenager to come to your house and cook dinner for you a couple of nights a week, or whatever. You're not able to see any of those options, though, when your mental capital is all tied up in beating yourself up. So, *consciously* choose goals that align with your values and what you really want.

OBSTACLE #2

OK. Let's move on to obstacle number two. The second obstacle I gave was New Year's resolutions morphing into a "let's find all the things wrong with me so that I can fix them this year" expedition. Trying to set goals from that mindset is problematic for a couple of reasons. One, it presupposes that something is wrong with me or lacking in some way, that I need to fix something to make myself valuable or good or acceptable. It starts me out from a deficit position or a place of scarcity. Our human brains tend to believe this kind of thinking is useful and even necessary to help us improve. Our brains think that hyper-focusing on our shortcomings and deficits will get us to make the changes needed. After all, if we don't hyper-focus on them, we'll just stay as we are and never make any progress, right? No! That is a *thought error*. It's not actually true. If it were true, we'd all be perfect. Think about that for a minute. You probably already hyper-focus on your deficits and tell yourself you should be better than you are. You're probably very good at that skill. But has it worked? Has it gotten you long-term results? Hyper-focusing

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on deficits and bullying yourself might spur short-term improvement, but it's not sustainable long term. And it feels terrible!

The second reason the *find-and-fix-everything-that's-wrong-with-me* mindset is problematic is that it creates overwhelm. When we try to do too many things at once, we end up doing none of them, at least not well. We can actually accomplish more and do it faster if we constrain and focus on just one or two things at a time. Achieve one and then move on to the next. What's magical about that approach is that the skills and mindsets you develop in achieving each goal will translate and help you accomplish subsequent goals. It's fascinating to me how that works.

STRATEGY #2: CONSTRAINT

So the second strategy I'm recommending is constraint. Splitting energy, focus, and time among too many things is ineffective, exhausting, and leads to frustration and overwhelm. Constraint allows you to accomplish more in less time using less energy. So ask yourself, of the things you want to accomplish, which ONE do you want to give your time, focus, and energy to first?

When I taught elementary school, part of the curriculum was teaching writing, and in teaching writing, I would have students focus on one, maybe two discrete skills at a time. For example, in beginning stages, I'd have them focus on starting each sentence with a capital letter and ending each sentence with some form of punctuation. I wouldn't start out teaching everything needed to write a five-paragraph essay or a full research paper. I wouldn't teach and have them focus on all the capitalization rules, all the

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punctuation rules, all the grammar rules, all the formatting rules, and so on, in the beginning. That would be too much and would completely overwhelm them.

When I taught sixth grade and they knew a lot of the rules already, I'd still have them focus on just one or two things at a time when they were proofreading their work. I wouldn't have them proofread for every kind of error at the same time. I'd have them read their work out loud and proofread for content first. Does it sound right? Are any words missing? Then I'd have them re-read it and focus only on capitalization. A third time through they'd focus on punctuation, and so on. And even though they were reading through their work multiple times, by focusing on just one or two things at a time, they actually proofread faster and with greater accuracy than if they tried to catch everything at once.

I'm not saying we need to uni-task all the time. Certainly there are things our brains can handle at the same time, like walking and talking and listening to a podcast while folding laundry. But the more complex the thing you're trying to do or achieve, the more advantageous it is to constrain your focus, and I think goals are complex enough to warrant a constrained focus.

OBSTACLE #3

All rights, let's move on to the third and final obstacle. The third one I gave was that it seemed pointless to set resolutions because I never achieved them anyway. Why torture myself with something I was just going to fail at yet again? So, there are a few thought errors baked into this reason. The first is that everything should proceed smoothly, effortlessly, and perfectly as I work

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on a resolution or a goal. And if smooth, effortless, perfect progress isn't possible, I should at least have only a minimal number of slip-ups. But that's rarely how growth and progress work. I don't know if it ever happens that way, actually, at least not with learning something difficult or complex. Growth and progress are inherently messy. Our overall trajectory might be up *if we keep going*, but there are a lot of ups and downs all along the way.

The second thought error in that idea is that giving up ahead of time by not even trying will save me from experiencing pain, discomfort, and disappointment. Not trying at all saves me from the possibility of failure which then saves me from experiencing negative emotion, right? But that's not exactly true because if I give up before I even try, I'm still going to experience pain, discomfort, and disappointment. The difference is that I'll experience pain, discomfort, and disappointment in me not growing and achieving my dreams, in giving up on myself. I'll experience pain, discomfort, and disappointment from being stagnant.

The third thought error is that pain, discomfort, and disappointment *must* follow failure. If you fail, you are guaranteed to experience pain, discomfort, and disappointment. But that's not true, either. Pain, discomfort, and disappointment after failure are optional, not inevitable. Did you know that? Did you realize that instead of pain, discomfort and disappointment you could instead experience pride, happiness, and calm?

In 2003, I decided to run the LA Marathon. I mentioned in a previous episode how I was never good at and hated running as a child. I never imagined running a formal race was something I'd be able to do or even want to. But I had a friend who convinced me to try and then helped train me. We ran a number of races together – 5Ks, 10Ks, and half marathons – and she said we

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should run LA. I decided to do it, and we trained for months. As the race approached, I decided I wanted to run or jog the entire time except when I stopped to walk for water breaks. I didn't care if I finished under a certain time, I wasn't shooting for a certain time to finish, but I wanted to run or jog the entire race except during water breaks.

Well, that didn't happen. I ended up having to walk more than just during water breaks – actually a lot more. I didn't achieve my goal of running or jogging the entire time. But you know what? When I crossed that finish line, I didn't feel the least bit of disappointment or emotional pain and discomfort. I felt plenty of *physical* pain and discomfort, but I didn't feel *emotional* pain, discomfort, or disappointment. Instead I felt proud, relieved, ecstatic, grateful, and amazed.

I had failed to achieve my goal, but I didn't feel any negative emotion. Now, what was that? It was all because of what I was thinking about the race and myself. I wasn't thinking I had failed, which would have caused me to feel disappointment, discouragement, and other painful emotions. Instead I was thinking things like, I'm so proud and happy I finished! I'm relieved the race is over! I made it 26.2 miles! I did it! All the training paid off! I'm a marathon runner! I'm so thankful for my friend for believing in and training me! I'm amazed that this body that was never very good at running as a kid actually ran 26.2 miles! Well, at least part of the time.

I felt something different purely because of what I was thinking. This is why learning to manage your brain is so powerful! I had no experience with coaching back then and hadn't even heard the idea that thoughts create feelings, but looking back now, I can clearly see that my thoughts after the race were what created all of those positive emotions for me. I could have

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thought something different that would have created a completely different experience for me. So I tell you all of that just to point out and to encourage you to remember negative emotion after failure isn't inevitable. I'm not saying it's easy *not* to feel negative emotion after failure or that you shouldn't feel it or it's bad to feel it. Negative emotion is not bad. I just want you to consider that it really is optional based on how you view your failure. Optional not inevitable.

STRATEGY #3: CONSISTENCY

And this brings me to the last strategy, which is consistency. After constraint, working consistently on your goals is what matters most. Consistency matters more than doing it "right" all the time and it matters more than the time it takes to achieve your goal. Remember that the path of growth is messy and often takes longer than we think it should, or that we would like. Also remember that negative emotion is optional during the ups and downs that inevitably occur on the path to achieving a goal, and not attempting a goal will not prevent negative emotion from showing up. If *you* keep showing up, keep returning to your goal – even after mistakes and missteps and even if it takes a lot longer than you anticipated – you make your success inevitable. You *will* figure it out. The only way you truly fail is to stop trying.

A few years ago I had laser surgery done to correct my vision. And because of my age and the nature of aging eyes, the doctor wasn't able to correct my vision in both eyes so that I could see clearly both up close and at a distance. If she performed the surgery to correct my vision to see things far away, I'd need reading glasses to see things up close. And if she corrected it so I could see up close, I'd need glasses to see far away. And I didn't like either of those

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options, because I didn't want to have to wear glasses, so I chose a third option called monovision which corrected one eye for distance and the other eye for up close. And I know that might sound a little odd – you might be wondering how that could work if one eye is set for distance and the other up close. The doctor told me that my vision would be blurry for a while as my brain was adapting (essentially relearning how to merge the visual signals from both eyes into a clear picture), but it would eventually do that. So I decided to try the monovision option. The surgery went well and the doctor said I should be seeing clearly again in about a week. And after that, I took the next week off from work to recover.

I went back to the doctor a couple of times during that week so the doctor could check my healing progress, and she said everything looked good both times. And after that week, I had a pretty big conference to go to for work, so I had to go back to work. But I still couldn't see clearly. If I closed one eye, I could see far away, and if I closed the other I could see close up, but if I had both eyes open, everything still looked blurry. I was expecting my vision to get slightly less blurry each day, but that wasn't happening.

After a few more days like that, I started to get pretty anxious. What if the surgery didn't work for me? What if my eyes weren't healing right? What if my vision was never going to clear up? Was I now going to have to wear glasses all the time? I called the doctor's office and expressed my concerns, and they reassured me this was all normal. They told me to be patient and everything would be fine.

I was not really thrilled with that answer because I was, I thought, well past the week I had been told it would take for me to be able to see again, but I went with it, because I figured what else could I do? I could either trust the

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expert and wait, or I could continue to freak out and wait. Either way I was going to have to wait. So, I waited, and I chose not to freak out. At least not very much. But then, the craziest thing happened. One day my vision was blurry, and the next I woke up it was clear! My brain had done exactly what the doctor had told me it would. It had adapted to the monovision so that I could see clearly with both eyes. It was so wild!

Now that's not the only time in my life I've gone from not being able to do something to being able to do it. But I love that story and I reflect on it often because it's such a wonderful example of how growth and change work. Sometimes progress happens differently than we expect. Sometimes progress looks like small, steady improvements that gradually culminate in a big change, but sometimes it looks like nothing is happening for a while and then all of a sudden a big change happens. A lot of the time, internal change is occurring unbeknownst to us long before we see any external evidence of it. During those days between the surgery and when I could finally see clearly again, my brain was making new neural connections to retrain itself, but I couldn't see any of that. Each day I was looking for evidence that something was getting better, but my vision just, to me, looked the same. And then all of the sudden out of the blue, bam! things changed.

When we're working toward a goal, trying to build a new habit, or trying to learn something new and we're failing again and again, it's easy to assume no progress is being made. We get frustrated, anxious, and think things aren't working. We freak out a bit when progress doesn't happen on the schedule we think it should or in the way we think it should. We think something's wrong with us, and we start doubting our ability to succeed. Have you ever done that? I know I have, more times than I'd care to admit. But here's what I want you to remember – despite the fact that we're not able to see all of the

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internal changes happening, we're not able to see the rewiring and new neural connections being formed in the brain, change *is* occurring. Just because we can't see it doesn't mean it isn't happening. It only means we can't see it yet. If we're patient and keep trying, keep going, we will eventually figure it out. We'll have a breakthrough, accomplish the goal, establish the habit, or learn the thing.

I said this earlier and I think it bears repeating again: if we keep showing up, keep returning to our goal – even after mistakes and missteps and even if it takes a lot longer than we anticipated – we make our success inevitable. The only way to fail is to quit. Consistency is the key.

RECAP

OK. Let's do a quick recap of the strategies I shared to help you achieve your resolutions and goals. In case you didn't catch it before, they're all Cs which I hope will make it easier for you to remember them. The three Cs are consciousness, constraint, and consistency. Consciousness is intentionally choosing goals that align with your values and what you really want for your life. Constraint is focusing on one maybe two goals at a time, but I'd really encourage you to stick with just one. And then consistency is showing up and plugging away until you achieve your goal.

I hope you found this episode helpful and that you can use those three Cs to change how you approach goal setting and resolutions, to start getting the results that you want. If you'd like even more help with goals, if you want someone to help you throughout the process, that's what I do as a coach. I will help you put the three Cs into practice in whatever areas of your life you

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want to work on – career, relationships, health, finances, spirituality, time management, or something else. It's exhilarating, hard work, and it's also fun to work with a coach. It's exhilarating to blow your own mind by doing more than you thought you were capable of. And it's so fun to experience a change in your self-perception, to feel more confident and sure of yourself, and to come to know that you can handle any challenge that comes your way.

As your coach, I will believe in, support, and teach you every step of the way. I will help you unlock the capacity already within you and help you increase belief in yourself so you can keep going until you achieve what you want. If all of that sounds pretty amazing to you, head to kerimartinez.com and click the green "Schedule a Call" button. From there, you can pick a date and time that works for you for a call. We'll meet over Zoom, and we'll chat for about an hour. During that time, I'll ask you about what you want for your life – maybe it's to feel better, feel more confident, get unstuck in some area, enjoy your life more, or accomplish a specific goal. If I think I can help you, I'll tell you about how we can work together through my one-on-one coaching program. And if we both feel the program would be a good fit and you want to move forward, we'll schedule your first appointment. And if not, we'll simply part as friends. My goal, whether you decide to work with me or not, is have you leave the call understanding more about yourself and how to get it.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the *Perfectionist Professional Woman Podcast*. If you'd like to see show notes and a transcript, head on over to kerimartinez.com/5. That's k-e-r-i-m-a-r-t-i-n-e-z dot com forward slash the number five.

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Have a beautiful week, my friends! Ciao for now!