

Leaving Open Loops (So Life Feels Lighter And Less Overwhelming)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Natalie Bacon

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Welcome to Mom On Purpose, where it's all about helping moms overcome challenges and live their best lives. My hope is by being here, you are more inspired to become the mom you are made to be. I'm Natalie, your host, a wife, boy mom, dog mama, Chicagoan and former lawyer turned professionally certified coach. If you're here to grow, I can help. Let's go.

Hello, my beautiful friends. How are we doing today? I'm so happy to be here with you to talk about open loops. I was thinking about this topic because I am so much better at leaving open loops compared to pre-kids and you'll hear what I mean in a second here. But I think it's just interesting to think about who you were before kids versus who you are now and how you've changed either on default or intentionally and how you can get even better at changing intentionally.

For me, I always think that part of doing this work is creating an internal steadiness regardless of what's happening externally. So, you know, if I used to experience a lot of high highs and low lows, now I would say that it's much smaller, much more like rolling hills. And that's a product of doing this work because on default, our brains always look externally for evidence of what is true. And what can happen inadvertently is that we end up hanging our emotions on what's happening. So if husband's happy, then we're happy. If husband's upset, then we're upset. If kids are struggling, then we are internally struggling or at least worrying. If kids are happy and succeeding, then we're happy and succeeding. And so on default, what can happen is we can tie our emotional experience to things outside of our control, which quite obviously leads to a rollercoaster of high highs and low lows.

And I think life is so much better when you learn how to untangle that. I know for me personally, I am so much steadier internally and have like a stronger sense of self-confidence and groundedness and certainty that's not dependent on what's happening outside of me. Of course, it does not mean I am a robot, nor do I want to be. I'm still affected and I still, you know, have the rolling hills, but I'm really a completely different person when you just think of like the high highs versus the rolling hills, right? The high highs and the low lows on the one end of the spectrum where you're

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tied to things happening externally versus the other end, where things can just feel easier, lighter because you're not so shaken by things happening externally. So anyways, just on my mind as I was thinking about why this work matters to me and I really think of like the Mom On Purpose Membership as the mental and emotional gym.

And it's something that I'm never done with because it keeps my brain sharp. I love coaching every single week and I think some things that I participate in are for a season. So if you, I don't know, want to become an exceptional baker and you want to learn just how to bake cakes, you know, there is like a learning process to that that would be your education and then it's complete. I just made that up, but maybe it's for college, right? Maybe that's a more relatable example. Although I would love to learn how to bake. But for, those of us who went to college or, you know, even beyond college, for me, it's like I went to undergrad and then law school and both of those experiences had completion dates. I did four years of undergrad and then three years for law school. It was long, it was somewhat might say stressful.

It was intense to say the least. It was demanding. And also it completed. And I bring that up because I think it's just useful to differentiate between types of learning and education that you want to be finite and have a completion date, like getting your law degree or, maybe learning how to bake a cake or something else, right? It's, it's something that has a start and an end versus taking care of yourself in certain ways like showering, movement, moving your body, brain management, things that we are going to do ongoing forever as long as we're capable because they're not supposed to complete. And I don't know, for me, just thinking about it in that way can be so helpful because sometimes I think at least I know I'm guilty of this, it's like I conflate the two and then I'm thinking, well, shouldn't I be done with this?

Or am I doing this for too long? I was actually thinking about this in terms of, of like listening to coaching and, you know, I'm a student of it just as much as I am a coach of it. And I was thinking about some programs that I participate in and whether I want to continue. And the answer is yes, even

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though I've been a participant in them for years. And it was this differentiation that really helped because for other things, for a lot of things actually, I love taking like one and done courses. You know, maybe it's a course on how to do something in my business, how to run Facebook ads, or it's a course to learn a specific skill and then it's done. And typically it's a lot more expensive than like an ongoing membership, like the Mom On Purpose Membership, but you pay it all upfront, you get all of the content that gives you the direct path for it and you learn it and then you know it and then you practice it, right?

And the skill that you learn is in that specific, you know, course, let's say. Kind of At Your Goal Weight is similar, my weight loss program where you're not going to be working on weight loss forever, okay? You have a weight loss goal. There's what you weigh now and if you want to lose, let's say like 45 pounds, then let's say you take out your goal weight, it's a finite course, you go through it, you implement it and you lose the weight, okay? That is something you have a before and an after of, you start and then you finish it. And having this, framework is just really helpful for knowing what to continue investing in, what you want to do next. Maybe there's a skill that you want to have that you don't yet have. Maybe you want to learn how to make flower arrangements, floral arrangements.

You know, maybe it's different cooking classes. I'm obsessed with using the air fryer, my friends, for my kids and then obviously that just inadvertently results in me eating a lot of air fryer food as well. And I, finally had the algorithm, unintentionally show me some air fryer accounts and I am obsessed. I'm like, "Why didn't I think to search for this?" Which I didn't. I had just been coming up with them on my own or, you know, looking at the backs of things or I don't know, random recipes and then turning it into air fryer. Anyways, long-winded way of saying that now I have followed a couple air fryer recipe family kind of meal accounts that are just for air fryers. And it's been really fun to focus on like learning this new skill. Now, like the skill of making new meals via this different type of, of cooking thing, I don't even know what you'd call it, air fryer is, is not like a lifelong skill that I'm going to be learning, right?

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Now, there are always going to be new recipes and I'm always going to be eating and cooking, but that's different. Just like in the way that you could practice law forever, but law school is a three-year period. And so just, you know, consider this framework something that could be helpful for you because if you are someone who struggles with knowing what to invest in or should I be done with this or should I continue taking it? I personally don't make that decision through like how am I feeling today? Right? 'Cause sometimes, you know, there's some programs I'm in, maybe I don't like what they're talking about right now or it's just not resonating with me or, you know, maybe I'm just personally having an off day or an off week. And so I don't want to make decisions out of that. And so it's helpful to just take a step back and make the decision through like metrics that matter to you and through results that matter to you.

And so for me, when I take a step back and I think about, okay, what's the purpose of ongoing regular coaching for me? It's to keep my mind sharp. It's to take care of my mental and emotional health. And when I think about the Mom On Purpose Membership and I think about how coaching, like me doing the coaching helps me keep my brain sharp as well and help other moms as well, right? All of the members in there. I am so like in love with that purpose, not just from a business perspective, but also from a mental and emotional health perspective, just as I'm sure, you know, all of the members feel as well. And so I think about other programs that I'm in through that framework and I think about, okay, in the last year, is this, you know, type of mental and emotional gym that I'm in, is it adding value in that way?

And the answer typically is like hands down, yes. And so I continue to invest and pay for them even though if I didn't have that framework and I just said, you know, "How's it going? Do I really like what they're talking about right now?" The answer might be no and I might leave. And the bummer with that is then I ultimately don't create more of what I want because I just didn't ask myself the right questions. And so I'm offering this to you because I think on default we just kind of decide things like what to take and what not to take based on how we're feeling like in the moment or

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that day or let alone that week. And so just to think about it a little bit differently, what skills do you want or need to learn to create a specific result? I love the example of using At Your Goal Weight here because I do have two signature programs that are different.

One is you take it, yes, you get lifetime access, but the idea is you go through it as many times as you need to, to learn the skill of permanent weight loss by going into a calorie deficit and maintenance mode so you can lose weight permanently. And then you're done with that, right? This is not something that is ongoing. Versus the Mom On Purpose Membership, I think of it as a mental and emotional gym. Most of our members end up staying for years and it's not something that you complete. And so, just separating out the types of things that you invest in through that framework can be really, really helpful so that you make a decision that aligns with what's important to you and what you genuinely want. So long introduction, my friend, that's what's on my mind. I hope it was helpful in some way.

Today I want to talk with you about open loops. Open loops tend to feel overwhelming on default. They feel heavy, they feel stressful, they feel anxiety producing. And I want to help you with that because this is like a micro transformation that I've had over the last handful of years, definitely since becoming a mom. And I want to share with you what that's been like and I think it could be very helpful for some of you who run a little bit more, you know, type A, high achieving, a little bit, like you don't like to leave open loops. So let's start with what do I even mean by an open loop? I want to define it as anything your brain believes is unfinished. It could be a task, a decision, an email, your entire inbox with unread emails. It could be, you know, things in your mind that you're considering buying.

It could be undone laundry. It could be toys in the playroom and living room if you're anything like me. It could be beds. Everyone says to make your bed, my friend. I want you to question that. I don't make my bed. I don't make my boys' beds. Now, did I always used to make the bed? Yes. Will I likely start making the beds again, you know, when my kids are in school and I just feel it's a higher priority? Yes. And so what I'm not saying is that you should leave everything undone and that you shouldn't make your

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beds. That's not what I'm saying. I want you to draw attention to the discomfort that you feel with things left undone. And I want you to make decisions about what to finish and what to complete and what to do based on what's important to you right now.

Not based on some like neurotic tendency to need to have this done and complete and the bed made. And so for me, that's exactly what I did. I used to always make my bed. I am a fan of making beds. And with three, you know, under four, now three under five, I have found that it's just not a priority and it doesn't bother me and I am more successful, you know, than when I was making beds. And so a lot of times we can take something that is, just like given as really helpful advice, like the intent is to be helpful and we can think of it as like a Bible, right? We can think of it as this is the law. And for those of you who grew up and maybe still are rule followers, I have been there. I am a self-proclaimed rule follower who has now become a rule breaker and I like this.

And really entrepreneurship helped me so much. And then obviously having three boys in three years helped as well. And it's so empowering because it enables you to do what's a priority for you. And so that's just kind of a tangent and small example that I want to share with you. But the idea here is your brain does not like things left undone. It does not like things unfinished. And when you know that, when you can be onto your brain and you can be aware of it and then you can decide not based on what you should or, you know, what feels the most like comfortable, but instead what you genuinely think is the highest priority. So I want to take a step back and just acknowledge that the feeling of overwhelm is always real, but it's also always coming from the perception that your brain is having of too many things to do.

And this can feel, you know, heavy. It can feel busy. It can feel exhausting. It can feel a little bit manic or anxiety producing. And there's nothing wrong with you. There's nothing wrong with your brain. It is simply, I think, the result of modern motherhood, the demands we have, and an unmanaged brain. And so, you know, take all of the things that you do in your life and then add the fact that your brain doesn't like open loops and it's just a

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recipe for overwhelm on default. So I want you to just think right now about the open loops that drive you crazy generally, that the open loops that like you have to close, that you feel like this impulse, this compulsion maybe is the right word to close them and the ones that, maybe just bother you a little bit. Like just take a second and think about that.

Like for me, I'm really great now at leaving laundry undone or beds unmade. But, I can't say that I'm as great, but what's more challenging for me is my inbox and text messages. I've gotten a lot better with text messages because I either have my phone on me or I can't find it is basically how my motherhood is right now. So it's either like right with me like in my pocket or I'm holding it if I don't have pockets or something or in my purse, it's on my person or I can't find it. I've tried to have a little station for it sometimes I do, but most of the time it's one of the two. And you know, for me, my email and my text messages, like I have systems for so I can do it so quickly, but I, I'm just onto myself.

And so what I'm saying here is that your open loops might not be a problem, but I still want you to question them. So for me, it's like, well, my inbox isn't a problem, but I do treat it like a priority, which is kind of interesting because my inbox is a way for other people to reach me. And like why is that a priority? Just kind of interesting. And so do I really want that to be a priority? Like probably not. But the idea of just letting my inbox go or checking it weekly or, you know, leaving it undone, I'm not there yet, my friends. I am just not there. So, you know, this isn't a huge problem. It's not actually creating a problem at all, but I'm just wondering, you know, I'm always trying to optimize for productivity in a way that aligns with like what I want to create more of, right?

The goal is not be as productive as possible, but it is get done what I want to get done. And if I can do that in a more efficient way or a way that better aligns with my values, then of course I want to do that. And so I give that example because, you know, even after doing this work and having this mini transformation, there are still areas where there are always, I think, open loops. And so I say that, so you know where I'm coming from. And also just to give you a more nuanced example that you may have not

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thought of. For you, think in your mind, what are the open loops? Do you, are you thinking about, oh, I need to schedule the dentist. Oh, I need to reply to that text. Oh, I need to figure out, you know, fall break, schedule or, upcoming trips.

You know, it might be kind of a to - do list in your mind or, you know, maybe you use a to - do list. It's sort of like saying a bad word around here. If you've been around for a while, you know my thoughts on to - do lists. But nonetheless, some of you still have them and if you do, this would be a great place where open loops live. So it can be mental. It can definitely be physical, just like we talked about with the laundry, with the beds. It could be dishes in the sink. I don't like dishes in the sink. I'm in, I'm definitely fine with it now because my husband, the way he grew up was, you know, put your dishes in the sink and you kind of leave them there and then I don't know if it was him or his siblings or his parents, but eventually they got put in the dishwasher, but it was later in the day.

Where I grew up in my family, we just put things straight in the dishwasher. And so it took a while for me to do the work around leaving the sink undone, leaving the dishes undone. And again, I think this is really important work to do. This is not about living a messier life. It is though about you feeling how you want to feel regardless of what's happening outside of you. So this is why it's important because you might be thinking, "I don't understand, Natalie. I want to declutter. I want to have my beds made. I want to have the laundry put away. I want things to be, you know, "perfect in your environment." Cool. I love that for you, but not everyone else in your environment does. And so you might have kids. In fact, I have some clients in the membership with adult kids who don't share that same sentiment, or you might have teenagers who definitely don't share that same sentiment.

Regardless of, you know, if everyone in your life also agrees and they're very tidy, it still really benefits you to get more comfortable with things being undone so that you have that inner strength when it, you know, does come along, when a circumstance does present where things are really left undone so that you're less dependent on things needing to be done in

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order to feel a certain way so that you can create that internal certainty, that internal calm, regardless of things being left undone. I want to bring up the Zeigarnik Effect because that's really what's happening here. This is where we typically as human beings remember unfinished tasks more than we remember completed or finished tasks. Isn't that crazy? Your brain creates this like tension and it will keep bringing up the open loops in the forefront of your memory until closure is achieved. Like that is wild to me.

And here's why, your brain just really treats an open loop and open task as an unresolved problem. And so your subconscious creates this sense of urgency. And I looked it up and research shows that your brain will bring these to the forefront twice as likely as it is to bring up finished tasks or completed tasks. Isn't this wild? So wild to me anyways. And so I love brain management because of how practical it is. So I am all for whatever works for you. Brain management works extraordinarily well for my clients and I'm always trying to just think of how I can apply it to myself in better, more efficient ways to get the results I want as well as teach it to you all and my clients in a way that is the most helpful for you. And navigating overwhelm is such a big part of my work.

I think just as women we take out a lot as moms, there's the mental load. And if you have tools to manage overwhelm, you can create more of the life you want. You can literally take on more because it's not a problem for your brain. Because you understand and you have the capabilities to manage stress, to manage overwhelm, to manage worry, to manage anxiety. And so you can have more. You can go after more. And, more doesn't necessarily mean more to - dos. It just means more of what you want. And so I think this is really important. I think it's one of those things that seems like useful but not life changing. But I want to suggest to you that it is very, very life changing. Because if you're someone who I used to be like this where I was just running around all day, trying to close open loops.

It's a very reactive way to live. And here's the thing. I have three under five. I work, you know, 15 to 20 hours per week. I'm the primary caregiver, meaning we don't have other childcare at this time. My husband works outside the home most days of the week like my life is very full. I don't, you

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know, say that for any other reason other than to add context to the fact that my life is very full and it would be very, very easy for me to go into overwhelm and I just don't do it. And so that means that I use my skills of, of getting more comfortable leaving open loops, leaving things undone. And I think this stretches from like the little things like dishes in the sink all the way to the big things. Should we move? Should, you know, my husband change jobs?

Should, you know, you send your kids to school or a different school or early or late? Should you outsource more or hire more help? What about the business that you wanted to start or the weight loss school? The decisions that stay open in your mind can feel important to leave open. It can almost feel responsible, but this is actually a great time to mention the decision making class in the Membership this month. It is gold because the better you are at decision making, the better you'll be at closing these loops. And I think the faster you can make decisions, the more of your life that you ultimately create. Meaning if you're sitting in a job that you don't like for year after year after year talking about getting a new job but you never actually do it, you've wasted a lot of time. You could have had three different jobs by then to figure out ultimately what you want to do.

Now this isn't about like job hopping or something like that, but it is about when you make a decision and you close a loop, you get new results. And you might like those results, but you might not. But then you can remake another decision. You always have the power to choose. And for some loops or tasks that are open, you might just want to decide, I'm no longer going to think about this. I have a perfect example for this and it has to do with my lawn and my landscaping. So we had our landscaping... When we bought our house, it was, flipped, but we needed to do landscaping. So in the first year or so we had, a landscaping company do the whole design and it was wonderful and they did an excellent job and I love our landscaping. However, there is a part of our lot that goes deeper behind our fence and we haven't really done anything with it and it's kind of, shall we say, getting a little bit out of control here.

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And I decided I'm not going to spend any time thinking about this. My husband has ideas for it. He likes to talk about it sometimes. And there, there's lots of different ways we could go with this. But ultimately it is of zero importance to me right now. It is not hurting anyone. It is fine. We own the land. It is nowhere near a high priority compared to, my own health, compared to my kids, compared to my family, compared to you all, my clients, my business. It's like so low on the list of priorities and yet I can easily look out back and see it, right? So it's very visual, just like the laundry's visual in terms of an open loop, just like the dishes in the sink. But for this, it's a little bit of a different, bigger type of decision. And it would be so easy for me to let that loop in my mind.

And so sometimes it's just about deciding, and this is what I did for that, that I'm not going to think about this anymore. I do not want to use my precious brain space on this. And that's just it. That's what I've decided. So I don't know. I don't have an answer for you for the back. My husband calls it the back 40. The deeper part of our backyard behind the fence. I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know what we're going to do. I, I'm just leaving it undone. But here's the thing, that is a conscious intentional decision to leave something open. And I think the big misunderstanding here with overwhelm in part is I need a better routine or I need less on my plate. And, you know, I love a good routine. I, again, nothing against routines. Like also, I'm all for you doing fewer things if that is helpful and that's truly your desire.

But typically, if you're anything like me, you want to do a lot of things. You love having your life full because you love creating experiences for your family and traveling and you want to work and create the life that you have with your kids. And so most of the things, if not all of the things you're doing, you want to be doing and you want to have the capacity to take on a lot. I call it being like a high capacity woman. If you are anything like me and, you know, I think a lot of the women in this community, then you will resonate with that as well. This is what you want. And so you don't want to do less. And I think you don't have to. I think you can do what you're doing,

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but you can experience it in a calmer, more grounded and less overwhelming way.

So I look around and there are things undone and I do not feel overwhelmed. That takes so much brain management, my friend. As someone who is just type A, again, like firstborn high achiever, I fall into that archetype of the stereotyp so well. And I am so proud of the work I've done on letting things be left undone. Circling back to the very beginning of this recording, this podcast, when I was talking about leaving the beds unmade, I was on my girls' trip for our 40th birthdays. I know I shared that with you gosh, it was already like over a month ago by now, almost two months. And I remember I don't know why someone was talking about like making beds. And I was like, "Oh, I haven't made beds in years." And my friend looked at me and she was like, "Wow. I, I can't believe that because you are such a bed maker. Like that just really says something."

And I was like, "I know. " And I was laughing because like they know me so well they've known me most of my life and just the type of person who I've always been is someone who makes my bed every day. Like you know and so it was shocking to hear that I don't make my bed, I don't make our bed, I don't make the boys beds. No. Do things look trash? No. Is the comforter generally on our bed? Yes, but it's not all put on with all the throws and nicely tucked and same thing with theirs. Nothing looks like a hot mess but it, it's left undone. Why? Because it's just not a priority right now. No, that again, this isn't to knock bed making. I'm all for bed making. You all keep making your beds if that's a high priority for you.

But what, who I'm speaking to is... Well, first of all, I'm speaking to all of you, but I'm speaking about an example that hopefully is relatable in terms of when you feel like you're doing so much and you are feeling overwhelmed, can you take a look at the things you're doing that you're doing just out of the compulsion because you want to finish and complete things versus, oh, that's actually a high priority. Because your brain is going to bring those to your attention, but that doesn't mean they deserve your attention. So anytime my brain talks about the backyard, I'm like, "Nope. We don't think about that. We don't spend time on that. It's not worth my

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time. I already made that decision." And so brain management becomes so important here in a way that, I don't know, I haven't really talked about before on the podcast nor necessarily in the Membership.

And I just want to bring it to your attention here because open loops left unmanaged create mental chatter that creates overwhelm. You will feel more exhausted, have more difficulty focusing, kind of like how it manifests a lot with my clients is saying things like, "I'm just spread so thin, you know, the mental load, I have so much going on." You're, you're feeling mentally on all of the time. Maybe you have trouble relaxing. Difficulty being present. You feel like there's decision fatigue because it's intolerable to leave anything undone so you feel like it's your responsibility to do all of the things, to complete all of the things. And again, hyper responsibility is like my middle name or my former middle name, shall we say. I'm speaking from experience. That's what I want you to know because it is my natural disposition to be that way and it has served me so well.

I can't remember if I said this last week on the podcast or if it was on social or somewhere else or in the membership, but I watched, I'm going to repeat it here I watched I think it was a reel recently and it was narrating type A, like firstborn high achieving moms, getting three boys and then turning into a type B mom. And I was like, "Yes, that my friend is it. That is absolutely it." I think I did mention it here. It might have even been last week nonetheless, it is worth repeating here because I resonate with that so much. The things that used to bother me don't bother me. And I've talked about this before in, definitely in the membership where I've coached clients who are looking for problems around the home inadvertently because your brain is a problem solving machine, but then they start a goal or they start working on their business or just something that they want to spend their mental energy on and all of a sudden the stuff around the home doesn't matter so much.

And so your brain is always looking for problems to solve. I want to encourage you to use thought work and brain management tools. Come inside the Mom On Purpose Membership, listen to weekly group coaching for a year. It will change your life so that you can learn how to rewire your

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brain, close those loops, feel lighter and less overwhelmed. This is not about optimizing so that laundry's always put away. It is about you getting the inner strength and the mental and emotional tools so that you feel calm, so that you feel connected, so that you feel however you want to feel regardless of what is left undone. That is a superpower, my friend. It means that anything can be happening in your circumstances or just about anything and you're not rocked. Again, instead of the high highs and the low lows, it's like little rolling hills.

It's such a better experience of life. I have lived it both ways and I am, just want to be a voice for encouraging you to use these tools. They are so, so extraordinarily helpful. So more details over at momonpurpose.com/coaching. I would love to see you inside. Until next week, my friend, take care.