Episode #5 Why You Aren't Taking Action

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Welcome to this podcast that will change the way you think, which will change how you feel, therefore, change what you can do, so you'll get the results you are looking for. And now your host, founder of the Straightness Training Academy, Marijke de Jong.

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MARIJKE DEJONG: "Have you ever wondered why you can't lose weight, go to the gym, wake up earlier, or why you can't make a video of you and your horse? Or create that Facebook page for your students? Well, it all comes down to the same answer, which I think is great to know, so stay tuned for episode #5.

Hey y'all, good to be back! And in this episode, I'm going to tell you why it took so long, and why I wasn't taking action when it comes to creating podcasts. So, why aren't we taking action? Because, I know, I'm not the only one, right? When I chat with my students and instructors, they all have these goals and ideas and things that they want to do, but one of the things that bothers them a lot is that they just can't seem to take action. Intellectually, they know how to do it, but they just can't get themselves motivated to do it. If this sounds familiar, then this podcast is for you, as I'm going to share with you a 3-step process that will help you breakthrough your procrastination and avoidance.

So, procrastination is when you put off doing something, but eventually you get it done, because there's a deadline, right? But avoidance happens when we just don't do something, like, for example, learning how to play the piano, because there's no deadline. This means you might not do it for days, weeks, months, years, even decades. And why is that? Why do we avoid and procrastinate? Well, let's answer this question when looking at two situations.

Situation #1 is when we aren't taking action when going after something completely new. And situation #2 is when we put off something we've been successful at in the past, but now it seems impossible to do. So, let's look at some examples in both situations. So, situation #1: a new goal. Let's say you want to do something brand new, something you've never done before, like buying a horse, or maybe you want to become an instructor, or you want to start an equestrian business, or you want to create an Instagram account for your students. And it seems exciting, and you know you want to do it, and you know that you should do it, you have good reasons for it, you may even know that your life would improve by doing it;, and you want to be that person who's already achieved that milestone, and yet you just don't do it! Why? Because, we have seemingly good reasons not to do it! So, what are those reasons?

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Well, most of the time we come up with, what I call, surface level reasons. And these are objections, excuses, or justifications why we cannot have what we want. That's when we tell ourselves things like: I've no time; I'm too busy; When I have more time then I can do it; When I have more money I can do it; But now the time is not right. Or we say something like: Once my kids are older I can do it. And also, a very common surface level reason is: I don't know how. I don't know how to do it; I don't know how to create a Facebook page. Right? And then, when we come up with such a reason, we feel unmotivated, or hesitant, or unwilling. And remember, our emotions drive our actions. So, of course, when we feel unmotivated, then of course, we don't take action, right? Because we don't feel like doing it.

Now, let's take this a step further and investigate what's below our surface level thoughts, like "I don't know, I don't have time, I'm too busy." We could also say: What's going on behind the scenes? In our subconscious? Well, most of the time it's fear. Fear of not being good enough when taking action. Fear of making a fool of ourselves when taking action. Fear for the unknown, not knowing what to expect when we take action, not knowing how to navigate, and there's this fear of failure, right? And when we fear something, our subconscious quickly goes to the worst-case scenario. So what's the worst that can happen if you buy that horse? Maybe that you're not good enough to handle that horse or that you don't know how to take care of that horse, right? And what's the worst that can happen if you become an instructor? That you don't know all the answers! That you give the wrong advice. That would be the worst, right? And what's the worst that can happen if you start that equestrian business? That nobody wants to do business with you and then you'll end up in a tent under the bridge, right? What's the worst that can happen if you post on your Facebook page? That people drop that angry emoji, or that they post a negative comment, telling you're wrong! And when that happens, you'll feel bad, you'll feel stupid, or ashamed, or embarrassed, or you'll feel offended or angry, or unloved, unwanted, even rejected, maybe. Maybe you'll feel awful, terrible, miserable, horrible, whatever, right? And I want you to remember, the behind-the-scenes thoughts are all about fear for the worst-case scenario that might happen in the future, plus, the fear for feeling bad when that would happen. So keep in mind that that's what's going on, on a subconscious level.

So, to your subconscious, trying something new feels like a big gamble. There's this huge risk that your future will be a catastrophe, and then you will feel bad. And back in the days, feeling bad was pretty much a sign that you were in some serious trouble. So, focusing on the negative, that's simply how we're wired, okay? It's the positive-asymmetry in our brain, and I'm going to dive into that in the next podcast. For now, just remember that even though we're living in a modern world, we're still operating with a primitive brain that steps in to protect us. Now, in the Straightness Training Academy, we call our primitive brain our inner crocodile, which is a metaphor and not the accurate truth, it's just a map of the territory, okay? Of course, our brain is a super complex territory, but it's like a car: you don't have to understand all the systems to be able to drive a car, but you do have to know some essential things. Like, that our brain's primary goal is to keep us alive, so we can reproduce and don't become an extinct species. And that it uses feelings like signposts. So if something feels good, it's considered safe. If it feels bad, it's dangerous and it might kill you. So, your brain wants to avoid unpleasant feelings. In other words, the subconscious mind is not designed to make you happy. No, it's designed to keep you safe and to protect you.

That's all it cares about. It doesn't care if you ever learn to play the piano or train horses. It doesn't care if you get certified as an instructor. It doesn't care if you create a Facebook page or a podcast. As far as your brain's concerned, that's just not really a priority. Its fundamental need is to move away from pain and towards gain, and to move away from discomfort and towards pleasure. That's why we want to avoid new things that make us feel uncomfortable. So, if you look at it from your subconscious' perspective, not taking action actually feels like a win. Now isn't that fascinating? We think that there's some mysterious self-sabotage going on, but actually, when we're thinking thoughts like "I don't know, I don't have time, I'm too busy," that has a huge benefit. So, what's the win? That things stay the same. And that's the simplest way to stay safe as your crocodile has evidence that in the current situation, at least you keep breathing and you're not dying. And remember, that's all it cares about. That's why your brain comes up with all those excuses, like, "The time is not right," or "I don't feel like going to the gym," so you keep things the same and don't take action. And this way, we are protected and that's a huge win.

Listen, when you're procrastinating and avoiding, that's what's going on behind the scenes: protection. So when you're putting something off, or resisting, and you don't want to do something, or you don't want to talk to someone, you don't want to have that difficult conversation, what your brain is really afraid of is that the worst will happen when you take action and that you'll have a feeling in the future that you don't think you will like, right? That's why you're stuck and not moving forward. And this is the key! So, if nothing else, remember this: When you're avoiding doing something, you're not avoiding the actual action, no, what you're avoiding is: the worst possible outcome and those negative feelings that come with even thinking about it. So your inner crocodile wants to avoid the worst-case scenario and avoid the feelings that come with that. This is key.

So stay tuned, because if you really want to hit your goals, you've got to let the conscious part of your brain be in charge. And in just a moment, I'm going to tell you exactly how to do that. But first, let's have a look at the other situation. So, so far, we've been talking about setting a new goal and not taking action. But sometimes, the first time you set a goal, you actually end up doing it and you're successful. But then it collapses. So, for example, you go on a diet for the very first time, you eat less, exercise more, you take massive action, and you are super successful, and you lose 10 or 20 pounds or so. But then, for some reason, you gain it all back. And then you try again, so you lose 10 pounds again, but also that doesn't last. How many of you've ever had an experience like this? I mean, have you ever set a goal, something you really, really wanted? And this goal could be related to your weight, your health, your business, your social media, your development with your horse. It doesn't matter. And you start making progress, you worked it out, you took the steps, and then you started to be successful. So you trained that horse to a certain level. Or you started your teaching practice, and you found 5 new clients in your new business. And, so you reached a certain point, but then, it simply fell apart. We've all had situations like that, right?

So, for example, you're an instructor, and you get to a certain level of success and all of a sudden something happens. Maybe you think the next level is more challenging. Maybe you failed a test at the next stage. Maybe your horse no longer wants to do what you want. Maybe students drop out of your program. Whatever it is, right? And you're in pain, there's this emotional suffering. But if you're like most instructors, they pick themselves up, they dust themselves off, they get back into the ring. So you start taking action again, you get to a certain point again, but again, you lose it.

But you restart, you get to that point again, and again you stop, and then for some mysterious reason, you can't seem to do it again. You can't seem to take action. Intellectually, you know what to do, you know how to do it, you know where to do it, you know when to do it, but you can't seem to take that step that moves you towards your goal. Sound familiar? Right? Well, here's the good news: you're not alone. People experience this pattern over and over and over again. Including me! For me, it was this podcast. You see, I created one episode exactly three years ago, and because it was the first time back then, I spent a lot of time, energy, and effort in it, and it was successful, but then I stopped because I had other projects that needed my attention. Then, about a year later, I created 2 more episodes and then boom. I stopped. A year later, 1 more episode, again, I stopped producing them. When you have scenarios like that, it's a pattern, right? It's a pattern repeating. How many of you've ever bought the same horse with a different face? Or married the same guy with a different face? You always have patterns in your life. And those patterns might block you from moving forward.

So let's think about this pattern from your subconscious' perspective for a moment. You see, your inner crocodile is as smart as you are, maybe even more smart, as it knows how to control your heartbeat, it controls your breathing, your hormones, your dreams, your habits, your long-term memory, and every piece of information that your unconscious mind thinks about. We think thousands and thousands of thoughts a day, and most of them, around 95%, are the same thoughts you thought yesterday. And they're coming from your subconscious. And it doesn't need your permission to choose a thought because it has all these default programs.

So if the situation you're in is perceived as a threat, it will make a choice, without your conscious understanding, and it will decide to protect you. That's why a lot of times you know exactly what to do, you know exactly how to do it, you know exactly where to do it, when to do it, and you just don't do it. You just can't create another post for Instagram. You can't film yourself again. You just can't go through another round of eating less and exercising more. You can't go through the process again of creating another podcast. You just can't pull the trigger, right? Now, why is that?

It's because your subconscious took a good look at you last time you were going through the process towards your goal. Listen, your subconscious part is always watching your conscious part! It's watching you as you train your new horse. It's watching you build your teaching practice, teach your students, build your business. It's watching you as you do webinars, zoom meetings, videos, podcasts. It is watching you as you do exams and take tests. It's watching you as you lose weight, go to the gym. And it is watching you going through the process, reaching the point where you're having success. And then it is watching you when it goes away! And then your croc is watching you suffer and being in pain, there's this sort of punishment you experience, and your subconscious mind doesn't want you to have that - ever again!

So what does it do when you want to start over for the third time? It goes; Oh, my gosh, three times! They've had that experience when going after that goal. They've reached a certain level of success. Then it fell apart. And then they felt miserable. And your crocodile says: This can't happen anymore! I got to stop them from having this pain, misery, despair, and suffering! How am I going to protect them from that? I know: Stop setting that same goal! Stop taking action!" Okay?

Remember, to our crocodile not taking action feels like a win, right? Because you keep things the same and that means you stay safe. So taking action feels like a huge risk. It's super risky to go through this experience again as it will make you feel bad. And your subconscious doesn't want that to happen. So, of course, it will come up with surface level thoughts like "it's not the right time." Or it will say "I'll start tomorrow," because tomorrow's your croc's favorite day of the week because tomorrow never comes, right. Now listen, your brain means well. It's not doing it to nag you or to punish you or to sabotage you. Although it seems that way to the conscious mind. But no, it's doing it to protect you. So, here's what you've got to keep in mind about your subconscious mind. It works kinda like a 7-year-old kid when it comes to how it thinks and makes decisions. And kids at that age, they're mostly driven by their feelings and what they want in the moment, right? If you've ever watched a super smart 7-year-old get really emotional and make a choice, you might have an idea of what's going on in your head. Their reactions can be quite raw and unfiltered.

So, here's the thing, your subconscious sees the pattern. That weight that you lose and creeps back on. Those two horses with the same face not listening to you. Those webinars not resonating with your audience. Those projects where you have given your blood, sweat, and tears. And your croc makes a decision. It says, "I got to protect them from this. This is too risky! How can I make sure that they never go through this process ever again? How can I make sure that they stay away from it. I know: If they can never have another horse. If they can never follow a diet. If they can never film themselves. If they never host another webinar, Zoom session, or whatever the struggle is, they will never be in pain again! And so your subconscious flips a switch, right? It says: "No more." 'This has to stop!" Because the risk is too high. The worst is going through all that pain again! And then you feel bad, again! And all of a sudden, no matter how much willpower you have, you can't move forward.

So if nothing else, remember this: Whether you want to start something new, or give a certain goal another shot, your brain shows up as the protector. It wants to protect you from experiences that are perceived as negative and it wants to avoid any negative emotion linked to that. It also believes that the goal you pursue is the cause of your misery and your emotional suffering. So your subconscious believes: goal means misery. The webinar, the Instagram post, the Facebook page, the business, the new horse, the diet—it believes that is the cause of your misery. The new horse with the same face makes you feel inadequate. Nobody signing up for your Zoom meeting is causing your disappointment. The diet creates your frustration. The comments on Instagram are causing your anger or anxiety. In other words, we believe that the situation is causing our emotions.

But here's a simple way to see that the goal is never the problem, it's how we think about it: I always tell my students: Who's in the White House doesn't determine how you feel. It's all about what you think of the president, isn't it? How do we know this? Well, half the folks out there are feeling pretty good about him, and the other half aren't feeling great about him at all... ... and all at the same time! So, it's not really about the president himself, right? It's about how we think about him—whether we think of him in a positive, negative, or neutral way. And those thoughts about him are causing our emotions, right? The situation is not the problem, what we think about it is the problem.

But if we believe that our emotional suffering is because of the situation, then, of course, we feel powerless, and then, of course, we're going to want to change the situation. We think that's the solution. And yes, that is an option, changing the situation. And listen, there is no right or wrong option, that's not what this is about. What matters is that you always pay a price, no matter the option you choose. You see, we've got this idea that changing the situation is going to make us feel better. Like, if we turn our goal into a dream without any real deadlines, we'll be okay. That if we don't take action, we'll feel good. Or at the very least, we feel safe. That's pretty much what our brain is looking out for, right? It's all about feeling . That's all it cares about. But you always pay a price.

So what's the price, when we let our goals drift into dreamland? Well, you might find yourself, after 1 year, 2 years, 10, 20 years, that you still don't play the piano, right? Or whatever goal you had in mind. So for me, it means, after 1 month, 2 months, 12 months, I still didn't create a new podcast episode. So that's the price I pay. So it's crucial that we shift our attention to the real cause, and become aware of what's really holding us back. So why aren't we taking action and moving towards our goal? Exactly! It's because of a bunch of thoughts. The real cause is our thinking. Really, it all boils down to what's going on in our brains: We've got that surface level thinking, like "I don't have time, I'm too busy." And then there's the behind-the-scenes thinking, like "The worst is going to happen so this is too dangerous!" So, of course, you feel hesitant or nervous and not motivated. It's normal. But realize that that is the real cause you're not taking action. Because remember, our thoughts create our emotions which drive our actions.

Now that we've figured out the real cause—that avoiding stuff, procrastinating, and not taking action is caused by our thoughts—let's look at how we can turn things around. Let me show you a simple 3-step process that's going to help you get moving and take action.

The first step is to recognize what exactly you are thinking. So, step one is to really begin to look inside your mind and see what you are thinking, to become conscious of your thoughts. One way to do this is to separate yourself from your thoughts, to create some space. You can do that by laying all your thoughts out on paper. In the Straightness Training Academy, we call this process a "story download." This means you write down the story of why you cannot have what you want. Here are some prompts that you can use to get you started: What is it you truly want? What stops you? What's holding you back? What excuses do you find yourself making? What's the worst thing that can happen if you go for it and take action?

So for me, prompt number one, what do you want, is: I want to create more podcast episodes. Alright? Then, what's holding me back? Well, on the surface, I've been telling myself I've got these other projects that need my attention. So I used this thought as justifications, right?

And then, when I ask myself, what's the worst that can happen? Well, that it takes too much time to create them. But what's really going on behind the scenes were thoughts like: "This is a big thing. It's got to be perfect. I need to bring my best." And these thoughts had the words 'best' and 'perfect' in them, so that sounds pretty noble, right? It sounds like a bunch of good thoughts, as if these are the right kind of ambitious thoughts to have. But man, they're actually the most poisonous thoughts ever. Because they pile on the pressure, right?

My inner croc was like: what happens if you don't bring your best? What if it isn't perfect? Then nobody will tune in and then it's a waste of time, energy, and effort. And that's the nightmare scenario, right? Wasting resources, that's going to kill you. So the brain's like: Nope, let's not even go there. No podcast. No risk. But the podcast in itself isn't the issue, right? It's all my thinking about it. How do we know? Well, someone else might have completely different opinions about creating a podcast. So the first step is crucial to create awareness: recognizing those sneaky thoughts that are holding you back.

Then step 2 is recognizing the effect of those limiting beliefs. If I tell myself "It takes too much time to create them" then I feel discouraged. So I avoid and don't make progress, and then I prove to myself that it takes too much time. In fact, it takes forever, right? One month rolls into two, then ten, and before you know it, a year has passed, and there's still not a single new podcast episode to show for it.

And also, the behind-the-scenes thoughts are not helping. Because when I believe "This is a big thing," I end up feeling intimidated, so I avoid the work, and by not making progress, I just reinforce the belief it's too big a task. And when I buy into the thought "It's got to be perfect," I feel hesitant, I end up avoiding, so the podcast doesn't get published, reinforcing the idea that perfectionism is necessary. And when I get caught up in thinking "I need to bring my best," it causes doubt, so I end up not taking the next step because I doubt it meets the high standards, reinforcing doubts about my ability to give my best.

So step 2 is recognizing the effect of those thoughts, and fully understand the think-feel-do-get pattern. So remember, step 1 is really about taking all those thoughts—ones you might not have even realized were there—and getting them down on paper. And then step 2 is noticing that those thoughts create that negative emotion including the fear of the worst-case scenario and the anticipation of more negative feelings down the line. And that's exactly why you haven't been taking any action.

So step 2 is very important: You must understand yourself before you can change yourself. You must understand that every action and inaction in your life is because of an emotion. And every emotion in your life is because of a thought you are thinking. And once you understand that your thoughts create your emotions that drive your actions, that's when you notice the real cause why you aren't taking action.

Now, if you're trying to change your think-feel-do pattern without understanding it, you're going to use willpower and then you'll end up in a battle with your own mind, with your crocodile, and then it's your croc against you, and that means, you'll lose. So it's crucial to understand the pattern, and to have compassion for why you aren't taking action and then you can change your pattern if you want to. And that's step 3.

So, in step number 3, be curious and navigate your thoughts by asking yourself three questions. That thought that you have: Is it true? Is it useful? What's the price you pay if you keep believing that thought? In my situation, for example, the thought "This is a big thing" is not a fact, it's just an opinion. So it's not true, it's not the absolute truth. It's also not useful, on the contrary, it's

counterproductive. So yes, I get it, my subconscious is just doing its job, trying to protect me—it's seeing the whole podcast idea as a big risk, so it's telling me, "Let's not change anything, just keep things as they are." That's normal to think it. It's okay. That's what brains do. They protect you. Nothing has gone wrong here.

But let's investigate, what's the price I pay if I keep believing that thought? The real price I pay is that I end up sacrificing my dream, right? When I think that thought and I feel unmotivated, then I don't take action and everything just stays the same. That means I end up missing out on what could be the best-case scenario—which is, creating empowering and helpful podcast episodes that offer valuable tips for people, right? Also, by holding on to the thought "It takes too much time to create them," I end up disempowering myself, disconnecting from my deepest desires. And I make people wait on me, I'm letting down people who could benefit from what I have to share, right?

And this navigation and investigation is so powerful. Because change happens when you realize that the price of staying the same is greater than the price of change. The moment we 1. recognize the thought and 2. the effect of the thought on our inaction and the price we pay, then we can notice that the cost of not taking action is bigger than the cost of taking action, and then we're willing to change. By not changing and by keeping things the same, often the worst-case scenario is missing out on the best case scenario – make a note of that. And that can be a good enough reason to let go of those superficial excuses like I don't know, there's no time, I'm too busy. And that can also be a good enough reason to let go of the fear-based thoughts that are going on behind the scenes.

Seeing the price we pay can be leverage, right? We become aware and consciously choose like "No way that I'm going to sacrifice my long-term goal just to feel comfortable in the moment." And then, my friend, you're ready to change. So how do we do that?

Remember, between stimulus and response, there is a space. Between your goal and your action is a space. I mean, between the diet and your avoidance is a space. Between the piano and your procrastination is a space. Between the project and your distraction is a space. Between your new horse with the same face and your reaction is a space. And in that space, you have the power to choose your thoughts and emotions. So between my podcast and my inaction is a space. So I can choose whatever I want to believe about the podcast.

So with this current thought "It's a big thing," I asked myself, Why make it so important as if it's the last opportunity? What if this is an amazing opportunity to share what I know and an amazing opportunity to create an empowering and useful resource for people, with practical tips and strategies? That's a way more useful thought, right? It makes me feel excited. And excitement fuels action. Then the thought "I need to bring my best." What if I don't need to bring my best, but I can choose to do the best I can with the resources I have. But what's the definition of 'best' anyway? People don't know what my best is. You don't know what my best is. And my 2024 best will not be my 2030 best anyway. So what if we're just warming up here! What if this is just the beginning, and it will get better and better? That makes me feel confident. And confidence fuels action.

So what about you? For instance, if your thought about doing a task, or creating an event, or starting a project is, "it's going to be complicated," you could practice thinking, "I figured out complicated things before," or "I can do hard things," or "No one better than me to do this, because I'm a badass," or "I just need to go step by step and I will get it done." Those kinds of thoughts create faith, or commitment or dedication, and those emotions fuel action, right? Remember, if you change the way you think, it will change how you feel, and that will change what you do and not do, right?

So let me just summarize what I told you, because I gave you a lot in this podcast. Let's go back to the initial question and the title of this podcast: Why aren't you taking action? The first thing we cleared up is what's not causing this inaction. It's not the situation you're in. When you are avoiding something, you are never avoiding the actual thing. You're avoiding the feeling that your brain fears you'll have if you attempt to do the thing. But it's not the podcast, the Facebook page, the Instagram account, your weight, the webinar, the Zoom meeting, your horse, whatever, it's not the situation that is causing your struggle and suffering.

So the real reason you're not taking action is because of the way you feel. And why do you feel a certain way? Because of how you think about the situation. So the real reason behind your inaction is your thoughts about the situation and how that makes you feel. And with that simple idea, you can reclaim your power. By stepping into the space between stimulus and response, you can use the power to choose your thoughts and emotions. And then you're able to change your actions so much more easily. And that's really what self-mastery is all about. It's about finding the cause of our habits, the cause of our patterns, why we do what we do and not do. And when we discover that, change is so much easier. So if you want to turn procrastination, avoidance, distraction, and inaction into action, here's what to do: 1. Recognize your thoughts. 2. Recognize the effect of your thoughts on your emotions and actions, and then 3. Change your thoughts if you want to. Just ask yourself: Is it true, is it useful, and what's the price you pay if you keep believing that thought.

Now, if you're up for some hands-on practice with all these steps, why not come along to my 3-day challenge at the end of March? It's called the "From Obstacle to Opportunity" challenge. And we're going to apply what we learned here and empower ourselves. It's totally free to sign up, and you can see when everything's happening over at www.straightnesstrainingacademy.com/challenge.

Also, in the next podcast episode, we'll dive a bit more into the natural asymmetry in our own brain, the positive-negative asymmetry, and I've got some really insightful stuff to share, so make sure you stick around for that as well.

Until then, remember, not every thought that crosses your mind is serving you, so don't believe everything you think."

Thank you for listening to the Marijke de Jong Podcast. It would be awesome if you would take a moment to write a quick review on Apple Podcasts. For any questions or more information, please visit us at StraightnessTrainingAcademy.com.