



Episode 21: Find a No Mentor

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 21.

If this is your first time joining me here, this is a podcast for the second-guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who suffers from decision fatigue. This is also a place for those of you who may just need a little white space or a few minutes away from the constant stream of information or the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment.

You long for thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

This month we've been casually circling around the topic of *time*. As always we are coming at it from a little different perspective than maybe you're used to — not so much from a scheduling angle as from a soul one.

How can we craft a life that practically holds space both for our schedule and for our souls?

So far this month I've challenged you in two areas that are often overlooked when we make plans.

First, we explored the myth of good opportunities and, instead, took a moment to consider if a good opportunity is actually good for *you*. Where is it going to lead *really*? If you want practical steps to explore that, check out [Episode 19: Choose Your Absence](#).

Then we dove in to honestly considering that low-grade anxiety inducing rectangle most of us carry around in our pockets - how our phones are messing with our ability to discern our next right thing. If you want some help to manage the impact your feeds, follows, and online accounts might be having on your soul and your time, listen in to [Episode 20: Ignore With Intention](#).

Today, we'll take another step back and recognize that sometimes when considering good opportunities or how to take your next right step, you just need someone to process this stuff with. What do you do when the answer isn't obvious? When you're too close to even know what you want and don't want?

Even more, what do you do when you know you need to say no but you lack the courage to do it?

Great questions. That's why you need to find a No Mentor and eventually, learn to be your own. Listen in.

I did it for years before I finally called it what it was - requested a meeting with my No Mentor.

It always started out in one of two ways.

Either I'd get an email asking me to contribute to something, travel somewhere, speak, serve, write, offer - whatever the thing was.

Or I would start to question a current commitment I already had and wonder if it was time to make a change.

Sometimes I knew right away this was not for me and it was no problem saying no.

Other times, though, I would have trouble.

Whether a new opportunity or an old commitment, sometimes I can't tell the best from the better.

So I carry the thing and look at it from all directions. In the looking and thinking, I'll get super excited. This will be so great! Or, this is my favorite thing!

Other times, I'll feel tired and worn out at the idea. But all things considered, neither one seems to weigh more than the other.

Usually the first person I talk to when I feel stuck is my husband John, and he always has great insight and valuable perspective. Usually that insight and perspective are all I need to say yes or no.

But other times, he just wants to support me in whatever I want to do. And that is both a profound gift and a potential problem.

What do I want to do?! How can I know for sure?

When I get to that point, I know it's time to request a meeting with my No Mentor. Which is a fancy way of saying: I call my sister.

My sister is my original and most professional No Mentor.

Every time the conversation starts in one of three ways.

“Will you help me process something?”

Or

“I'm thinking of saying yes to this but maybe I'm crazy?”

Or sometimes it would be, “Can I tell you something I've been asked to do and you tell me not to do it?”

Of course how I frame the question will determine how strong or loose a filter she'll put up for me.

If I start the conversation with that third option - *help me say no* - she will without hesitation not allow me to talk myself into a yes in her presence without an extremely compelling reason.

For years, my sister has been my No Mentor, but only in the past few years have I been calling her that. It started off as sort of a joke - like you always tell me not to do stuff! But as I've realized how valuable her direction has become for me, this No Mentorship thing has become a vital part of my decision-making life.

I know when I have a tough decision to make, especially when I'm leaning on no but don't have the confidence to throw all my weight into it, she will be there to remind me what I value, what I'm about, what I have time for, and what I truly want to do.

The No Mentor is a special kind of person.

While a regular mentor will help you weigh decisions and give valuable advice, a No Mentor goes in with a stronger filter from the beginning.

Most likely, this person will help you say no to the things you already pretty much know should be a no but it's just hard for you to admit.

She will be no nonsense, straightforward, and unapologetic.

She will not be deterred by glitz or glamor. She is not fooled by shiny objects or mirrored balls.

She is relentlessly on your side and has the health of your soul, your family, and your work in mind.

Sometimes, this person will convince you to say yes — but this is rare and not the norm.

If you don't have a No Mentor in your life, one friend or sister who will help you eliminate the unessential, then maybe finding one is your next right thing.

Here's what you're looking for:

First, you're looking for someone who makes decisions the way you want to make them in the areas you want to make them in.

In the same way you wouldn't take fashion advice from someone who dresses in a way you don't like, don't take scheduling advice from someone whose schedule makes you want to hide under your coffee table.

When you're trying to make a decision about your schedule, for example, asking the pre-school mom friend of yours who is always late, flustered, and distracted is a terrible idea. Likewise, asking the go-getter with a high capacity for people and activity might also not be best if you don't share this person's energy level.

This might seem obvious, but we tend to ask the people around us for advice because that's what we do, rather than considering if the people around us are actually modeling the life we want to live.

Next you need someone who knows you *and* gets the subtleties of your decision in a way other people might not.

For example, I'm an author, and sometimes I'm invited to be part of cool things so it helps to either ask a fellow author or at least someone who semi-gets the work I do to help be a No Mentor for me in that area rather than someone who would tell me to do it just because it would be a cool thing.

I'm lucky in that my sister is also an author, so she sees through the mythology of opportunity and knows when something could be great for me or when it just **sounds** great.

It's important to note here that a No Mentor is someone who knows YOU and gets the subtleties of YOUR decision. My sister has often advised me to say yes to things that she would never say yes to. But that's because our gifting and our goals are different. A good No Mentor knows how to differentiate between her stuff and your stuff.

Third, you need someone you can trust with the underbelly.

Every choice has an underbelly - whether that is a season of life, a particular phobia you have, or a recurring argument you and your spouse always have about a particular issue.

Your No Mentor has to know the whole story, the ugly and the weird and twisty. Which means you have to be able to trust her. If she doesn't know the whole story, she might say, "Yes, take that opportunity to travel to Hawaii to network with those cool people!", but she doesn't realize how travel makes you seven shades of nervous, how those cool people are conniving and cutthroat and include your ex-boyfriend, and how you are allergic to the sun.

Tell it all and tell it true. Your No Mentor can handle it.

Finally, look for someone who respects you but isn't *impressed* by you.

This one is tricky and is why my sister was the perfect pick for me. She respects me and loves me and has my best interest in mind. But she isn't impressed by me in the sense that I can do no wrong or I'm so cool. It's hard to fool a girl who knows you as her dorky baby sister who played Barbies way past an acceptable age.

Now, there's a chance you've already got a No Mentor in your life.

Maybe your next right thing is just to make it official. Not like, asking her to be your No Mentor. She may not even know you call her that. But just build it in to your normal decision making process when you get stuck or have something you are leaning on no for but need help going all the way, just make it a natural next right step to ask her if she would be willing to help you process a decision you have to make.

Now remember this, a No Mentor is not there to keep you from doing things you want to do. *She's there to help you feel confident about saying no to the things you really don't want to do anyway.* OR to help you finally, discover your strong, brave yes in the midst of fear.

We all need a friend we can trust who is willing to go deep with us, to listen, to offer feedback, and to help us either solve a problem or feel better about the fact that the problem is unsolvable.

What inevitably will happen the more you run things by your No Mentor is this - eventually, you'll learn to be your own.

Many of you have probably heard of Kendra of The Lazy Genius Collective. If you haven't today is your day, my friend. You can find her at thelazygeniuscollective.com and she also has a podcast called The Lazy Genius Podcast.

She is another one of my No Mentors (yes, I'm lucky enough to have several in my life) and we live in the same neighborhood. As in, I could and do walk to her house. Yes, that's right, it's magical, by the way.

But if you don't have a sister or a Kendra in your neighborhood, you can learn to be your own No Mentor. For example...

Kendra and I have been in a small group together not once, but twice. Years ago before she even had kids, we were in a couples group at our old church and now, we're in a family community group together as well.

Now Kendra is a baker. One of the many benefits of being in a small group with her is that sometimes, she cooks and asks us to test it out.

Years ago, when we were in that first small group together, she made us a cheesecake. And it was (and I'm not exaggerating here or being dramatic) the best cheesecake I've ever had.

All of us loved this cheesecake so much, that we started to tell Kendra how much she could make by selling them. She mentioned something about storing them and how that would be trouble and how hard and so we told her she could invest in a big freezer and get cool packaging and come up with a cool name like Kendra's Cheesecakes.

We didn't notice how quiet she was because between bites, we were so busy nodding and agreeing with ourselves about what a good idea this was and we nearly had her on Oprah's Favorite Things.

There was only one problem: *Kendra didn't want to sell cheesecake*. Not at that time and maybe not ever. And when she said that out loud, it sort of stopped the conversation and we got back to simply enjoying the cheesecake.

Knowing what you want to do is important. But knowing what you don't want to do can be even more so.

Maybe you're picking up on a pattern here, but a big part of discerning your next right step is knowing and understanding what you really want to do. Knowing what you want isn't selfish, it's actually crucial to making decisions because it builds confidence, hastens healing, and is a gift to the people you love.

The simplest benefit to knowing what you really want? It helps you say yes and no to things without all the angst.

[Episode 14: Know What You Want](#) will dive deeper into that.

Now one day, Kendra will have a bakery. That's actually something she wants to do in the future. But no amount of small group members trying to convince her to sell cheesecake from her house today is going to get her to do it, not yet anyway. It's because she knows what she wants and she's willing to work and wait for it.

Just because you make a great cheesecake doesn't mean you are supposed to sell them, even if everyone tries to tell you that you should. Even if you could make a lot of money for them. Even if it makes a lot of sense. Even if people tell you you're crazy for not. Only you carry the vision. The better you know and communicate that, the more content and effective you will be.

There was a woman who mentored me for many years and her name was Bonita Lillie. She mentored me in my writing both from a distance and in person talked about how only you carry the vision for your writing (or your business, your parenting, your career, your ministry). No one else does. Wisdom from others can be a wonderful thing, but just know when you seek counsel from him and them and her and Oprah, it can also breed chaos and confusion. (Now I've mentioned Oprah twice in this episode.)

Here's the point. Pick your No Mentor wisely.

And if no one comes to mind right now? That's okay. Maybe your next right thing is to be your own No Mentor and to pray for a person to come into your life who could walk alongside you in this way.

I'm going to issue you a challenge. That you refuse to feel bad here for what you don't yet have. In fact, the best way to ensure that more No Mentors are out there is to be a No Mentor for somebody else.

When a friend comes to you with a question, a problem, or a tough decision, take a step back.

Ask lots of questions and listen to her answers.

Listen to both what she says and what she fails to say.

Watch how her body rises or falls when she talks.

Listen to her tone and her excuses.

See if her eyes light up when she talks about the thing.

Will she look you in the eye? Does she use the word "should" a lot? Does she sound motivated by guilt, shame, or pressure?

Consider the underbelly. Be on the side of her soul. Stand up for her in ways she may not yet have the courage to stand up for herself.

In closing, consider these words from Bonita, the writing mentor I mentioned before.

"In the stillness, when all other voices were silent, I heard *His* voice speaking to me. And He was leading and guiding and clarifying and redefining. The vision becomes clear. And with that clarity, I was empowered to make decisions. Instead of yielding to or even entertaining every request put before me, I am able to say, "I do this. I only do this. I don't do that." You are the sole carrier of the vision God has given you. No one else has it. You are the visionary. Trust the vision."

Father, May we continue to cultivate a strong no in our lives so that we can say more life-giving yeses.

Thank you for always walking with us as we take our next right step in love.

Thanks for listening to Episode 21 of The Next Right Thing.

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And once a month I send a letter to my innermost circle of readers, filled with first word news, the books I'm reading now, my favorite things list of the month, and a secret post you won't find anywhere else. There's a link right there in the show notes in whatever app you're listening to in to emilypfreeman.com/letter.

You can be sure that everything I write or speak about will always have one goal in mind: to help you create space for your soul to breathe so you can discern your next right thing in love.

Hopefully you know by now that we provide a transcript for each episode, so if you know someone who either can't hear or prefers reading to listening, you can download those transcripts at thenextrightthingpodcast.com.

Some final thoughts from John O'Donohue in my favorite book of blessings "To Bless the Space Between Us"

"May you be blessed with good friends, And learn to be a good friend to yourself,
Journeying to that place in your soul where
There is love, warmth, and feeling.
May this change you.

May it transfigure what is negative, distant,
Or cold within your heart.

May you be brought into real passion, kindness,
And belonging.”