



276: How to Do An Inner Workout with Taylor Elyse Morrison

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 276. This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for discerning your next right thing.

Today, I'm glad to welcome author Taylor Elyse Morrison, who has turned being bad at self-care into a career. She's the founder of the Media Company Inner Workout, and the author of a book by the same name. I could have invited a number of different wellness people to come and talk about self-care, but I'm particularly interested in Taylor's style and approach. She's a founder, facilitator, coach, and serial entrepreneur making wellbeing and personal development more accessible. She's all about supporting people's journey to know, care for, and become their full selves. I'm grateful to have Taylor join me today. I hope you'll listen in.

Emily:
Hi Taylor. Welcome to The Next Right Thing.

Taylor:
Thank you so much for having me, Emily.

Emily:
Well, I'm so glad you're here, and I'll tell you why. Over the years I've talked about the importance of reflection, of looking back in order to move forward, of our past decisions being our best teachers for future decisions, and how generally we don't need a five-year plan to move forward. We just need one next right thing. And I think so much of that conversation is wrapped around a story that we can easily ignore. That is the story of our inner life. What is pulsing beneath the surface? What is informing our decisions in ways that we might not even be aware of because they're unseen and unspoken? And so that is my long intro to say to you why I'm so glad to have this conversation with you. Because you are a person, from what I gather and what I know of you so far, who pays attention to what's happening beneath the surface, and specifically your approach to self-care is one that has a Next Right Thing posture, and that is why I'm so deeply drawn to it. So we're diving right in here and I would love to hear from you, big picture, when it comes to our inner life, what do you think most of us are missing?

Taylor:
That is such a juicy question. I guess to start, so the definition that I use for self-care is listening within and responding in the most loving way possible. And that listening within is often what a lot of us are

missing because we receive so much. There's so much noise in the world, and even if it's quote-unquote "good" noise where people are telling us things about caring for ourselves, we can forget to filter through to see how does this fit my own lived experience and my age and my stage of life that I'm in right now? And so I think a lot of people, even people who want to care for themselves, forget to actually check in and listen to themselves. That's the big missing.

Emily:

That's the big missing. And I love your definition of self-care and something that you say is, and this is your quote, "My real life is filled with paradoxes and gray areas just like everyone else's." And I could imagine as someone who has written a book on self-care, who has self-care practice, who teaches this, that maybe sometimes people, you can share with us, do people look to you and say like, "Oh, I could never," or the things you're talking about, maybe they feel intimidated by even the topic before they've maybe heard what it is you mean by it?

Taylor:

Oh, absolutely. People will tell me, "Oh, I'm so bad at self-care." I love that, "I could never," because that's exactly what it is. And I have to remind people I do this work because I'm not naturally good at self-care and I'm not someone who's meditating 30 minutes. My meditation practice right now is four or five minutes. That's what it looks like for me. And sometimes I can feel almost intimidated or have a sense of imposter syndrome as I'm doing this work because I'm not perfect at it. And then I'm reminded, "Oh, but that's what I'm inviting people into, is to practice self-care where they're at."

Emily:

Absolutely. I'm so glad you said that because as someone who hosts a podcast about decision making, and I have for six years, I've written a book, I've put out a journal, I host this podcast, people ask me about decision making, discernment, and still sometimes I feel like I'm the worst one to make decisions. It's like, "Well, okay. I have to talk myself through this and remind myself things that I deeply believe." So I'm not a hypocrite in it. I really do believe these practices work and I believe looking back as a key to looking forward and all the things, and yet I still have to actively work to practice these discernment and decision-making movements in order to make clear decisions for my own life. And I think that's why I instantly have a trust with you Taylor, is because you say that out loud.

I have all the gray areas and I'm not necessarily an expert because I do it perfectly, but you're an expert because you're imperfectly practicing the very thing that you're teaching. And so I'm so grateful for that. You talk about how you can't buy your way out of burnout, and in your book *Inner Workout*, which hello, fantastic title, you recognize how this can be an intimidating subject, and also there's multimillion dollar businesses built on the concept and practice of self-care. Where would you place your work on the spectrum of this self-care as a business, self-care as, "Here, just do this thing and then this will happen," space?

Taylor:

Yeah, this is something I wrestle with a lot because before *Inner Workout* the book came, I had and have a company also called *Inner Workout*. So I have sold products, I sell resources. And also I very strongly believe that the starting point for most people's self-care isn't with a purchase, it's with listening to themselves. It's with using the resources that they have available to them. And so it's tricky. What I find is that what I am most frustrated with tends to be companies that are selling these quick fixes where it's like you buy this lipstick and you'll be a new person. You buy this yoga strap and all of a sudden all of your problems will be gone.

That's frustrating to me because we know at an intellectual level that these things aren't going to fix all of our problems. And also sometimes it's easier for us to give that \$20, \$30, \$100 dollars than to sit with

our inner world. So where I think I sit more is either holding space for people to do that work and to offer accountability in a way where it's like, "I paid for this workshop. I'm going to show up and reflect now," or to give people tools and frameworks and resources that help them do the work on their own. And I still sometimes have mixed feelings about quote-unquote "selling" self-care, but I've seen this to be useful to other people.

Emily:

Absolutely, it is. I think about your conversation that you're hosting and the work that you're doing about care, it's adjacent to the way that Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith talks about the seven types of rest, how we can feel tired when we get physical rest, even though we've gotten plenty of physical rest. But it's because it's not the physical rest that we need, it's social, rest, or creative rest. And similarly, you talk about how there are many types of care saying that care exists within ecosystems just like we do. And if we're going to redefine self-care, we have to acknowledge it. There isn't just one kind of it. And so I would love to hear you talk a little bit about the different types of care conversations that we could have.

Taylor:

Yeah. So we live in a very individualist society, and even honestly we already talked about it, people even struggle to enter into the conversation around self-care because they're like, "Ooh, I'm not good at that. I can't even go there." So it's easier for us to enter into the conversation around self-care, and there's still a lot of difficulty there. I strongly believe that we live in ecosystems. Humans are part of nature. Nature is made up of ecosystems. And so there is this ecosystem of us, but we exist within our communities. And a lot of the conversations around care that we need to have are actually around communities. The more work I do in self-care, the more I realize and experience for myself that we are such communal creatures, and my care for myself is so intertwined with the care of my community. It's hard for me to care for myself without being in community.

Beyond that, in our communities, I think of as the places where we have more influence to give and receive care, and then we can bump out and look at our society, which impacts our ideas of who's allowed to receive care, what resources do I have access to? And then again, our natural world is going to affect us. I talk about how I live in Chicago, it is finally starting to be springtime, but now that means there's a lot of rain, which means my dog is scared all the time because he hates thunderstorms. So he requires a different type of care because of how the natural world is impacting him.

Emily:

And I think that is so important to remember. There's the us, or the me, but then there's our community, our context, our society and culture, and then the natural world. But you bring us back to starting with the self, with self-care. Why do you believe we have to start here and what would you say to the person who cannot separate self-care from being selfish?

Taylor:

I think we start with self-care because that's where we have the most control, and that's where we can have the most impact. I also believe, again, now, the deeper I go into this work that when we are engaging in self-care, it actually makes it easier for us to enter into community care in a way that is healthy and not getting into codependent or losing ourselves in others. So self-care is where we start. It also allows us to sustain our work in all of the other ecosystems. For the people who think that it's selfish, I would bring them back to my definition of self-care, that it's listening within and responding in the most loving way possible.

We have to learn how to be in relationship with ourselves in order for us to be in right relationship with others. So it's actually not selfish for you to make sure that you understand your wants, your needs, your desires, that you are well resourced because you are not going to be able to sustain your relationships with

other people if you're not doing that self-care element. You will burn out. You will not be able to keep your commitments. You'll be resentful or frustrated if you're not doing that self-care piece. So it seems like a step you want to skip, but I promise you from personal experience, you don't want to.

Emily:

It seems like a step that is the easiest to skip, but in the end, when we do, it has a really negative impact I have found. Can you give us some examples of what it looks like in your daily life or what it can look like in the lives of some of the people you've worked with? Maybe even contrasting if it's possible, what a day looks like in a self-care positive way, and then how it could look when self-care isn't on your radar?

Taylor:

Oh, yeah, absolutely. I can think of examples from the past month. So for me, when I am in a day that's really rooted in self-care, I am waking up. I'm pretty quickly getting into a place where I'm moving my body. I'm checking in with myself to see what type of movement I need for that day. I'm doing my little four or five minute meditation before I'm getting ready for the day, walking my dog, I'm nourishing myself with food. And throughout the day, I'm taking little breaks so that I'm doing deep focus work and then I am doing something else. I'm making sure that I'm eating. And in the evenings, I'm generally doing something creative. Maybe I go for a walk with my husband. That's what a day looks like that's self-care. I'm checking in with myself. I'm giving myself what I need.

On a day where self-care is not present, I'm getting up, I'm almost immediately checking my phone. I haven't locked out my apps the night before, so I'm looking at everything else. I'm seeing an email that someone sent me. I'm going straight into working. All of a sudden I look up, it's 3:00 PM I have maybe brushed my teeth. I haven't really eaten. I got things done, so to speak, for other people that may or may not have been related to my priorities. I was feeling pretty disjointed. And then by the end of the day, I'm just exhausted and I just zone out in the evening and go to bed. So those days, I'm getting things done in the same way, but I can very easily get disconnected from myself and then just focus so much on outputs, focus so much on what other people need from me without checking to see is this actually taking me to where I need to go? And am I also being kind to myself in the process?

Emily:

We've all lived that day. I can feel my stress levels rising just hearing you describe that day, because I think we've all had it, and I think this conversation is so important on a podcast about decision-making. Because that day you just described, if something happens in that day where I need to make an important decision, it is not going to be a rooted, well-informed, confident, clear-headed decision. It's not, because I have not rooted myself in time and space enough to where I can actually respond. Instead, I'm just going to be reacting. And that rings so true. I love that you can describe that day. That means you've lived it.

Taylor:

Oh, yeah. More times even than I'd like to admit.

Emily:

Even you, just being someone who, that this is your work that you do. Well, I'm a big believer in the reality that often our best work flows out of what's bothering us. And you mentioned something that gets you fired up, I read in Inner Workout, is that most people assume self-care takes a lot of time. Why does this myth fire you up and how do you respond?

Taylor:

It fires me up. Already, I'm like, "Ooh."

Emily:

I love it. I love it.

Taylor:
I feel the heat coming.

Emily:
I can tell.

Taylor:
Yeah, it fires me up because it is what causes people to not feel cared for. People will say, “Oh, I don’t have 50 minutes to do that, so I’m just not going to do anything kind for myself.” And then that’s how you get stuck in this cycle of burnout. Instead of being like, “Any care that I can give myself is worth celebrating, whether it is a minute or an hour,” we get into this binary either/or thinking where it’s like, “Either I do the 30 minutes, the 50 minutes, the whatever some person told me it was supposed to be, or I do nothing at all.” And what a disservice to yourself to say that even a minute of time isn’t a valuable enough gift to give yourself.

So yeah, it really fires me up because I see so many people using that as not only an excuse to not care for themselves, but also it’s just perpetuating this cycle of them feeling burned out and disconnected. So I’m a big believer of do something for yourself. This morning I was feeling really exhausted. I got up later than I normally get up. I still just did 10 minutes of movement because I was like, “That’s the time that I have. I’m going to do 10 minutes, do something kind for myself.” Even though it would’ve been nice if I had 45 minutes, but you know what? I didn’t. So I gave myself what I could, and that’s worth celebrating.

Emily:
I love this idea of celebrating. I think that can be a foreign concept to a lot of us, but this idea of celebrating progress, starting small, celebrating progress, and then doing it again tomorrow, I think that’s the part that we can sometimes miss, is that I did the thing and then recognizing that tomorrow might be more full of a day or there might be different things happening, but there can still be a minute, one minute. One minute, one minute. Something that you talked about is how we often think that we’re not doing enough or we’re not enough of something. Am I exercising enough? Am I eating enough? All these sentences with the word enough at the end, and as I was reading them, there are probably 20 things you mentioned, all these questions that run through our minds, and I thought, “I think I’ve asked myself all of those questions today,” not even on purpose aware.

And I think that’s what the gift of reflection, of being mindful in the moment, of taking three minutes, five minutes of time to just reset things can help us be aware of those scripts that are running beneath the surface without our permission even. They’re just always there. And that can be the gift of these small moments of reflection that can wake us up to, “Oh, I’m doubting myself on the inside,” and there’s not even anything happening. It’s a default. And so I think part of this Inner Workout work is recognizing some of those scripts and then counterbalancing them with something different.

Taylor:
Absolutely. I sometimes, when I lead workshops, I’ll talk about how we think we’re starting from a blank page, but so often there’s invisible ink there. So we think, “Oh, I can just do this new habit. I can practice self-care in this way,” but there’s all of these things that are beneath the surface, these scripts as you called them. And if we’re not addressing those first, it’s going to be hard for us to see different results.

Emily:
One thing I’d love to hear you say words about is about the idea of trusting ourselves, of listening to our inner voice or listening to ourselves, paying attention to the insight. Because I’m going to guess that there are people listening who love the way that sounds, but they do not know how to do it. The first thing, that

they would love to be able to answer questions like, “What do I need? What do I want?” But they cannot access it because either you’re so out of practice or you’ve never given yourself permission to ask yourself those questions. But do you have any tips or advice for someone who has a hard time? Okay, I have the time and I’ve settled in and I’m working to listen to the inside. I would love to be able to trust myself. I have no idea where to begin or how to start.

Taylor:

Yeah, I empathize with that so much because I have been that person and in some parts of my life, I am still that person. It’s hard to trust someone that you’re not in a relationship with. So I would encourage you to build your relationship with yourself, whether that’s engaging in hobbies that you enjoy or doing a journaling practice where you’re asking yourself questions. What I have, and this is relatively new over the past year or so, is I’ve just leaned into noticing when I have a strong reaction to something, “I really like this thing. I really don’t like this thing,” and then asking myself why. What’s the reasoning behind that?

And starting to see trends. I’ve been doing this a lot in designing our home recently. I used to have relatively boring colors in our home because I wasn’t sure what I wanted and I was afraid to rock the boat. Now our bedroom is this dark teal color, and it’s really moody and rich and we’ve got this orange tiger striped carpet, which is something I would’ve never done before, but I started noticing what do I like, what do I not like? And this can be in such small things, like you’re at a restaurant and you’re ordering on the menu and you feel really drawn to something or really not drawn to something. Why is that? Getting information, getting to know yourself is how you’ll start to trust yourself.

Emily:

I wrote down a quote you said, which is, I have cultivated a dynamic relationship with my whole being. And that points straight to that brilliant point you just made, that you cannot trust someone that you’re not in relationship with or it’s hard to trust someone who you aren’t in relationship with. What a wonderful practice to give us to begin to pay attention to our strong reactions, because those are hard to ignore. And then I think as we do that, we can maybe get better at paying attention to our tiny reactions, to the nuanced reactions. But let’s start with the big ones. I often invite people, “Hey, when you’re crying, don’t apologize for the tears. Just pay attention to them and welcome them because they are giving you a hint to something happening in your inner life.”

Whether that’s just a moment of joy or a moment of grief or something you’re moved in a lyric of a song, I think it’s all information. It’s not good or bad, it’s just information. And so what a great practice to journal, for our non journals who might be afraid of the blank page, is to just write down those big responses, those big reactions. Last weekend was my birthday, and we went out to eat and it was the same kind of thing, got the menu. And I often have that paralyzed you want to order the best thing, and then you don’t want to regret not getting the thing that someone else got, whatever. But I just tried to really pay attention to, “Okay, I’m drawn to this thing and I’m going to order it.” This sounds so ridiculous saying out loud, but this is how we think. So I order it, and sure enough, it wasn’t what I thought it would be. And I was tempted to think like, “Oh, I chose wrong, look, and it’s my birthday dinner. Here it is.” And there’s that weird little place we might go that’s like, “It’s ruined now. This meal is ruined.” But the reality was that my husband really liked the look of my plate, and we ended up switching. I took his, he took mine, and his was delicious. And it was just a very tiny, tiny, small grownup moment of realizing even if you choose and it doesn’t turn out great, you can still pivot. There might still be a gift in it. And even though it’s a silly example, I think the community aspect of that can’t be ignored, that sometimes in these choices that we make, even working to care for ourselves, and it goes awry, maybe there’s community around us who can step in and we can have their salmon and they can have our chicken and all will be well. All will be well in the end.

Well, I want to ask you a question I always ask every guest who comes on, and then after that, I’d love if

you could read us out. But first Taylor, tell us what is your next right thing?

Taylor:

Yeah, I love that we're having this question today because it would've been different last week, but I was talking to my husband and I was like, "You know what?" I have spent almost three years doing all of this stuff around the book and thinking about career and stuff. And my next right thing is really building up more joy and creativity in my personal life. And I want to put just as much effort that I've put into building my professional life into my personal life. So that's my theme, my next right thing for the summer and beyond.

Emily:

I love that. I have a followup question. If you're willing to share, is there a place where you're going to begin that work?

Taylor:

So I have been painting on and off for the past year, but I recently started paper making. And I've been very into process art. So my dream is to make the paper that I paint on and then make some natural paints from different dyes and stuff and then paint on it and have it be like this whole process extravaganza thing. So that's where I want to start.

Emily:

I love it. I loved you used the word extravaganza, that just leveled it up big time. That's beautiful. Thank you for sharing that, Taylor. And if you would, I would love for you to close us out with a reading from Inner Workout.

Taylor:

Absolutely. So the book has all of these different practices in it, and I'm going to read part of the final practice of the book, which is part of a loving kindness meditation. And when I was doing it, I envisioned everyone who was reading the book as I was writing these words down. So let's go ahead. If you're listening and you feel comfortable and you'd like to close your eyes, feel free to close your eyes and just receive these words over yourself. As you're inhaling, imagine yourself receiving love. As you're exhaling, send that love throughout your body and I'll speak these words over you. May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be safe, may you be at ease. And continue breathing, just receiving that love and sending it throughout your body. And I'll invite you to silently speak these words this time. Speak them over yourself. May I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be safe, may I be at ease. Maybe take a couple more breaths here and then if you had your eyes closed, you can open them whenever you're ready.

Emily:

Amen. Thank you, Taylor.

Taylor:

Thank you.

Thanks for listening to episode 276 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of creating an inner workout can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because while it's true, this is a podcast about making decisions, the bigger truth is our daily decisions are also making our lives. You can find Taylor all about her and her new book Inner Workout at taylorellyse.com, or you can find her on Instagram @TaylorElyseMorrison or @InnerWorkout. You can also as always find me on Instagram @EmilyPFreeman and online at emilypfreeman.com where you can find a transcript of this one and every episode of the Next Right Thing.

A special thanks to the team in Unmutable who faithfully edits our sound and to Ashley on my team who is keeping me organized and creative in all Next Right Things, including our podcast, tech and show notes. Well, like I said, Taylor’s new book, *Inner Workout* is available wherever books are sold. I hope you get your hands on that. And in closing, I’ll share a few final words from Taylor. She says, “Self-care is listening within and responding in the most loving way possible.” Thanks for listening, and I’ll see you next time.