

Lisa Lewis:

Welcome to Let Go Lean In, my podcast designed with transformational leaders like you in mind. I'm Lisa Lewis, your transformational leadership coach. In each episode, you'll find help growing awareness of your mindset as a leader, be equipped with a tool to let go of unrealistic expectations and self-limiting beliefs that get in the way of your one precious life. My goal is for you to thrive as you lean in toward the leadership call God has put on your life. Join me and other leaders as we let go and lean in together.

Lisa Lewis:

Welcome friends to another episode of Let Go Lean In, my transformational leadership podcast for you and your benefit to become the best leader, learning how to live fully this one precious life that you've been given. In today's episode, I'm excited to share a very important concept. In fact, such an important concept that it transformed the way I work. Way back in 2004, I first learned of this concept, and I'm going to tell you what it is.

Lisa Lewis:

Today's episode is titled Make Room for Margin. Now, if you've been listening to me for any length of time, not just in this podcast, but in the way that I write and encourage women, I speak about margin. In 2004, I read a book that came out that year by a Dr. Richard Swenson. Now some of you may be familiar with it, it's simply titled Margin. Now, what is margin all about you might ask. Well, it's essential and we take it for granted. And in this day and age, it's absolutely a measure that needs to be paid attention to.

Lisa Lewis:

So I want you to picture for a minute a page in a book. And when you think about that page, do the words run all the way from side to side on the piece of paper? No. There is always at least a half an inch around the edge of the writing; top, sides and bottom. So that page could actually handle more letters and characters, but it is designed to give our eyes a space to rest, a margin of capacity. That's the concept that Dr. Swenson wrote about. In his book, he tells his own story about living to the edge of his capacity as a doctor. He had been treating a lot of patients that had a lot of stress and stress-related illnesses, and then it happened to him. And during a time of healing from injuries, he started to reflect on how our bodies, our mind, how we use our time, they all need margin. In our society, our culture has not been designed for us to live within margins. We're invited to live outside of them all the time.

Lisa Lewis:

And we find ourselves in this work from home era right now, and that means it's a lot easier to roll into work or to open your laptop, again beyond times when you would have been at work. Our margins are being used up. In his book, he talks about four different areas in our lives that we need to provide margin and defend margin. One of them is time, another is finances, our physical margin, and then our emotional and spiritual margins. Now, I bet you can figure out the idea of financial margin pretty quickly. If you have a business or you are working in an organization, you've got budgets. You have a family budget I hope, and that budget doesn't do well to take you outside of its capacity because then you're in debt.

Lisa Lewis:

Using that same kind of concept, that's what's happening to us with our physical self. We do not give enough margin for rest for the drinking of water, eating good food, exercise, and we live outside our margins and we get sick. The same thing exists with our emotional and spiritual self. If we do not pay

attention to self-care, time for rest, for recreation, to be restored and renewed, then we're living outside our capacity and something will be stressed as a result, our emotions and our spiritual life. It's the same thing with time.

Lisa Lewis:

Each of these four areas, we intuitively know that there is supposed to be some kind of limit and we want to set those limits, but then we come up against something when somebody asks us of something, or there are expectations that are placed on us, we have to exceed our capacity in any one of those areas and sometimes in all four of them. We cannot sustain that long term. Yeah, for short term, maybe for a crunch time or getting the taxes done or whatever, there might be a short-term burst that we need to exceed our capacity. But long term, you will not be able to sustain living outside your margins.

Lisa Lewis:

So how do you establish them? How do you pay attention to them? How do you defend them? All great questions. In his book, he talks about the ideas of giving yourself a limit and then stepping back from it. For example, if you know that your workday is really more like 10 hours, then you must stop at that 10th hour. You can't exceed it because then more will be asked of you. So you need to step back from that 10th hour and start to wind down when it's around eight hours and start to close out the day, knowing that other things are going to come up and you're going to have a hard stop at that particular time. That's hard to do. It is really challenging when other people are looking to you for your leadership, for the culture to be established and fulfilled. And so if you're in a situation where you have the opportunity to set those margins for other people, then give yourself that good gift of recognizing time is that nonrenewable resource that you can help others steward.

Lisa Lewis:

What would it look like if you gave yourself permission to have an hour before your workday started and two or three hours in the evening after your workday ended where you got to do some things that renew your mind, your body, your emotional health, and gave you a chance to connect with your people? What would that be like to have that on a regular basis? It would be helpful, that's what it would be like. But how do you get it? It's a very short word, only two letters, very hard to say. No. It's hard to say no when a good opportunity has come your way. It's hard to say no when you are being asked to carry a project forward beyond your capacity on a regular basis. There has to be a way to negotiate some of those things, and it takes a lot of effort and energy to get to a place where you can be comfortable and your people can be comfortable with creating and defending margin. And it doesn't just happen, it has to be intentional.

Lisa Lewis:

The hard stop of time is also the same kind of thing, the hard stop in a budget. If you are going to try to spend beyond what you have to be able to pay off what you're spending, there's going to be a hard stop. The creditors are going to come looking if you can't make those payments. Same as with your body. Your body will say, "Sorry, you have no reserves," and you hit a crash. People are stressed beyond limits and their health suffers. In fact, some of the susceptibility to this virus comes from people who have not been able to take good care of their physical selves for a variety of reasons. You have choices. Dr. Swenson says margin is necessary.

Lisa Lewis:

Let me tell you a story about my own life living outside margin. I mentioned that I read this book back in 2004. Three years of preparation and work in developing the school that I was a co-founder of had taken me outside several of my margin limits and I knew it. I was tired. I was cranky. I was not the best person at home. I definitely was living outside my relational limits. And then my mom died. That is hard no matter what your circumstances are. But when I was tapped out with no margin, I had to take a hard stop. Thankfully, I was given the gift of a couple of months of time away from work so that I could take grief time and that was so very helpful. Working with a counselor, having more rest, stepping away from my responsibilities for that time. I know not everybody has that gift, but not having the margin made it evident that I had to come to a hard stop.

Lisa Lewis:

That's an example that you don't want to have to get into. You don't want to live beyond your margin when something outside of your control happens and you don't have the capacity that you need to be able to facilitate what's happening in life. My hope for you is that you can benefit from the concept of margin. You can take a look at how things are in those four areas. How do you manage your time? Do you have margin in your days where the unexpected doesn't throw you for a loop? What about finances? Do you have margin in your financial situation whether it's at work or whether it's home where the unexpected thing with the car or in a health concern doesn't throw you for a loop?

Lisa Lewis:

What about your emotional and spiritual margin? Do you give yourself time for self-care? Is part of your self-care also paying attention to your spiritual life? There are ways just with little bits of time here and there that you can create emotional and spiritual margin for yourself. What about your physical self? Do you give yourself time to exercise, to not just grab and go with food and eat whatever is easy, but actually make fresh food, drink enough water, get enough rest and get outside to even go for a walk or a bike ride or a hike? These may sound like pipe dreams for you, but they don't have to be.

Lisa Lewis:

Choose one area of those four and consider how you can intentionally establish more margin in that one area and then practice saying that very short word when asked to go outside your margin. No. It'll be hard, you'll get some pushback, but it's so worth it. When I mentioned about your spiritual life, I want to share what really helps me to be reminded that we are not alone in this journey of transformation. God is in it with us, and he wants you to be reminded that Holy Spirit is here and ready to give you what you need in the moment that you need it.

Lisa Lewis:

I'm going to read to you the passage that I have really loved for so long. It's Romans 12:1-2, but I'm going to read it from the message version. So sit back and relax and listen to this. "So here's what I want you to do. God helping you. Take your everyday ordinary life, your sleeping, eating, going to work and walking around life and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you." Did you hear that? God is on your side. You're going to be changed from the inside out when you don't

let yourself become so well-adjusted to the culture around you which expects you to work beyond your capacity to live outside your margins. Just say no.

Lisa Lewis:

I want you to stop for a second and listen to this question and leave with this idea. What do you hope is the outpouring of your heart to those around you. If you are living within your margins, you have extra to give to those you love and care about, your people, your family, the community, and to others that might come across your path. Having margin will change your life.

Lisa Lewis:

I'm going to have more information on the concept of margin, a link to Dr. Swenson's website and a little bit of a question and answer kind of an opportunity within the show notes. You can find those over at my podcast website, letgoleaninpodcast.com. And if you have questions about how to implement margin in your life, or you need to process a particular issue that's come up as you've been listening, I would love for you to go over to my coaching website, lisalewiscoaching.com, and schedule a complimentary session with me. You'd be amazed at what 20 minutes can bring to the surface and how you can get strategy around an idea to take action and move forward in your precious life. Thanks so much for being here. Talk soon.