

Grace: Hello! This is Grace from GraceQuantock.com and joined today by Brooke Snow for another Trailblazer interview. Brooke, thank you very much for joining us.

Brooke: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Grace: I think we should give Brooke special points because it is 7 AM her time, 7 AM people. It's amazing. So, yeah she's been especially kind.

Brooke: It's great, good way to start the day.

Grace: Thank you. And this something, again what you're mentioning is, how do we start a day in relation to the internet because what we'll talk to Brooke about is conscious internet use but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Brooke Snow delights in the pursuit of a meaningful life and if you want to learn more about how to find the true balance in your life, you can check her out on everybranch.is. You can check out her podcast at Every Branch.

And Brooke lives in Northern Utah with her calm husband, an adventurous 5-year old son and a bouncing baby girl.

Brooke: That's right.

Grace: So what brought me to Brooke's work was some of you may know, I mentioned in little pieces but we haven't told the long story yet. I have been part of what really is now a 2-year long life detox.

I seem to kind of be – the opposite of the Kon Marie Method but I didn't do it for 24 hours. I did it in two years.

This began actually out of my own program which is the Phoenix Fire Academy which is at PhoenixFireAcademy.com, which started around looking at larger space thinking, "How does this space represent me?" For example, is it full of disability equipment I don't use or conversely or is it full of equipment for a sports that I can no longer participate in the way I used to before I disabled?

And so, I kind of started doing that and for me it just expanded into stripping off 18 layers of wallpaper, which is an exaggeration for some of the rooms in this house, and finding what's underneath and finding my life shifted as we cleared.

But having done the physical clearing, that didn't feel like enough. It began with the physical detox. It ended up with a detox in the digital spaces because I haven't considered my relationship and use all of the internet even though it's probably one of the largest relationships in my life, the one that takes the most time and the most attention. I spend a huge amount on it and it would grow over time.

It was unconscious and unconsidered and that needed to change. And I saw Brooke and saw her offer and I went, "Yes."

Can you give people who haven't maybe come across your work a little bit about that?

Brooke: Yeah, what you're referring to is the digital detox course that I developed. The subtitle of the digital detox is "how to find –" I should know the subtitle of my own class. It's finding harmony in your digital life, basically. "How to live in harmony with technology," that's it.

It's all about – I like to compare it to a physical diet and consuming the most highly nutritious information that we can. It's our information diet. We're taking in information all day long.

And so the course goes through a series of steps on how to live in harmony with technology. It's not a bold move of, "I'm done with Facebook. I'm done with the internet. I'm leaving for two weeks." You

often see people online saying, “I’m going to be gone for a little while.”

And this more about how we can change our lifestyle in the way we interact and have this relationship so that it feeds us and it doesn’t deplete us and it can actually become a healthier relationship, something that’s sustainable long term.

And I think that’s really important because the internet is not going away and there are many wonderful awesome things about it. Just having a few guidelines and boundaries setup so that it contributes to our life more than it takes from it is what the course is all about.

Grace: And so much of that really resonates with me especially I’m sure for everybody watching and listening, especially for people who are living with illness related fatigue, who maybe have a cognitive dysfunction or memory loss. We have people living with traumatic injuries, people living with auto-immune disease which can affect their function.

And a lot of these can be related to information overwhelm, on a grand debilitating scale. And the things about it contributing to us rather than depleting, to it be sustainable and being aware – like you say, it’s not going away. This isn’t something which it seems often very practical to quit.

And that seems to me like very extreme than what happens when we stay with it, live with it, work with it but do that consciously.

Brooke: Yeah, there’s so many good things like, wonderful things about the internet. Just the fact that me and you are able to talk right now on totally different sides of the world. We’re able to connect with people who are going through similar things that we are and be able to have that sense of community. It’s amazing.

There’s so much information that we can get and many uplifting, encouraging things that we can experience.

So, if we can just design our interaction and the things that we intake to be able to be all of that, really nutrient-dense, uplifting, wonderful things then that’s how it can be more of a support to us in our life.

Grace: I think you’re so right to say that because I think sometimes when we start talking about the challenge of the internet, the first thing people go to is how bad it is.

I was actually in a conference recently for consultants and psychotherapists about being a therapist in a digital world. And a lot of the stuff around the challenges of the internet, the things we need to be safe around on the internet and I really appreciate that we need to think about these.

We need to think about safety when we’re working with clients; we need to think about if a client tries to find you on Facebook. What happens if a client sees an article you wrote for a newspaper and they like it or don’t like it? Do they feel safe to share that with you?

So I think we do need digital policies. We need to look at challenges around internet addiction and around different challenges in the internet.

But I really felt in the conference, it compelled me to say, “Gosh, if it wasn’t for the internet, I would not be working. I won’t have the businesses that I have. I wouldn’t have had such supporting community when I was house bound, bed bound. I would have been incredibly isolated especially when struggling with infection. Visitors was very, very challenging and I think also very scary for visitor.

What if you have a cold and you don’t know and that makes me ill and that makes me really ill? And that’s something, does not a lot to ask a visitor to bear whereas the internet doesn’t. It’s fantastic.

Brooke: It’s very exciting.

Grace: So can you talk to us a little bit about the slow web because that’s – I know you before of

course, I read about slow eating and slow living. And as what we call a “recovering type A”, I’ve written before about being type A with chronic illness. So kind of as a recovering somebody who’s trying to live in a kind of... speed. The slowness can be kind of a new concept.

Brooke: Yeah, I originally took the term and slow web is not something I came up with. But it’s derived from the term “slow food”. I love that comparison so much because when we think about food and how it can nourish our body or it can be filled with junk. And we have all experienced the difference between something that’s very nourishing and if you compare it between a meal that you grabbed from McDonald’s that is highly processed and it’s fast food, the opposite of that is slow food.

It would be something that was, it took a long time to prepare especially if you consider it down to the life of growing the vegetables in the ground and something that came straight from the garden and was prepared lovingly in the kitchen.

Meals that are slow food meals, they’re high in nutrition but it’s not just about the food. It’s about the conversation around the dinner table and the feelings that you get, this entire experience that is built around that meal.

Another term they often use is farm to table. And if you think about that, that’s a long process to be able to go from the farm to your table. There’s so many people that play an important role.

And so when you compare that with the slow web, we have what I would say is like a fast food version on the internet. Information is coming at us all the time. There’s always something that’s flashing, sidebar ads and things like that to click away on. Even when reading an article, there’s hyperlinks and to learn more and go deep into this article which is all fine and good.

In our newsfeeds everything is really, really fast paced. And so, the idea of slow web is similar. It is consuming information that is really feeding to our souls. It’s having those community experiences online that are really nourishing to our spirits as well.

To do that, there are some exercises and boundaries that definitely help. I’m going to use Facebook as an example. Oftentimes people complain about Facebook. I think most of the problems with Facebook that we hear about are because there’s no filter on the people that we have in our feed. I mean, there is to a degree. We have to approve someone who wants to add us as a friend. But I know for me when I first started adding people as friends, there’s no rhyme or reason at all. It could be that someone from my elementary school that we were just in the same class but we never had a relationship or friendship, didn’t know each other very well. I’m sure many people can relate to that. You end up with a feed with lots of people that you don’t know very well, that may or may not be real friends in real life and that you can start to see information in your feed that is not necessarily uplifting and people are complaining. And there just ends up to be a lot of negativity or just things that aren’t of high value. Any time that we’re going to give our time and our attention to that, we are consuming.

And so, again using Facebook as an example, if we can go through and filter what actually shows up in our feed by either de-friending people that just don’t need to be there. Or if there are people that continually bring us down in the type of information that they post, you can change the setting on that friendship to be an un-follow setting. And that just means you can still be friends but you’re not going to see all information that they put online.

And so, spending some time to go through that and filter it can do amazing things for the experience that you have on Facebook.

I spend some time doing that and it was amazing, the change because the people that were showing up in my feed were people that I really admire, people that were sharing great, encouraging content and so it was fun to go there.

That’s the comparison I’d like to make is designing your experience so you don’t have to be, have the internet just happen to you. You can be intentional about the use.

Facebook is just one example. So many of us end up signing up for lots of newsletters and our inboxes can be filled with information that we don't even need. So unsubscribing, cleaning that up or maybe there's a list of blogs or places on line that we visit. And maybe at one point, they had something interesting but it isn't something that's truly consistent and so filtering that down too. And so, using those things and asking ourselves the question, "Does this nourish me? Does this feed my spirit, feed my soul? Does this uplift me and bring good, positive thoughts?" Those types of questions. And if they don't, why would we spend our energy reading and following?

And even in the newsfeed, you may not actually click away on links but if you see some things there even headlines and little tiny updates and things like that can be negative and take from our happiness.

I'm a big believer in being able to intentionally create the space that you want to experience online and what amazing difference that makes in being able to have a slow web experience that way.

Grace: Thank you for sharing that. Yes, I completely agree and I think for many of us who, as I say, living with illness or challenges, being aware of how precious our energy. Often if you feel depressed or maybe you've been to a treatment or a therapy and you kind of invested in this.

You want to feel this way and have this many – for people who have illness we have fear experience sometimes – so you have these spoons. You don't really want to give them away because they're precious to you.

At the same time, I'm aware that there's also a struggle around the internet – excuse me, I kind of want to jump to it for a second – is the internet can be very distracting. And when you're ill and in pain, sometimes what you really want to do is just not be in your body even though you know that what we're doing, the association is to really be present to work with whatever it is and meet the pain and say, "Hey," and then talk to it and then be present to it and then, move forward. Sometimes you just really, really don't want to do that.

That's the great thing that the internet is fantastic for. But there's something else which I know that comes up with the internet which is around triggers. For people who are working with trauma, triggers can be a huge thing. Basically the internet does not really do trigger warnings particularly well.

Occasionally people just do trigger warning. It's like a trigger warning for what? It doesn't just help to write "trigger warning". And I know there are people out there who really dislike trigger warnings and kind of say, "I don't – we shouldn't have to do trigger warnings."

So we were talking about trigger warnings on the internet. It can be very challenging but the internet doesn't have trigger warnings. I know some people dislike trigger warnings. Me, I'm all for trigger warnings. I use them. I need them. I just stated that that's what I need and that's where I am. But I think sometimes around the conscious consuming, it can be quite a challenge to actually find something on the internet which is uplifting. At least, I've had had that challenge. A lot of things which I found was uplifting were also very aspirational and sometimes kind of involved some judgment or some idea that my life should be in a different place than it is or affirmations like "if I wasn't disabled then I would be richer and probably thinner," even though I don't think I need to be any thinner or richer or not disabled.

So actually, what I ended up doing when I started being more conscious in the internet is that I was doing what you mentioned around creating firsts, creating something offline that's creating and instead of just mindlessly consuming and just basically gulping the internet without processing it and wondering why I felt kind of sick and dizzy and not really moving. And so, I actually ended up doing a lot more offline living.

Brooke: I love that. Our regular default, as I say in the course, our default usually is to consume especially when you look at points in our day. Maybe there's some downtime or we finished a task or we're bored. We're not doing something else is and our default is to consume. "I'm going to get on my phone. I'm going to look on Facebook. I'm going to go check Instagram. I'm going to check the newsfeeds, check the news sites," whatever it maybe. That's a default.

Something I like about this class is that we want to change the default to instead of consuming, you're creating as you mentioned. And not that we have to go do some extravagant thing from start to finish but just creating one thing.

The amazing thing about doing the first step is that it usually has momentum with it and that first step is usually the hardest. Once we start something, we're often – you get energy from creating and often go farther than that first step.

We can be uplifted and fed by the things that we create. And "create", I use very, very loosely that term. For me, creating could be I am going to write something. I'm going to write an article or I'm going to go and play the piano or I'm going to organize a drawer. I'm going to...

Grace: Create space.

Brooke: Yeah, anything like that. You could even define it very broadly as improving upon something whether that's improving on our environment, improving upon our relationships with other people. It could be sending my husband a text saying that I love him and I'm thinking about him. It could be improving upon my talents or my hobbies and interests.

Creating is very loose but there is deep satisfaction sometimes from creating. And you talked about how sometimes being online, we can end up feeling a little bit discouraged even reading things that are inspirational.

Grace: Yes.

Brooke: I think that you're so right saying that the creating can help partly just because we can get a lot of satisfaction having done something.

I listened to a commencement talk a few months ago from a military sergeant who spent most of his commencement talk talking about the importance of making your bed every morning.

Grace: I think I have read an article about this and since then every morning I made my bed.

Brooke: Yeah.

Grace: If I don't do it, I have to go back and do it because I'm kind of thinking, if you don't, what happens in the day is you'll just think, "Oh, gosh. Should I just go back to bed? Maybe that's a good idea."

Resting is generally a good idea. Generally rest helps but not in the bed because then, it's hard to sleep in the bed.

Brooke: Yeah.

Grace: So do tell me more.

Brooke: The thing I love about him, here's this decorated military professional who's talking about something as simple and basic as making your bed. And he's said that's the first thing you do when you wake up in the military, is you make your bed.

He said the importance of that is you accomplish something and he said, "No matter what, by the time we come home at the end of the day and we go to our bed, no matter what happened that day, you can look at your bed and you can say, "I've got something done. I did something."" And that was really inspiring to me especially considering the life that he has lead.

And that's the same concept that that one little thing of creating, just tidying up the space of bed and making it can make a great difference at the beginning of the day, the middle of the day, the end of the day when it's time to go to bed.

So that's the whole concept of changing that default from consuming to creating. Those little things

can lift our spirits. They can help us feel like we've accomplished something. They can give us energy which seems like it shouldn't work that way because we're spending energy on creating but it does give us energy at the same time.

Grace: I really love what you're saying about this having consuming not being the default. I think that for me, there's a lot around process because I'm consuming somebody else's work and consuming their end product they have published or created or curated something and they're offering it to me as a product.

Even if they're doing, "This is my process of blogging," they've still chosen the best photographs and posted those. They've edited their words. They did a photograph and they've added the filters.

Everything's very shiny. Everything is finished whereas in my own process, when I'm doing the painting, I'm very aware that in the process. I'm with the process. I'm in the process. I'm with the real. I'm with the unfinished. I'm in the raw and constantly changing.

It's much less about the results and much more about the present moment and the engagement with that present moment.

Brooke: Absolutely. Being able to be in the present moment also can help us to be thankful, and I think gratitude's a really powerful healer in our life. And so, the more opportunities that we can create to have those moments of in the present and moments of gratitude, the better.

Grace: And so before we head off, I just wanted to ask, if you could ask the people listening, watching to do one thing to shift their life today, just one thing to begin so that we synthesize all these with a takeaway of a first step so they could achieve something if they do this. Could you tell us what that might be?

Brooke: The first thing that comes through my mind is what we've already talked about, just changing that default to creating something. I just love that whole concept.

It sounds simple. The phrase that I'd like to repeat to myself – because sometimes the thought of creating can seem daunting because we see the big picture and we see all the small steps to go from point A to point B, or I should say from point A to point Z.

And so, I always like to tell myself and tell other people, just do one small thing. Just take the first step. That's all we need to do. You don't have to finish. Just do one small thing. I think that's really powerful for people to do that.

Grace: I'll let that sink in. One small step, just start from that is enough.

Brooke: Yes.

Grace: Like you say, simple but very profound. Thank you so much for joining us today. If people would like to find more of your work or explore your digital courses, they could find you at [EveryBranch.is](https://www.everybranch.is) – is that correct?

Brooke: Yes.

Grace: Okay.

Brooke: Absolutely.

Grace: Thank you. Thank you very Brooke.

Brooke: Thank you. Thank you for having me. It was great to be able to talk with you.

Grace: My pleasure, good bye.