Ep #37: Time Management Hacks with Diana Page

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

<u>Sarah Michelle</u>

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Welcome to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*, a show for new NPs and students that want to pass their board exam the first time and make that transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. I'm your host Sarah Michelle. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

Sarah: Hello, my friends. I decided to bring back a guest that I had on previously, the wonderful Diana Page, also known as the catalyst for self-care on Instagram. Last time we talked all about identifying and overcoming burnout. But today we are gearing our conversation in a little bit of a different direction and we're going to be talking about time management.

I hear from so many of you out there that time management as a new nurse practitioner, and even during your clinical rotations, can feel like a huge struggle and obstacle as you navigate this new role, which is totally understandable. And since we already know Diana from her episode over the summer, I figured we could just dive right into today's topic.

And so, Diana, have you always been a time management wizard or was it something you kind of learned along the way when you became a nurse practitioner?

Diana: Oh my gosh, I was not always a time management wizard. And I think that term is hilarious. I usually use time management ninja, but I like wizard too.

Sarah: I like it, I like it.

Diana: Yeah, no, I definitely struggled with that early on. In my first NP job I remember that we used the phone dictation system. And I was terrified, terrified to dictate into the phone for whatever reason. So I would actually write out my notes freehand and then read the script into the phone. It was ridiculous.

But at the time, I was just like, "This is what I have to do to feel comfortable." But now it's like, that is definitely not an appropriate use of time by any means.

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Sarah: Yeah, well you wanted to make sure that you had it right, which everybody does when they're new. And even when you're not new, you still want to make sure you're doing it.

Diana: Right, right. Although, little did I know that you then have to edit those recordings. So even if it was a terrible thing, I could have just edited it on the back end. So it wouldn't have been an issue.

Sarah: Yeah, I remember being so fascinated, there was a clinical rotation I did in a really old school clinic. And they literally had little tape recorders that they just carried around everywhere. And then their secretaries would just type up all of their notes for them.

And I just remember looking at them like, "What in the world are they doing?" Because it took me a few weeks to figure it out because it just looked like they were standing in the corner talking to themselves, literally all the time. And I was like, "What is happening right now? Where am I at?"

Diana: That's hilarious.

Sarah: So kind of like looking back on when you started your career, is there anything that you wish you had done differently that kind of would have expedited you figuring out those time management skills?

Diana: I think for me the biggest thing is just prioritizing things appropriately. Knowing kind of your non-negotiables, your kind of extra stuff, like the kind of the need to do versus get to do/want to do. Knowing how to differentiate that.

And also just the concept, this has been very liberating for me, just the concept that sometimes done is better than perfect. Sometimes it's okay not to include every single thing that you think you need to include in a note. We call it note bloat where when you're charting, you're just kind of adding information like, "And then she likes to go to Florida for the holidays every year."

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You could put that in there if it helps you have a rapport with the patient, but a lot of times there's information in the note that we're adding that really, A, makes it difficult to read and, B, just sucks up your time.

Sarah: What do you feel like would be some examples of those non-negotiables?

Diana: Like getting your charts done. I mean, it depends on what you're talking about. Is it like home life, work life?

Sarah: I'm talking about work life.

Diana: Yeah, so with work life, at the beginning of the week I typically look at my week ahead. Like what kind of meetings do I have, obviously I look at my schedule to see if I have any new consults and try to review those notes ahead of time. Like there's things that are kind of non-negotiable in terms of work life.

And then there's extra things that can be work related that you want to do that you don't necessarily have to do. Where it's meetings that aren't required, but you are interested in.

Like we have a lot of wellness initiatives where I work, so some of the meetings that are offered are really cool like brown bag lunches and things like that that look really great. But if I go then I'm kind of in trouble if I have a really busy day or if I have a really busy week. And you have to know the tradeoff. If you say yes to that meeting, and you do it during your lunch then maybe you're staying a little late and then you miss dinner with your kids or whatever.

So it's about kind of looking at the different things that you kind of need to do, want to do, and then your life outside of work and where kind of everything fits together. But being intentional about it and really not necessarily waiting until the heat of the moment but trying to look ahead at what your week looks like.

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I typically plan out my week on a Sunday for my life, and that oftentimes will include work related stuff just because, again, if I have to stay late for some meeting then that affects my husband and picking up my kids and things like that.

So it melds together in a lot of ways, but there are ways to plan out your week where it doesn't seem as scary. And looking at your non-negotiables versus your want to dos and get to dos, and then obviously making time for you also is really important

Sarah: Yeah, there's definitely a lot of strategic planning that goes on. Even on my end running a business and having other work life and other personal life. Sunday morning I get up and I'm like, "Okay, what's on the calendar for the entire week? Does anything have to shift? Does something have to move so I can meet those non-negotiables?"

And so I think there's a lot of pivoting and maneuvering. Because you can make a calendar a month out, but you never know what's going to happen that week or the next day or whatever else.

Dana: Definitely, yeah.

Sarah: So I have some flexibility in there to.

Diana: Yeah, you have to leave room for that kind of stuff. And I have to say, what I've learned over the years is really like it's 50% of that organizational stuff, like planning, automation, time blocking, stuff like that. And then it's 50% preservation where it's making sure your energy is where it should be, being in a focused environment, having boundaries, limiting distractions, things like that.

So it's not all about planning it's definitely like half planning and organization and half just preserving the things that you need in order to do what you need to do.

Sarah: And if you have that plan in place, then you know what you can maneuver. Versus if you're just kind of winging it every day you're like,

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"What can I move? What can I not move?" It feels a lot more chaotic and then you feel really burned out really quickly too.

Diana: Oh, 100%. And that's just hard for our brains anyway. If we're always in like fight or flight and kind of feeling like we're always overwhelmed, that's really tough for our brains. It's just like task switching all the time is really tough on our brain.

So it's better to really be intentional about it and clump things that are alike together so that you're not kind of all over the place. And or you switch stuff around and then you get to the end of the week and you're like, "Oh my gosh, there's all these things now I have to do on this day because all my non-negotiables have flowed downstream and now I'm kind of in a bit of a predicament." So yes, I totally agree.

Sarah: Yeah, that was definitely me when I started my business because I was working full-time on top of trying to run this business full-time. So my focus was split 100% of the time and I always felt chaotic and rushed and I could never get a grip on my calendar.

So eventually like six months in I'm like, "Well, something's got to give here." One or the other, something's got to give. I've got to move part time, or I've got to cut my hours, or I've got to find more people to help me with this business. And then I kind of meshed all of that in one so that way I could have a real life and work life and not just be1,000% work life all the time.

Diana: Exactly.

Sarah: That's a big piece of time management too.

Diana: Totally, and that's that preservation piece. That 50% preservation is setting those boundaries and knowing what your capabilities and capacity actually is and then kind of adjusting from there.

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Sarah: What do you feel like are some solid ways of really honing in on that time management? Because I feel like time management is definitely a skill.

Diana: Oh yeah, I mean when we're talking about just time in general, something that I do with my mentees is a time audit. Because a lot of times like we are like, "Oh my God, I don't have time. I don't have time. I don't have time." You actually do have more time than you think, it's just we waste a lot of time.

So that's something that I recommend everybody do is even for just a week write down, like track what you're doing every single day, all day. And just see where your time is going.

Sarah: You'd be surprised.

Diana: Everything, your work, how much you scroll on social, how much you're playing with your kids. Whatever it is, track it and actually just see where your time is going. It's actually kind of shocking when you do it. I remember the first time I did it I was like, "Oh my God, there are definitely things I could streamline here."

So I think that's step one, is actually seeing where your time is going. And then again looking at what are your priorities? What do you actually want to be putting your time and energy into? Maybe a lot of that stuff is stuff that you don't actually care a whole lot about.

One of my mentees now, we did the time audit and she was like, "There's so many extracurriculars that I'm doing that I don't actually feel that connected to. And I feel like I could maybe let go of some of those and do something that actually fulfills me." So that was like a huge eye opener for her.

Sarah: Yeah, the time audit piece was huge for me when I was kind of in that place of working full-time times two. And I remember after I did my time audit, it was two days later I hired an assistant. Because there were so many things on this list that anybody could do but I'm just holding on to.

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Diana: Exactly. Yeah, actually it's funny I just did– This is really ridiculous but it's a good example of this. So you know those little animated stickers, like the gifs that you can put on Instagram or whatever. So I was like, "I kind of want to make some fun branded ones that'll be really cool to use."

And then I started to look into how you have to do it. I Google like, "Okay, I can do this." And then I was like, "Okay, this is taking up way too much of my time, this is ridiculous." So I actually just went on Fiverr, paid someone 30 bucks and they made me a few of those things, like the images I gave them.

But still it's like, okay, that was a really good use of my $30 and my time. Because now that three hours of my life I probably would have spent doing that, I got other things that are more important to me done. So that was a really good example.

Sarah: All the tech stuff.

Diana: Yeah, but you have to just know your strengths, know what you actually want to be doing. And it's fine to outsource, it's fine to automate, it's fine to say this is not something I need to be doing. Like mowing your lawn, some people hire people to mow their lawn, and that gets them three hours of their life back if they have a big lawn.

Sarah: Amen. What about more so like in the clinical setting? How do people stay on task? How do we not procrastinate? Those sorts of things because those definitely play a factor in time management, too.

Diana; Yeah. So I think we've all been there, right? Where we're like we have a million charts to do. And we are like, "Oh." Especially when you have that really hard one that you just don't want to do and you're like, "Oh, I have to sit down and do this. It's going to take energy and effort."

But you know you have to do it, so you procrastinate because you're either stressed, you're bored, you're frustrated, you're unsure. And so we put things off because you just don't want to do it. So that's very common, but I think it's about–

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First of all, one of the tricks I use when I'm charting is like, "Okay, I'm just going to do it for like five minutes. I'm just going to work on this for five minutes." And typically, an object in motion stays in motion. So if you start to work on it for five minutes, typically you will continue to just get it done. It's kind of like mastering the art of showing up and just taking that first baby step.

But also when you have a long list of things to do, like let's say you have 10 charts to do and you're just like, "Oh my gosh, I'm feeling so overwhelmed." Just focus on step one, you don't need to think about the 10th chart. Just focus on the first one. And then just get that one done. And just focus on step one, not 100.

I think for me, too, having an environment that's conducive to me focusing is really important. So just knowing how you work well, some people like white noise, some people like to have a fan on, some people hate noise and have to wear noise canceling headphones. I have a little blanket at my desk, that's just how I roll. But some people, again, like to have a fan or window open.

So knowing the environment that you best are able to focus. And then obviously, setting boundaries. If you have like one of your colleagues who is in the office next door or whatever, they want to come talk to you and you have a million things to do, you can set boundaries and say like, "Hey, I'd love to catch up, but I've just got to crank this stuff out." Or whatever it may be. So I think also being able to set those boundaries is huge.

Sarah: Yeah, I think environment is a lot more important than people realize. Because that was actually how I ended up getting an external office to my home office. Because at first, I was able to work in here really well. And then when my husband started working from home too, it just felt like he got really chaotic really quickly. And there were so many more noises, and things to do, and distractions. And I'm like, I'm literally getting half the work done here that I used to get done versus when he worked outside of the house.

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Diana: Yeah, yeah.

Sarah: Even at the end of– Oh my gosh, I almost said 2020. Even near the end of 2021 we still have this whole work from home situation too, and I know a lot of people out there doing telehealth appointments and those sorts of things. So I can't imagine trying to do a telehealth appointment at home, and then your husband and your kids and your dog and everybody's running behind you and trying to get all those charts done, I mean, it really adds up.

Diana: Yeah, and I think for people who are working from home a couple of things is like really just having a separate space. Like having you're kind of workspace and then having like an end of day ritual that you do to signal yourself to transition out of work mode into home mode.

Whether it be you change your clothes, or you do like an exercise class, or you go for a walk, or you go have a snack and close your computer and leave, whatever. Having a separate space and having that end of day ritual can actually be a great way to just leave that kind of piece behind.

Sarah: Yeah, when I was working from the home office, which I am today, I always like to change my clothes at the end of the day for sure. And I always like to go on a walk too.

I feel like the walk really helps me disconnect from whatever I was doing that day. And then I can show up as my home self and not my work self. Because it's really easy to just sit on the couch and continue to work and work and work and forget that you have a home self.

Diana: Yeah, and it's easy to let those bleed into each other. But you really want to try to avoid that because then you, again, have that kind of separation between work and life and you're hopefully not thinking about work when you're hanging out with your partner or whatever.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. It kind of ties back into that burnout discussion too.

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Diana: Yeah, exactly. I mean, all of this. I mean, that's why time management is helpful because then if you can manage your time well then you can feel less of the burn because you're not in that fight or flight mode all the time. You can really streamline things and be intentional about your time so that you can leave on time.

I, as a rule, don't bring charting home with me. I haven't for a really long time. I did when my kids were really tiny, but that was just kind of like a manifestation of the chapter of my life I was in. But I really don't. Actually I had to do it the other day and I totally forgot how to do it because I just don't do it. If I have one chart left at the end of the day that I have to do the next day, that's okay. We have 48 hours to get our charts done.

When I'm seeing a patient, I don't kind of stay on the computer and head down typing while they're talking to me. But I typically do while looking at them, which takes practice, typing just notes to myself in the chart so that when I go back, if I don't get to it right away, I'm not going to forget what they said or what we did. Or any key abnormalities on their exam, I'll just quickly throw it in after the visit.

But using templates, if you have them, in your charting system. We use Epic, there's a ton of great hacks for Epic, whether it be templates or dot phrases or things like that. I use a ton of those for the things that I just say all the time. If you find yourself saying like the same thing over and over again, that's a good thing to make up a shortcut for.

And then Dragon, if you can use Dragon, Dragon can be really great. Once you train your dragon, so to speak, it knows your voice and you can just speak into it and it's a lot faster unless you're like a crazy fast typer. But I find it really helpful.

Sarah: Yeah, I'm all about typing in the room. People get so strung out about that, they're like, "What will the patients think?" And I know me, personally as a patient, I don't think twice when somebody does that. I'm just like, they've got to get their stuff done too. They've got to see me, but they also have to get their portion done.

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Diana: Yeah, and again, it's like that balance, right? You're not going to not engage with the patient. You still have that rapport, you still are present for them, but you can do both.

It's funny, my husband's PCP actually does it in, I think, a very inappropriate not cool way. Which is to dictate into his headset while–

Sarah: Yeah, no thanks. That's a different feel.

Diana: I was like, "That is bizarre." So don't do that.

Sarah: You can take some light notes, it'll be fine.

Diana: Yeah, exactly. But I think definitely there are those hacks to charting that can make it a little less overwhelming. And, again, that concept of done is better than perfect. And really just being intentional about what you're putting into your notes. And if you aren't sure if you're a note bloat person, or if your notes are appropriate or whatever, just ask for feedback.

I've done that a million times with the attendings that I work with. I'm like, "Hey, can you just like take a look at my notes for a week or something and just see if there's any ways I could streamline this or blah, blah, blah?" Just ask for feedback, that's always totally appropriate.

Sarah: Almost like a mini audit.

Diana: Yeah. Yeah, it can be really actually really helpful.

Sarah: Yeah, because you never know what somebody else might be doing that's saving them 10 minutes of time. But 10 minutes of time adds up again and again and again.

Diana: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Sarah: So something that I think, especially because this podcast we talk to a lot of new nurse practitioners and we talk to a lot of students too, so something I think kind of plays a factor in time management is really just kind of figuring out your groove in practice.

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So what do you feel like was either your biggest hurdle or obstacle for figuring out your groove? Like figuring out the routine of your day.

Diana: Like as a student?

Sarah: As a student or when you were a new nurse practitioner, either or.

Diana: I mean, I feel like as a student I struggled with the concept of studying. I feel like I was kind of in overachiever mode.

Sarah: Always.

Diana: Where it was like really not setting limits on things and then subsequently getting really burned out in the process because I was just like, "Oh, I have to study all the time and I have to do X, Y, and Z and go to the library and cram for like a jillion hours and feel horrible."

Sarah: Yeah, nobody misses that.

Diana: No, but I think now there's techniques that I probably would have benefited from. Things like the Pomodoro method which is just basically taking your task and breaking it down into smaller chunks and ensuring that you're taking a break.

So I think that technically the Pomodoro Technique is like 25 minutes and then you take like a five minute break, 25 minutes, take a five minute break. And you do that four times and then you take a longer break.

I think for me I would have benefited from like a 45 minute chunk, you know, I think like a decent sized chunk and then a little break and then doing that technique would have been really helpful. And that's kind of what I do now.

I set timers and things like that now if I have bigger projects, like just breaking it down into smaller chunks. Because then you just feel like you could focus and you get actually more done, I think, if you just set a timer for an hour. Because you're going to get it done in the time that you allot yourself if you break it down into smaller chunks.

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Sarah: Yeah, I actually do that on this end with writing podcast episodes. When I do solo episodes by myself, I'll look at the clock and be like, "Okay, I'm going to give myself one hour to do this." Because otherwise, if I didn't set that time and have that intention behind it, it would be two or three hours, which I have done before. And I definitely don't want to spend two or three hours to write just a quick 15 minute episode. So just the intention piece is huge.

Diana: Yeah, and because I think too, as nurses and nurse practitioners, we have like a tendency to be the overachiever and the perfectionist and like the doer. And so I think setting those limits for ourselves is actually really healthy, because it forces us not to go down that perfectionism road.

That road can become kind of toxic after a while, where it just puts unrealistic expectations on yourself. Which can just make you feel like– It just ends up affecting your confidence and your self-worth and things like that. So I think setting those limits is actually super healthy.

Sarah: Yeah, I think for new nurse practitioners, or even on the student end of things, people come into clinicals, or their first job and they just have super high expectations of themselves. And they forget that they're a novice provider, they're still going to be learning for a long time. Even once you have experience, you're still learning every day.

So I think part of it is just the mental shift too. Like I'm not expected to know everything, I'm doing the best I can with the information I have. But with this personality type of most nurse practitioners being kind of like type A, perfectionists, wanting to get it all done and do it perfectly, it can be really tough.

Diana: Yeah, and that imposter syndrome, man, when you're a new NP that is no joke. I mean, I definitely remember feeling that. And the issue is when we feel that way, we tend to then overcompensate by being the yes person and not having boundaries and not saying no and just kind of do, do, do, do, do. Because you want to get that validation from others that you're doing a good job.

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But realistically I think it's much more healthy to really look within and celebrate those wins. Celebrate like, "Wow, I learned this new skill and I did a really great job." Or "Hey, I did my first consult and I really kicked butt and the attending said that I did a good job." Whatever it is, celebrating it yourself versus like looking for that validation and not letting imposter syndrome kind of take hold.

Sarah: Well I think the validation piece is hard too, not to get on a tangent. But when you're working as a nurse, you're usually working with a whole unit of nurses. And there's a lot of teamwork and collaboration and working together on patients.

And in the nurse practitioner world that just doesn't happen as much and so you don't get that same feedback all the time. And then all of a sudden, your brain is trying to trick you like, "Oh, something's going wrong because I'm not getting the feedback anymore." There's not enough of that feedback available in that new setting.

Diana: No, agree. Agree. And I think a lot of times it leads to just feeling underappreciated in general. But yeah, there's ways to get around that. Again, asking for feedback from your colleagues is really helpful because then they will be like, "Wow, you did a really great job." Or "Hey, this could be tweaked." Someone you trust, obviously, not somebody toxic.

And celebrating yourself. We feel weird when we celebrate ourselves, we feel like we can't receive that but it's actually really healthy. And we think it's like this arrogant like, "Oh, I'm such a –" You know, whatever.

Sarah: That's a shift all its own.

Diana: Yeah, it just really helps to boost your confidence when you celebrate your wins. Really, it's a game changer.

Sarah: And confidence is a skill too. That's what people ask me, all the time when they're asking me about imposter syndrome. I'm like, "It comes with time, and confidence will come with time as well."

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As you build up your experience, and you build up your knowledge base, and you talk to more patients, and you kind of really figure out that groove we were talking about, it'll all come together. You just have to stick this initial hard piece out.

Diana: Yeah, and you have to put yourself out there. But yeah, it's like a muscle, you got to flex it and then it'll build and build. Yeah, it definitely takes time. But yeah, I agree with you that nobody expects people to know everything on day one. And I'm 12 years in at this point, and I still learn every day.

Some days are obviously easier than others, but that's kind of one of the amazing things about being an NP or a nurse. I feel like we're so lucky that we're in a field where we're never bored. At least I'm never bored. I mean, I work in neuro but there's always things to learn, there's always things you're like, "Oh my gosh, I didn't do that." Or talking to other people about beds that they use, whatever it is, you're like, "Oh wow, this is cool. I like this, I'll try it."

Sarah: Yeah, and things change all the time. That's why I try to remind my students over and over and over because they'll be like, "This guideline says this, and this one says this. And this is in this book." And I'm like, "Things change all the time." Because the more that we learn, the better that we can do for our patients. When you know better, you can do better. And so it's not always going to be just a black and white answer every time too.

And I think that's really the biggest hurdle as a new nurse practitioner, is trying to figure out what exactly you want to follow and how you can kind of fall in between those lines too.

Diana: Yeah. But yes, the knowledge changes, but things like these time management hacks and ways to boost your confidence, those are like just evergreen, always the same, and you can always just kind of implement those to help you on that journey.

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And so when things do change and you're like, "Oh my gosh, this is crazy and overwhelming," you have these tools in your toolbox so that you can navigate them and feel like, "Okay, I got this. I'm good. Like we got this."

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. And everyone out there listening, Diana is being super gracious and super nice and she's going to give you guys a link to her habits and productivity workbook. So can you tell them a little bit more about that and what's included?

Diana: Yeah, so it's basically a workbook that talks about habit forming. So one of my favorite books actually, I'm like such a nerd, I swear to God. But one of my favorite books about habits is Atomic Habits. I don't know if you've read that one. It's so good.

So if anyone hasn't read that, if you're interested in the science behind habits and really, really good hacks, that's a great book. It's kind of using some of those techniques, but the workbook has just kind of like tips for habit forming, the science behind it, mindset stuff. And then we talk about procrastination. There's a lot of prompts in there to help kind of guide you through a lot of the things we just talked about.

And then we talked about procrastivity, which we did talk about today on the podcast, but that is something that I think a lot of people struggle with. Yeah, it's a great little workbook. So if you guys want it, it's totally free for you. It's something that I've used with my mentees, and it really shouldn't take up a ton of your time. So you can check it out.

Sarah: Do you mind to give them a brief snippet into– How'd you pronounce it, procrastivity?

Diana: Yeah, procrastivity. So procrastivity is the concept of doing a task that is an important task, but it's doing it so that you avoid another more important task. So you have, let's say, a paper to write. And you're like, "I'm just going to go fold that laundry that's been sitting there for a while. I'm just going to go wash those dishes and mow the lawn, and then I'll get to that paper."

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Those are tasks that need to get done, but are they more important than the paper that's due tomorrow? Probably not. So that's procrastivity. So in the workbook we talk a little bit about that and kind of how to navigate that. And some mindset too.

Sarah: It's easy to fall in that loop. It's really easy to fall into procrastivity.

Diana: So easy, yes.

Sarah: What a word, I love it.

Diana: Yeah, I love it.

Sarah: Well thank you so much, Diana, for coming on the show. Do you want to tell them your Instagram handle or how they can find you?

Diana: Sure.

Sarah: I know you've been on before, but just in case.

Diana: Sure. So I'm on Instagram, @catalystforselfcare. I'm there all the time so my DMs are always open. There's tons of stuff on there just about what we talked about, boundaries, toxic work environments, you name it. Anything nurse, wellbeing, nurse practitioner. Wellbeing is my jam, so you can find me there. That's predominantly where I hang out.

My website is in construction. I had to revamp it so it's not really up right now. So it will be eventually.

Sarah: That's okay, I know that life well.

Diana: Yeah, it's catalystforselfcare.com, but when you go there it's kind of hot mess.

Sarah: Well, thank you so much. I so appreciate you today.

Diana: Oh my gosh, I appreciate you so much. This was fun, as always.

Sarah: All right, I'll talk to you guys next week.

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Thanks for listening to Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner. If you want more information about the different types of support we offer to students and new NPs, visit stressfreenp.com. See you next week.