

HOUSE RULES

Episode 25: Three Mantras for Your Home and Life

I'm Myquillyn Smith and this is House Rules.
Welcome to Episode 25.

A few years ago, I was in a mastermind with a trusted group of women. We gathered in person every February and shared our goals, questions and what was and wasn't working in our life and work and asked each other for advice and opinions.

One February, I was really struggling with where to focus my effort, time and energy in my work. For years I had a dream of a big project. That project was fixing up a house – separate from where I lived – with my family and I wanted to use it as a business. I wanted it to be a hosting and gathering space for small groups. I knew the exact neighborhood where I wanted this house, it was near my favorite shopping place on earth, you've heard me talk about it before, The Depot at Gibson Mill. And I had saved the down payment for the house. IT WAS MY DREAM. And I was so close.

But – I kept not doing it. Chad and I even toured a house or two but something was holding me back and I couldn't put my finger on it and figure out why I was hesitating. It was really frustrating. Until it instantly wasn't.

By the end of today's episode you'll have three simple mantras that can guide you through simple or big decisions if you're stuck or frustrated like I was.

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I've been online sharing my home for seventeen years. For fifteen years, this has been a business and for about thirteen years of that, it's been our family's main source of income.

In 2018, I was full of ideas and all kinds of different directions. I found myself working on one project, planning and dreaming, then the next day I'd be excited about a new idea. There were so many options, and every option had sub options that were good and bad and I was getting overwhelmed. Have you ever felt like you just wanted someone to tell you what to focus on and what not to worry about? That was exactly how I felt.

One day, in an effort to keep myself on track and get some direction, I wrote three mottos out on a note card and taped them to the wall above my desk. I know I'm not the first person to say these types of words and they aren't anything scientifically proven to magically give you clarity, but they helped me.

The three phrases that I wrote down were:

Do what you know.

Use what you have.

Finish what you started.

So in my work, as I considered what to do next, these three mantras guided me.

It's almost embarrassing to admit that letting these three mantras guide me was revolutionary. I had clarity and focus and y'all, I finished things. I was getting things done!

When it came time for our yearly mastermind meeting, I was excited to share how my three mantras created clarity and gave me a path for making decisions in my work and I did that the very first day that we met.

On day two of our mastermind, we shared something we were struggling with. So when it was my turn, I shared how I was having trouble moving forward with my dream project – what I shared with you at the beginning of this podcast. I was so baffled because I was making progress in other work goals and I had the money saved to get us started and I assumed that would be pretty much the biggest hurdle. Maybe my friends could help me figure out what was holding me back.

It turns out, my friends are geniuses.

They simply started asking me great questions and let me listen to my own answers. I wish I could reenact the entire conversation, but all I know is that, in less than 20 minutes, it became apparent that although my business dream was to have a beautiful hosting house, my personal dream was to have a beautiful house of my own that I lived in. And I wasn't doing that.

I was shocked, too. So this was February of 2019 and by this point, I had written two decorating books and was in the middle of a third book. We moved into a fixer upper seven years earlier and we had fixed her up – mostly. We de-popcorned ceilings, changed out millwork, took down walls, and redid the kitchen. We even removed an old inground pool and Chad built us a

gorgeous huge new pool in our backyard. We had a beautiful hot tub and outdoor patio and fireplace. We made progress.

There were areas that were beautiful, but there were many, many things left to go and the house lacked that enchanting, charming, soulful beauty that I was longing for. We had done so much work, but I think over the years we lost our vision and were overwhelmed and I felt like we had a twelve acre long to-do list. Because the property was on twelve acres, and everything needed attention.

I can remember telling the group about how every time I drove up on the property, I instantly felt sad, a little bit depressed and overwhelmed. The driveway, when you pulled up on the property, where it was located, instead of looking at something pretty, you faced what I was calling “car butts”. We had three high school/college aged boys at the time and we had lots of drivers and lots of cars and when you pulled into our house you didn’t see a pretty front door, or a bed of flowers, or even the outdoor fireplace that we did and the pool. No, no. You saw the backs of five random cars, you saw my husband’s mini excavator that he had for our property, and a run down carport that we hadn’t touched yet. We were busy doing the house.

The truth is, I was LONGING for beauty. And I had a beauty deficit. I was so focused on having a successful business that helped provide for our family, that I had stopped making progress in our own house. This is crazy and ironic because my job was actually all about decorating and home.

So my brilliant friends asked me what it would look like if, when it came to my house, I followed my three mantras?

Do what you know.
Use what you have.
Finish what you started.

It was a defining moment.

YES. This was exactly what I needed to do. DUH. I didn’t need to invest money into another project – I hadn’t finished the first project. I wasn’t finishing what I started. I called Chad that afternoon and told him I was changing directions. No more hosting house. We were going to finish the house we had.

Here’s what it looked like for me to apply the three mantras to my house:

DO WHAT YOU KNOW

Ok, so I had to ask myself, “What did I know?” Y’all I’m embarrassed to tell you where we had stopped in our own house. If you’ve ever lived in a fixer upper that needed lots of work, you will probably relate to this. After five years of work and literally investing more

than six figures into the property and making a zillion decisions, you just get tired. I saw the progress, but also it began to feel like a money pit.

The truth is, we had stopped short. The first floor was complete, and I liked it, but I had not put any effort into the second floor. And that's where there were two bedrooms and a bathroom.

We had no heating or air-conditioning upstairs and had been using window units and space heaters up there since we moved in. I told you before that when we moved in, we had pulled up the stained carpet and painted the subfloor as a temporary fix. But it had been five years and I hadn't touched it since. I might not have had a big design plan, but I knew I had to begin with the basics. I knew a house had to have heat and air and actual floors. We got a new HVAC unit and decided to install real flooring.

To make the house cohesive and make my decisions easier, I again decided to do what I knew by piggybacking off decisions I was already happy with on the first floor. I repeated materials I loved as we updated the flooring, I put in pine flooring upstairs. We did the ceiling the same way we did downstairs, we put in trim, and I even used the same paint colors. Because I chose to move forward by starting with doing what I actually knew to do, we made progress and I felt confident in my decisions. Instead of those decisions exhausting me, they energized me. I earned some momentum to keep going.

USE WHAT YOU HAVE

What did I have? Well, for the first time in my life, I had a little savings account full of cash! Y'all looking back I feel so stupid – why didn't I just finish my house? I don't know why I didn't give myself permission to do that. But I know what I was trying to do was ultimately what was best for our family and investing in something for the business seemed smarter. But no more. I knew that money needed to be used to finish our actual home.

FINISH WHAT YOU STARTED

This was my ultimate goal. We had started this fixer upper, and I wanted to finish it. I am a chronic non-finisher, especially when it comes to personal projects and decor.

Because this third mantra had served me so well in my work, I finally believed it was worth implementing in my home. We finished what we started. The upstairs looked amazing with the pine floors, and a new bathroom. We focused our efforts on the basement next and added new flooring, walls, ceiling and we even put a bathroom there. We hired a landscaper and we put him on landscaping around the barn and the driveway. That way when you pulled up, it was perfectly beautifully planned. We saw

flowers blooming every month of the year! He made the driveway and barn area beautiful. Chad knocked down the eyesore part of the carport, painted what was left and we planted some vines around it. And he also got rid of some random other buildings that were just kind of falling apart on the property. And I focused my effort right at the house and created an enchanting, kind of maximalist, English garden style beds at the front and back entrances of the house. We also ended up making a parking area, had the driveway paved and suddenly, when I pulled up to our house, I didn't see car butts.

They were still there, but there was so much beauty that you no longer noticed them.

I know what it feels like to face a literal houseful of decisions and suddenly feel tired, overwhelmed, and like you need to eat a donut. I have a long history of making things more difficult than they need to be and assuming I need to know everything before I can even begin to make a difference.

But the truth is, decorating starts in your head, not the furniture store. Not with making a lot of exhausting decisions.

Your thinking, your goals, and your priorities need to be right before you start picking out paint colors or buying a sofa. That's the first step to any project — simply start with what you need to know. Sometimes you already know a lot, sometimes you have to do a bit of research, and sometimes you simply need to refresh your memory.

Over my 15 years of moving, I've learned a lot about making decisions and I wrote it all down in the House Rules book. And, I'm happy to tell you that it's organized in three sections:

Part 1: Do what you know. And it's house rules that are all about how to begin

Part 2: Use what you have. And this is the part all about how to keep going.

Part 3: Finish what you started. How to follow through.

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This is the last episode I'm recording before the new House Rules book is available everywhere books are sold. If you are listening to this before April 23, 2024 you can preorder and claim your thank you gifts, the new masterclass AND the audiobook free.

If you are listening after the release date, we still have one thank you gift for you. When you receive your copy of the book, turn to the back and scan the QR code and follow the directions.