



All Ears English Episode 179:

Thomas Frank on Momentum, Missions and Motivation

Gabby: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 179: “Thomas Frank on Momentum, Missions and Motivation.”

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Welcome to the All Ears English Podcast, where you’ll finally get real, native English conversation with your hosts, Lindsay McMahon, the ‘English Adventurer’ and Gabby Wallace, the ‘Language Angel’, from Boston, USA.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: In this episode, Thomas Frank will give you an equation for success in life and English.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Guys, raise your hand if you are listening to this on a mobile device.

Gabby: Ooh, me.

Lindsay: Oh, you are too? Me too.

Gabby: I, I always listen to podcasts on my smartphone.



Lindsay: Absolutely. That's why we want to build a smartphone app.

Gabby: Ooh, that would be so cool. We could offer even more than the audio episode. We could offer transcripts, we could offer other learning materials, and fun, supplementary materials...

Lindsay: What a good idea.

Gabby: ...with the app.

Lindsay: But it's not free to make an app.

Gabby: It's not?

Lindsay: And it's not cheap, either.

Gabby: Oh, man. How are we gonna (going to) do that?

Lindsay: I don't know.

Gabby: Oh, my gosh! I know. We can, we can make this part of our Kickstarter campaign.

Lindsay: Awesome idea.

Gabby: So when you guys donate to our Kickstarter campaign at AllEarsEnglish.com/Kickstarter, you'll not only get a prize according to the level of your funding, but you'll also be helping us to create an app that will make your All Ears English experience even more awesome.

Lindsay: Yeah, we wanna (want to) see you guys over there at AllEarsEnglish.com/Kickstarter.

Gabby: Get over there before October 1, 2014. That's the deadline.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Hey, Lindsay.

Lindsay: Hey, Gabby.

Gabby: What's up?



Lindsay: Not much, and you?

Gabby: Well, I'm great. We have an amazing guest today, Thomas Frank, from CollegeInfoGeek.com. How are you Tom?

Thomas: Doing great. How you guys doing?

Lindsay: Good.

Gabby: Great.

Lindsay: Thanks for coming today.

Gabby: Yeah, so happy to have you today.

J: No problem. Thanks for having me on the show.

Gabby: Yeah, I think our listeners are gonna (going to) be really interested in what you do because you are – you're an expert in productivity and I think we all wanna (want to) be more productive, right.

Lindsay: Yes.

Gabby: Oh, yes. I do.

Lindsay: I wanna (want to) learn from you today Tom.

Gabby: Yeah, yeah. (I mean), we have so many things we wanna (want to) get done, we wanna (want to), (like), learn new languages, we wanna (want to) be successful in our careers, and have great social lives and oh my gosh, how do you fit it all into the day.

Lindsay: I'm getting stressed out just talking about it.

Gabby: So, yeah, (I mean), we would really appreciate if you could share your top three tips for productivity with us and with our listeners. Does that sound good?

Thomas: Yeah, definitely.

Gabby: Great.



Thomas: So, productivity is this huge topic and there's all sorts of things you can do. So I kinda (kind of) just picked three that really stood out to me from, (uh), an outline I've been (creat-) converting.

Gabby: Great.

Thomas: And so the first tip is, (uh), try to induce momentum in your workflow.

Both: (Um).

Thomas: And, what that means is – it-it's actually really hard to start something that's very big, that's very daunting.

Gabby: (Mm-hm).

Thomas: And what I've found is if you can get yourself to do some smaller things, you get those done, and that's great, that's fine, but it also (kind of) gives you momentum to (sort of), (like) push yourself into bigger work. So the way I apply this, is every morning I have (like) a morning ritual that I do. I wake up at 6 am. (Uh), I have a really, really, really good way for forcing myself to wake up, which I could tell you about if you care.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: I wanna (want to) know.

Gabby: I need that.

Thomas: Okay, yeah. I guess I can explain that really quick. So, (um), there's a tool called Buffer, and it's like a social media scheduling tool.

Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

Thomas: (Uh), so I have it hooked to my Twitter and then every morning there's a tweet that's scheduled for 6:10 am in my Buffer, and if it goes out, it says, "I'm still in bed, I'm lazy. Reply to this and I'll send you five dollars."

Lindsay: Oh, my god.

Gabby: That is really...



Lindsay: That's accountability.

Thomas: Yep. And, (I mean), (like), I have a good amount of followers at this point, so if it goes out, there's going to be a lot of people asking me for money. And I don't want to pay them money, so I have to wake up and reschedule the tweet for the next day.

Gabby: Oh, my gosh, that's the power of...

Lindsay: Wow.

Gabby: ...negative – what is it, (like), negative reinforcement or something.

Thomas: Yeah, it's like [crosstalk].

Lindsay: Fear.

Gabby: Fear, yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah, I like that idea.

Thomas: So I-I, for that reason, I don't keep the app for my, from my phone so I have to go to my room, turn on my computer, log in, then that process helps make me to go to bed. So that gets me up.

Gabby: Wow.

Thomas: Then I make sure to have (like) a ritual in the morning, (like) things I need to do and just (like) simple things, like brush my teeth, take vitamins, go for a walk, listen to a podcast, and read for a while. And I check 'em (them) all off in this thing called HabitRPG, which is (sort of) like Lift, but a little geekier. And I can just see like, "Oh, cool. I've gotten five or six productive things done," and it's like 6:30 in the morning.

Gabby: Cool.

Thomas: And that just (kind of) gives me the momentum to keep going and working on bigger things later.

Gabby: Say the site again. It's Habit?



Thomas: HabitRPG.

Gabby: RPG, okay.

Thomas: Dot com (.com).

Gabby: That sounds like a good tool.

Thomas: It's like a – I don't know if anyone in the audience plays (like) Final Fantasy or like Pokémon or any RPG video games. You (kind of) get a character and every time you do a habit, or you do a to-do list item, (um), you get (like) experience points, which is really cool.

Gabby: (Hm).

Lindsay: Yeah.

Thomas: What I like about it is you can team up with other players. And, so (like) my roommate has an account and I have an account and we're on a team and at certain points we'll like go on **[indiscernible 05:36]** together and if I don't do my daily habits, it will hurt him too.

Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

Gabby: {Gasps}

Lindsay: (Mm).

Gabby: That's brilliant.

Thomas: So there's more negative reinforcement, I have to do. So say I (like), I had a goal to maybe practice ten kanji a day...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Thomas: ...(um) for learning Japanese. If I didn't do it, he's gonna (going to) come knocking on my door and be like, "Why'd you make me lose a level and lose my gear?"



Lindsay: Oh, so your levels go down. Interesting. So that's something that our learners, (you know), listeners can learn about learning English, right, to really team up and try to motivate yourself based on that team.

Gabby: Yeah, and it's making it like a game. I love it.

Thomas: It is, it's gamification, which I love and also, (uh), HabitRPG has lots of, (um) – what are they called? Guilds, I think and they're just communities of people and there are language learning communities there. English-learning is a community I've seen on there. So there are people who are trying to hack their productivity and also learn English and there's a good community of people there for anyone who wants to join up. And I'm sure there might be, (like), (uh), collaborative learning opportunities there too.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: What a cool tool.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: I'm-I'm glad we went off on this tangent because that's such a great tool.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: So how did HabitRPG, Lift, Buffer, (you know), take advantage of these sites to...

Lindsay: Absolutely.

Gabby: ...(kind of) hack your productivity. So...

Lindsay: Just one quick question.

Gabby: Oh, yeah.

Lindsay: What does it mean to hack?

Gabby: Oh.



Lindsay: Because I have a feeling a lot of our listeners aren't – I think we should just break that down for a second 'cause (because) we're gonna (going to) be using that today.

Gabby: Yeah. Well, I used the word, so I'll try to answer to that and if you guys want to add something, feel free. I think it just means, (um), (you know), doing something more (productiv-), (uh), more productively.

Lindsay: (Hm).

Gabby: (Um), more, I guess, smarter, faster, cheaper, (uh), better.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: Yeah?

Lindsay: I think so. Yeah. It's just good...

Thomas: That's, that's exactly right. I – it's small innovation. (You know), it's finding better ways to do things.

Lindsay: Yeah, cool.

Gabby: Great. (Um), so – okay, I didn't mean to get way off track. You were telling us that you wake up at 6 am and then...

Thomas: Yeah, and that's what works for me. You don't have to wake up super early, but I find that if I don't, that it's bad.

Gabby: And you have your ritual, and so you start small and then you get into bigger things later in the day?

Thomas: Yep.

Gabby: That's how you (kind of) induce momentum?

Thomas: Yeah, that's, that's what works for me.

Gabby: Great.

Lindsay: Oh.



Gabby: Yeah, I know, I think that makes a lot of sense.

Thomas: So, the (uh), the, the second tip, I guess I could give...

Gabby: Yeah.

Thomas: ...is to do mini-missions.

Gabby: Ooh, okay.

Thomas: Or to just use (like) the mission basis for learning something. And this has gone over in Benny Lewis' new book, *Fluent in 3 Months*.

Both: (Uh-hm).

Thomas: It talks about doing mini-missions when you're doing a language-learning mission. So say you're learning Japanese and you notice that your lack of grammar skills is (sort of) holding you back in, (you know), your overall study. Well, you've got your, (you know), your dailies. Maybe I'm going to practice certain kanji daily. Maybe I'm going to have a Skype conversation with somebody every day.

Gabby: Yeah.

Thomas: But if you're like, 'Okay, my grammar's bad. I'm gonna (going to) go on a mini-mission where I'm gonna (going to) focus on a huge amount of time to set a goal with grammar and get to that goal in a very short amount of time.'

Gabby: Great.

Thomas: (Um), blocking off long periods of focused-time for work...

Gabby: (Um).

Thomas: ...translates to incredible, (uh), results.

Lindsay: Oh, I like that.

Thomas: So, instead of trying to do a lot of things at once, focusing on one thing and doing (like) a mini-mission can really help language learning or with



just, (like), anything else. For me it's writing. I have to sit down, (like), give myself three or four hours to write, or really get peace.

Lindsay: Oh, I like that, but they're really a refreshing way to approach it I think.

Gabby: Absolutely.

Lindsay: A very intensive period of focusing. (Um).

Gabby: Yeah, because sometimes, (you know), we tell our learners just take 15 minutes a day to, to keep studying English and do a little bit every day, but I think that every once in a while, you really need to do this thing you're calling a mini-mission...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: ...and block off a more focused time where you can just focus on what you want to learn. I, I think that's great, and, and (I mean), you said a long period of time, but it sounds like it doesn't have to be 72 hours, it could be three or four hours, right?

Thomas: Oh, yeah. Definitely. Just, (uh), figure out and, and to a goal that you want and then however long it takes you, (like) challenge yourself to reach that end, and make it manageable. (You know), it could be done in a day, it could be done in a week, but then you could find your mini-mission as I'm gonna (going to) learn this and I really want to achieve it in this amount of time.

Gabby: Okay, and so it's about the goal and not...

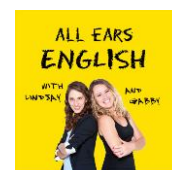
Thomas: I think so.

Gabby: Yeah, (I mean), you give yourself a deadline, but it's not, it's not only like, "I'll study English for two hours," (like), that's not the goal in and of itself.

Lindsay: Right, the doing.

Thomas: Yeah.

Lindsay: Again, it's...



Thomas: And I think that, that wouldn't be a very good goal because studying English isn't very specific.

Both: Right.

Thomas: So there, (you know), you can, you can break studying English down to many different components.

Gabby: Oh, yeah.

Thomas: So you could say, 'Okay, I'm going to learn, (uh), past tense grammar,' ...

Gabby: Yeah.

Thomas: ...or something.

Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

Thomas: Or, 'I'm gonna (going to) go have a conversation and talk about x, y, or z.'

Gabby: Yeah, so if past tense grammar takes you two hours, or four hours, or eight hours, it's not really about the time right, it's about the goal.

Thomas: Right.

Gabby: Cool, cool.

Lindsay: I like that. That's so refreshing 'cause (because) we're so scattered these days with all the resources online, and we wanna (want to) just – in a superficial manner bounce from thing to thing, but...

Thomas: Yep.

Lindsay: ...I love the idea of going deep into something. It's so – I don't know. It's such a relief.

Gabby: Right. Right. That's great.

Thomas: Me too, yeah.

Gabby: How 'bout (about) one more tip?



Thomas: Yeah, so, (uh), the last tip that I have is, (um), figuring out and increasing your motivation using something called the procrastination equation.

Both: Oh.

Thomas: So, we're gonna (going to) get a little mathematical here.

Gabby: Okay.

Lindsay: Okay.

Gabby: Take it easy on us.

Lindsay: We're English teachers don't ya' (you) know.

Thomas: It's totally okay. This is a very easy equation.

Gabby: Great.

Thomas: And there's actually no numbers in it.

Gabby: Oh.

Thomas: But – so your motivation is equal to – and then there's – so you have your expectancy times your value and that group is divided by the impulsiveness times the delay. So I'll quickly define those four things. So, the expectancy is your perceived odds of being able to achieve your goal. So, (like), say that, (uh), you want to be the first person to create nuclear fission or something crazy like that. If you're a particle physicist, then you are more likely to achieve that goal than if you're Tony Hawk.

Gabby: Okay, yeah. Totally.

Thomas: Or if you're Michael Jordan, (you know).

Gabby: Yeah.

Thomas: So find ways to break your goals down into, (uh), manageable goals that you expect to be able to achieve and your motivation increases.

Gabby: Okay.



Thomas: And then then the value is the, the value that achieving the goal is going to bring to your life.

Gabby: Okay.

Thomas: So if I go wash the dishes, that doesn't bring a whole lot of value to my life.

Gabby: (Um).

Thomas: (I mean), expectancy's pretty high for that 'cause (because) it's very easy, but something, (you know), bigger like, (um), graduating from college or having a fluent conversation in – with somebody in English...

Gabby: Yeah.

Thomas: ...if you're an English learner. That adds a very high value to your life. So that increases your motivation.

Gabby: Okay. Great.

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Thomas: So the impulsiveness is how likely you are to get sidetracked.

Lindsay: (Mm).

Thomas: And this is actually the – probably the easiest aspect of the equation for you to control because you can modify your environment. You can close tabs, you can get apps to make yourself, (uh), (like) not get distracted on the computer. You can find a place to work where you won't get distracted in real life. All these things are variables that you can easily control. And the lower your impulsiveness is, the higher your motivation is.

Gabby: Yeah, it's about will and determination, and (uh)...

Thomas: Yeah.

Gabby: ...staying focused, yeah.

Lindsay: So important.



Thomas: (Uh-hm), and then the, the last part is, unfortunately, the part that you can't really control a whole lot, which is the delay, the time it'll take to achieve the goal.

Gabby: Okay.

Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

Thomas: So if you set a goal, (I mean), you have to do the work. Often there is things out of your control, so, (I mean), if you want to graduate from college, (like), if you're a freshmen, four years from now is when you graduate, you have a little bit of control over that, you could try to graduate early, but it's still gonna (going to) take quite a while. So I think the first three are the areas that most people should focus on, especially impulsiveness because we are often pretty bad at the impulsiveness area with getting distracted and things like that.

Gabby: Absolutely. So the, so the better – the better the expectancy, the better the value, and then the – the less chance of impulsiveness and the shorter time period, that (kind of) equals more motivation?

Thomas: Right.

Gabby: Okay.

Lindsay: (Mm).

Gabby: Wow, I feel good at math all of a sudden.

Lindsay: Do a math review here.

Gabby: Yeah. I think that makes a lot of sense, and so as we're planning our to-do list or our goals, or what we're going to tackle for the day or the week or whatever, this is a great equation to keep in mind, that, the procrastination equation. Maybe, (I mean), for me it would useful in figuring out what I should prioritize because I have a list of 100 things that I want to do, but which one is going to be most, (uh), realistic, or what's gonna (going to) bring the most value to life.



Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

Thomas: Yeah.

Lindsay: And this would be a good way to – that our learners could use to actually choose what they want to do in terms of their methods when they're learning English.

Gabby: Yeah.

Thomas: Exactly.

Lindsay: That's how you use this equation.

Thomas: Yeah, (I-I mean), I want to learn Japanese. That's a really big topic, (you know). And you have to ask yourself, 'What do I actually want to do with Japanese. Do I want to be able to read Harry Potter in Japanese? Do I want to have a conversation with somebody who's a friend in Japan?'

Gabby: Right.

Thomas: (You know), those are very different skills...

Gabby: Right.

Thomas: ...and eventually I'd like to be able to do both, but I need to prioritize and that will set my learning course.

Gabby: I love that.

Lindsay: (Um).

Gabby: I think that's a really good point. (Um), I think a lot of language learners, including myself, we get really fixated on passing a test because it's all about that achievement. (Like), I can say I have this certificate...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Gabby: ...and I passed the test, but what does that mean. What's the value? (I mean), what I really want is to be able to have a conversation with someone.



Lindsay: Right.

Thomas: Right.

Thomas: To connect with people.

Lindsay: So all about people.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Thomas: (Uh-huh).

Gabby: Awesome. I love these tips, so I'm gonna (going to) just summarize them real quick. (Um), the first one was induce momentum, so start small. (You know), you don't have to tackle the world in one day, right.

Thomas: Right.

Gabby: (Um), and I think in that you were talking about having a ritual where you start your day with certain habits and that can get you started on that momentum towards bigger things. (Um), mini-missions for learning. So, (kind of) give yourself assignments, almost, based on what you feel you need to do and, and focus for, (you know), maybe an extended period of time. And then think about that, (uh), way to increase your motivation with the procrastination equation...

Lindsay: Ooh.

Gabby: ...that you gave us.

Lindsay: We're gonna (going to) have to put that equation up on our website, I liked it.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: Of course with a, with a link to your, (uh), to your blog, obviously.

Gabby: Yeah.



Lindsay: I like it.

Gabby: Super helpful tips. Very, very practical. (Um), I know you have a lot of great information on your website as well, and (um), I-I'd like to ask you to share your website with our listeners. Could you tell them the, the address and maybe what they could find there?

Thomas: Yeah, so the, (uh), the web address is CollegeInfoGeek.com.

Both: (Uh-h uh).

Thomas: And that's my website for helping college students be awesome at college. (Um), but, I-I kind of break it down into three main focuses. So one focus is helping them get a job in, in the Press Recruiters. Another one is staying out of debt, learning to be financially independent at personal finance areas. But the third is probably the area that your listeners are probably gonna (going to) be most interested in, (uh), which is learning faster and working more efficiently.

Gabby: Great.

Thomas: So I'm all about productivity, I'm all about learning hacks and that's the third main focus. So if you go to the blog section of the site, you'll see a sub-menu and one of the main areas is 'Learn faster and work better'. So there's a whole, (like) hub page there that links to other best productivity and learning related articles on the site. So I guess that's a pretty good place to start if you're looking to become more productive or anything like that.

Gabby: Yeah, well, I think e-everyone's interested in career, and money, as well, and we probably have a lot of college students listening, but also if you're finished with college, you're not in college, I think your website is still really valuable for life-long learning...

Lindsay: For sure.

Gabby: ...and tips for being a better learner and more productive. So, (you know), I hope, maybe in the future, we could have you back on to talk about, (you



know), managing your career, or managing your money because those are topics that everyone loves.

Lindsay: Huge. Huge.

Thomas: Yeah, certainly.

Gabby: Cool. All right, well thanks so much for joining us Thomas. It's been great talking with you.

Lindsay: Thanks a lot Tom.

Thomas: Yeah, great to meet you both.

Gabby: All right. Bye for now.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: If you wanna (want to) put your ears into English more often, be sure to subscribe to our podcast in iTunes on your computer or on your smartphone. Thanks so much for listening and see you next time.

