Ep 14 Vardy part 1 – Problems with Time Blocking

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Francis Wade, Mike Vardy

Francis Wade 00:09
The Task Management and Time Blocking Podcast episode 14. So you're a time blocker to some degree. This means you put tasks in your calendar, not just appointments with people, which can easily be changed, but solo time you commit to doing a particular task on your own. But you make a promise to yourself that no one else knows about to do something at a particular time and place. It's an easy concept to explain, right. But most people who seem to start the process having a typo.

Francis Wade 00:56
It's an easy concept to explain. But most people who seem to start the practice, have a rough time taking it to the level they want. Once they get past the beginner stage, when they're experimented with a few tasks, they want more tasks. And for a while, they schedule these "more tasks". And more and more and more, until they have too many and their time blocking becomes a problem. It should be easy, they think, but all of a sudden it's turned into something that's not. What are some of the best solutions available once they hit this let's call it a plateau or a ceiling. Tune into this episode to hear from me and my special guest Mike Vardy as we solve this challenging problem together. Welcome to the Task Management and Time Blocking podcast.

Francis Wade 03:01
And welcome back. As you can see, we're joined by our special guest, Mike Vardy. And just before I introduce him, let me let me tell you a couple of things about the podcast. One is that this is a problem and solution kind of conversation, where Mike has joined me to help to define the problem that I mentioned before. And then we'll switch over almost like changing gears, and then work on some possible solutions. And as we do so, especially in the part where we're talking about solutions, we're looking to see if we can come up with some new stuff, something that's never been said before. Now, we may not get there, just okay. But if we do, you'll hear this ding, which means that we've come up with something that we think nobody in the world has ever said before. We could be fooling ourselves, but we're gonna have fun doing it anyway. And if we get to the end of the podcast, I wikk put in a

buzzer that said that time ran out, and we didn't come up with anything new but so far, not a good track record.

Francis Wade 04:05
So right before I introduce Mike, let me tell you a quick story. Jose, has been time blocking for about six months, faithfully putting all these tasks for each day, right there in the calendar. Before he made the switch he only used his calendar for appointments like a doctor would, when he is seeing patients. As soon as he began time blocking he noticed a huge improvement. All of a sudden, he lost the fear of losing control of his day. Now, he knew exactly where he stood at any moment, whether he was executing according to his plan, or not. Or at least that was on the good days. On the occasional bad day. His plan would be disrupted in the first five minutes by an unexpected emergency. For example, his boss could come under his time and direct him to do something completely unplanned. This would have a ripple effect that will last several days and he hated this. But this company had a flaky global supply chain. And as a procurement expert, there were days, more days like this than ever before. Thank you COVID. The worst moments came when he skipped time blocking for several days and would have to return to the original emergency. Then he'd move all his tasks forward one by one, a tedious process, at best, you know, that dragging and dropping as you try to move all the tasks. At worst, he'd feel like abandoning approach, but he was wary...the idea of going back to doing mental planning was not appealing. However, there was a lifeline. He was recently offered the services of a remote assistant who could do some of his rescheduling. So he's thinking about that. And he's also aware of other scheduling apps like Motion and SkedPal, but he hasn't tried them. What is the best course of action? Or maybe se should just wait until the supply crisis goes away? So maybe then he could return to his former success? Hmm.

Francis Wade 06:11
So let me introduce Mike Vardy. Mike is an author, speaker and productivity and time management strategist, or productivityist based out of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, his company is called Productivityist. And the company's mission is to help people stop doing productive and start being productive through a variety of online and offline resources that he facilitates. He's the author of The Front Nine, How to Start the Year You Want Anytime You Want, published by Diversion Books. He's also self published several ebooks most recently, the Productivityist Playbook. Mike, welcome to the Task Management and Time Blocking podcast.

Mike Vardy 06:55
Thanks for having me, Francis, I'm looking forward to this. I think I'd like to hear that nice sound happened more than the buzzer sound. So let's make some magic happen.

Mike Vardy 07:06
We'll see. It's not that the buzzer is bad. It's just that, you know, we could have a great conversation and sure, we bring we bring ideas that we already know. And it's nothing new gets created. Sometimes. All right, so let's talk about this time blocking problem that we've defined. So people think it's easy. And then they get a rude surprise. Does that resonate with your experience of working with clients?

Mike Vardy 07:31

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Yeah, I think time blocking sounds very promising. And almost like the Holy Grail in a lot of ways, like, you know, if I block my time, then I'll be able to get all the things that I need to and want to get done, done. But the problem is, is that, especially if you're not, if you're not working for yourself, like I am, I have, I have a lot of luxury of being able to kind of create those blocks of time and not have to worry about it being commandeered as, as you mentioned in the story. But when you have, when you work in an environment where the time isn't all your own, it's very hard to get incredibly specific with blocks of time on a consistent and sustainable basis. And so how do you do it in a way that allows you to maintain and sustain it, but leaving room for those emergencies or when things go wrong, so that you don't drop the ball with it all together, it's like, you know, I mean, biases creep in all the time, oh, this didn't work this week, which means it will never work again, or there's no way I can block my time. Because my days aren't completely under my control, we tend to you know, kind of exaggerate how much we can't do something over because it's changed, it's difficult. So when time blocking makes things easier, to some degree, it's the getting to that point, that's hard. And then the maintaining it, which is even harder, especially when you talk about things like having to move things from one day to the next to the next. People end up thinking it's more maintenance, and you spend more time moving things around and actually doing the thing. So it hopefully during our conversation, we'll be able to solve some of those concerns and make it so that whether you block your time very specifically, or whether you use the kind of stuff I talked about, which is theming your time, um, you may be able to have the best of both worlds.

Francis Wade 09:23
Right, right. So that's what we're heading for kind of a balancing of the opposites because there are some people who they not only don't time block, they don't do any planning whatsoever. There are people who, you know, in the morning, they wake up there, they reach for their phone on the nightstand. And they start checking email, and their entire day depends on what their email is telling them to do, or what the messages are telling them to do. And that's the day

Mike Vardy 09:55
And that's a huge problem. Because basically when you're saying that is you're saying What I had in mind for my day, my time is not nearly as important as the external demands. And the reason that we tend to do that is it's easier for someone else to tell us what to do, than for us to tell ourselves what to do in a lot of cases. Because some of the stuff that we need to tell ourselves to do is more challenging, deeper, more thoughtful work.

Mike Vardy 10:21
Whereas if we're getting messages from our bosses, that the 14th thing that they've given us is now the most important, is it that I mean, we have to realize that when we get demands from our colleagues, they probably aren't thinking about the things that they've already sent our way. They're just thinking about the most recent thing that they sent our way, and they're getting it out of their head and sending it to you. And then you have to decide, well, how do I work through this? And if you start your day off with no plan, if you grab your phone, and you're dealing with the external demands right away, then yeah, you're already behind the eight ball. And it's very hard to get out. It's like quicksand. Right? It's very hard to get out of that. So you have to almost start from a point of, I've planned my day, the night

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before, or I mean, again, when we talk about time blocking, or again, and I'll use my example of daily theming.

Mike Vardy 11:10
Like when I wake up in the morning, I don't say to myself, Well, I wonder what I'm going to do today, that is a terrible question. Because my brain, right, it's it's the worst question. Instead, I say, Well, what day is it? Oh, it's Wednesday, Wednesday's = Media Day. Okay, so my overarching focus today is media tasks. Well, let's take a look at the to do list and see what's on there. And then we're orchestrate. And I think that's one of the other things we could probably get to today is how the calendar and to do list can work together. Instead of you being like on a calendar person that all the things go in a calendar, or I'm a to do list person in the calendar is just for appointments, like there's a way to have those integrate, so that they talk to each other, and they help you be your most productive cells.

Francis Wade 11:50
Right, right. So the person who I met who was the most reactive kind of person that I mentioning, was a very junior member of staff. And it really came as a revelation that you could plan your day and that your boss wants you to plan your day, your boss doesn't want you to be a complete puppet, you know, a completee victim of whatever drama was happening. And whatever latest, you know, item your colleagues thought they wanted you to work on. So in a way that the time blocking allows anyone to start up or move further towards the accomplishment, the idea is to move them towards the accomplishment of their goals and intentions, away from the pure chaos that this particular employee happened to live in.

Francis Wade 12:36
It's just that on the way from the pure chaos to full intention, there is real life, right. And real life is that not only do other people have things for you, they want you to do things and they want to do them on their schedule. So there's that. But there are there are bonafide emergencies and unexpected demands, cause you to have to react. And that's where the early time blocker, the novice at time blocking, you know, they put the tasks on their calendar in the beginning and it works like Jose did. And then life starts to build...more items start showing up that they need to time block, they become really good at creating an eight hour schedule, only to see it go to heck and maybe the first 10 minutes. Yep. And they so they have a choice at that moment. But there's something internal that goes on. From my talking with people. For me, it seems like a loss of confidence, like, I'm not doing the right thing, because look at all these changes that are coming in. Well, how would you characterize it like that sort of that internal feeling that people have, when that moment comes? Realize your time blocking isn't working the way they want it?

Mike Vardy 13:54
Well I think part of the problem is that they get too specific right away. So they get too specific with their tasks, which is what I found when I work with people. And they because most people have heard about time blocking but haven't heard about time theming and they're like, well, what's the difference? I'm like, Well, the difference is, is that theming is a broader, there's a broader scope to it, right? So instead of me starting off my day with a block of time that says I'm going to record all of the intros and outros for my gym podcast episodes. I don't go that specific right away. Because what if, what if, what if I have,

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like, I'll give you an example, I had a particular podcast guest that said, we need we need this or something like that. And that that got my attention first. And if I had had in there no do the record the intros and outros between 9 and 930 and I don't get that done. All the sudden the snowball effect starts to happen like you're talking about right? So we either they either get too specific with what's in the block of time, or they make the block of time too narrow to fit the thing in.

Mike Vardy 14:56
So I think that's why I prefer using theming Early on, especially early on, because what it does is it says, Okay, today, this period of time, whether it's a day or horizontal theming is times of day, I'm going to focus on, I don't know, communication. Okay, great. That means that that could be email, that could be social media, but I can't tell that person what their time blocks should be what that period of time should be. Maybe they need to go narrower and say, Okay, this is email time, right? So I'm going to focus on just dealing with email, not just emailing this one specific person. So I think that's the first thing, because we're

Francis Wade 15:34
gonna we're gonna talk more about theming later on when we get to solutions, but before someone knows about theming, as a solution, what's the experience like?

Mike Vardy 15:34
I mean, that's that, I think, to that end, the experience is, I have so much to do, and not enough time. So how can I how am I going to, and you know, my day is now full, and it's too full. So that's number one. Number two, is, am I doing these in the right order? Right? So am I doing them in the right order at all? Right, whether it's based on the priority that people are placing on me, whether it's my body clock that's telling me to do these at the right time, because some people are not wired to do things in the morning, and they're better suited in the afternoon, I would be an example of that, versus like the morning person. So like, there's a lot of variables in there. But the ultimate thing is that emotions, play a role.

Mike Vardy 16:25
And I think that when it comes to productivity, in general, we skew either too far to the emotional response, oh, I got this thing from this person, I got to deal with it right away. Or too far to the logical, well hold on...this time block says that I should only be doing this. And then they they focus intently on that, and they're forsaking other things. So balance doesn't just come, you know, in the sense of work life balance, or whatever the balance should be your approach to, I don't want to be too emotionally responsive to this. And I don't want to be too logical. I want to be like reasoned with my approach to to the tasks that are going in my calendar. So you're moving, they're boasting around the kinds of bouncing around between emotional responses and being too. So they tend to overcorrect. So oh my god, this is freaking me out. And they go, okay, that's bad. Maybe I should just be completely ruthless about this and go, nope, this is the time and this is it. And I don't care what my emotions say. And they forget that they're human beings.

Mike Vardy 17:22

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So so they they overcorrect either and they don't they don't realize, and they don't test the waters. They don't go okay. Well, is, you know, you mentioned everything because like, emergencies happen. Well, what is an emergency? Like, you need to define that before you can. Because if everything is an emergency, then nothing really is. And it's like when people say to me, and I don't know if you get this, Francis? Oh, man, I spent all morning putting out fires. I'm like, Okay. Do you know that a firefighter will let certain things burn, so that they can actually strategically attack the thing that you know, so they'll get part of a burning building burn? Because they're like, Okay, this part we can let go for a while while we let do this. So when when people say they're fighting fires, I envision them like spraying like willy nilly, like a fire extinguisher everywhere, you know, or grabbing a water, a bucket of water when it's a chemical fire and then going oh, no, or you know what I mean? Like they're not. They're not being strategic about it. And so I said, when you say I fight fires, I want to know how, because if you're just like, we'll, you know, being very reckless and ruthless about it, then you're not being...you're not taking a strategic approach. And I think that that whether your this problem goes beyond time blocking, but I think that's part of it, too, is what is an emergency and find out. And the only way you can do that is to ask questions, internally, test waters, but then also ask questions externally, Hey, Boss, what is this? What is an emergency? Because you get a lot of different answers on that. Yeah, I mean, your answers could be really, really overt. This is that when I say this, this is an emergency, we'll put it in the headline of the email, urgent, right, or whatever. Or you'll get subtext, which is your boss saying, hey, when I email you, everything's in emergency. And that sends a completely different message.

Francis Wade 17:22
So that strikes me as one of these early realizations, because when you become mistyped, time blocking, all of a sudden, you become hyper aware of how different life is from your expectations about life. There's a there's a rude surprise when you start off, if you had a to do list before you started time blocking, or worse, if you just kept it in memory. You had a kind of a vague idea that was never really tested. Now all of a sudden, you put something down in writing, and you put a time to it. And now you can see the failure, kind of talking right back to you. And all of a sudden you're your boss's email that never used to be a problem. That his emergency emails are no problem. Your colleagues emails that try to get into your schedule, are now a problem, all of a sudden, all these things are problems, but they weren't problems before. Because you would just kind of go, oh, well, you just surrender the day or surrender the moment. And you just give it right back, give it you does not have to make a hard decision. It strikes me that when you start time blocking, all of a sudden, your intention runs into the reality that's always been there. You may think it's new, like, Oh, my God, they they now, I'm time blocking. So they're trying to ruin my day. But the truth is, you're really just aware of something that was always going on. But no, you're you're actually accounting for it, you're not just smiling and going on.

Mike Vardy 20:46
And I think the key is, is that before you start to allocate your time, and leverage it, or lead it, not manage it time moves on whether we want it to or not. (That's what I mean, time management is such a crappy term for a lot of cases because, you know, managing it is not like that's what time management meant.)

Mike Vardy 21:06

I mean, think about the difference between a manager and a leader, right? Like a manager is just, you know, you're moving pieces around all that stuff. But when a leader wants to do more with that, right, so when you start time blocking, you're actually leading your time. But more importantly, and I think that this is the piece that you don't hear about is, I would argue that time blocks are more attention blocks than time blocks. Time is the frame. But what they do is they heighten (you talked about awareness), they heighten your attention towards your intention, which is whatever you're putting there.

Mike Vardy 21:39
Whether that's a very specific task, a set of tasks on a project, what you're doing is saying these are my intentions, or this is my intention, which is why I prefer the term intention over task, like I intend to do this. And in order to be productive, you have to say, okay, how am I going to pay attention to this? Because everybody else is vying for your attention. And you've been freely giving it away before not just your time, but your attention. What a time block does what any period of when you say, from nine till 930, right? That's, that's attention. And then that's when it becomes a problem. You're like, wait a minute, they're not taking my time. They're trying to take my attention away. And if I'm not paying enough attention to this, then the outcome is not going to be what I have in mind. And therefore, that's when the problems really start to show up.

Francis Wade 22:30
Now, I wonder if that's where the other ding should be because I've never, I've never heard that beforel...heightened your attention to your intention, that time blocking for proceeding starts off, heightens their attention to their intention is I mean, I've said that before?

Mike Vardy 22:43
I've said it, I've been, well, no, no, but I haven't said it. I haven't said in relation to time blocking. What I've said is product productivity to just just to kind of give you the higher view of this. Productivity is not about efficiency and effectiveness. Right? Those are byproducts of productivity, productivity is the active linking. between your intention and your attention. That's what that is. So to that end, that's what that's, that's essentially what I'm talking about here. So time blocks, they do they hide, they give your attention a place to live.

Francis Wade 23:18
Okay, great. So I'm gonna give that a ding because we're talking. Because we're in the world and time blockers in the world need to know that. If you're just starting out time blocking, be aware that all of a sudden, failure is going to become your friend, because whererattention and intention were kind of mixed up and not quite clear. And you didn't really know that you weren't following your intention. All of a sudden, you are not going to learn that and you're going to realize that for the very first time. Great.

Ep 14 Vardy part 2

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SPEAKERS
Francis Wade, Mike Vardy

Francis Wade 00:09
So, to summarize where we just left off, we discovered that there is a problem that new time blockers have, they run into a whole bunch of reality, where their intentions don't match their actual attention. And they come to realize this, because they're keeping track of where they want to put their time. You know, either it could be, it could be a theme for the day that gets knocked off, it could be all the way down to the minute, you know that... for some people, Oh, my God, this is five minutes later, or five minutes early, or I'm not following my schedule. Because there are some schools of thought that say that you need to follow your schedule no matter what. And those probably lead you to feelings of failure faster than, for example, theming, which allows you to enter it gently.

Mike Vardy 00:57
Well, and further that, for instance, I think the biggest thing that happens is once you start to tap into once you start using time blocking and you get you really you realize some of the the barriers, but the the not even pitfalls, but the problems, the things that they show up the concerns that you didn't, you weren't aware of before things. It's the stuff that we do have more agency over that you can actually start to take control of and command of. So when, you know things like expectation management, like you couldn't do that before, you didn't even know that you had the ability to do that. Because your expectation, like there was no sense of that you're getting all of this stuff thrown at you. And then what you can start to do is parse it out and say, Okay, well, what are these external demands, I need to give them my attention. But I can't give all my attention away, because there's some internal demands, which may have been given to me by others that I need to focus on. So now I need to manage expectations. So that way, I can have those blocks freed up. And that's where you'll do things like, hey, you know, the way the business runs is that we're going full guns from nine to three, but from three to five, I'd like to block my time out where no one can, and then they go, okay, and that's, I think that's the other problem too.

Mike Vardy 02:20
And we I know we might get into this is, whenever somebody adopts something new, like a new, breathtaking or groundbreaking or something I've heard they go, all right, I'm all in. And we've seen this with getting things done before...I read the Getting Things Done book, and I'm gonna do the weekly review, and I'm gonna get it. And then all of a sudden, they're like, it just, if one thing breaks, or doesn't work, it just collapses the same thing.

Mike Vardy 02:42
Same thing with technology, they'll go, I know, the new app, like Motion, or Click up, or whatever it is, they'll go, I'm gonna put all my stuff in there, because that will help me be more productive. And then all they've done is said, here's the pile, I'm just gonna move this pile in. There are anything for it. And

they're like, Well, how come this didn't work? Well, the reason it didn't work is you don't have human driven processes in place that can work in any app that can be future proof that need to be adjusted. And you also tried to do it all at once. It's, it's the same battle we hear when someone's trying to work out. If you go from not working out at all, to try to work out seven days a week, the likelihood of failure is high. If you're trying to go from being a night owl to a morning person, you've heard 15 minutes every day, go to bed, 15 minutes earlier, every day, if I was going to bed at one in the morning, and then said, I'm going to start going to bed at eight at night, I'm probably going to fail. So it's the same principles with time blocking. Don't, I mean, real quick, if you're going to start, start with one, right? And start with the one that you're gonna have the most success with, like, start on a Saturday, hey, you know, when you know you have more agency, I think

Francis Wade 04:03
Do you or I don't answer emails after three. They're like, No, you can't. You have to figure out where those boundaries can be built.

Francis Wade 04:03
that's like in the morning or seven o'clock at night, or pick the times that are least likely to be disturbed by emergencies. Other people that's, that's, that's great, great coaching, because you can you can tell the newbie or the coachee that listen, the time is going to come when but until that comes, here's what you get your feet wet, and you start back time blocking and theming the kinds of days and in a kind of way that allows you gentle entry. Because you are about to be rudely surprised, like for example, speaking of expectations, management, I could imagine the erstwhile tamillockers saying to his boss, well, no I can't do that. Time blocking between one and one on five and the boss goes: "What?" What are you talking about?

Francis Wade 05:01
Oh, you mean your -next- job? Yeah. Oh, that won't work in this job. You mean some other job, right?

Mike Vardy 05:09
And I'm sure you and I, where I live. It's a capital of a province. And I've done some work with government and you can't treat government the same way as you would treat big business. That because it's so firmly entrenched, and there's so much red. So you have to kind of decide it's the same principle that I mean, I might be going in the weeds here a little bit, but I don't like no meeting days. Because the optics of a no meeting day sounds like what you don't take meetings on a Wednesday? Well, who are you, but if you if you instead say, you know, I don't do meetings after three? Well, that seems more reasonable. Because Oh, it's just the last two hours of the day. But here's the great part. If you don't do meetings, after three, five days a week, you get 10 hours back, which is a whole bunch of time plus, trying to do meet, what if you had meaning like a no meeting day on Wednesday? You don't really recuperate in that time? And also, you're likely to let some get in there. You really are, you're more likely to let people get in on a Wednesday, or that no meeting day, right? Then you would with the after- 3pm? Right? So I don't that's again, that's, that's a different way of approaching it. But I think more often than not, we hear the shiny new strategy, we go, Oh, I'm going all in. And the problem is, if you go all in, and you're, it's like jumping into the deep end of a pool and not knowing how to swim, you know, you're gonna have some problems.

Francis Wade 06:28

Right? Right. So our coaching at this point is to find ways to learn to time block, gradually, almost, because the fact is, you are in a social system with other people, you have your own expectations to deal with that you don't know about, you are not very skilled at it. So you're going to fail. So here are, here's an approach that can sort of ease you into the social challenge, the personal challenges, the expectation challenge, the just the planning fallacy challenge. Here are some easy methods that will ease you in so you actually can gain some momentum, because what happens often is that people give up time blocking. And then they're saying it doesn't work, because their experience of it is that they had this idea of how it would work. It doesn't work that way. And then they quit. And then they write a blog post that says time blocking doesn't work, and here's why. You gotta go.

Mike Vardy 07:26

It's the same and you have to find I know in my case, like when people have said they can't theme their days as an example. I call I call BS on that, because I'll say to them, Well, okay, well, when do you do your laundry? Oh, Saturday, what about your grocery shopping Saturday? When do you mow your lawn Saturday? And like so Saturday is like a day where you do household stuff, right? Yep. So Saturday's your household day, right? Yeah. Oh, like, yeah, you're already doing it to a degree already. So all I'm asking is for you to (and you probably do it like we you know, bet we know what we're doing at certain times of day anyways), there's certain things that... so own that like, just take some agency over it. And then and then to your point, start to see those results and go,

Mike Vardy 08:07

Okay, what if I go a little bit further, like, what if I, what if I try from three to five on a Friday when everyone's out of the office, and the expectations on their side are low, but I can do some of this stuff. Now. Instead of you know, wrapping up emails or something like that, I'm going to do that earlier in the day. And I'm gonna take from three to five where I'm not interrupted, I'm going to do something that's a little bit, you know, bigger, a little bit more in depth. But again, it's that's the thing, even when business isn't personal productivity always is. And so with that in mind, you need to kind of go How do I work subjectively, in an objective world, and time blocking does allow you to do that. But again, like anything else, and we've been talking about this, you can't jump in with both feet right away, especially because it's new, and it's likely unproven. You need to see some of the results. And when you do, then you're going to start to add more layers to it.

Francis Wade 09:00

Right, right. Right. So so this is this is great, great coaching, I've never I've not heard this, what we're seeing it was really said before,

Mike Vardy 09:07

Not publicly...like free coaching right now, like this is like we expected the hourly rate to be plugged in now! I'm just kidding. But no, I mean, this. This is some of the stuff. But I think that people need to know that. The you know, you can work partly, if not entirely, the way that you feel will work best for you to hit your objectives. You just need to try and...to the point of time blocking and I know that this is something that comes up a lot Cal Newports talked about this too, about putting very specific tasks in very specific

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blocks of time. I personally am not a fan of that, because that's where I think one of the first things starts to fall apart Francis because something thing happens, and they can't do that specific task. So therefore, everything else gets derailed and pushed. And then they're like, oh, oh, now I'm spending more time moving things around and doing stuff.

Mike Vardy 09:07
Whereas if I, you know, in my mind, it's like, Okay, what if you broaden the scope a bit and say, Alright, so from nine to 10, I'm not going to send these five emails, I'm going to focus on email, or instead of working on, you know, this project, which by the way, you might be having bottlenecks from other people, which pushes you into email, now you're checking email, you say, I'm going to focus on all the things that I can do in Salesforce. Oh, and here they all are.

Mike Vardy 10:43
This is why when people put their tasks in their calendar, and they don't have a to do list, I'm like, You should really have a to do list too. They're like, why? Like, because the calendar offers the directory of your day. The To Do List offers the details. So if the calendar is the place where you're like, oh, from this time to this time, I should be a bit paying attention to this kind of stuff. What's the stuff Oh, the to do list tells me the stuff. And then you draw lines. So if you have a sales force block between nine and 11, then in your to do list application, you use a tag called Salesforce, you click on that tag, and you see every task that says Salesforce, and they could be for one, project, three projects, five different projects. And then you're you're in that modality of Salesforce, which helps you get into flow, right, because that's what time blocking can do is get you into flow. And then all of a sudden, when you're done that time block, not only did you stick with the time block, because you did all the Salesforce stuff, you moved 1,3,5 projects forward. That's that's a massive dopamine, that's like holy crap, I moved those things forward. And then all of a sudden, when your boss says, Well, how are those things going, you can at least say confidently, well, I've updated everything in Salesforce for it. And that's huge, as opposed to either trying to work sequentially in a project where bottlenecks can show up, or just saying, I'm going to work on this very specific task. Oh, this came up. So I think that there is, again, there's there's give and take, and there's a relationship between your to do list and your calendar and to forsake one. Right? It gives me a detriment, it's detrimental. It's detrimental. If you're strictly a to do list person, you also need a calendar, because the calendar will tell you, Oh, shoot, I can't do that right now. Because I have a meeting with Francis or, you know, this is not the right time to do it. Because my kids are home from school. And I should not be recording a podcast on a Saturday. Right? So those two things need to work together. And when they do, that's when you go from doing productive to being productive.

Francis Wade 12:43
Right. All right. Well, I think I think also there's a, there's a there's an initial kind of hyperbole. But there's a there's a belief that people have that if they start time blocking, it would solve problems, like the ones that you that we're describing. So far, this should be the Holy Grail only to find out because their idea of time blocking ... a philosophical problem isn't the one that they are actually experiencing. They're experiencing practical problems, but they bought into it at this philosophical level. And they don't really know whether the philosophy...in fact they question the philosophy, question their belief and question themselves. And, you know, we're here, I guess we're seeing that you should question the

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philosophy. But the way the question is with specific practice, not necessarily to ask, does the overall idea work? But is there a way to implement it that actually worked for for me and my circumstances? And if you can't find that, well, let's talk about that. So if you find solutions like that, and you never really get to solve the problems that you experience, once you start blocking lots of tasks, it could be that you give up on the technique altogether. You say it doesn't work. You switch back to what you were whatever you were doing before. Like I said, you read a blog post and say it doesn't work. And that's what some people do, they go back, to they get convinced that this is a better technique, more effectiveness and more efficiency. They try it, and then they give up. But to me, that's a tragedy, because I think there's empirical proof that says that you..Not I think...there is research proof that says a task and a calendar is more likely to be accomplished than a task and a list only.

Mike Vardy 14:35
There that's the key only. I think that that the problem with most to do lists, especially is that people work them sequentially. So they work them either by like what what how were they written down? Your brain does not write things down in the order that they're supposed to be done. That's not the way the brain works. So this is it. So then what's the second way that they look at the to do list The due date. Well, the problem with due dates is we often overestimate what we can do in a day and underestimate, we can do over a longer stretch of time. So now you'll listen you've overwhelmed yourself with not only do I have all these tasks here, in and I have to scan to figure out which ones to do. Now, there's 43 of them that are due today. But are they due today? Well, I think I can get them done today, you know, that's the second, then the third problem real quick, is, then they put them in a project. And the project also is made up of a list things that are done sequentially. So now all of a sudden, you're like, Okay, well, what pieces of the project need to be done? Or worse, they have a task on their list, that's actually a project and they haven't broken it down.

Mike Vardy 15:39
So now all of a sudden, I tell them, and this is where this this is the spiral. Okay, oh, you've got work on report? Well, is that something that you can get done today? Well, no, there's a lot of steps to it. Okay, well break down the steps. But now I'm gonna have more things on your my list. No, you're not, you're just going to see them all. Like you're, you're taking invisible and making it visible. And then you can make dents in it. But they're seeing this and their brain goes, "Oh, my goodness, look at all these things". Same amount just broken down... better verbs, better ways to move it forward. The the fourth thing rather, is is they'll use priority levels. And you and I both know, after having studied this for a while, that if you have more than one priority, then you have zero, right? That's what it means. Greg McEwan talked about this, in his book essentialism, Merlin Mann who's one of the early pioneers of online productivity, he's talked about this, like, prioritization needs to be reined in. If you're watching this, I've got a bunch of Lego figures behind me. And one of them is Syndrome from The Incredibles movie. And his plan, his evil plan was to make everybody a superhero. Because his quote is, if everyone's super, no one is, and, and that and that's what happens if you make everything a priority, or three or four or five things, then what is it like your job should be to filter this time blocks help you filter, right? Because you're adding another element to it. It's Wednesday between 10 and 11. And this is when I work on this.

Mike Vardy 17:08

The problem is, if you go too narrow, then that's that's another barrier. So you have to figure you have to figure out your Goldilocks factor, what's just right for you. And that's why and you and I have had this conversation offline before, when someone says like, what app should I use? Because they want it done for them? Right? Like, what's the app I should use? I'm like, I don't know. You're like, but you're the expert. I'm like, Yeah, but do you like analog or digital? Do you work? Like, we know what questions to ask. But even then, aesthetically, we don't know what they're gonna like. We also don't know how they're breaking down their tasks in the first place. We don't know if they like to use due dates or start dates, there's so many variables. And I will say that so as you're listening to this, or hearing this, you're like, Okay, Mike. So really, it's a lost cause. No, because you have enough time until your time is done. Time moves on whether we want it to or not. When we're done, we're done. So you can leverage that. That's what you have to keep in mind. Not I have to get this done today. When you learn to meditate, you're not trying to win meditation or get meditation done. You're just that's the practice of meditation. Right? And why what I teach is called time crafting is that you're always crafting your time time blocking plays a role in that, or in my case, where I talked about time theming, it plays a role in that because a craftsperson never says, Well, I'm done. That's it, like an actor will never go I'm a craftsperson will constantly working on their craft. And that's what you're doing with time. And if you do that, and you know that, and you understand that, then you know that this is going to be a continuous process and practice that leads to progress as opposed to a one and done solution. Because if that's what you're looking for, you're not going to get it.

Francis Wade 18:57
right. But right now there's this this strikes me that that as you're talking about the different ways of prioritizing that when someone, for example, has picked up GTD as a solution, and GTD says only use contexts, yep. And basically nothing else. And GTD says, do not do time blocking because that's a bad idea. And it won't work. Basically, it's very clear about that. Yep. But But what happens is that when you use a solution like GTD, and you don't do any prioritization is that you end up use the word visible versus invisible, I would say, visible versus mental. Because you still have the attributes in your head, which tasks are more important, which will take longer, which have due dates. It's just that to take your point, you're not putting them out there in front of you where you can manage them, you're keeping them all up here (in your head), where you can't manage them very effectively. If all you manage is context, and that's not a rich enough way, for most people, not a rich enough way of prioritizing or choosing.

Mike Vardy 20:02
Well, contexts are a filter, that's the thing people once they understand that is, so the way I believe here, let me give you an example of if you're going to start time blocking today, like time blocking, let's not even say theming, what you should do is sit down with a blank sheet of paper, and just brain dump (a GTD term), just get the things out of your head that are there. Do not censor yourself during this process. Because the things there are in your mind, you may have written them down already, they may be in motion, they may. But that's not the point. The point is, to your point, Francis, the things that are top of mind or that are in your mind that show up as redundant. Those are things that are really holding, like they're the things you're holding on to, and you need to get those blocked. So that's what so write them down, then go then assess it, then audit it and go, Oh, I already have that in Todoist

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already have that in? Oh, that's the clue. The clue is my brain, even though it knows it's written down, it doesn't trust that I'm going to do so therefore, where I can see it in a calendar.

Francis Wade 21:08
It's not where I can get my time slot, that particular point. It's not that a time slot that I trust that I can defend.

Mike Vardy 21:15
It's not an defend and pay attention to. I can't I get because you can't everything that's going on in here you get that's why people when I mean, we talked about time blocking not working for people, I don't know how many people I've come across this who say I can't meditate doesn't work for me. Like how do you know, they're like, well, because you know, I try my mind is going the whole time. Like that's the purpose, the purpose of it, is to do it consistently to the point where you're okay with that, because that's what the brain does. And so the bottom line is, is things bubbled to the surface, they rise to the end, by the way, meditation doesn't have to be sitting in a room with dark, you know, dark room with candles, meditation could be running, going for a walk. There's lots of different ways to do it. But my point is, is that if you're looking at your this sheet of paper where you've written everything down, and you go, Oh, it's already in clickup, guess what? You need to put that in your calendar to say work on X or not work because that's a terrible verb, but like, write 500 words for book. And then all of a sudden, it's like, okay, that's the block, and then figure out what block of time you need to do that right? Start there.

Mike Vardy 22:21
And by the way, don't, here's the thing, don't look at the 20 things that are done and go Well, I better get all 20 of these things done this week. Go to the next week and block like don't just start with one week, spread it out. When I when I help people theme their time and give daily themes. They go, Okay, I'm ready to start. I'm like, great. Let's go four weeks down the line. You're like wondering like what I go and I show they show me their calendar while they do it. And I say because look, and as you make your way three to four weeks down the line, the calendar gets emptier, and emptier and emptier. And the only things that stand out are the certainties for every week, like the Monday stand up meeting, the Thursday, you know, trainer appointment, I go, this is the purest that your calendar is ever going to get. So let's theme this that way we know Monday is immediately we know that there's a meeting on Monday at this time. So we don't probably want to have that as a deep workday, let's say for so it gives us more information. But most people when they time block or start this, not only do they try to do too much all at once, but they try to cram it into a week and then go what didn't work this

Francis Wade 23:25
week. So I'll read it out. So so write it out future, because the future is more defensible. Sure. Yep, arguably is not there's not drama and emergence is happening in the future. And you can tell people around you that listen, I've I've I've blocked out three weeks. Yeah, Wednesday in three weeks time to do this particular thing. epoca okay. Oh, yeah. Okay, so I scheduled my emergency for you for Tuesday. Not the Wednesday.

Mike Vardy 23:54

And that's the thing, right? It doesn't make good, right? Well, well, and there's tools that will help you with this. Like if you decide ultimately that you want to take more control over your time. And Cal again, Cal Newport talks about this in his book, a world without email. And you and I both have done this is get a calendaring program that allows people to block time with you and say, Okay, well you wanna have a meeting, and then protect the time that you want to protect. Right and still and share the link because here's the thing is people go oh, you know, forget the ego of like, Oh, who am I to have a scheduling link first off lots more people have them now. Don't worry, you're not like you're not like trying to be an elitist when you're doing something like this. I don't that I don't buy that. i If you have an assistant, I find that to be a little bit more like Oh, my assistant, that you don't even I don't think people need even do that. They have assistants anymore. They could personally respond and say, Hey, you go here, or they're gonna have somebody respond. But anyway, the point is, is give them the link. And when you give them the link, you're not saying I only give you these dates, what you're giving them is the power to choose over the time. time that you have, they don't know what you're doing, they're not going to look at well look at all this time this person is not available. I mean, if you have hardly any time available, maybe maybe you're gonna have, you're gonna have a balanced approach where it's like, Oh, I could choose from nine to noon on Monday from nine to noon on Tuesday from nine. And they're like, Wow, look at all the time that Francis and Mike are giving me to choose from. They're not thinking about it inversely, because you've given them you've been, you've empowered them. And what you've really done is also empowered yourself at the same time. Because you've avoided the email back blessing, you avoided the email, back and forth, you've avoided the whole like, here, just feel free to like, you know, and nothing drives me nuts more than people who say, in within organizations, one of the first things I tell people organizations to do is do not allow people to schedule things on your calendar. Don't like Like, like, don't don't like, yeah, it turned that off, because you wake up the next morning, and your day is full. Right?

Francis Wade 25:57
And you have had no time to get out of bed and even check your email. Yeah,

Mike Vardy 26:01
exactly, exactly.

Francis Wade 26:02
So the social side of time blocking, you mentioned this business about meditation being about the chaos in your mind and noticing it. So the analogy I'm drawing, then is that the practice of time blocking is about know becoming very aware of the chaos in your commitments in your as it relates to social with other people as it relates to your own expectations. And the idea is to confront it, and keep practicing so that you get better, as opposed to giving up and saying it doesn't, doesn't work. It's a different mindset to bring to us. That's great. All right.

Francis Wade 26:42
So people who try and go back to old solutions, it won't work for them, because it's really is a matter of growth towards something that you have tocontend with. You can't avoid time, if you're managing lots of tasks. And as your volume grows, you have less free time. So you're moving towards having less and less and less discretionary time and time that's absolutely free. You know, we're talking about

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pretty intricate, intricate subjects. So Mike why is it that this problem hasn't been sort of tackled the way we're talking about? Why aren't more people talking about what we're talking about on this call? A popular way of thinking about the problem?

Mike Vardy 27:25
Well, number one, I think technology's played a huge role in it, the idea that, because we have all these tools, we can do more. But the problem is, is that the tools can only do so much right. You know, I would argue, for example, let's use inbox zero as an example. That email the way email was created? Yeah. And and utilized. Yeah, there's no user manual, there's no best practices for email, we would have been better off with this, like, okay, so if this is urgent, we send an instant message, we don't send an email, right? If this is related to a task that it goes inside of our task management system as a comment, as opposed to an email about the task, right? So there needs to be like a charter or almost like a standard of practices around these things. And really, when it comes to productivity, I think people are still measuring it and in a quantitative manner without thinking about the qualitative aspects.

Francis Wade 28:26
So agree, agree, you know, fields when we got, you know, when our programs announced us that we got mail, back in the 90s, when we came home, and we told our friends that we got an email.

Mike Vardy 28:37
Yeah, it wasn't the novelty of it. It was amazing. And now it's the bane of our existence. And the way that we measure productivity, a lot of people measure it. And we've seen this again, back to Merlin Mann whose intent I am certain was not to say Inbox Zero is the goal. You know, first off his definition of inbox zero, if you look it up is not get your email to zero. It's going to email with nothing waiting for you that you don't already have a sense of right, like so. Don't go it like basically, when you leave email, you should have everything handled. Everything kept like everything.

Francis Wade 29:12
Right not open ended. It's not coming back to bite you.

Mike Vardy 29:17
Well, and that's the thing is the reason that Inbox Zero has been kind of corrupted to this. Oh, I got my email zero today. Therefore I was productive, is because it's a measurable quantity. I had 3600 emails now my inbox is zero. I had 230 emails come in today. And I got them all done. I'm at zero. Yeah, but what about the Salesforce updates? I didn't get that done. Why? Because there's no red dot. There's no urgency and there's no an urgency. The thing about emails, much like social media, is if you get your email to zero, and 40% of them are auto responders copies, right newsletters, you still get that little dopamine like you would on social media by just checking your DMS and stuff like that. So your brain is going. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks, thanks, thanks for the dopamine.

Mike Vardy 30:03
But then all of a sudden the disappointment of not getting those bigger things done is a problem. So I think the reason we're not having these discussions is number one, the definition of productivity has been skewed. Now, interestingly, I think the pandemic has started to correct this a little bit, the pause

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that we were, we had, again, not not, not at all, you know, kind of downplaying the tragic elements of the pandemic. But I would say that COVID-19, the pandemic has accelerated things that were going to happen anyways, remote work, for example, things like that, but also has kind of altered what people are thinking about, like, Hey, I don't have to try to get all these things done in a day, or Wow, look, I'm spending time doing some deeper work on things. And I'm seeing the results.

Mike Vardy 30:52
So and the way you attack this problem is not by, you know, going in, you know, full bore, you have to be strategic about it, it's this is not all out assault, this is a chess match, it's a check, like you have to, and some people are not going to be willing to make those changes, because, or at least they're going to be kind of, they'll have to be led that way. Because the measurables are numerical, right? Like it's affecting our bottom line is affecting our bottom line. But qualitative work, helps the bottom line in ways that you don't, you can't immediately measure. So if you start to block and that's why, you know, companies are doing things like, again, no meeting days, it's a it's a valiant effort. But you may need to tweak that it may not be something that's permanent, or using actual task management tools instead of email to deal with tasks, and then finding the outliers that are just not going along with it. And by the way, the way that you deal with that, as a last resort, is you leave those people out in the cold. I've had clients where they're like, they're the people are consistently emailing, and they're not checking their task management app. And they're being called called to the carpet by their bosses. And they're like, Well, what do you mean, I'm like, you're supposed to be using this task app, and you keep emailing tasks, and that's why they're not getting done. So you need to get out, you need to get on board or get out. And I mean, that sucks. But it's the only way that we can kind of alter the, the importance of again, being productive, over quote, doing productive in real quick, you're always going to have these people in here that are that are, again, with remote work, especially in mind, there's always going to be people that will do busy work and confuse it with productive productivity. And that that's gonna happen. I mean, it's an animal kingdom thing.

Mike Vardy 32:46
There's ants in an ant colony that are called lounger ants. And they literally go along with the colony, looking as if they're doing something, but they are not contributing at all. So if the insect world has it, the human world, we'll have it too. And the whole goal is, you know, if you know, it's again, what is it the Pareto Principle, right? The 8020 rule, right? Like spend, let those 20% that are not doing let them flounder, if that's the case, until they get along, don't punish the 80% by saying, Hey, we all have to come back to the office, because you know, I need to see you all working. And you know, as opposed to same thing with using a task app and things like that. So, leaders are going to have to start looking at this a bit differently. And that can start with us, it can start with you blocking out like two hours at the end of every day. And then your leadership team going, Wow, how in the world? Are you getting all this stuff done? Like how are you? Well, you know, I block out two hours every day at the end of the day for uninterrupted work. Wow, maybe everybody should do that wouldn't be a bad idea, boss, you know, things like that.

Francis Wade 33:51
You found an interesting point. You mentioned technology. The technology doesn't support us in the direction that we're going an email is a great example. Because email was using email we were using it

today is a bit like carrying a megaphone to a meeting ology that doesn't really belong in that space. But we are funneling all of our 95% of our messages through a channel that it's not meant to hand right now. The people on the other side aren't trained to give you only what they should be giving you by email. The channel itself allows for anything to be sent, which is its power, and its downfall. It ties you to the inbox which means you have to keep checking all the time because it's where most of it is coming through. And even doing something like time blocking your time to to process email is in some companies forbidden? You can't do that,

Mike Vardy 34:49
which is ridiculously silly.

Francis Wade 34:54
Most companies like oh my God, nobody checks email between certain hours.

Mike Vardy 34:57
Have you heard of the Stack Method? By the way, have you You heard of the stack method, that email? It's fantastic. You should I mean it in Show Notes linked to the stack method. It's a fantastic email workflow that has been built by person there. Who I interviewed for my podcast, it's episode hasn't aired yet will air for a little while, but just he, you would love it because he explains the way he's just dealing with tackling the email problem, which we're talking about right now. And he's using examples that like you'll watch it and you'll probably have this one's like, yeah, like the same examples. We've some of the stuff you just talked about. Some of the stuff I've talked about, you can go haha, this guy gets it, this guy gets it. And he does. But he also presents it in a way that I think organizations could get on board with. Because it's not, it's not. He's found like I think a way to maintain email workflow without being overly just, yeah, it doesn't have to be to work like it's not overly like I have to move things around all the time. He's got like very specific ways, but it can get it can expand and shrink as you need.

Mike Vardy 36:03
But to your point, the example I was used when it comes to email and using it in this manner is and again, this this does relate to time blocking two is how many times you go and check your physical mailbox every day? Like how many times do you go check the mail?... once the birth right? Once the mailman only comes or the letter carrier only comes once per day? And generally, you know when they come if they've been doing the same route long enough, right? That's the first thing. So you're only checking once a day. I'm not suggesting you should check email once a day. What I'm saying is that like email was initially meant to replace memos and letters and things like that. Right. So then the second thing is, when you get your letter mail Francis asked you, once you check your letter mail, do you look at it and then just put it back in the mailbox

Francis Wade 36:49
Like in the mailbox?

Mike Vardy 36:51
No,

Francis Wade 36:52
of course, it was the same story with emails.

Mike Vardy 36:55
the same story with emails like okay, let me look at this, oh, I'm gonna mark it as unread, mark it as unread. Again, I've been in this game long enough to know that if you know that mark as unread means that it's something you need to deal with. That's fine. I'm not saying it's the best solution, especially if you've got hundreds that are marked as unread, I'd rather have you move them to something else not called inbox.

Mike Vardy 37:17
But the point is, if you start to think about email, in the same way you think about letter mail, you're going to realize how ridiculous it is that you've been dealing with email and your bosses and things like that. So the stack method is fantastic. I mean, we all have different ways of handling email. But the point is, to your point is saying, and in the stack method, he actually says I have two times of day that I check email, and he blocks time for that. Right and that that to me, is one way to do it. But also, let's say you've got that one. Let's say your boss is somebody who is relentless with email. The best way to handle something like that is you create an email folder called boss. And when an email comes from your boss in your inbox, you just drag that email to that boss folder. Don't answer it right away. We were creative, or creative. But that can break too. You can have a filter, but what if they're sending it from an email that you haven't necessarily? So sometimes, and by the way, the manual practice of it is, I think, a better one to start with, right? Then once you're done checking your inbox, your brain goes, Oh, I better see what the boss wants, right? Because that's, that's, that's a human reaction, oh, the boss folder tells me what the boss wants. And then you deal with those. And then you just that's your cycle. Sure, you can't change the behavior of the boss, but you can change how you react to that behavior. And then you could do silly things if you wanted to, like, I'm not going to respond to that email, right and see what the boss does. Like you could do things like that. But you can't do it. If everything's in your inbox, because your inbox is like, it's literally a loading zone. There's no, there's no rhyme or reason or definition to it. So any so you can, you have to define anything that you're working with, including time blocks, whether it's very specific or broad enough that you can fit enough in it so that you know that oh, I'm going to be able to use this time block effectively. Same thing with email. So yeah, you could have an email time block. But then I would encourage you to figure out how to best leverage that time block in a way so that you can only have one or two as opposed to having you get pinged by email all day long.

Francis Wade 39:22
Right? What were the challenges that the two tools the tools that you need to use for time blocking, don't support time blocking. They're not they're not friendly to your objective. So once you make the switch from not time blocking to time blocking you're also not going to realize that my calendar isn't made for this my email, email inbox is not made for this. My to do list isn't made for this. My social circles aren't made for this.

Mike Vardy 39:55

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No, yeah, and you and you have to do It's like, it's like I grew up in an era where the Transformers were like a big cartoon and Voltron and all that stuff. It's like, all of those. They're Voltron was like the four or five lines or whatever, right? They individually were pretty powerful. But when they formed together to be like, Voltron, unstoppable. That's the same thing here.

Mike Vardy 40:18
So your calendar, yeah, your calendar, your email, to do list is when all speaking the same language? You're going to be so yes. So again, like to give a really interesting example, your calendar is not made to time block specifically, because where do you put the tasks? They don't really, there's no, right? Like, you'd have to put them in the description, or maybe you have like to dos inside of it, or whatever, but very rarely. So what do you do? Well, the calendar says it's email time, okay, great. I have a to do list item that says check email. So therefore, that you know, or emails I need to send, and you go to the email tag, and you see all the emails you need to send. So that way you go into email with missions, rather than questions, because that's always a better way to go in.

Mike Vardy 40:59
And then you open up your email, and you see all that you send those emails, and then your email inbox has all these things, you're like, oh, emails from the boss, well, there's the boss folder, I'm going to move that to that folder. And I'm going to keep going through. That's how you do it. Because the calendar says the block of time is for email, the To Do lists, here's the emails that I know I want to send. And then the email says, here's how I manage the inflow, so that the hundreds and hundreds of people that email one person aren't overwhelming me in a way that I have to constantly be reacting to these things. So that the next time the email time block comes up, I can go back in and deal with it again. That's how that works. That should be

Francis Wade 41:35
one seamless activity, with example, the inbox should be blocked, the inbox should be hidden from view, to send emails, you don't want to be distracted by what came in five minutes ago, that's not going to take a three hour you're distracted time. So it should the three, the three tools should present you with (we're getting into solutions now). No. So this is we've done this solutions now would be the kind of software that is fit for purpose, not fit for this purpose, that one and this one, and then you got to put them together. And when you put them together, they're actually not made to work together, they're not helpful to you as a timeb locker, you've got to know be so disciplined that when use them. You only do this when you're in this mode, you only do that in that mode, you're having to integrate all of the discipline that should be built into the software. Right?

Mike Vardy 42:29
Right. But the tools allow to make that easier. And that's why when someone says to me, Well, how do I know, I'm just using my to do list and my to do list has due dates, and like Apple reminders, let's use that as an example. until they've added tags, to Apple reminders. It was really not that good for this sort of thing. And I would argue it still isn't. It's not meant for this kind of stuff. Even Francesco's new Bento app, it's not meant for that either. We're talking about SkedPal, Gosh, Clickup, Asana, Todoist is like anything that has some way for you to tag or create a connection to your calendar, and then whatever it is you're supposed to be working with. So I mean, I'll use examples like the time you need the resource,

the energy, the activity, whatever, you need to be able to connect those dots quickly. So that when you're like, oh, it's it's writing time. Oh, okay. To do it says, here's all my writing tasks across multiple projects. Let me look Oh, and, you know, so let me work on those. Like, that's just a quick connection. But if it's like I need it's, it's an I'll use theming as an example, here. It's two o'clock on a Wednesday. That's my writing time. What's my writing project I'm trying to work on right with my project I'm working on right now. Well, this month project is the procrastination course. Okay, let me go into the procrastination course inside of Clickup. See all the tasks that are associated with writing with it. And let's go. So the human cannot be removed from this and the discipline is required. But you have to have a tool that will help remove the friction that can show up because there's that primitive part of your brain that wants to go, Yeah, but email will tell me what to do or Facebook, what about that, like, you need to have some form of direction. And that's what these again, it's all about directing your attention. And if you have the path of least resistance setup, then your time blocks will work. But you have to they require it's like a gardener, you have to constantly be weeding and cultivating and feeding the soil so the plants will actually grow and you'll get a great harvest.

Francis Wade 44:35
Right with given the tools that we have today. there and I think this is the this is the message for anybody who, particularly if you're you're new to time blocking is that you're we've talked about all the different ways in which you may have understood time blocking before you started. You started off too hot and heavy. You started off too quickly because you didn't really have a gradual way of getting into the challenges it presents.

Francis Wade 45:02
As you get into the challenges you present, you realize that the social people who are around you, and your expectations aren't aligned with what really what you want to accomplish. And as you start to put the tools together and start to use them, they don't talk to each other. They're not, they're not concerned about your time blocks, they're concerned about other things. And you have to kind of, as you said, you have to keep crafting it, and working it so that it actually accomplishes your goals. And this is, this is the bad news of time blocking is that, my goodness, you commit to it. And as you commit to it, you are forced to become the architect.

Mike Vardy 45:39
It's a lifestyle. That becomes a lifestyle. Here's the thing. And I was just thinking about this before we hopped on our call today, because I've been working out and working out is a lifestyle, eating healthily, like, you know, I don't like the term diet in that, like, the quick like, I'm going on a diet to lose weight, like a diet technically should be like, this is the diet that I have in my life. And this is what I do. Now, what's interesting, and this is this is I would challenge you like once if you are somebody like me and Francis have been time blocking for a while or using these kind of processes. I think it's important to have a cheat day. I do like I'm not saying it shouldn't be during the work week, but maybe on a Saturday, you don't time block at all, because that will actually help with the discipline in a way. Think of it. It's the same thing with eating healthy, like you've heard, have a cheat day, like, Oh, it's my cheat day like it's something to actually look forward to. Now, I'm not suggesting that you should do it right away. If you've if you're new to time blocking, don't go, well, here's my cheat day and move the cheat day around. Like that's what you wouldn't do that with a physical routine or workout anyway. But there's something but if

the discipline needs a bit of a breather, too, right? So if you know that, hey, every Sunday like Sunday, I love watching the Cincinnati Bengals play football when it's going on. So I will do things like watch the videos of past season like I will do. But Sunday is my it's well, Sunday. So my cheat Saturday is right now my cheat day, but Sunday would be like the day where I'm like, you know, I don't I don't theme right. Like, and actually, I've had it on Friday before because Friday is a day where no one really wants to work. So I'm like, I'm free to do whatever I want on Friday. That doesn't mean I all of a sudden go through my to do list in a sequential order. I still look at it. And I'm like, Well, what do I feel like doing right now? I don't know. Let's I'm tired. Let me look at all my low energy tests. Okay, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, I'll do those right. But I'm not beholden to what's today's focus, right? It's more like, I just use the to do list at that point as a directory, right? But the calendar tells me Hey, Mike, it's your cheat day. It's free day, it's free day Friday, right? I can do. I can do whatever I want that day. But whatever I want. Isn't that like it really is? Because I use it. So I think that that's worth keeping in mind too. This is not a and I've had this happen before.

Mike Vardy 48:01
People have said, Mike your system, it's like time crafting and time blocking sounds so rigid, like so. So like, it's hard. Yeah, it can be. But it doesn't have to be, I would say initially. It's it's, it's there's some rigidity at first, because you're not used to it like you like you know, I mean, there's some constraints there. But frameworks foster freedom, right. So if you have a framework in place, and you haven't long, I feel like you know, I don't need to follow it today, because I'll be able to pick it back up the next day. That's why, you know, the theming days is helpful for me. Because if I'm sick on a Thursday, and Thursday is my training day, my brain doesn't go when we can do all this training stuff. Well, next Tuesday, because Tuesday is also a training day, so don't worry about it. Well, what can I do today? Well, you're kind of tired and sick. So do all your low energy stuff. So I, I don't I have those there as attention points. That's what they're designed to do. That's what these blocks are designed to do. That's what themes are designed to do. And by having one day a week where I'm not beholden to that, it actually strengthens the other days that much more.

Francis Wade 49:07
It's kind of like your your days off from the gym make you better in the gym? Yes, it needs the rest of the day, to recover from the challenge of working off.

Mike Vardy 49:16
Yeah. And you know, what's hilarious is that I didn't have that for the longest time. I didn't I was like, every day is themed at every, like, I was relentless about it. And you know, the only reason I recognized I needed one is I don't I mean I journ as part of my evening routine every night. I'm like, why am I like, I just feel like I'm constantly like, I'm getting the right things done. But what am I going to get a break? And I'm like, wait a minute, why don't I just give myself a break? Like I could do that like, and I just recalibrated. And I'm like, every Friday, which is you know, like we're recording this on a Wednesday two days from now I got I'm free to do whatever I want but the great thing is whatever I want to do, I know where to find it. I think that's the other thing too. You have to know where to go find this stuff. And

Francis Wade 50:02
right, so it's not hitting you from any point of the world

Mike Vardy 50:06

Right? And we've done this long enough now both you and I to know that the places where we can find it, we reasonably know to look, there's because we've used them, so we trust them, right? And the only way time blocking sticks is if you put them in places that you know, you can trust, and you do it over consistent. That's why I said look for weeks, don't don't just like, make that list. 20, whatever it shows up, that's redundant.

Mike Vardy 50:28

Block out time, but not just this week, maybe only pick two blocks this week, but go like 3-4-5-6 weeks down the road. That worked backwards. Yeah. And in fact, you could you could even get to the point where you're like, well, what's the most important what's the least important stuff? Let me go six weeks down the road and put it there and graded to like, oh, the most important stuff needs to go this week, right? Or the most urgent stuff rather, right? That's this week, right? Yeah, exactly. Um, but just know this, you will never stop crafting your time, including your time blocks until you have no more time blocks to craft.

Mike Vardy 51:02

Because, you know, you're just No, I mean, you've ascended to a higher plane, where your to do list and your calendar and all that stuff doesn't really matter anymore. It's just who you were. Who you became that does, right. So just keep that in mind. Like it. I know, we live in a society that's like live for today, because tomorrow isn't guaranteed. I'm not, you know, crapping on that at all. I think that's important. But just remember that there's only so much you can do in a day, in a week in a month. And there's this great book by Dr. Henry Cloud called Necessary Endings. And he uses the metaphor of a rosebush, which I think is brilliant, because you have to cut healthy blooms on a rosebush so that others can look amazing. You could have an okay rosebush, but it's gonna be crowded with flowers, they won't stand out. So healthy things need to be pruned. So that way, the rosebush can thrive. And it's the same thing here. So there's going to be things where you're like, I really want to do this this week, but it's not the best week to do it. So I'm going to leave it to the next week or so keep that in mind, you're always going to be crafting your time, you're never going to stop once you stop crafting your time, then you are giving your time away. And you don't want to do that.

Francis Wade 52:13

That's going back into the past. So Mike, how can as we wrap up, we have some awesome, awesome conclusions and advice for people as they get into time blocking. And as they start to grow as time blockers we've given them. I think insights are not heard anywhere else with respect to here's what happens. Once you get on this path. It's not as bad as you think it's also requires a whole lot of nuance, and a lot of strategy. what can folks hear more about the work that you're doing in time crafting time, theming and productivity podcast?

Mike Vardy 52:47

Well, if you want to learn keep up with my work, and just get like I'll, you'll get regular emails for me and so on and so forth. I'm going tohttps://productivityist.com/dobedobedo. And you'll get a what I call the Starting Six. And I think what I like about it is it's both qualitative and quantitative. It's a worksheet that

you can use. And then you'll start to get some insights and advice from me on how to leverage that kind of stuff, how to theme your time how do you know how to how do you know operate by mode, more than say by project like different lenses with which to look through the your intentions, so you can pay more attention to them. And again, if you know, my podcast is a productive conversation, which you can check out. It's on Spotify, Apple podcasts, wherever you listen to podcasts. And yeah, I mean, I think the best place to go just to get started is with the starting six productivity. https://productivityist.com/dobedobedo

Francis Wade 53:45
dooby dooby doo is how many do's and isn't there to do's? dooby dooby

Mike Vardy 53:52
doo. So there's I think it's it's two B's and three dues, right? They get think of like dooby dooby doo. There you go.

Francis Wade 54:02
Oh, yeah, that's right. Excellent. Great having you on the podcast! You will be back. Yeah, we will not pick another topic and habited because is these kind of conversations are, they get to places that people just don't get to hear and understand because we're going into depth in something that they're dealing with? Problems that they're having in this one specific area. And, boy, I'm trusting that, folks, if you're listening that you got value, but keep listening, I'm going to tell you about the next podcast in the series, the episode that follow this one in just a few minutes plus, give you a few more announcements, so keep listening.

Mike Vardy 54:38
Thanks for having me. Francis had a blast. All right. Bye.

Francis Wade 54:40
Take care.