

ep 12 Trevor Lohrbeer

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SPEAKERS

Trevor Lohrbeer, Francis Wade



Francis Wade 00:35

The task management and time blocking podcast episode 12. You're someone who time blocks, a quick glance at your calendar, which show that you have put some thought into each day's plan. What happens when you get to the end of the year, and realize that you haven't accomplished your most important goals? For example, some gurus at marriagebuilders.com recommend that you spend 15 hours per week in solo time with your spouse or a significant other, you may block the time in your calendar with a recurring appointment. That makes sense, right? But what if you realize after a year that you fell far short of 15 times 52, to where that number is? Why does this happen? Why is it even avoidable? That when we set an objective to spend a certain amount of time on a project or some intention that we don't accomplish it and we fail? How do we get past that? So tune in to this episode to hear from me and my special guests Trevor Lohrbeer as we solve this challenging problem together. Welcome to the task management and time blocking podcast.



Francis Wade 02:51

And welcome back. As you can see, we're joined by or a special guest today Trevor Lohrbeer . And before I introduce Trevor let me just talk to you if this is the first time that you're hearing our podcast. So this is a different kind of podcast, it's not an interview, or I'm not asking Trevor to talk about his book or the software that he represents. Or it's not an interview with chipper per se instead, Trevor's a guest here at two time labs. And together, we're going to spend time looking at a problem. So we're going to spend the first part of this episode trying to solve the problem of time allocation...trying to define sorry, define the problem of time allocation, then we're going to switch from defining the problem into solutions. So this has a very much a part one and part two. And at the end, we'll wrap up by looking at the implementation, what are the steps that need to be taken.



Francis Wade 03:48

And here on the podcast, we also are looking for different kinds of ideas that we can pick up for

the very first time. So when we hit on one of those, you'll hear thisnice bell. And that bell will go off when we have picked up on something brand new and insight that we want to point out and say, Okay, this time around, we've actually gotten something brand new. If we don't accomplish anything brand new. If, basically, we're sharing ideas that we already had then we'll play a buzzer at the very end. And so we didn't quite hit the objective of brand new thinking, which is kind of lofty and very aspirational. But we had a great time, and we trust that you get value.



Francis Wade 04:32

So before I introduce Trevor, let me tell you a story about Li Wei. So she is a very busy project manager. She works for a conglomerate, as a middle manager and when she's not working, she tries to spend as much time as possible with her family. But the pandemic has changed things quite a bit. Now that she's working from home for four and a half days per week, she spends more time than ever with her husband and two children ...time. Okay, but it's not enough. Her husband and her older child started to complain that they never will see her. This makes no sense. She explains to her therapist. His name is Michael. She's at home all the time. No, and they're under the same roof. Almost all the time. He pauses and asks a few probing questions. And they reveal that while she has them in sight, it doesn't mean they're in her mind. For example, She used to be really careful to leave work at 5pm each day. After abandoning the practice, due to COVID, she actually works all the time. She's available to answer messages at almost every waking moment. Also, her projects the a job have now slipped behind schedule. When they review her actual time usage, they uncover the truth. She spends hardly a single quality hour or with each person in her family per week. One hour or less? How can that be?



Francis Wade 06:20

So welcome Trevor Lohrbeer . Trevor is the founder of dayoptimizer. And you can find out more at dayoptimizer.com is a web app that helps all solopreneurs create daily plans that reflect their priorities, using guided workflows designed around neuroscience principles. He's also the creator of strategic life tools, which is available at strategiclifetools.com/tools. It's a free membership site with tools for life planning and lean decisions. He also has another site at leandecisions.com. And that's a blog that he just keeps concepts and techniques to make better decisions. Trevor is a global citizen. He lives part time in Asheville, North Carolina, and also part time in Berlin, Germany. In his spare time, he is an avid swing dancer, and is currently working toward B2 fluency in German. So this is a second time that we're having Trevor with us. We cued up the beginning of this problem last time.



Francis Wade 07:25

Right? The I think we we decided to punt this one. Because last time around, we talked about time optimism. And this time around, we are now looking at allocation, which is I guess defined by..well, tell us. So how do we define time allocation?



Trevor Lohrbeer 07:56

Yeah, so let's quickly review a little bit of the last episode where we talked about that that

distinction between time estimation and time allocation. And time estimation is figuring out how long it takes for a test to get done. And time allocation is figuring how long are you going to spend on it today, or this week. And where the confusion lies is we often think that everything can be estimated when it can't. And so we use time estimation in areas when it's not necessarily appropriate. And where a time allocation strategy will be more effective. Because if it's a complex task, or a task we've never done before novel or complex tasks, then we can't actually estimate them. And instead, we should be allocating time to moving that forward. But then we also dive into we started diving into which we'll get into this episode is...How do you allocate your time, both at the macro level all the way down to the micro level? And we'll talk about the three levels of time allocation and how to make those work.



Francis Wade 08:57

Right, I think it's fair to say that human beings have problems in all these different areas once they start time blocking, because it's not easy. You know, when you're when you're allocating time, you're not just making a decision in a vacuum about we're to know when to "debug the program". Because whatever you decide to do at any particular time, means that you're also deciding not to do something else at that particular time. And that makes it annoying and difficult. Because you don't... none of us probably listening to this podcast, have 168 hours to play with...not really. We have maybe an hour to spare, here or there. And when we decided to do something, no, it means that we're putting off 25 Other things and we're not doing them now. So those have to be managed, each one on their own merits. They each have their own deadlines and their own consequences for not completing them. That's a lot of tasks to manage isn't it.



Trevor Lohbeer 10:00

Yep, yeah, absolutely.



Francis Wade 10:03

And when we don't allocate our time, well, what are some of the things that happen?



Trevor Lohbeer 10:12

Um, we tend to get very stressed out, right. So like, what happens is we tend to be, try to work overtime. A lot of times what people do is they try to work more to account for the time that they're not, they're not allocating their time well, so they just put in more effort, when they you know, where else to put it. Yeah, and they, they should be putting in smarter effort, they tend to cause a lot of stress, which then makes us actually perform worse. And so it becomes then a vicious cycle where the more stress we feel, the harder we try to work. And less effective we are going that work, which causes us to try to steal more time away. So I'm very big in trying to get people to think strategically about how they use their time. So they can start working smarter rather than harder.



Francis Wade 11:03

Right? I also mentioned that there's a, there's a loss of confidence, because you start to question, is there something wrong with me, you know, time blocking is sold as something that's pretty easy. And it's easy to understand, just put tasks in your calendar, until you go start to do it. And you realize that there's more to this is more challenging than I thought....it's not just as simple as doing that. You're actually managing a lot of moving parts. And you're doing it with imperfect information. And you're doing with poor estimates. So you're doing a lot of guessing, basically. And when you do a lot of guessing and you guess badly, you start to think, Am I doing it wrong? Is there something wrong with me? Is it my attitude? Is it my frame of mind, my mentality wrong? Is time blocking not believable as a technique? Should I go back to using lists and forget about trying to use my schedule in this way?



Francis Wade 12:00

You know, and then some of us even judge ourselves even more harshly and we say, you know, there should be a way to get this done? And why can't I figure it all out? And some start to, you know, beat themselves up! Because it's it, it seems like it should be an easy problem to solve. And, in general, we, I think we approach time blocking, thinking that it should solve these problems for us. There's a big should in there, and it ought to work out. And that we should be able to use it to execute our priorities. Yeah. Like this, there ought to be a way. And when there's not an easy way, we struggle with the concept that, that we thought this would be easy. And we're now surprised, because no one told us that it's much harder than it looks. What do you what do you think of that?



12:55

Yeah, I think. So I think I would summarize that as our expectations, around time blocking, and our expectations on how well that will solve our problems. Or even the problems that need to get solved are incorrect. So one of the biggest areas where I can see that mismatch happening is going back to what we talked about is that expectation that things can be estimated, right? There are definitely certain tasks that can be estimated accurately. But there are also tasks that can't be. And so if you have the expectation that this is something that you can accurately estimate, and then you're not able to accomplish that, within that estimated time, that's going to be frustrating, because your expectations did not match up with reality. But if you go into something expecting that you're not going to be able to accurately estimate the time for a task, and you use these other strategies that we'll talk to you about today, like time blocking, and the concept of allocation rather than estimation within that time blocking, then you're going to come out with less frustration because your expectations are not going to match reality a little bit more.



14:13

Likewise, is we often have the expectation that the end product needs to meet some specific spec. And that sometimes is the case. A lot of times we have a lot more wiggle room and a lot more adjustment within that, that we can change. And by not having such not sticking to our expectations in that process. We're able to adapt our time management to accomplish our

goals better than if we are perfectionist about our expectations. So we'll talk a little bit later about how one of the key things I want to drive home that is a lot of time management is scope management. It's changing what our expectations are or not holding ourselves to our initial expectations on what the finished product looks like, so that way we can meet our time management needs. Right?



Francis Wade 15:09

Right. Because we, it's almost impossible to start an important task without an expectation. It's not like we're clean slates, we can't quite brainwash ourselves into expecting anything,,, we are human. So this is not like a problem that will go away, just because we're good people, if we bring the baggage or expectation will sit there every single task, and even to the end of our life, you know, if it's on a week by week basis, that expectation is there, but it's also there, you know, as you're laying on your deathbed. Yeah, you're looking back. And you're, maybe you're asking, Where did I allocate my time?



15:49

And, and I would say, Our expectations are derived from what we know. And so they explicitly exclude what we don't know. And for many problems, what we don't know, has a bigger effect on the outcome than what we know, at the start of the project. That's where we discover Oh, the whole phrase "opening a can of worms, right?" That's something I didn't even know that existed. And so that lack of knowledge, when we're creating those expectations, causes our expectations to be incorrect in the beginning.



Francis Wade 16:24

Right, and assuming karma doesn't exist, that applies to life as a project, right? Yeah, one shot as far as we know, you get one shot. And at the end of that shot, you kind of go, if I knew, then what I know. now... Right? So this has everything to do with the quality, a quality week, a quality year, a great decade, a lifetime. Because we are always allocating time. Now.,If we don't do it, well, we end up with these day to day irritations of, or projects getting screwed up. And if we don't do it well, on a whole life level, we end up with all these regrets. So there's that. And I don't mean to get heavy. But most people, what do you think? My impression is that most people just don't think too much about allocation until there's a urgent problem. It's not something they consider too often. What do you think?



17:31

I would say that's fairly accurate. Yeah. So keep? Right, let me let me i because you just lead into that about the life thing, I want to lead into jumping into the three levels of time allocation that I think are going to be useful for our discussion around it



Francis Wade 17:48

it. So the problem, lower parts of the solution is my question

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17:51

I think this will frame both the problem and the solution, right? Because I think it's a problem and a solution issue. So when we talk about allocation, you were just talking about the life allocation of how are we allocating time in our life, you know, on a weekly basis, a monthly basis? And all that. We also have, at the more granular level? How do we allocate time to a project or a task? And you know, that could be like, Oh, I can get it all done in a single day. But oftentimes, that's how do I allocate time over a series of days or weeks to a project or task?



Trevor Lohbeer 18:28

And then at the most granular level, will also talk about within a specific time block how do I allocate the time within that time block to achieve my goals for that timeblock? So those are the three levels, I think we'll talk about from both the problem people struggle with doing the allocation, all three levels? And then what are solutions we can do for those three levels.



Francis Wade 18:49

Great, I suppose if that's there's three different kinds of skills. Yeah. As you as you define them, it sounds they don't, they're not. They're similar. But thinking about your life is not like thinking about how much time should we spend on the first part of the podcast versus the second?



19:07

Correct? Correct. Yeah, they wind up you use different techniques to solve each problem. But recognizing that there's at least those three different levels, let's you say, What level am I trying to operate at right now? And then how can I solve that? And how can I align all three levels together? So what I'm doing at a time block level, at a project task level and at my life level are all in alignment. So I'm not like misaligning things.



Francis Wade 19:34

So I have a suspicion that most people just.... they're happy being really busy at the first level. They manage the chaos at the second level, and they ignore the third level?



Trevor Lohbeer 19:46

Yeah, that would be my suspicion as well. Okay. Yeah.



Francis Wade 19:50

And that doesn't work. Because you could be really great at the first level. And the second and

And that doesn't work. Because you could be really great at the first level. And the second and third will determine the quality of your life. So in a sense, they're not I think, well, I want to I want to say they're all important. I don't think there's one more important than the other. It's just that it's easier to focus on what you're going to do in the next five minutes... Than it is the next 10 years. Yeah, normal. Okay.



Francis Wade 20:24

So this is, this is not a new problem, of course, right? This is not like we're discovering something. This is a this has been going on since mankind started to think of probably even people that don't even think about time, still have the problem? Because it's a fact of living, it's a fact of living a limited life. Yeah. And if you, you know, when you were cavemen and you needed to, you know, you had the same problem you do, like, go after the, like, keep running after the gazelle? Now. Because we need to eat, or do I stop, and instead go after the turtles, which aren't running as fast? Do we travel five days north? That's level one, level two, do we travel five days north? To go hunt? Elephant? I guess? Or do we stay home and you know, look after the look for the gazelles. And at the end of your life, yeah, I should have spent less time hunting and more time taking care of the kids. Because if you're alone laying in the cave, and the kids aren't with you, and if they can't be bothered, because you don't care about them, so they don't care about you, with less time hunting and more time spending with the kids. So this is you know, all the way going back to caveman times. We're talking about a inherent human problem. And time blocking is, I think, helps to define the problem in a way that most people don't think. What would you say?



Trevor Lohbeer 21:52

Yeah, I would think that's correct. Yeah, I would say people don't often think through how they're using their time. And time blocking is one way to help surface that,



Francis Wade 22:04

right. And time blocking sort of drives you down into making very explicit decisions about where I spend my time. Ultimately, on all three levels, but traditional time blocking is really about probably about the first two, I would say.



22:23

Yeah, I think that what's not talked about as much that should be is that third level of how do you how do you within a time block structure that time block, but you're right, most time blocking is, I would say most time blocking is done at that middle level at that project test level. It's like let me figure out how to schedule my tasks into my calendar or etc. There's many coaches who do the the first level of life planning stuff, you know, I have to build your own life portfolio and strategic life tools. Lots of people have different things on how do you look at your entire life was Laura Van der Kam? That's the structure of 160 hours? How do I divide this 160 hours? Lots of people have frameworks for thinking about how do I divide that time at the light

level. And then like I said, there's lots of stuff talked about scheduling time into your calendar, creating time boxes, time blocks within your calendar. But I think also at that micro level within a time block that is very rarely talked about.



Francis Wade 23:30

Right? Right. That probably explains why Li Wei in the in the story isn't at the level, I think she's a second level problem. She's not managing the, the I don't want to solve it yet... But she's experiencing problems by talking about by noticing that her family is reacting adversely to the way she's spending her time. So we will talk about that when we start to solve the problem.



Francis Wade 24:00

But what someone someone like her ... if she didn't have our therapist Michael to talk to, or if we didn't have time blocking as a tool, I could see ongoing frustration and trying to, especially if you're not time blocking at all. So there's a whole school of thought that time blocking is a bad idea. And you should keep your stuff on lists. So you're not even pre thinking, what you should be spending your day on or your week. You're not looking at dependencies between tasks. You're just scanning lists and deciding what to do next.



Francis Wade 24:34

And it can be really frustrating if you're someone who has especially sharp deadlines, because it's really hard to meet sharp deadlines, or even meet expectations of your family if you're just looking at the list. It's not as difficult to look at the list and it says "spend time with the kids". It's not something you put on a list, and manage it that way. The better way is to use a calendar. So if you're not even time blocking, then you could end up really frustrated and, really getting to the end of week, month year life and say, You know what happened here? I think it's way more likely, if you're not time blocking, what do you think?



25:10

Um, certainly, if you're not doing like looking at your time allocation, I don't know, there's several strategies for how to pace your day in time blocking is definitely one of them. And I would say probably one of the more effective ones to make sure they're allocated. I always say all contexts, all devices context sensitive. So it depends upon the context. Time blocking to me is really useful when you have multiple competing priorities that you need to balance, so that way allows you to strategically think about those, or if you have lots of time, so you only have a single priority, but you're having trouble defending that time. So creating protected time blocks that say, "Hey, like, I want to write a book". So I only have a single priority there. But I'm having trouble figuring out how that is. So you actually use time blocking in slightly different ways for each of those, whether you're balancing multiple competing priorities, or just creating protected time blocks. But yeah, I think those are critical to tie into, how am I using my time overall, and is it aligned to my life goals?



Francis Wade 26:16

Yeah, and time blocking offers you a particular kind of intensity around your time usage. Because you're bringing a whole lot of attention to the way you spend your time. your waking hours, let's call it that...you're very, very much focused. And you're always managing a plan that you created at some point in the past. Again, very different from just looking at the list and saying, Well, what's next? What should I put? Do I feel like next? Or what do I remember to do next? I think it's way more likely to get into that position where you're regretting the way you the way you allocated your time because you weren't really managing the time, you're just going from the lists. I think that regret is more likely to show up. If you're only if you're only list managing. And it was something that's not a problem. But for some it really is.



27:11

Yeah, and I would say that like, you know, task management is totally valuable, you should be creating lists and managing lists. But it is a separate discipline and time management. And you can use time, you can do list management. For some people, list management is a form or task management is a form of time management, just like some people use energy management or attention management to manage their time. Those are valid strategies to use, what works for one person may not work for someone else. But like I said, there's these categories of things, if you have multiple competing priorities, and you need to make sure that all moving forward, then actually using time management through a strategy, like time blocking is really valuable. Not that you wouldn't use other some of the other strategies. But it's critical.



Trevor Lohbeer 27:55

If you are doing a job like you know, a classic one where you're basically doing list management is if you're a single track job, and you just have a backlog, in which case like, you know, say I'm a salesperson making sales calls, well, I just need that list of the people to call, or I'm a developer, and I'm just developing code, well just give me the backlog of features, and I just work through it. And then I'm using other strategies to manage my time. But for the people who do need to be managing these competing priorities, we need to decide how am I going to allocate time across those priorities to meet my end goals?



Francis Wade 28:28

Actually, now you mentioned the salespeople that I've met salespeople, and I used to be one for a very short time in my life. We are working off that list. You start working at nine o'clock. Yeah, and you do like this. You bat your eyes twice, and it's five o'clock. And you haven't had lunch. You havebt been to the bathroom, you haven't gotten up to even stretch. The momentum of working on a list this is this is one of the one of the reasons why blocking time for launch, for email for recovery. And the reason why those are such valuable strategies. Yeah. And I think when you when you're not allocating time, accurately, you know, if it guys if you're the walk away from this call, and you're not better at time, allocating you could feel as if the future is only going to be more of the past that you won't have the better results that you really want to get. Because I think ultimately where we want to take you or encourage you to get is kind of to towards set it and forget it. Where you're able to create a combination of behaviors and apps and devices that allow you to time allocate in a way that's repetitive, repeatable,

cyclical, systematic that you can rely on. Like you don't have to recreate every time you sit down, that operates on its own so that you can move to the next level and think about how can I improve it? Does that make sense? Trouble



30:01

Yeah, I think so I mean, I think there's always, it's not completely automated because there's, there's a lot of value. Well, this is a little bit different. I know you use an auto scheduler, and I'm gonna specifically create a app that is specifically a manual scheduler because I believe there's a psychological benefit to going through the planning process and creating those commitments versus an auto scheduler that does it for you. But again, that's different strategies for different people. So how much of this process you automate will depend upon what your job is, and whether you're going to gain that psychological benefit of making some of those deliberate decisions and setting some of those psychological triggers, right.



Trevor Lohbeer 30:41

In some cases, it will be valuable to do that, in which case, you want to make sure that you have a manual planning process in place. For some cases, that won't be relevant, in which case, automating that process makes a lot more sense. And I would tend to say that people who are doing more longer term projects like so if I'm writing a book, or I've got a lot of them a standard regular thing, I know you'd write an article every week, that's something that's classic, figure out your time block, put it in your calendar and automate that. So you, you decide upfront what that thing looks like. And then you're just running it because you don't need to make those decisions every day or every week. However, if you're doing something where your priorities are constantly shifting, then having a more deliberative process upfront, is going to be more relevant, where you're setting those priorities on a daily or weekly basis and going through a more manual planning process for that. So it just depends.



Francis Wade 31:33

Yeah, actually, that's, that's a, I'm gonna put a ding for first insight. I got something from what you just said, which is that it's not the point isn't the ultimate creation, automatization autumn.



Trevor Lohbeer 31:33



Francis Wade 31:36

Yeah, actually, that's, that's a, I'm gonna put a ding for first insight. I got something from what you just said, which is that it's not the point isn't the ultimate creation, automatization




Francis Wade 31:48

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It's more like the systematization. Where you're, you're able to systematize your activities manual or your app driven, whatever it is, and allows you to move to this next level, where you can know manage the system, because the system is pretty much running on its own. Yeah, therefore means you can you're above it. You're beyond it. And I think in particular, the time blocking allows for that a great deal of that, because you're so intimately involved with time. I suspect that when you're not doing that, you're not time blocking it to any degree. You're always having to think about time because you can't set anything and forget, it has to be a concern that's always on your mind. Unless you have infinite time, and nobody really does. Yeah. So

 Trevor Lohbeer 32:51

I again, I think it will depend on again, I think in our context, it's very relevant for doing it. One of the other strategy, very popular strategies, which I would say would contrast with time blocking would be doing different rhythm methods or pacing methods, like the Pomodoro method, right, the Pomodoro method is a way to do time management, that doesn't require time blocking, because what you're doing is you're setting up a cadence of how you're going to work. And again, if you're working, if you are, if you have the type of job, where you're working from a backlog, doing a cadence or a thing where like, I work for 25 minutes, I take a five minute break, I do that four times I take a half an hour break, you know, that cadence can be a very effective time management technique for certain types of jobs. But it's not going to help you if you need to balance these different competing priorities. Or if you need to defend time in your schedule, because you have a manager schedule where you're like, you're constantly meeting with people, you have lots of interruptions or whatnot, and you need to create protected blocks, or you need to create multiple priority blocks to allocate time across those, that's not gonna help for that. So it just got to be the context within which people are working.

 Francis Wade 34:02

But you can use and this is this is where to get to get the solutions in case you have not noticed folks what we're talking about, now, actually, how do you solve this problem. But you can use time blocking and Pomodoro. Just you have to stick make sure everything fits into a particular time slot. If you're if you're doing strict Pomodoro, 25 minutes on five minutes off. Most people don't like that. They're doing it their way. They're saying whatever number of minutes I need, and then five minutes at the end to recover.

 34:34

Yeah, if you're doing strict Pomodoro I think you'd have to do like two hour time blocks, right? Because it's for Pomodoro. And then you take a whole break. So you could do four Pomodoro and a two hour block and then take a half an hour break and then you have four more to do you could time block. Like if you're doing strict Pomodoro most people don't actually pay attention to the four Pomodoro rule. The other thing I'll just mention because people always miss this in Pomodoro is Key to do the check mark at the end of the Pomodoro, you're supposed to do a check mark after every Pomodoro on a physical piece of paper or on on a device to get the dopamine to get the dopamine hit Yeah,



Francis Wade 35:10

oh, to get the dopamine rush.



Trevor Lohbeer 35:12

And people, people don't do that, they'll just do the do the 25 minutes, we'll take the five minute and they'll do the cycle, but they don't check it off. And there's actually value in that, check it off, because it's four checkmarks. And then you take your break. It's not four Promodors. And then you take your break. I mean, it's the same thing.



Francis Wade 35:30

Checkmarks and then a break. Okay, for positive. So that's a very level one activity, right? That's a Yeah, that's a level one activity in the sense that you're giving yourself the dopamine reward for having followed your schedule.



35:45

Correct. And, and then that what the what the dopamine hit does is it helps build your motivation...increases some of your motivation to do the next Pomodoro. So like, like, you can do Pomodoro without doing the checkmark after after every Pomodoro. But it's going to be more powerful if you do. And it doesn't have again, it's like a piece of paper app, whatever, in some way. Having that checking off. And like doing that little thing I've done the Pomodoro. Great. Like, in fact, you could even do, like a great way to do it, I think is to do one slash two slashes, three slashes, four slashes. And then when you take your half an hour break, you flash it all the way through that like, you know, on the on the fifth slash. But um, but yeah, that's.



Francis Wade 36:32


And those are ways to keep yourself on track with respect to the time that you're allocating. So to the task, right, we're at level one. Yeah. So for example, we're here recording by zoom. And there's no clock. Zoom has that does that but as far as I know, I don't maybe it's somewhere hidden in the feature. It doesn't tell you how long we've been talking. So I'm kind of looking around saying, Why don't they have a clock that tells you how long the recording is. But maybe it's there and I just haven't turned it on. So I keep having to have a look at a different clock in order to manage your time. So there's that. So if you don't have a visual sort of indicator, I also read somewhere, just today, actually some research that came out that said that if you're going to put a countdown timer. So a countdown timer is just what it sounds like. You just like a pomodoro or you decide to do a task within an hour. Now usually use an hour, and you have a countdown mechanism. So they've done research that shows that you're more effective. If you can't see, physically see the countdown happening. See in the countdown, it actually has an impact on your productivity. What do you think?



37:16

[1] 37:40


I think that's critical it like it creates anxiety on that. So like within day optimizer, we have this real time tracking feature where it tells you how much effort is remaining and stuff like that. And I had to make the decision when we're designing that. Do I actually keep that accurate or not? And so what it does it update every five minutes, so no one can actually look at it and stare at it and see a change, it's only gonna change every five minutes. So it kind of removes that, that anxiety aspect of it. Because by not updating every minute, you actually like changing it to where someone can't be staring at the clock, because no one's gonna stare for five minutes. Right? So like, there is that psychology around that is like, yeah, keep it out of sight.

 Trevor Lohbeer 38:27

What I actually recommend is, so let's get into a little bit into that. This is the allocation within the time block when setting up pacing timers. So yeah, I allocate an hour time block, I recommend what people do is they set a 15 minute timer on their phone. And so every 15 minutes, it goes off and you click repeat 15 minutes repeat. But a key to that is, again, you're not going to look at it until it goes off. But you'll use a alarm sound that soothing, not jarring. So I you ocean wakes. So like it's not meant to so like on an iPhone, I can set a timer and the fact that you can start to buzzing, and then it slowly gets louder. So like it basically if you're in the middle of something, it just brings a gentle awareness to you, hey, 50 more minutes has passed. So if you're trying to get something done in an hour, that helps you pace your time throughout that hour. If you're doing it over two hours, maybe it's a half an hour time, whatever. But having that pacing another strategy I'll use is in brain FM, which is the focus music right? You can set it to go for half an hour. So do a half an hour when the music stops. I say another half an hour, but that tells me a half an hour past. So this concept of pacing within your time block I think is critical because it helps you become aware that time is passing and then make those decisions to do things differently within that time block. Right

 Francis Wade 39:59

Are either of those apps connected to your task management app. Are they connected to dayoptimizer? Are they standalone apps, they're just

 Trevor Lohbeer 40:07

that just yeah, they're just standalone. Like, it's just the on the iPhone, like, and I'm sort of Android has the same thing. You know, we just have this like little timer function where I can set a timer. And I can say, Okay, I'm gonna set a 15 minute timer, and I have ocean waves as mine, as the when the time were entered just gives me ocean waves. And then I'll just can easily click repeat. And, but again, setting some sort of timer, that's a pacing timer, right, so people will use that cube. Because the problem with the cube is a very jarring sound like they've got the time cubes where it can say 10 minutes.

 Francis Wade 40:40

Yeah. the cube. the amount of minutes that you want to block. Exactly. it's a jarring sound at



Francis Wade 43:05

And there's something called attention residue, which Yeah, is your carryover from one task to the next.



43:13

And this helps minimize attention residue, because you're actually unloading your brain. And it also then helps you build that momentum faster at the beginning of the next task, because you can load all the information into your brain faster, if you actually documented it before you ended the previous time.



Francis Wade 43:32

Right? Right. So we're, these are micro strategies that allow you to be let's call it like 100% or 100%, Prep, 100% Do and 100% Wrap. So we covered we covered the trouble introduced the framework in the last podcast that we did with him. So after you've wrapped then you can prep the next activity start again prep, do wrap. So you know this this rhythm is sort of very natural. And by the way, I'm someone I I don't wrap anything, I just leave everything and just move on to the next thing because I'm...I'm impatient. And I don't at all, take that breath at the end and then say okay, how do I wrap this in a way that so sometimes I come back I'm like, What was I doing when I ended that activity yesterday? I can't remember our what did it tell me to do all the action item I didn't. I can't recall because my Wrap...my Wrap? I find it I find it challenging to Wrap., Trevor. Yeah.



44:35



Francis Wade 44:35



44:35

Well, so this is this is where having that even if you're not using pacing timers or even if you are having a timer that says it's time to Wrap. So what people will do is they'll set their their notification is okay, I want my notification at 10 o'clock because that's what I'm switching my my x TAs will instead have the timer go off at 950 or 955 It says like you only have 10 more minutes left, wrap it, wrap it up, right. And that's a prompt for you to wrap. And so having this concept of a wrap timer, lets you be more conscious of that going, I only have five minutes, let me, let me let me put everything in order making sure so I can shut those things down. And then there doesn't involve systems because you do have to, if you've got a bunch of browser tabs open, you have to have a figure have a way to save that state, you have to remember to

have a place where you're taking your notes. So there are other things involved in that. But I find the first thing is people need to actually make time for that phase. And then we can start talking about the systems that support that phase.



Francis Wade 45:42

right. And I was on a call just before this one. And I tried to wrap too late. And my urgency only added more wrap time, because the other parties decided to talk some more. Yeah, I can see, I have to wrap, I have to wrap. And it became harder and harder to wrap. Eventually, fortunately, A call came in and interrupted the wrapping. So I could say, Oh, I gotta go. It was difficult. I said, I gotta go. So I got let off the hook. But if I had someone tap me on the shoulder, which say for my next car with a manual, say, okay, these guys take a long time to wrap. So 10 minutes, I'll give the warning. And I'll start out with 10 minutes to go as opposed to five.



Francis Wade 46:23


So, you know, in case you're wondering folks because you're listening, is there a research that backs us up? I know, there's research that backs up the idea of a countdown timer, that you're more focused, and even if you don't buy the research, or if you think it was done, away from, you know, some college university, but it's not for you. Try...try the level one experiments that we're talking about within the time block, and see whether they work for you or not, I definitely found that as I experimented, I had to make tweaks. But the the experimentation delivered in the sense that I became better at as a level one task manager, because I did these experiments. So I'd strongly recommend that you as you hear them, you make a list. And then this for a week, try Plan Do Wrap for a week, try the countdown timer. Try a soft alarm versus a jarring alarm. Try, try a reminder to let you know to wrap. So try these things and see how they work for you.



47:33

Let me tie in, I was gonna say let me tie into what you're just saying in the light. While the other reason we do it. And going back to what I said at the beginning of the episode is one of the reasons why we have these different strategies of a countdown timer, or pacing timers is to create more mindfulness within that time block. And specifically what we want to do, because we like, a lot of times people talk about mindfulness saying, Oh, you have to be mindful continuously. And I'm going to use the term mindfulness is to bring into your awareness of the passing of time, we're bringing into the awareness and coming into an awareness phase. When I'm actually trying to work on something, I can go, and I'm in this doing phase, but what I want to be able to do is have these mindfulness checkpoints to ask the question is, is this going according to how I expected this to be going? Should I change my approach to this? So if you if you set pacing timers, or countdown timers or whatnot, and you don't ever ask that question in the middle of that time block, it's not going to really be effective, because all you're doing is okay, time passed. But again, what are we talking about the beginning is a lot of time management is scope management. And what that means is if I set an hour, an hour, half time block, you know, and halfway through that time block, I have a timer that goes off, I shouldn't just close the time, like reset the timer, you know, what I should do is take 30 seconds a minute and go, Okay, I'm halfway through, where am I at? Am I going to be able to reach this


endpoint? And do I need to change my approach in some way? Do I need to change my scope? Like maybe I need to be less of a perfectionist? And knowing that how do I get to that point. And that is what's going to make those effective is, is using those as triggers, to ask the question to create these moments of mindfulness that allow you to adjust your approach. If you don't use if you don't adjust your approach, it's not going to be valuable.

 Trevor Lohbeer 47:35

I find that we need a different term for the different kinds of mindfulness that we're, we're distinguishing because when you're in the middle of a task, and you're like I was reading an article earlier today for the newspaper. And we are in the middle of that you're mindful of a particular world. And you're not mindful of how long the task is taking. The reminder would remind you to be mindful at this next level up here. So you've bumped out of the editing, and bump up to managing the task itself. But we use the same word for the two kinds of mindfulness and that, that even the three levels of mind that we're going to be talking about, and mindfulness does, it seems as if it's, it's too blunt, or too blunt an instrument to just say mindful, I think we should have another level of this kind of mindful, like level one, level two, level three, or in task versus out of task. Or some words that that give us more definition. Yeah, so if you've traveled, that's what I want to know,

 51:03

let's let's, let's not use the word, mindfulness is becoming a very wide word, it means many different things to many different people. And I totally agree with that, let's just real quick jump into, like two of the major forms of meditation, there's, like one or two others in there. But like, when people talk about meditation, the research has actually identified different types of meditation, there is Focused Attention meditation, which is where That's where, like, when I meditate, I'm focusing on a specific thought, or I'm focusing on my breath, right. And then there's something called Open Awareness meditation, which is a, if you think of focused attention meditation is a convergent type of thought, like, focusing down onto it, open awareness is becoming aware of everything around you. And in the research, what happens is, you can practice both of them. But if you practice Focus Attention, first, you learn to train your brain to focus. And then from there, you get extra mental bandwidth to create this Open Awareness. So Open Awareness is where no matter what I'm doing, I'm still aware of my entire environment. So what you're describing is, yeah, I'm deep in this task. And in a flow state, maybe we only want to focus attention. But there's the there's also the concept of, can I still be aware of everything around me? And I think that's a lot of times what people mean by mindfulness, am I still aware of everything around me while I'm focused? I don't think it's always necessarily to have that. But just that distinction between Focus Attention and Open Awareness can be a useful thing to have have. So creating an Open Awareness of the passing of time. But I would even say like, again, it doesn't have to be continuous. Right? You don't have to continuously be aware that time has passed. If you set these triggers,

 Francis Wade 52:56

it's not caught, it'll have to be constant. Yeah, yeah, there's a lot of energy. You have to expend to be constantly aware of those two levels, or the entire hour, and you don't need all that time, because you just need to be aware at periods of time. Openly aware, as you said, at moments

in time, to be effective you don't need is not to be a 60 minute activity.



53:14

Yeah. Okay. But yeah, that framework is useful for you can also think of it in many different skills that we learn, particularly in physical skills as well is the focus attention is focused on the technical skill and getting it all that. And then open awareness creates this kind of more generalized awareness. So if we think about learning how to drive, right, we have to be steering, we have to be using the gas, pedals, all that kind of stuff, we need to pay attention to everything. When we're first learning, that's a very Focused Attention. And we need to be very focused on that right. Later on, we still need to be focused, we shouldn't be using our phone phone. However, as we get better at driving, we also develop this Open Awareness right? While we're driving down the road, we can also look at the billboard and take in the billboard and it doesn't prevent us from driving because we've internalized some of those skills, we've taken that focus attention and driven it down deeper into our body our skill levels. And so that's where learning how to create more Focus Attention can give us more Open Awareness later on. But we don't we don't have the bandwidth for open attention until we get the



Francis Wade 54:38

focus attention. That's actually a useful one because when you start time blocking is the same thing. You're probably all focused, focused attention and no open awareness. And then somewhere you know, as you go along, you start to develop Open Awareness and you start to know manage the task with better regularity, you don't get to 65 o'clock and realize you didn't have lunch, for example, your open awareness allows you to manage that. Okay, if you want to read a keep going, you need to eat lunch. You'd have to be fueled by food. Yeah. Good one. That's a that's almost like a hierarchy of time blocking skills.



Trevor Lohbeer 55:21

Yeah, yeah, there's definitely like you learn different skills as you get up, even if you're not good at the beginning.



Francis Wade 55:28

Yeah. Sorry, I didn't, I didn't mean to interrupt you there. But I got so excited about ringing the bell. Alright, let's go to level two, we have a we have a king of time available, we have about 10 minutes left to go through the next two, let's say 10 minutes. So level two is you're managing the time you're spending on projects or intentions, one versus the other. So Lio Weifrom the from the story I told is a level this is a level two issue is that at the end of the week, or the end of the month, or whatever her family is saying I haven't talked to I haven't talked to mom for more than 15 minutes, one on one for the whole month, but ahw has been heard all the time. We had conversations, we talked about stuff. But the kind of quality you know, like real connecting, that doesn't just happen, you know, by accident that actually needs a little bit of, or a lot of intention. That didn't happen. I'm gonna add it all up. I got 25 minutes total for the last month. Now, you know, his or her husband maybe might think that hang on, how much time

am I really getting here? How much time are we really spending? But at that second level? Usually, I hate to say but you know, on average, we're not very conscious of it. I think for me, it takes some real accounting, it takes a weekly review, an annual review. What do you think?



57:09

I think I think annual reviews are great, or weekly reviews are great, I think it requires three different things. So one is having a plan for how you want your time to be used, right? So if you don't have intention, it's hard to then judge yourself for not meeting your intentions. So again, like people in this podcast can go to [strategic lifetools.com/tools](https://www.lifetools.com/tools). And there's how to create a life portfolio that talks about how do you divide your time into different pillars, different facets of your life, and then allocate time to those different things. So I want to be spending, you know, 15 hours a week on my relationships, I want to be spending, you know, three hours a week, maintaining my physical health, etc, etc. Right? So coming up deciding that plan up front, and then you can look on a weekly or yearly basis and go, Okay, especially if you're doing contracting, you can go, Okay, how much did my reality match my intention. But without those intentions, it doesn't really matter. And you don't even need, if you have good intentions, and you have other systems to implement those intentions. You may not need to do the analysis, I think it's still valuable to do it. But I would say if you're trying to prioritize, should I track my time and look at it retrospectively? Or should I plan my time upfront and have intentions? Definitely prioritize the upfront planning over the analysis later on? It's going to be more about me.



Francis Wade 58:36

In the introduction, I mentioned the [marriagebuilders.com](https://www.marriagebuilders.com) is a good example. So yeah, the author says, I don't think this is based on research. But it's at least worthy of discussion. That to keep a relationship going with your wife or husband or a significant other. You need 15 hours a week minimum. And he says the 15 hours. Can't be like watching TV. Or a movie. Well, it could be timeline can't be watching a movie like in the movie theater where you can't talk to each other. Yeah. It can't be that you're in the same house. You know, kind of the mistake that she was making is that we're in the same house... should be should be okay. Should be enough. We see each other all the time. Yeah, but so it needs to be 15 quality hours of one on one conversation with no kids around, no friends around. I guess you could be on your phone to some degree, but certainly not. I'm in my world on my phone and you're in the other world on your phone. I'm in Netflix, you're in Facebook and then just because you happen to be sitting together in the car means that you're actually spending time. It doesn't that's not what he's talking about. He's talking about 15 hours of preferred face to face quality conversation. And so I've mentioned this to friends. And when I first heard it, I was like 15 hoursthose you crazy, we're supposed to get that time. So that that, that that that my first reaction was that then, unfortunately, I was in a marriage where it came, the idea came too late. And the practice came even later, it didnt workout in that case, but I took the lesson away, it was like a marriage. And I'm very, very conscious of that 15 hours. But most people argue that they don't have the time. for that. The author argues back that when you were courting you did. So why not now? Oh, that's me. That was different because? And he says, No, it's not. If you were to, if you were to know start dating again, you will find that 15 All is like magic, you will get the most you conjure it, and he makes the unfortunate comparison between, like, if you have a girlfriend or a boyfriend on the side, like an affair, you make time, materialize out of nothing, when you

have an affair. Your intention is so high. That yeah, you manufacture 15 - 20 hours out of nothing. Or you do it in a way that you're hiding it from the other person. So you're highly intentional, and you really go about creating that time. They said this is not a matter of time availability. This is a time allocation issue. And you you're arguing that it is? And he said he says it's a matter of your skill, essentially, what he's saying your intention and your skill. And once you get those two together, the argument about not having time is nonsense. Comments about that Trevor?



1:02:00


Yes, so I definitely have comments. So I think one time block is important. But I want to drill down into two concepts within that. One is this concept of protected blocks. So there's different types of time blocks. And a lot of times what we talk about in time blocking are task blocks, or what I call "facet blocks". So I'm either working on a specific task, and I'm going to schedule that in my calendar from two to three, one to work on a facet like marketing, admin, email, from two to three. Then there's this concept of protected blocks where people will schedule personal time, relationship time, that is a type of facet block. But usually, what I want to drill into in the protected block is the concept of how do we define that time block using rules. And I was just trying to look up on my phone, I just was listening to this book, and I can't remember what it was the talking about black and white rules versus fuzzy rules. And a classic one is that like, create a rule where if you break the rule it's extremely clear. And so if I'm going to say I need to spend quality time with my significant other, it might be we're not allowed to look at our phones during that time. And so the second you look at your phone, the entire hour is no longer valid. That's like yeah, and maybe that's it, but like, it depends upon what the rule is like, it can be like, we can't spend more than like, you know, we can't look at our phones, when the other person's like directly in the room, like if so if they get up to go to the bathroom, then we can look at the phone, whatever, but having clear black and white rules that determine what that time block means can be important. And saying like, like, this is what that protected time block looks like you talked about watching movies, it's like, okay, that can be a rule. It's like watching what can the relationship time block consists of, well, it can be watching a movie, but not in the theater. Like we have to be able to talk to each other. It can be, you know, it can be eating meals, but only if we're, you know, not using a phone during the meal or whatnot. And having this list of rules allow us to be clear, with what that time block that allocation means. You know, and that can be used for for work as well and stuff like that you can use come up with different rules around that is like, you know, when I'm processing my email, I can only spend 10 minutes on newsletters, and then I've got to move on to other things. But but particularly with the structure that you're talking about where I want to create this personal time and create those boundaries, well boundaries are defined with rules and the rule can be yeah, like I can create a time boundary. But to your point is how do I make sure that it's quality time or the way I make sure that quality time is I define this is what quality Time means, right.




Francis Wade 1:05:02

I could see us doing that with software, you know, we scheduled 10 minutes of 10 minutes of time for me to read this with a fuzzy ending. So it was a soft ending, rather. So it gives me it automatically. The 10 minutes it goes, who plays that nice ocean music? Yeah, I can see that, you know, that software helping you to drop into the flow state 10 minutes, 15 an hour, two hours. Give me a reminder every 15 minutes, and it offered it automatically setting it up for you

and said, Okay, Siri, good. I don't think that has that. But it'd be nice. It'd be nice if it played nicely with us, because then we wouldn't have to devote our time to actually doing all of that remembering. Do you think?

 Trevor Lohbeer 1:05:55


Yeah, yes, figuring out ways to structure. So yeah, too, because I know we're running out of time here to summarize a little bit around time blocks is, one is defining what type of time block it is. It's half time block, where you're working on specific tasks, or you're working on a group of tasks a facet like marketing? Are you working on context tasks? Like I'm only doing deep work or office work? Or is it protected time block, like personal time or work time? The second one is then looking at how do I structure that time block the time within that time block? And how do I set timers or other things to, to structure that, whether that's using the Pomodoro Technique, so I make sure that like, my time block is always in half an hour increments. So I can use Pomodoro, or, I'm doing like one of the methods we talked about, like a pacing timer, or a countdown timer to help within those. And then the third one is defining rules that define what goes on within that time block and what's allowed and what's not allowed within that time block. And you can even define rules in the beginning. And we haven't, we may not have time to talk about this. But like, as far as, you know, I have this this concept of jumpstart towards like, Okay, I need to work on this test for five minutes, when it starts, and then I can take a break. But that jumpstart, it's called priming the pump, I work on it for five minutes. Like if I'm experiencing procrastination, what kind of for five minutes. And then if I take a break, I'm much more likely to come back to the task and finish it out for that time block. So there's lots of other strategies with it in there. But these these are different rules in how we structure the time. And then how do we decide what's allowed within that time, that

 Francis Wade 1:07:31

time? And again, software could help us. I trialed a trial app a long time ago, that it actually measured your movement from one room to the other. It didn't work very well. Work. Probably more like it didn't work at all. But they tried. They tried to. So if you if you say okay, I'm going to focus on this, if it senses you in the kitchen eating when you should be working. It could it could give you a reminder. A soft reminder, maybe it could say you shouldn't be here working. Yeah, it could actually pick up your movement and measure it try to map each room and its distance from the router.

 Francis Wade 1:08:13

Well Trevor, guess what, I'm we're gonna have to schedule a part three, because how to have apps that help us in all three levels. We need to finish up the question of the level two, because we haven't talked yet about managing and comparing the time we're spending on projects, planned versus intended. We barely know. And we haven't even gotten to the third level yet. This looks like another call rather than trying to squeeze everything into the three minutes we have left. What do you think?

 Trevor Lohbeer 1:08:50

Oh, we can certainly do another one. Yeah. All right. Great.



Francis Wade 1:08:53

Can I prevail upon you? Yeah, we're rolling this out in the next however long or so? Whichever, it's been a pleasure having you on the show again. We tell people where to reach you. What can you tell them again?



Trevor Lohbeer 1:09:10

People can find me at dayoptimizer.com People can email me at Trevor@dayoptimizer.com. They have promised as your digital day planner app. And I'm also available on Twitter and other social networks as [fastfedora](#).



Francis Wade 1:09:31

as per door. Excellent. So you're listening to the time block task management and time blocking podcast. We'll be back with a little preview of what's coming up in the next episode. So keep listening