

# raw part 2 ep 19

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## SPEAKERS

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It's the Task Management and Time Blocking Podcast, episode 21. You've noticed that as you make promises to people to get things done, the risk of not delivering goes up. Sometimes the fact that you made the commitment falls through the cracks as if it were never made. Over time, this reduces your effectiveness and your reputation for getting things done. People start to avoid you, seeking out others who are more reliable. You want to intervene before this gets worse.

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But just trying harder to remember may not be enough. If you want a real solution, such that you manually capture new tasks flawlessly, regardless of the circumstances. You want to be someone who never forgets to complete a commitment. Where can you start to create that kind of track record when it comes to your task management? Join me on this solo episode as we explore this challenge that affects all knowledge workers. I'm Francis Wade, and welcome to the Task Management and Time Blocking Podcast.

00:00

Welcome back, and if you're new to the podcast, let me quickly explain the format that we follow. It's a three part format. And it was inspired in part by Albert Einstein. Not really...I found this quote afterwards. But Einstein said, if I had an hour to solve a problem, I spent 55 minutes thinking about the problem, and five minutes thinking about the solutions. Now why did he say that? Well, if you do a great diagnosis of a problem, you actually cover the solutions, you actually address the solutions in the quality of your diagnosis. So here on the podcast, we'll spend quite a bit of time agitating the problem which is kind of shaking it back and forth, looking at it from different angles, then we'll go into solutions. And then we'll talk about implementation.

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Let's take a look at the story. So Kumar has twins, and they have just entered kindergarten, there are a handful. And the fact that He has four kids in all means that he has a lot to handle. At work, same time, he's just been given an intense project, which is taking long hours to get work done each day, it's likely to continue for another year, and he's someone who is in demand. Why? Well, he's the only person who understands the critical technology at the heart of the effort.

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Lately, he's also been disappointing the guys in his running club. Well, he's missed four runs in three weeks disrupting his plans to run a marathon. They began to make jokes about his broken promises, but he's not worried about them so much. This week, he forgot to pick up the the twins from school. And he didn't provide the specs to the product manager that the product manager needed in time for a meeting with the CEO. It's not like him to forget. But he's hoping these are temporary glitches, unlikely to be repeated. As such, he is living in hope, and fear.

01:18

So Kumar may be typical of a lot of people who find it a tricky business to remember everything that they have committed to. And I use the word remember, because that's the language that we use. And I'll talk about why that language is actually a little bit outdated and why we need to move way past it. Especially if you're someone who has a commitment, like Kumar, to be engaged in many things and to do them well.

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Because what he wants, maybe what you want is to never ever, ever have to say or realize that you forgot to deliver something that you said you were going to deliver. You want to be flawless or perfect in giving your word and fulfilling it. Sending someone an email saying that you will deliver and that you always deliver. But then you know life has a way of intervening... he wasn't expecting that the twins would be very different than having one child. But turns out having twins is very different. And life right now is giving him way more than he suspects he can manage. And we blame life when these things happen and said there's too much going on, there's too much happening with me ...too much happening for me or to me. And we we feel a sense of panic as we start to see the commitments multiply. Once we get over a particular threshold, we realize that we're not quite remembering all of them, we start to feel an inner sense of anxiety. And, you know, you might not be the only person. But Kumar certainly isn't!

03:11

Other people, have noticed that his memory is failing, and that he's getting old. And they're making jokes about him... things from dropping into the cracks and him not really reliable and "Don't give it to Kumar -he won't remember".... that kind of thing. And he's hearing them and inside, he's starting to feel some frustration and some concern. He's feeling a bit anxious, he's feeling a bit on edge. Because this is not who he thinks he is. It's not who he's ever been. It's not what's helped him to be successful in his family, his job. And even in his running, his hobbies. You know, he's he's someone

who people could rely on and that's changed. And whereas the guys are making jokes in his running club, people at work don't quite joke as often as they do. Because the stakes are higher. His wife certainly doesn't find this to be funny at all. And that the fact that he left the twins at school and you know, things worked out, but he did forget. And thank goodness, you know, they there weren't big repercussions for them. They weren't left in the playground in the middle of the night or anything like that, but she's noticing it. She's not making jokes about it. She started to get a little bit short with him.

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So what he's facing isn't uncommon. But there is a limit to what he is able to manage in terms of the promises he's making? So what should he do with respect to this? How should he respond? What should he think about? How should he think about it when, in particular, he is in the moment of making a promise, just at that moment.

05:19

And so this particular problem is not one that is new. This one has gone on from time immemorial, from the days that language was invented. And promises and requests were implemented, which is to get when language was invented, but many 1000s of years ago. And people started to make promises to each other. And, you know, we noticed that some are kept and some are not. And as you attempt to make more commitments, the risk, as I said before goes up, because the chances of you not delivering on one or two increases.

06:02

But what we don't have is a common sense way to solve this problem on an ongoing basis. So we have principles, but let's see what happens if you take those same principles, like the principle of capturing, and we apply it and apply it not just the one time or in a simple way, but we apply it to the general case of commitments that grow and become difficult to track. Is there a way to think about capturing as a skill that we could apply forever? Because if we don't, if we don't sort of deal with this, there will come a time when we're just like Kumar. And we have to get to our limit. So we might not be at the limit that Kumar has that we can maybe we have 10 kids, two jobs. We're triathletes, we do way more than him and we're able to manage it. But maybe there's a ceiling for us as well. And that ceiling? What does it mean, and what does it trigger because if we don't, aren't aware of it, or we don't know that it exists, so we don't have a way of even thinking about it, we could exceed the promises that we can safely manage. And all of a sudden, suffer some of the same problems that he's dealing with in terms of his reputation, and even his self confidence. Most people, you know, when you get to this point where they sense that...they start to not make any more commitments. And sometimes that works. But if you're someone who's even a little bit type A, I'm going to suggest that that may work. But it won't be satisfying. Because if you're if you have the ambition that type A people have, you always want to be increasing the number of commitments that you can make. You always want to be around people and in situations where you can make promises to yourself and others and see them fulfilled. So your ambition could be driving your commitments. And it's not necessarily just a business commitment, ambition, it could be a commitment to have your son be, you know, in the NFL, one day.

08:35

You know that between time when he's 11, and decides "I want to be in the NFL" and when he's 22 years old and potentially enters. There's a lot of parent has to do to facilitate that. Commitments. A lot of promises need to be made, promises made and kept in order to move then keep moving it forward. And if you're not someone who has a pretty big capacity, then there's a point at which even a commitment that somebody else who is ambitious has, and you're trying to facilitate that... your ambition is tied up with theirs...creates a problem. But often, we don't realize, as we're making more commitments like this, we don't see the role that Capturing...the skill of capturing plays... in managing greater levels of commitment. A greater number of promises. So you probably may know that capturing is the activity of translating a time demand a promise that you make to yourself into a commitment that's made in or stored in a safe place for later retrieval. So what's a time demand what's that? Okay, that's an "internal individual commitment to complete an action in the future."

09:33

So it's a promise that you make to yourself. Anything in the world can trigger a time demand. And when it gets triggered as a psychological activity, and a time demand is a psychological object...unlike physical objects, which have a lot of permanence in them. Or a digital object...so you're listening to me because of the power of digital objects. Time demands / psychological objects don't have a whole lot of permanence. The mind creates them and the mind attempts to put them in a safe place. So we know that, for example, that time is taught to pre adolescents, a child learns the concept of time around the age of eight or nine, a child starts to create animals around the ages of 11, or 12. And then starts to put in place mechanisms to save time demands for later retrieval. Somewhere around a year or two after that...early teens. So the first mechanism that we resort to is of course, memory. So we create a time demand, and then we try our very best to remember it. So we, maybe the creation is over here, and the storage is over here. All mental storage, okay, early on, we all use memory to begin with, and we get into the habit of creating time demands and putting them in memory.

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And when we're young, and we only have one piece of homework per week, that works really well. And at some point, it stops working. At some point...for knowledge workers, sometimes before the college years or in college, but whenever it is, your memory is unable to manage the number of time demands that you're creating. Because you're no longer creating one or two per week, you're creating one or two per hour perhaps, and now you have a problem.

12:38

So capturing is that movement of a time demand from the point of creation, the moment of creation, to a safe place of storage. Most of us learned that, our memory is not reliable. So we pick up at some point a piece of paper. And then, at some point, the piece of paper becomes impractical, we pick up one of these. (A a paper pad). And then at some point, we replace one of these will actually open up my smartphone and show you a calendar, a calendar. So instead of using a task list, we move to using a calendar. And then we move to an auto scheduler, but that's the transition that we make.

13:25

The philosophy is the same throughout however, which is that time demands...place of storage in memory. And then we learn over time that our memory is not sufficient and that we use other methods. So Kumar is probably like most people, he's using a combination of maybe all three. He's using memory. He's using a piece of paper, and he's using smartphones, a list on a smartphone. So he's not particularly strong at capturing but and that's probably why the problem he's in is probably difficult for him to solve because he doesn't understand that capturing is so important. Capturing is critical to his ability to manage his tasks. And once you realize that, once you realize that you're using way more memory than allows that...your current system can handle, you then can get committed to not use as much memory right. And that's let's imagine that Kumar has not made that commitment yet. He hasn't read Getting Things Done. He's not been exposed to the idea of capturing. But you probably have given that you're someone who's listening to this podcast, it's probably not a new idea for you But I'm going to suggest that the principle applies...The same principle applies to him as it does to you, which is that he needs an upgrade. And so do you. So I have no evidence that you need an upgrade today, or right away. But there's a lot of evidence that says that the number of time demands you're going to be managing in the future is going to increase. And there's evidence that shows that the number of tasks that you need to capture effectively is going to increase. And the capturing that you did five years ago, when you first learned the concept, is not the capturing that you will need five years from now, when you're dealing with a big increase in the number of time demands that you're managing.

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So the philosophy could be the same, which is that you're exploring the boundaries of what you do, and you're looking for a technology to move to /allow you to expand even further, the same philosophy that Kumar would use. But Kumar is just focusing on using less memory, more paper. So he's sort of at the very beginning, but the challenge is still the same.

16:17

Okay, so how can you be someone who is always evolving your capturing. Now, if you've been exposed to the idea before, you may have may also unwittingly learned from whoever taught you the concept that capturing is a one time skill, kind of like holding a pencil. Once you learn to hold a pencil, you don't forget how to hold the pencil. Once you learn to capture that was it. And all you needed to do was to set it once and forget it. And from then on, you could rely on that skill to work the way you wanted it to work and you'd be fine forever.

17:07

Unfortunately, that's not in keeping with the philosophy and the reality of the world that we live in, which is that the number of time demands is going to increase. Then, if you stay with the capturing that you learned when you first heard the concept, you probably are going to run into trouble in the future. So let's bring about a whole different way of looking at this, which is that your capturing needs to be constantly overhaul driven by first, increases in volume and second, increases and changes in technology.

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And that if you don't keep up, you will experience some of the very basic symptoms that Kumar talked about...things falling through the cracks that you're capturing has to evolve and maybe evolve at a faster rate than other elements, the other 13 fundamentals in your task management system. I won't go into them here. But if you check out some of my prior episodes, you'll hear me talk about 13 fundamentals.

18:20

So I went through the same evolution that Kumar talked about, I captured the memory. And that didn't work. I remember capturing to an Excel spreadsheet before this was before Excel, but something like a spreadsheet. Actually, before I even got to the spreadsheet, I used to capture in one of those nice Day Runner/Daytimers -- one of those big diaries that people carried around in the 90s. These were like paper version of smartphones...they were not. They were just big diaries. That's all it was... lots of paper, and I captured there. But also used a lot of memory. Then I switched over to a paper pad something like this, something smaller. And then I eventually transition from that to using an app on a phone and the Phone or a use a smart smartphone. And I use Google Keep. And that's where I do my capturing today.

19:26

So over time, I became less and less tolerant (as you could imagine) of using memory. Once it was explained to me the how dangerous memory capture was and how unreliable it is...once you got to higher task volumes. It didn't really matter how smart you were. You know, you could recall the fine details of case law if you're a if you're a lawyer, but that wouldn't help you in managing time demands. Why? Because case law you need to know for the rest of the time that you're practicing as a lawyer. Picking up the bread this afternoon is only something you need to remember from now until the time you pick up the bread. So you have no commitment to store those time demands in a permanent place. And that means that you are you treat them differently from the very beginning, as you should.

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It's a different kind of memory that the psychologists call prospective memory, versus retrospective memory. Prospective memory is used for things like case law, prospective, memory, is used for things like time demands.

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So I became someone who saw every lost commitment, every time I didn't capture effectively as a defect. So in other words, every time I tried to use memory, in lieu of my, the better solutions, "Ah, that's a defect". But usually, I wouldn't know that's a defect... to this day....Because unless something went wrong, I didn't remember I wouldn't see it as a problem, I would just keep moving. So when there's a problem, however, and if some mistake was made, and something falls through the cracks,

that would be a signal that, oh, I have a defect. I went to using an unreliable method to store time demands. And I'm committed to not use that method at all. Okay, what do I need to put in place so that I can make a change.

21:34

And that's how I become someone who's engaged in that kind of improvement, using the defect as a signal to say, "Okay, here's an opportunity to get better." Actually, in Episode Three, I talked about why these failures, these defects are good signs. Because they point you in a particular direction. These are the symptoms that tell you that your system isn't working. And if you can pick up the small errors, these are the predictors of big problems. And then there's times when I you know, I get lazy and I'm feeling overconfident, and I'm feeling, yeah, I'm not under any pressure...I can remember. And sometimes I get away with it. And sometimes I don't. But when I think I'm getting away with it, even then, I'm really not getting away with it.

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So as you hear me speak, you might see that I'm bringing a sort of a level...trying to bring a level of rigor to this particular practice. And the reason why I'm adamant or why I'm sort of strident maybe about this particular practice is because of the 13 practices in your task management system....This is the point of entry. And as the point of entry, it has a unique role.

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Because you can't manage tasks in your system which aren't captured. Otherwise, you can only be as effective as you are in capturing, which is not as true of the other fundamentals as it is of capturing. So for capturing, it's the most true, okay, a task that doesn't enter into your task management system is one that is not going to be managed at all. So what I'm prompting you towards is being engaging in a certain kind of self diagnosis. And, as I offer several tools in which you can diagnose your entire system, this podcast we focus on capturing, but my book Perfect Time Based Productivity is one. The Rapid Assessment Program where you can get your assessment, first initial assessment done in just a half an hour, much shorter than reading the book is also available. That's an item for sale, I'll drop it in the show notes, along with the book. And then there's the New Habits training, in which I offer a one day training, or a two half-day training online, I also offer it in person. But the three of those are efforts to bring your diagnostic power up to a particular level so that you can engage in improving capturing, for example, in a different way.

24:46

So there's there's some reflection that needs to be done that you must engage in. So this is now we're getting into the solutions beyond the diagnosis of the problem. You have to engage in some reflection here. In order to make the improvements and see the defects for what they are.

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Okay, some other ideas that you see are in the idea of a Capture Point. So you could probably suggest

Okay, some other ideas that you so one is the idea of a Capture Point. So you could probably guess what a capture point is, it's a place where time demands are stored. So I mentioned a number of them...memory, then paper pad, the task list on your phone, unsorted something like Google Keep. And these are just methods of capturing time demands. Alright, so that's a simple explanation.

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Here's the more expansive explanation, which is that there's two kinds of capture points. There are Manual Capture Points. And then there are Automatic Capture Points. Okay, so what do I mean by that? Well, the ones I just described are the manual capture points, the memory, the paper list, and the smartphone, the parts of the smartphone that has an app like Google Keep.

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But there are automatic capture points, which are made up of your inboxes. So these are places that potential time demands, can be stored, but they're sent there by other people. So this is your email inbox, your direct message inbox on Instagram, on LinkedIn, or Facebook or all the different places that someone can send you a message. But it also includes physical messages, like your post office box, your mailbox, where a physical letter could be sent, and postman puts it in the box, and you retrieve it later. That's also an automatic capture point where someone is sending you a potential time demand.

27:09

So I say these are potential time demands, because they don't actually become actual time demands until you interact with them, right? So you may retrieve all 10 pieces of mail from your mailbox. And if it's all junk mail, then none of them get converted into actual time demands, they're all potential, they all want you to do something, you may look through them all, or even if you don't, and throw them all away, renders them void. So they're not even potential anymore. But people want you to receive their potential time demand, and turn it into an actual that's why we have junk mail, right. But it's true for every single email message that you get.

28:00

So on this podcast, we're going to focus on just the manual capturing. In Episode 19, we focused on email, which is one of the versions of automatic capturing, we focused on email or direct messages, or SMS, or WhatsApp or Telegram, or all the other ones that exist ways in which you can receive asynchronous messages using digital formats, okay, so we focused on that on Episode 19.

28:33

But here, we really want to focus on manual capturing, and the defects in manual capturing. And the moments that we notice, like Kumar, that if you left the kids at the playground, or at school...that that was a defect and it's a defect that points to a problem in a way that you capture.



29:02

So there could be a number of number of issues, maybe he puts it in memory. That's, that's all he did. Maybe he wrote it on a piece of paper, but the piece of paper was on a post it note that's stuck to the screen of his computer. And he hasn't looked at the post it notes on the screen for weeks now. Maybe he put it in his phone, but it remains in a raw list of items that were captured. And he needed to empty it...empty that capture point in order to have it be located in a place that would turn into something like an alarm and that alarm would interrupt whatever he's doing. And he was deep in the middle of the project at the end of a meeting and the meeting went on. He didn't have an alarm and that's why he didn't pick up the kids because the meeting was ran over and he forgot.

29:56

So if his time demand is stuck in any one of those places to pick up the kids, then he wouldn't have received any kind of notification. And we could say that your system is broken. So he would be ideally want to reflect, diagnose, acknowledge the defect, and say how can I prevent this from ever happening again, and then taking steps to change his workflow, so that he'd have no more defects.

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So capturing is not something to forget about. It's not something to kind of treat as a routine. Instead, it's a living, breathing, essential activity that's partly made up of technologies that you're using. And you, you always want to be looking for the best technology available. I happen to use Google Keep, because it's replicated across several platforms instantaneously. It interacts with other programs in the ways that I like, like Google Calendar. But if a better one comes along than Google Keep, I'm going to be all over it, I'm going to jump all over it because I need to be using the best technology that I can.

31:41

If I'm going to be on a project, that's going to be very demanding. And let's say for argument's sake, I can't have my phone available to me. Because my sambala, super secret project, something national security, you can't bring your phone into the room. So I need something to capture with. So I'm not going to resort to the worst case memory. So I'll find something else...a piece of paper. In that case, I know I need to change my workflow, to suit the situation.

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So my capturing needs to be this dynamic activity. And I could just see it as...once again, it's critical to your task management system, perhaps the most critical because it's the point of entry for every task. And your system is only as good as your capturing is. So capturing deserves kind of the latest technology. It deserves this kind of ruthless problem solving and root cause analysis You need to be doing this diagnosis, you need to be finding the defects as soon as they start happening. Because the downstream effects of your capturing, not working are horrendous. Unlike, unlike many of the other 13 fundamentals, when they don't work, there's a cost. When capturing doesn't work, every other fundamental is diminished in its power and its ability to do what it needs to do.

33:15

So there is no kind of forgetting or letting capturing be as good as it is, and then allowing it to stay the same and then moving on. That doesn't isn't an option in the world I'm describing. Instead, you're hungry for further improvements. You're looking for advice that would help you do a better diagnosis of your capturing skills. You have thought through some of the ideas like once I introduce in my book.

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So one idea is that you have a capture point with you at all times. And how skillful you are at that. And other is that when your capture point is with you, you always use it. And in the different trainings that I mentioned, I allow you to do a self diagnosis, I help you show you how to do a self diagnosis from being a real beginner at this skill to being someone who's extremely expert.

34:28

And there's also having those moments when you're caught in a situation where you don't have a capture point. An example I give is if you're in a dance at a party, you don't have your phone with you because you didn't want to bring it because I get lost. And you see a client and the client says to you call me tomorrow, here's my number and they rattle off this number and you're like how do I store it? So that you find a way perhaps using other people around you to store that number so that they can be retrieved later. Because it's critically, something really critically important. And you don't have your capture point with you. Because for practical reasons, like you're doing laps in the pool, for example, you don't usually do that with a phone, right beside you at the pool. Anyway, the point is that you for this third skill you are, you're the MacGyver, you're a genius when it comes to finding ways to capture information in moments where you're caught off guard.

35:29

So those are three skills, for example, that are covered in the the Rapid Assessment Program, New Habits training, and my book, Perfect Time-Based Productivity, the whole intention is for you to be able to diagnose skills like capturing, and to treat them as malleable and treat them as growable.

35:53

So I'm going to invite you to do a little exercise. I can't be there to see the outcome of this. But think of the last time you had a defect in your capturing where something didn't work. And often we use the word forget, although I encourage people are trained not to think about "forget", but to think about "my system broke". Think of it in those terms, which are more more robust, more accurate.

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Because you're not really caring as much whether you forgot or not, you care that the time demand was effectively captured. That's the main activity. And that's the main thing you want to have your

was effectively captured. That's the main activity. And that's the main thing you want to have your focus on.

36:45

So when was the last defect? What was the cause of that defect? What produced the result you didn't want? And then finally, what needs to change so that you permanently fix that problem? So that it goes away forever? What behavior or what technology needs to be inserted, so that you don't have that problem again. Okay.

37:21

So, again, if I were there with you, I would take you through this myself. But I invite you to sit down and try to do some reflection on capturing. It's the kind of reflection that would allow you to grow and give your system the kind of reliability that Kumar doesn't have. That most people don't have, but they will add to your peace of mind and take away any feeling of overwhelm.

37:48

And also help you know in the future when early on...when a defect shows up. It's starting to tell you that your system is nearing its capacity and it's time to now make some upgrades. Even though you may think this is a one off. Maybe it is but if it's not, it's a great opportunity to try and effect an improvement. So, coming up next I want to tell you about the next episode here at the task management and time blocking podcast. Keep listening. We'll be back in just a moment.