Melanie part 2 - autoschedulers

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SPEAKERS

Francis Wade, Melanie Wilson

Francis Wade 00:01

The Task Management and Time Blocking Podcast Episode 29. Almost everyone who time locks manually, for enough time starts to wonder what it would be like to automate some of the overhead...they eventually ask that question. Wouldn't it be nice they think, to click a button and see everything instantly assigned to an optimal slot in their calendar? But no such software even exist? The good news is that yes, it does. And in this conversation with Dr. Melanie Wilson, we update our prior 2018 conversation, comparing the six auto-schedulers that existed at the time. So should you be using one of these AI artificially intelligent infused apps? Tune into this episode to find out what we discovered and how you could save some time stress and maybe even some money. Welcome to the Task Management and Time Blocking Podcast.

Francis Wade 01:17

And welcome back. And as you can see, I've brought my special guest up to join me on the stage. And before I introduce Dr. Maria Wilson, I want to give you a little bit of a heads-up in case this might be your first time listening to the podcast, because it's a little bit different. So we've we organized our podcast, or this episode into three parts. The first part we agitate the problem at hand. Second part, we offer some solutions. And the third part we talk about implementation. So the first part really sets the tone for the kinds of solutions and answers that we come up with, because a good analysis can yield some good reasoning and some good results.

Francis Wade 01:59

And also, we use a bell and the buzzer. And the bell sounds like a little bit of a being like that. And the buzzer will play only if we didn't come up with some brand new insight that didn't exist before or compensation side. So the balance for the insights and the buzzer is if we actually didn't come up with anything new, it's because we're not just repeat stuff that we already know. But in the conversation or itself, we're trying to come up with new insights that sort of entertain and excite the most, the most demanding of audiences.

Francis Wade 02:42

So here's a quick story and then I'll introduce Melanie... So Susan currently uses Google Calendar to do her time blocking. But she recently came across an auto-scheduler in a YouTube review. These apps promised to revolutionize her productivity by automatically scheduling her calendar. And by making smart recommendations. She thinks it will be wise to make the switch. But she's not sure what they do, what the benefits are, and in which one to implement. Is there a way to decide between the alternatives? One that makes sense? There should be... But she's not sure where to start? Or even if there is a way who has the kind of information she wants? And where can she get help in deciding which one to try first, perhaps, and how to go about testing them. When she searches for reviews, she can't find anything in depth that could help.

Francis Wade 03:55

So before we jump into the conversation about what Susan should do, or what you should do, if you identify with Susan, let me introduce Dr. Melanie Wilson. She's a clinical psychologist turned homeschooling mother of six.Sshe publishes the homeschool curriculum called Grandma Galaxy, and happens to be the author of A Year of Living Productively. And we've known each other for, I guess, almost a decade. She's the one who introduced me to my first auto scheduler. And as I mentioned before, she was a guest in 2018 The two of us the two episodes on two time labs podcast (and I'll put that in the show notes) in which we analyzed and compared six auto-schedulers. Dr. Wilson welcome back.

Melanie Wilson 04:58

Thank you so much. I'm really delighted to be here.

Francis Wade 05:02

Great. It's awesome to have you have you here with us. It's still not as if ever the whole world is talking about auto- schedulers, since we did our podcast, is it?

Melanie Wilson 05:13

No, no, definitely not.

Francis Wade 05:15

And if anything, you come across an advertisement. And you wonder what, what is this? And some of the ads are written to lead you to think that this is the only one that exists of its kind in the world. But we know a little bit better, right? Definitely. Because there's a bunch of them out there. But the typical person, so here's a built in auto-scheduler, that maybe a friend is using one, or they see an advertisement, or they see a review, like Susan did on YouTube. She wants

to make improvements, but the choices if she does a Google search, or she comes across a list, like we have a list on the ScheduleU website at schedule, u.org/apps have all of the current other schedulers actually had to revise it for our show today? Because I found a few of them were under business. But she sees a list. Is that oh my god? Why would she say oh my god, wait, what's the what's the struggle that she immediately faces? Doc?

M   Melanie Wilson 06:22

Well, there are so many options. And I don't she doesn't even have a metric for knowing how to evaluate these apps. You know, what? What should she be looking for? Specifically? How does she try them out without completely disrupting her life? So it? It's definitely a quandary.

Francis Wade 06:49

Right? This is this is not like, should I use Snapchat or Instagram? It's not a fun, it's not a fun thing, right? It's not that use this nice, you know, should I use Wordle? Should I try that or some other game that's... this is not a leisure activity. In her calendar is every single meeting that matters. And if she's time blocking, then her commitments, her priorities are all all scheduled. So her calendar has become like Mission Control. And when someone comes along and says, Hey, I got a mission, better mission control for you to use, you kind of go... "Alright". It's not an easy answer. So inside, you know, she may feel conflicted and confused.

Francis Wade 07:36

And what may have brought her here is the fact that she wants to make improvements, because she knows you can't use the same app forever. At some point, it's gonna get stale, she wants to be keep up with the Joneses, to some degree, at least be in the pack. She doesn't want to be using, you know, some 1995 app. And it's already 2023. And she's back there using something that nobody else uses. She wants to keep up, and to make sure she's using the most productive technology, and one that doesn't prepare for any public embarrassment, for example.

Francis Wade 08:13

As you say, you know, there should be a way for me to pick out the auto-scheduler, I should be able to make my way from doing my manual time blocking to using an auto-scheduler. Because like, like many people who use an auto-scheduler, once they've used them for a while, the number of tasks becomes onerous. You know, it doesn't take much to throw off a schedule.

Francis Wade 08:39

And then she's got to go in Google Calendar, for example, and individually drag and drop each item into its correct place every day, because almost every day, there's some disruption that you didn't account for. And no one tells you, when you pick up time blocking, you're really gonna become an expert in manual time, rather manual time block relocation. That's never a

part of the description, right? It's always about the benefits, never about the costs, right? And the benefits really kick in when you know, you may not see them when you have are only time blocking five tasks a week. But when you get to 100 and 200, now, we're getting serious. I'm going to spend all day having to read juggle this schedule, and the auto scheduler is promising to take the pain away is. And in a prior podcast, we talked about Motion and some of the claims that they made. And what did you think? Let me ask you to repeat what some of what you said. Well, a little bit.

M Melanie Wilson 09:44

I absolutely agreed with you that Motion is like an early version of an auto-scheduler. It has some features that if you've never tried an auto-scheduler, you might really appreciate them. But I think, as you were mentioning, the more tasks you add to it, I think the more frustration you're going to have, because there's there's no way to differentiate the type of task and when you want it scheduled, besides saying, "Here's how firm the deadline is", and the priority of the task. That's pretty much it, although I think there is a start date too. But it's going to be frustrating for you to try to translate what you want in your schedule, to the Motion app.

Francis Wade 10:47

And I guess we've not seen the kind of onboarding in any app, that would be truthful about what you're likely to experience for a second and third, right? They kind of gloss over that... They tell you how to use it, Here are the mechanics but...not here's where the pain is going to come in. Right? Let's be honest, right? There, there is a learning curve. And you are talking about for someone who's already time blocking, and would look look to an auto-scheduler, chances are they're not, it's not, they're not 10, there are not a 10-task person. They are a hundreds-of-tasks or 100-tasks person. So it's a major commitment to switch. You have got to move all the tasks manually, usually from one, usually, to the next. So you have a challenge or problem. And of course, the problem that you said: you have a life and you're using this to run your life. And you can't go up to production levels in a Beta test and see if it works, you hve got to do it for real. So the stakes are kind of high. And you know, it's kind of hard to stay, well, should I stay stagnant? Or do I make throw my hat in the ring and just try it and see if it works, which could be kind of reckless, right?

M Melanie Wilson 12:01

It could be and especially because if you if you don't trust, the auto-scheduler that you're that you're using either as a trial or for real, then you really are going to have another layer of difficulty in your work life. Because now you're trying to figure out, well, should I go back to what I was using, and then I have to, you know, if you've moved tasks, then you really have an issue, because you have to click them all back.

Francis Wade 12:35

So who wants to do that? Having said that, you did pick up an auto-scheduler and un-pick it, so you made the switch, you made a two stepper since you introduced me to auto-schedulers back in 2015. It was a revelation to me, it led me to rewrite my book, come up with a second

back in 2015. It was a revelation to me, it led me to rewrite my book, come up with a second edition way earlier than I thought I would need to. I changed my whole workflow. And I followed your lead and...you changed your mind. Well, so that folks have an idea of what you know what's involved here.

Melanie Wilson 13:09

Now you're making it sound like I was just real, like fly by night like, oh, yeah, I'm done with that. I used SkedPal for years and years and years. And I will just tell you that the problem that I ran into is I started feeling like I was spending more time trying to get SkedPal to read my mind than just doing it myself...just scheduling every day, myself. And so that's what I started doing. Instead, I made the switch to Amazing Marvin, which has a lot of different strategies that you can use with the same task list. You don't have to move your task list from app to app to app. You can try all different kinds of approaches, including time blocking. Where you can have a lot tasks in different time blocks. It does not have an auto-scheduling feature at this time, which would be nice, because I would I would love that. I could say hey, you know, I would like to see if Amazing Marvin can figure out what I want. So I don't have to do it myself. But without the problems in switching task managers that we were just discussing, but right now it does not have that feature. So I just take my task list and pop each of the items into an agenda for my day and I move the tasks around manually.

Francis Wade 14:53

Right. So there's a there's a practice that you're engaged in that many people engage in that SkedPal was might I say, over engineered to perform. Because I guess you could have used SkedPal. It was just harder to use SkedPal for that particular purpose.

Melanie Wilson 15:15

Okay, here's here's an analogy for you. This is how I felt, I felt like I had an assistant, a paid assistant. And I was spending so much time trying to get her to understand what I wanted, that it was faster for me to just do it. And so that's why I made the switch. And, you know, I'm not, I'm not I will say this that I think about SkedPal a lot.

Francis Wade 15:51

Like a lover that you broke up with recently. Oh, "Maybe I could have made it work. Maybe...Maybe I should have given him another chance. I didn't try hard enough. I forgive him. No, but should I really take him back?"

Melanie Wilson 16:11

Oh, funny. It's so funny to me. But you know, moving all my tasks back over...it's something I don't, I just really don't enjoy that. But what I am 100% committed to is scheduling. And in terms of time blocking my time blocks, right now, I've tried it with like hard time blocks that are

actually dictated within Amazing Marvin, or they're in the background on my Google Calendar. But I just don't even like that amount of structure. I just know, in my mind, from this time to this time, this is the type of tasks that I do and from this time to this time, and so because it's it's just in my mind, it doesn't matter if I put some more tasks outside of that time block, if that makes sense. You know, it's like, Okay, I'm gonna, I'm gonna cut into my, my cleaning and organizing time around here, because I really want to get all of these administrative tasks done today. I'm just feeling it, I just want to do it, do them all together. So that's, that's how I am managing my task right now.

Francis Wade 17:27

Right? Right. So folks, as you're listening, you, you want to pick up on the nuances of the behaviors, that Melanie is adjusting. She's working to get the software to match her behavior pattern, (which has changed) and then find the software that would best suit the new behavior pattern, the newest behavior pattern. And you know, the truth is someone like Susan, someone who is committed to a certain high level of productivity, where you're managing lots of tasks, this is not a temporary game. This is not a one shot thing. This is a lifestyle that Melanie is describing. This ongoing fitting and refitting and altering, changing and managing is not a one-of. This is the price you pay to manage a certain volume of tasks effectively. And you know bright creative people with big commitments.

Francis Wade 18:33

Melanie didn't also mention that she homeschooled six kids at once. You know, I have no children. This is monumental and it's for people with big commitments, who have lots of tasks, lots of projects and and find themselves tempted to use an auto-scheduler are also committing to this path of behaviors plus technologies. And finding and fitting the best match between the two. So this is like a like I said, this is like a lifestyle.

Francis Wade 19:12

So Susan, you know, she she has a choice. In her mind. Probably her only choices are, you know, make a reckless decision or go stagnant. She doesn't want to do that. Most people when faced with this decision, they say "you know what, forget it." I'm just going to stick with my manual time blocking or they say time blocking on a whole doesn't work. I'm going to go back to just using a task management app that has no no calendar attached to it at all. They regress because regressing seems to be easier than trying to go down this unknown path. I think that's true for most people because there's very few who talk about the journey from task management app to auto-scheduler or from time blocking app to an auto-scheduler. There's very few. We talked about it a lot here on this podcast. But the progression that people make is kind of a lonely journey. And it's hard to find role models to say, Okay, well, here's the journey I made, here are the mistakes I made.

Francis Wade 20:15

So we're here to also tell you that you're not alone, that we understand the struggle, or we can share from our experience of being on the struggle and having to make these tough decisions

share from our experience of being on the struggle and having to make these tough decisions. So, ultimately, we really want to give you some relief, you know.You'll have the kind of insights that help you to decide whether other than auto-scheduler is for you, and which one is and some of the criteria to use when deciding. So is that fair enough mentally in terms of what we want to accomplish?

M Melanie Wilson 20:46

Yes, that's excellent.

Francis Wade 20:48

Great, so it should be some peace of mind, you know, coming out of this that we want to provide you. Okay. So if you are listening, and you're not online, we have dropped the link, or we will drop the link for www.scheduleu.org/apps. And these are all the latest auto-schedules. Okay, Melanie, you have your list in front of you, or you want me to share it with you,

M Melanie Wilson 21:10

I can, I can see it.

Francis Wade 21:12

Let's talk about that list a little bit because a bunch of things that have changed so that the list is somewhat longer. Since 2018, and I'll read it off if you're not, if you're not watching this on video. So at the topi is SkedPal, which is by the way, I have a share in SkedPal, a teeny tiny one. But I do have an interest. So you should listen to me like I'm a shill. People who try to tell / sell you something but they have some other thing going on like it's a racket or something. So I have a racket going on. And I am a SkedPal user but I'm also very small owner.

Francis Wade 21:55

But SkedPal was at the top of the list because that's the one that we were both using at the time. Focuster, Sorted3, TimeHero, Butleroy, TaskLine, Reclaim.AI, Mayday, Futurenda and Motion. Now, the ones that existed up to the time we did our comparison. The list would have ended at TimeHero. And it would have added on I think Futurenda.

Francis Wade 22:29

But anyway, the new ones are Motion. And we did a podcast on Motion alone, you can check out in the stack, Mayday, Reclaim.AI and TaskLine, and Butleroy. So there's five new ones that have come up since then. Okay, so those are the those are the ones that have sort of made their appearance. And we're going to make reference to the analysis that we did, however long it was ago between the different ones that existed at the time. We'll drop the link in the chat.

Francis Wade 23:05

But at the time, we compared six. And we said okay, well here are the pros and cons of each one here. Are they the apps and some of the the capabilities that we like in the ones that we've tested here, the things that we didn't like? Maybe we should have started with, I guess the big findings of what we came up with the last time and then go from there, because they may not have changed all that much. Because I think one of the assessments I've made mentally (tell me if this was wrong) is that there's not a breakthrough app that has emerged in the last few years. It's kind of more of the same. No.

Melanie Wilson 23:48

Yep.

Francis Wade 23:50

It's more like more, it's more like the same idea at the same level. And no, there's no brand new interface. There's no brand new technology that we can't even spell...there's nothing new, they kind of are still doing the same things. Which is that you, you give the app a calendar, you tell it some give it some parameters, you give it a calendar of fixed ...let me be more pspecific...you give the the app a calendar of fixed appointments. You throw in some flexible tasks. And what you want the auto-scheduler to do is to keep the fixed appointments like the one that we're having right now, which was in our calendars, you want to keep those the same and not move them. But it wants the tasks that are free floating (that can be rescheduled) to be rescheduled, right? And you want that to happen in an instant. So that the app should take care of it. And it should present to you, offer you recommendations for an optimized schedule. Is that fair enough?

Melanie Wilson 25:07

Yep. I mean, that's spot on.

Francis Wade 25:10

Great. So nothing has changed. Do you agree nothing has really evolved?

Melanie Wilson 25:17

Yeah, I agree. And I've been seeing ads for Focuster, as well as Motion. And I have looked at it again, and I don't see anything, you know, significant, that has changed.

Francis Wade 25:39

So we're pretty much basing our analysis then on the same, the same parameters, there's no new parameter that none of them have introduced a brand new parameter that we would say is amazing and grew. Okay. So it's really a matter of using the same parameters, just in new software. Okay, so what were the what were the parameters that we felt were really important? From your recollection?

M **Melanie Wilson** 26:06

Um, well, I know that having a Reschedule button was huge. We will really big deal. Yes. Because I mean, what's the what is the point of having an auto-scheduler, if you can't just say, Okay, now taking everything into account, you know, the appointments that I've added or deleted or tasks that I've added, or the fact that I've been procrastinating and not doing what I'm supposed to be doing. Now telling me what I should do, given all of that? And if if you don't have that ability to just quickly say, Yeah, Reschedule? I don't, I don't think it's truly an auto-scheduler at all.

Francis Wade 26:55

Oh, I think it's like the Gestapo. It's just to take over your life and run it.

M **Melanie Wilson** 27:01

I don't know. I just feel like it's not. It's, it's just not automatically rescheduling. And that's, that is what I would expect. I mean, with SkedPal, I liked to keep my schedule, the way that it was planned, until I was ready to hit that Reschedule button. That is for sure. But just to have that as an option, that I can quickly say, hey, now give me an optimized schedule based on what has happened in the last few hours is its primary for me.

Francis Wade 27:42

Right, right, right. On the prior podcast episode, I said, it'd be weird to have an assistant than you give her two items in your schedule and say, and then she said, Okay, I figured it out. Here's what you need to do. You say no, but I haven't given you everything. Hold on a minute. Let me let me tell you all the things I have to do, and then you tell me what I should do for a second or third, to have her kind of jumping in, do it for you before you're ready is a little bit strange. Right?

M **Melanie Wilson** 28:08

Right? And it's also the case, I know, in a review that I wrote, I advised not hitting that Reschedule button until you feel like okay, I've done. I've done you know, I've marked complete the things that I have accomplished. And I want SkedPal, for example, to give me more things to do. It wouldn't make sense to hit the Reschedule button, because then, you know, maybe

you got something done early. Well, fantastic. You know, you have a little bit of a break time, but SkedPal won't see it that way. If you click reschedule, it's just gonna say, Okay, now, now start on your taxes. It's like, oh, that's No, I didn't want to do that.

Francis Wade 29:02

Right. Right. And in the analysis we did in 2018, only two of the other schedulers had Reschedule buttons. Because, you know, in the fact is, you know, in real life, like do your taxes, we want the auto-scheduler to be kind of human, be like a human being who knows that taxes are tough, and you need a break afterwards. That's pretty advanced. But at least the person shouldn't be optimizing your schedule before you're ready. Right?

Francis Wade 29:34

They should be in sync with you to some degree. And to have your auto-scheduler adjust. Every time you add a task, it does it all over again is like wait, hold on a minute. Wait, let me get to where I'm ready for you don't right ahead and do your thing. Right, until I'm ready and then we are not ready for it. It's a little bit like you know, hold your horses. So there were only two that we found. Sorted3, which is still around, very much so. And SkedPal were the two that had auto-schedule buttons. And I think it's fair to say, when we mentioned this in the analysis of motion that a lot of these auto- schedulers in a way they need to follow a particular path of development. Because the job that we're trying to get done, for those, those of our listeners who are familiar with the jobs-to-be-done theory, there's a job that you're trying to get done. That job that we're trying to get done is the same for all auto-schedulers. A few have added in some bells and whistles that we didn't ask for. And we don't really need to get the job done.

Francis Wade 30:44

But there is, there is something happening here that's commonly human, which is I have a lot of tasks. I have a calendar, I have them stored somewhere, I need everything to work together and mesh, and I need it to come back with a nice schedule that I compare it to. I did mention on the last podcast, a certain Mrs. Landingham. She's President Jeb Bartlett Secretary on the West Wing TV show. He would turn to her and ask her for the schedule, she would give him the perfect schedule every time. So she was his autho-scheduler, a perfect one. And we kind of want our interface or program to behave that way.

Francis Wade 31:26

So there's something very human that has gone on in auto-scheduling, or someone else scheduling your calendar. This has been going on for a long time, in the human form. We're really replacing the human form with software. So this has gone on for a long time, hundreds of years, it's gonna go on for 100 more years. It's a human need that is unchanging. So it seems to me as of all the auto-schedulers, pretty much need to follow the same path in terms of meeting human needs. What do you think?

Melanie Wilson 31:58

I agree with that. I don't know how quickly they're going to be able to, to develop the technology to be able to do that. But it's interesting to watch it play out.

Francis Wade 32:12

Yeah, for example, there still isn't any talky interface, any audible, you can't say, change the change my four o'clock appointment to five o'clock, and then give me a new automated schedule. Right, talk to your computer or your phone and have it. That's not as easy as all that. Right. I don't know if I I don't know that any of them even take voice commands. I could be wrong. And it could be in development right now. But...

Melanie Wilson 32:43

right. Yeah, I, yeah, I don't I don't think so. And, and then even more nuanced. Like, I found myself trying to figure out what SkedPal's algorithm was, you know, it's like, well, why did you why did you tell me to start working on...You know, my daughter's graduation invites today? I'm very surprised that you suggested that. So let me try to figure out why you said that. And it could really be frustrating, because I'd say okay, well, let me you know, I'll, I'll change the priority. Now. Now. It's still saying to do it today. So you know, what is it? Well, then sometimes I would find out oh, it's because maybe I have the whole graduation party projects set at a different priority, a different start date, a different deadline, you know, so it, if I was talking to a human being, I could say, I don't want to do that today. I know, don't don't bug me about that until later.

Francis Wade 33:55

A human being would ask, Well, why not? Because why not right to do that in order to do this? And you would explain why not that today. It could be because of the dependency, it could be because you're not in the mood. Energy might be off. So you'd have that dialogue. And when you're picking up an auto-scheduler, folks that you're really training a robot, you're training this thing that is very powerful. But you are discovering your nuances as you're using it. And you're translating that into behavior by the app.

Melanie Wilson 34:34

And okay, so you just, you just mentioned something that I think is huge. It's a huge issue with auto-schedulers. If I can convince or not convinced if I can train SkedPal to give me the right tasks on the right days with respect to my daughter's graduation party. That's That's great. it right? I have it, I have it all worked out. But guess what? The next project, I have to start all over, I have to start all over to make sure that SkedPal knows what I want to do with respect to this project. And when...and all of that. And if it was a person, a person would say, Oh, I remember the last time you were having a big party. And this is how, this is how we did it. And you really liked that. And so this is how I'm going to schedule it for you. You don't get that with SkedPal.

Francis Wade 35:37

That's one of these insights that deserves a ding. Okay. The Dig it off the it was right on the time. Oh, the thing because the software isn't cooperating with us today. So yeah. So here's why I thought that it deserves a big Ding, because there should be a way for for us to more directly train the software to not do certain things. There's doing certain things, yes. But there should be a way for us to say "never program", almost like a list of "never have" or negative attributes. Okay, because I think I think SkedPal and on the others are based on positive attributes, but not negative ones, where we say an example of a negative one? Actually time, the heat maps, the time maps are used as our way of saying negative blocks, right, that's a way of telling, I'm telling the system that don't never schedule an item at this particular point in time. But SkedPal, I think is the only one with time blocks with with time maps. So I'll explain what a time map is Melanie before I lose everybody.

Melanie Wilson 37:06

Okay, so the time maps aren't just, you know, I want to, I want to do my creative work from nine to 11am, Monday through Friday, it's a lot more powerful than that, because I can, I can make that time block nine to 11, a green time map, not time block, sorry, I can make that time map a green time map. And that means that this is the best time for me to do this creative work. But if I am up against a deadline, on a high priority project, such that I would stay up late to do it, I can create a yellow portion of that time map for creative work. And I can even create a red one, which is like all hands on deck panic time, you have to get it, I have to get it done. And so I will allow you SkedPal to schedule these, this task in this time block time block, I guess that's part of the time map, but only in the most urgent circumstances. And so that is a way that we can communicate with SkedPal, you know, these are our preferences, but being realistic, because, you know, I can say I'm only going to work on this writing project from nine to 11. But the truth is, if I get behind, I get distracted. I don't get it done. I don't you know, it's not going as quickly as I want, then I probably would work over my lunch hour or I would work until bedtime because it has to get done.

Francis Wade 38:52

Right. But I think there's a little bit of correction, I think the red is the negative that you don't schedule in those blocks. If I recall rightly?

Melanie Wilson 39:00

So it's no block is you can't schedule SkedPal, the red is only like, in the most dire circumstances you can.

Francis Wade 39:17

Okay because no it's consuming. Okay, the entire and the green is the best. Green is the best case, red is the worst case.

Melanie Wilson 39:25

Yellow is like if you if we need to okay, you know, but red is like only only if there's blood.

Francis Wade 39:36

Right? Okay. In the worst circumstance?

Melanie Wilson 39:39

I think of the red it's like okay,

Francis Wade 39:42

That's actually a highly nuanced way of giving negative feedback. Yeah, well, the one I thought that you just mentioned is if SkedPal could read what happened yesterday. I know. And if you if it sees you going to bed at one o'clock it automatically could say, you know, when you when you log in for the first time, it says you're logging in later than usual you had a late late last night. Do you want to? Just that little, I know, give and take Why wouldn't that be endlessly helpful? The hint that it kind of understood where you're coming from right? And there's no understanding like that yet, it probably might come. I don't want to say it's machine learning because it is, but I don't want it to automatically reschedule. I want it to give me the recommendation or the choice.

Melanie Wilson 40:34

And you and I talked a little bit about some of the suggestions that I'm getting from my iPhone these days. And so here, here is a great example. I think. My phone knew from my schedule that I was doing this podcast with you. And it asked me, Do you want me to go into Do Not Disturb mode?

Francis Wade 41:02

It did?

Melanie Wilson 41:02

Oh, yes, yeah. Yes. And I said, Yes, that would be great. That would be great. No, I said that. And so if you're, if our, our auto-scheduler could say, "Hey, you were working"...Nnow, I mean, there is a problem with that, I think a little bit in that, you would have to be checked in somehow so that your auto-scheduler knows that you're working late at night. But then to have your auto-scheduler not to say, hey, you had a late night? Do you want me to push some things

back? Or even more important? I'm really speaking as a psychologist, I would love to have my auto-scheduler say, "Do you want to work late again tonight? Or do you want to have you know, off time do you want to you want to adjust it back?" And, you know, I think that would be super helpful. I know that's very advanced. But it would be.

Francis Wade 42:03

Actually I I track my time using an app on my phone. And I put in my days consumption. Just before I go to bed, it prompts me throughout the day to update my time usage. So it's a really, it used to work better than it does because that something changed in Android and it no longer pops up the way I want it to, and I can't fix it. But my time is being recorded my usage, okay. And it probably wouldn't take much for an app to make some smart choices. I could teach it when I could say if I go to bed after 11, then change my alarm to etc.

Melanie Wilson 42:47

...if I don't have an appointment.

Francis Wade 42:51

If I don't have an appointment at six, I put in some conditions that could tell it okay, here's what here's what I am doing. You know what I'm doing? Because it's in my schedule. You know what I did? Because you have my prior time usage. So make some intelligent recommendations like the one that your phone made to you.

Francis Wade 43:12

And that's kind of where, you know, we it's, it's a bit klutzy. Yeah. Oh, that's good schedules are a bit klutzy, because they require you to go to this place. That's all text, there's no voice. It's all looking at the calendar, looking at an app. It requires you to interface with this app. And usually your calendar is somewhere else. Your Google Calendar, for example, is someplace else. So you're interacting with the scheduler over here so that your calendar over there looks the way it should. And it's clunky, because that's not normal, natural for us, it's natural for us is to say, I had a late night, cancel my morning and stop me working at 12. Instead, I'm going to take the morning off and SkedPal or whatever, auto-scheduler says, no problem. "You have no appointments, I'll take care of it for you." And you're done.

Francis Wade 44:10

You know that's that's what we really wants to some kind of very humanish interface. Right. But it seems like what we're getting from the auto-schedulers, SkedPal included, is more an emphasis on features that are there. I would call them narrow-tail features, so to speak, the features that you would need 1% of the time, as opposed to the interface you want to use 100% of the time. So if all of that resource could be taken from the features that you're trying to add that maybe duplicate features in other places for some auto-schedulers, or you would

only use in a rare occasion, or only the super super super geeks would actually use and brought someone out to see, okay, well, let's create an interface that actually fits in with the job that the user is trying to get done.

Francis Wade 45:07

I think that would be the kind of progress that if we were sitting here in a few years time, we will say, well, these things are totally, they're totally different. They don't even feel like software anymore. In fact, my auto-scheduler isn't even there, because I'm just talking to, I'm just having these conversations about my calendar and schedule, I don't see the auto-scheduler, because it's somewhere in the background doing something. I don't want to think about it,.

Melanie Wilson 45:34

It would be pretty amazing. Wouldn't it be neat to have your auto-scheduler, maybe before each big time block and by time block here, I mean, more like morning, afternoon, evening, if you do anything in the evening, but just to have your auto-scheduler check in with you and just say, what's your energy level like? And then if you say, I'm really, really dragging, really dragging, then to have your auto-scheduler say, you know, do you want me to replace these, these tasks with tasks that you have marked as good low energy tasks? Right? No, just like, ask me, you know, right.

Melanie Wilson 46:26

That'd be neat, because then I could say, you know, I am really low energy, and it would be great. I mean, I wouldn't have this whole conversation with my Task Manager. But you know what I mean, I would be thinking to myself, I am low energy. But the fact is, I really need to get these things done. So I'm just going to push through and knock them out. But it would be as a psychologist, just knowing how rebellious some of us are, I think that would, it would remove a lot of the resistance, right? We have to doing tasks just to be given permission, by our task scheduler, just like we would be with an assistant who knows us very, very well. Say, Hey, are you sure you want to do this? You had a late night last night? Are you sure you want to do these really, you know, high focus activities this morning? And then if we say, You know what, thank you for asking. But yes, I will get them done. I think we would feel so much better about our work.

Francis Wade 47:30

Right. Right. It would be it would feel more comfortable for us, because it's kind of a match for what we're been doing for most of our lives anyway. More more natural in the psychological sense, I guess. Yeah, for sure. It would fit. And I wish because today, I think what we're seeing is that you can kind of get them to do what you want them to do. But it takes a lot of work. And you basically bailed out and said, You know what? Auto-schedulers take too much work to get them to do what I want it to do.

Melanie Wilson 48:10

For me? Yes, I was getting frustrated. You know, I would even contact tech support a couple of times, because I just couldn't figure out why it wasn't, you know, doing what I wanted it to do. And it was always my fault. Because typically, just as I said before, typically I had a task that was part of a project that had a different, you know, paid or priority or whatever.

Francis Wade 48:40

Meaning the priority from the project as (Yeah, yeah) opposed to only the task and it was forcing the project earlier than you wanted to see it.

Melanie Wilson 48:49

And that's, you know, that's another issue that I've been having, with Task Managers in general, you know, the, you know, the traditional idea that that stems from David Allen's work is that, you know, if you have a multi step, task, you need to make it into a project so that you're not overwhelmed. You know, like taxes, for example. You don't do taxes, you collect your W2s, you know, you do all these kinds of little steps in it. But I have found that scheduling projects within Task Managers creates a level of complexity, that if it's worse, for me, all of that finagling than it is just to look at, oh, I have taxes to do and then I will figure out what I'm going to do step by step.

Francis Wade 49:45

Right? Do it yourself rather than give it to the auto-scheduler...

Francis Wade 49:48

Right and that's, I mean, that's a personal preference that I can absolutely see some people want they want the whole thing broken down first, I do this and then I do this and and I think when your work. With an auto-scheduler, it just really creates some, some challenges, you know, to, to getting that, that schedule the way you want it to go.

Francis Wade 50:14

Right, I interviewed Mike Vardy recently, and he talked about a beginner time blocker, shouldn't use fine, you know, finely defined time blocks, like don't use one hour time blocks, use big blocks of like, four hours. If you just call it afternoon stuff, you have an idea of what goes in the afternoon, just do the afternoon stuff in the afternoon. So at least you're getting into the idea of manipulating these blocks. And you could do the same thing with an auto-scheduler is just, you decide what goes in, like like my after lunch work, you could decide what goes into that. It's more time boxing than time blocking. But it's the same idea, right, you don't go down to the 15 minute increments and say, the 15 minutes, I'm going to take off 10

minutes, and then I'm going to stop. Because that's more detail than you really want to have to manage in your overhead activities. If you don't want the overhead, then don't go to that level of detail. And probably the recommendation is that if you're brand new don't try.

M Melanie Wilson 51:25

Right. Right. Don't try, you know, I feel like we need to talk about one of the major reasons to schedule manually or to auto-schedule. It's a huge benefit. And I don't think we should get so far afield talking about all the details of auto-schedulers that we lose track of that. And that is that you understand that our time each day is limited. And we have to make decisions about what we're going to do in that limited time. Our schedule is a container for our tasks. And it, it forces us just like just like our checking account, it forces us to realize that we we don't have unlimited checks to write with our time. And that we have to say, Okay, this is more important than this. And this is how long it typically takes me to do this task. I am really amazed at how much better I have gotten at estimating how long it takes me to do things. It I have had a dramatic improvement in that. And I am much much happier when I plan a reasonable list of things to do in a day. And I see how I'm going to at least allegedly how I'm going to get them done in a day versus a task list that has 30 things on it. And I'll check off five or six on a good day. And then I'm just I'm left feeling like I'm not doing enough. I'm left. Overwhelmed,

Francis Wade 53:22

right. Fast behind, right. So they should have gotten them done.

M Melanie Wilson 53:27

Right. Like I'm lazy or something when no one of those tasks, I keep going back to taxes. But if one of those tasks that you finish was taxes, holy cow, that's a great.

Francis Wade 53:38

Yeah, right.

M Melanie Wilson 53:42

And so I don't think we should lose sight of that bigger picture. If you are doing anything, whether it is a great big time block like afternoon, or you know, morning and then you can see that there is a limit to what you can accomplish in the morning or in the afternoon. And that allows you to make some good decisions about what you're going to do today, maybe what you're not going to do at all. That is a very, very good thing. And all of the details about trying to get an auto-scheduler to help you with that, I think is just icing on the cake.

Francis Wade 54:23

Right? Right. There's an awareness that we're hoping you get to in your time blocking and that's why your time blocking in the first instance. Right? Right. That's the I agree with you that's a big deliverable. It's not the use of the auto-scheduler or the training of the auto-schedule. It's this kind of clarity. You know David Allen talks about it but then he gets negates it. It's kind of strange. He says Your mind is for Having...

M Melanie Wilson 54:55

supposed to be like a mind like water.

Francis Wade 54:57

Yeah, but there's a lot more pieces to it. Escape method also says, essentially don't use your mind for holding tasks, instead of having come up with the tasks. Exactly. He's absolutely right. And it's the Zeigarnik Effect is a, an expression of that. And that research was done before you long before he wrote his book in the 1920s, by his Bluma Zeigarnik. But he then says, Don't create a schedule for the day, (I know). But the same rules should apply. Because you're left having to juggle and rejuggle a bad schedule, that's mental, when you don't create a schedule for the day. And that's why time blocking has taken off in the last decade as a meme.

Francis Wade 55:43

I was taught time blocking in about 2000. I tried it before. But then I learned how to do it more effectively, and could actually implement it in about 2000. So I've been doing it for 20 years. And I feell old all of a sudden. I've gotten better at it. It's producing better results, I produce better estimates and I had before, right, and I wouldn't go back at this point, doing it any other way. But the way he wrote his book was as if to say, the benefits I talked about when I say take things off your mind and put them in front of you doesn't apply to your schedule. And I have never understood that logic or thinking. And if you're someone who's time blocking, you probably have already passed that point. But it he was though, that you're looking to take stuff off your mind. So you can be free to focus. He was right about that.

M Melanie Wilson 57:34

And I do understand where he was coming from with in not putting things on your schedule. And remember he wrote his book before digital calendars the everyone today is using. It was more paper. He didn't want people to add tasks they didn't end up doing to appointments and deadlines they had to meet. Because then if we know "I'm not gonna do all that stuff on my paper calendar" then we'll stop looking at it , stop depending on it, then we'll miss appointments.

Francis Wade 57:34

He saw it as an integrity issue that you're kind of like lying to yourself. Exactly. That lying would eventually accumulate to the point where you're not effective anymore.

Melanie Wilson 57:43

Right. And, and I don't see it that way. Now with a digital agenda. I see it more as a plan. It is a plan for the day, not that your locked in, you know, schedule, it's not that it's more like what am I able to fit into this day. And given that restriction on my time? What is most important for me to do, given my energy level and the other things that I have going on today?

Francis Wade 58:17

Right. Right. And in that respect SkedPal has evolved from when we first users. We were were version 1.0 people, right? Back in beta testing days, it's now to version three, and it's followed a particular development trajectory. And it struck us on our last call that all of the auto-cheduling apps, pretty much are following the same trajectory, that SkedPal did it is just that SkedPal is a bit further on better customized for large volumes of tasks. So it allows for scalability, cut out features that they found people don't want to use. So it's a little bit like the research is being done by the one that's, to our mind, anyway, the the one that's furthest ahead.

Francis Wade 59:07

And then there is further to go, but the ones we're following are, they're like working out problems that the early versions of SkedPal already worked out, like the Reschedule button, the Time Maps and other things like that. They're working them out. So they're behind, but no one has made that a leapfrog, for example, like to have a voice interface. Noone has leapfrogged and said, Okay, we don't have to worry about any of that. All you do is you talk to talk to your computer and it will be all taken care of in the background. Nobody is there yet. That's what we really want.

Melanie Wilson 59:46

And it will be here. I'm just thinking maybe in the interim before we would have that kind of a voice interface. Having a check in.. a check in, just spoken with a couple of questions about, you know where you're at today. You know, so in other words,

Francis Wade 1:00:09

yesterday schedule, you don't need to have a voice interface to see your yesterday scheduled, for example,

Melanie Wilson 1:00:15

That is true, but I'm just saying more like, okay, so, "Hey, good morning, Melanie, what's your energy like today? Do you have a new priority for the day?" Wouldn't that be nice?

Francis Wade 1:00:32

Okay, as opposed to having to go in there, click around, yeah, change the priority and some deep setting?

Melanie Wilson 1:00:39

And I could say, say, "Yes, I just got a phone call. My son needs me to redo his taxes. I know, I'm fixated on that. That's my priority. So you know, I want to get that done this morning." And I mean, wow, that would be really, really neat. I think,

Francis Wade 1:01:01

To have an upfront dialogue. Does it need to be voiced. Because it could just be, it could just be an intelligent, intelligent, give and take.

Melanie Wilson 1:01:12

Right, right. You know, just like, yeah, you might have a team meeting in the morning. Okay, what are we doing today? And I think that would be, that would be really quite something.

Francis Wade 1:01:26

What if that weren't SkedPal? So what if that were okay, an app that sits on in front of all the auto-schedulers. So you have your autoscheduler of choice, sitting in the background, and some app interacts with you, and asks you these questions.

Francis Wade 1:01:42

And it knows how to interact with the auto-scheduler?

Francis Wade 1:01:47

Yeah, it had API's and web hooks, and whatever the heck, yeah, cool stuff that it needs to do behind the scenes and you didn't care. But you may need a bit of training, because I've tried to use Google Assistant basic scheduling, and give up because, frankly, just typing it in was quicker than saying, "Google set an appointment for three o'clock". It was not easy to use. But I could imagine it could be something like Google assistant that is better able to ask me the right questions. I could learn the syntax. We could have this dialogue every morning. I mean, that doesn't seem interesting. To my naive point of view, it doesn't seem to be that hard. I bet you

it's really hard. But I suspect I'm saying here, am I saying? Oh, I should be easy! Some developers, you know, basically just manage all of the calendar stuff in the background, and just have a normal conversation with me and use that feed as an input?

Melanie Wilson 1:02:52

Right. Well, yeah. So I could say, Blackout two hours this morning for me to work on my son's taxes.

Francis Wade 1:03:00

Yeah, it says, done. Here's your new schedule. Yeah. It's not adding a whole lot of...again, I'm sure I'm under estimating the challenge because everyone tells me who designed software that it always looks easier than it turns out to be. I know. It's never... it's 10 times harder than you think. Even for the simplest, though. So I'm sure it's going to be that case. But maybe that's the direction I would like to see, if we're gonna do a review in four years. Five years time. Yeah. We'd like to see that one.

Melanie Wilson 1:03:33

Yeah, that'd be great. And maybe my son will be a graduate in software programming by then. And we can get his input.

Francis Wade 1:03:45

Okay. He can listen to your podcast, you can send him the link and say...Son. Yeah. What do you think? Where's the next level? Yeah, your mom, your mom took it to one level? Yeah. And you can take it to the next level, how about that?

Melanie Wilson 1:04:02

Only conceptually, which I don't think that's that. Amazing. But, you know, that's one thing. Implementing it would be hard.

Francis Wade 1:04:11

Right? Right. But we're at the end of our or our together, but I've not found other conversations like this one between people who have used auto-schedulers. I just have not. I have searched the podcasts and see Reviews of Individual auto-schedulers, best people who don't use them, or funny, people who don't use an auto-scheduler, right. And they're coming across the concept for the first time and they do a review on YouTube or a podcast, but they're not a veteran auto-scheduler who has written or talked about the ins and outs. So I wish there were more

conversations like this between other people who are in the know because I believe they're out there. They're not doing podcasts necessarily, and they're not coming on episodes and they're not.

Melanie Wilson 1:04:59
Yeah,

Francis Wade 1:05:01
We have each other? Well,

Melanie Wilson 1:05:03
we're people are too busy...

Francis Wade 1:05:08
doing valuable things? And on that note/..

Melanie Wilson 1:05:16
what was fun, it's always really interesting and inspiring to chat with you. It is

Francis Wade 1:05:23
lut takes us in some unusual directions. I don't think for.. this is a big ding for me a big a big bell because I'm gonna do another one at the end. Okay, because we're the only people having these conversations. So everything we say here is like, no one is saying this stuff about auto-schedulers or even again, about the transition from from using a task manager to doing time blocking to using an auto-scheduler. Right. It's not being talked about, I think we're all the poorer for it. I think the new apps that are coming out, they're not benefiting from a body of knowledge that given that there's 10-15 uto-schedulers I believe many of them come out, they don't even know about the other ones.

Francis Wade 1:05:25
I talk to them and say "By the way, do you know that there are others?" and they go "Really?" They actually do believe that they're like the first one and they say things like, this is the best app, this is the first app ever to do this, then they use this language in their copy, which tells me like, they don't know, you didn't even do the market research to figure out that you're not first.

Francis Wade 1:06:41

So thanks for coming on. This is extraordinary. And I love doing brand new stuff with you. I don't think we'll wait another five, four years will we?

Melanie Wilson 1:06:55

I don't know. I don't know. I will, we'll see. You know, I can't predict what's what's going to happen, you know, going forward. Who knows?

Francis Wade 1:07:07

Maybe there might be an explosion. We could look back at this moment. What we're seeing, I don't know, who knows, five years, 10 years, we're gonna have a really long a big laugh a year from now, if all of a sudden things change, and they could change dramatically.

Melanie Wilson 1:07:20

They could

Francis Wade 1:07:22

Let's see this moment, and come back and have a good laugh. All right, we will. All right, great. Dr Melanie Wilson thanks for appearing on the Task Management and Time Blocking Podcast.

Francis Wade 1:07:33

As you're listening, stay tuned. I'm going to tell you about the next episode that's coming up in our podcast and also share with you some more information. So keep listening