

It's the Task Management and Time Blocking Podcast. And this is the season two opening trailer,

You are a productivity enthusiasts who's been around task management for a while. Over the years, you've made lots of useful improvements and can say that you have made tangible progress.

However, it's been some time since you felt that before-and-after feeling when you had a productivity problem, found a solution, implemented it, and saw positive outcomes before and after. Getting that feeling of making progress has become much more difficult. You just can't find the improvements that you want by following anyone's prescription. Someone's one size fits all approach, training that you found on the internet, or reading a book you found on Amazon, somehow, you must find your own way.

And if this is your first time listening to this podcast, you may not know that there are many others just like you, but they don't listen to this podcast to hear experts so that they can.

They don't just listen to this podcast to hear expert opinion. They also attend my conference on Task Management and Time Blocking. They read my book, they join the multitaskers community. And they enjoy the training I offer. And, of course, they find other thought leaders in the vast world beyond one size fits all solutions. And these experts and thought leaders help them continue their improvement journey. Now, this is the easy path to follow. It's definitely not. But it's the one that bears the greatest fruit in the long run. And here on the podcast, we bring those thought leaders and those experts to have conversations that would help you make continuous improvements. If this engages you in any way, Welcome to Season Two of the Task Management and Time Blocking Podcast.

And welcome back. And if this is the first time that you're tuning into this particular podcast, where you missed a whole season of some 31 or so episodes, in which I had solo talks like this one. And I also invited on a number of guests to join me in specific problem solving episodes. So what you can expect in the next season is the continuation of the same format. The solo episodes are ones in which I offer my point of view or my opinion, usually based on some recent research. And that's, as I said, that's the solo version of the podcast. And then we have a guest version of the podcast, which is all about solving a particular problem.

So I don't bring on guests and interview them. I don't ask them about their favorite book, I don't ask them to tell us about their most recent insights. They are not here to share that. Instead, we start with the definition of a problem that is particularly difficult to solve in the world of task management and time blocking. And the two of us bring our information or background or knowledge or experience to bear in a conversation... a first time conversation... to try to tackle the problem.

It's almost as if we're doing it having the conversation alone. And we have the recording recorder on in the background and it's capturing what we're seeing. It's almost as if you're in the next room listening in and you're hearing us working our hearts off to try and solve or make some progress in what are called wicked problems. Wicked because they don't have easy solutions. So they require some ingenuity. And the purpose of these conversations is to have a bit of serendipity happen, a bit of some, some want to call it jazz, some insight that pops into the space that that either we never had before individually, or we are now sharing for the very first time.

So that's the format that we're going to continue with going into the second season. Also, if you're new, but also, if you're a longtime listener, Thanks for continuing to tune in.

I want to set the stage for the kinds of problems we will be tackling in the second season because there's been a shift or an evolution, and the kinds of approaches and questions that we're tackling. So your objective, as you as I mentioned, is to come up with these brand new insights. So our assumption is that as a listener, you are someone who has been around the block, as I said in the introduction, and even though you may have even mastered an approach like GTD or Covey, Stephen Covey's approach, or you may have be expert at using Pomodoro, or any of the other books or or systems, you, you've gotten some grounding in some other areas.

So this is not your first rodeo. However, you've not want you've not stopped wanting to make and feel as if you're making progress. Otherwise, you wanted to see tangible improvements in your task management. So there was some point in the distant past at which you took your task management for granted. And something happened and you began a journey, where you started to implement ideas, and you started to see them make a difference. So for many people, that's when they picked up Getting Things Done. For me, I did a training program called Mission Control back in somewhere in the late 90s. Somewhere there. And for you, it could be something else, you know, just picked up a book, or maybe you sat down with a coach.

But at some point, your task management was running on its own, and you decided to make a difference. And you had this before-and-after experience that I mentioned in the introduction where you went from not knowing what you were doing to having a keen sense of what you were doing, and seeing your productivity improve as a result. But now you're at this different stage, where I'm going to propose to you that the approach that you used to get where you are today will no longer get you any further. In other words, you're on another plateau, you may be close to a plateau.

Why is it? Well most people used a model of following a guru, a trainer, a coach, and mentor, a role model who worked in the same office. And the idea was to follow them or copy them. And if you picked up a book or you followed a training, the trainer probably told you "Just do what I tell you to do." A form of one size fits all kind of thinking. And really what they told you is what they would tell anyone else. And

that one size fits all thinking was responsible for all of the gains that you made in the very beginning. So it was tremendously useful.

However, you're now at the point further down the pike, where that one size fits all thinking is no longer working the way it did. And I'll go on to explain why that is. But let's just let me propose that that's the reason why you're unable to move past the plateau if you find yourself unable to make steady improvements the way you used to. So here on the podcast, we'll be tackling one size fits all thinking. And one size fits all teaching.

Even in the cases when for example, Getting Things Done is the classic... and you might say it's a standard one size fits all approach. Now, I'm clear, right that David Allen, the author has said many times that he wants you to customize his approach for your use. But the bottom line in the last 20 to 23 years is that he's offered a single set of behaviors that have changed very little. And he's proposed or promised that success comes from following that method. And we know it's a one size fits all approach, because there's no real help in saying, "Well, okay, I want to change what you've offered to customize it for me, what should I do?" And there's no one kind of offering to say, "Okay, well, here's what you do change this, change that. And here's why you change it. And here's why you don't change this and you don't change that...or the other thing."

The very premise, the very context is one of one size fits all application, that everyone does the same thing or needs to do the same thing. And there are many reasons why this is the case, you know, it's easier to teach one size fits all thinking, it's easier to write a one size fits all book, it's easier for someone to understand one size fits all logic. Because you don't have to understand the theory behind it, all you do is you just change your behaviors accordingly. And if that one size fits all approach has worked for 1000s of people, then who are you to say that it shouldn't work for you also?

So we will be once again, (and this has become more clear since Season One) tackling one size fits all thinking. And looking to see where its limitations have prevented you from making the progress that you want to make. So you found that you're not you're not able to find new improvements. So there's some diminishing returns in there, because it's harder to find improvements, as you become more productive. The easy gains aren't as sort of straightforward, aren't as simple to find.

And what some do is, you know, they swap one guru for another. Someone I might say that I'm their guru, but...that approach of finding a guru, following the guru, and then when the time comes, you think you're not getting anything more from him or her just replace them with someone else. It's actually more of the same one size fits all context, more of the same one size fits all thinking.

I'll propose in this season that that won't take you to where you want to get, that if you want to get better, you actually have to confront that you need to make your own way. And you need to make your own progress.

And that is an entirely new and different way of thinking about the progress that you need to make that I'll talk about in just a few minutes, that you need to adapt and to consider an entirely new mindset. And if you don't make a shift to this particular mindset, that what you'll find is that you stay stuck, feel stale, experience the same level of issues and the same challenges and same problems. Because no matter how productive you are, life is changing around you. So your task management will always experience challenges. But what you want is you want the challenges to change over time, which shows that you're growing. And as a result of your growth, you're experiencing new issues, not just the same issues, repeated over and over again.

So if you're in that situation of trying to improve and can't, you may have a feeling of being frustrated, of trying very hard, but not seeing much return. You may also feel a little bit alone. And as you hear this podcast, you may be conscious that there are not too many folks talking the way I'm speaking, or saying the things I'm saying and you know, I listened to lots of podcasts, perhaps you do also.

But there's not many folks saying that you will get to a point where your one size fits all approach (the one that you have been using) is no longer going to offer you any further improvement. And that you need to do something radically and just completely different. Shift the whole mindset. I've not heard that on too many podcasts (that I'm not anyway!) There's not too many people studying the problem...the way I described it to you.

So you may feel just a little bit alone that...Why aren't there 10 podcasts? Why aren't there five groups online on LinkedIn? Why isn't there a whole conversation on Twitter or X about this? Why isn't this message getting out to people who are in a similar situation? And why aren't they getting together in different ways to talk about it at scale?

So I mentioned at the top that there are People who listen to this podcast, we do have an online community. On Mighty Networks, we do. We have had an annual conference each year. And those are places where people could have these kinds of conversations. Although I'll tell you in the beginning, it wasn't clear that one size fits all thinking was, what we were seeing is not working. It wasn't I wasn't the enemy at the time, it wasn't the villain. We didn't...it wasn't that clear, it's only become clear.

But as you listen to me, you may also think to yourself, you know, there should be easier ways to make improvements. You know, once you sort of get that one size fits all thinking doesn't work, then what, what next, that should be pretty obvious, right? Well, today it's not. And in Season Two, we'll be talking

about why that is and how to get past it, how to systematically bring improvements that don't rely on one size fits all thinking into your life. That also means not following one size fits all coaching. We also want to empower people who can't afford a coach.

So when you hire a coach, a very smart coach will have a background that's so broad, that they never give one size fits all advice. It's all contingent, right? That's the kind of coach that you would want, if you could afford to have one meet with you on a regular basis. But most of us don't have access to an individual coach. Instead, they're on their own. And they're left to their own devices.

So if this is the situation, you know, you sort of have already figured out that, to some degree that you don't want to stay stuck at any particular level that you want to continue to make progress. Maybe you need to find solutions, a way to jump to the next level, and not do what most people do, which is to most people when they get to this level and realize they're not making the kind of improvements that they used to make, or that they want to make. And you're threatened with the thought of not making progress and not growing and advancing and developing.

You know, they often go back to the guru, they go back to Stephen Covey are Getting Things Done. And they pick up the book and they read it twice, three times, four times, then they double down. They decide that the solution is that they have not been doing it properly. And that's why they're having issues. And I did that myself with a couple of schools of thought that I found very useful, figured out wasn't doing it right. So therefore I tried harder.

The other thing that people do is to search for a new guru harder. So they you know, they do searches on Amazon to find books, they go into places like Reddit, ask questions or Quora. They want to find the next guru to follow. But the truth is, if you replace one guru with another with another, chances are you haven't left the world of one size fits all thinking. And that's what we're about to have you give up. Because there's no breakthrough. Once you're stuck in that mindset. There's no more that you can get by following a one size fits all solution, any of them because none of them work forever right.

You know, you may not agree and say that, you know, you're you're 95 years old, and you're perfectly fine using GTD. And I get that. And also what you want to know is that for most people who aren't necessarily 95 is that they don't have a way of going past the level at which they're satisfied. In other words, they're dissatisfied with where they're at. Their satisfaction comes from greater productivity, and they have no access to it. And they've decided and they have discovered and they sense and they are suspicious / suspect that the one size fits all bus which brought them to this point and will take them any further.

So if doubling down doesn't work and finding a new guru doesn't work, why Francis, you're the one with this message. Why isn't everybody doing this? Seems so obvious, perhaps that I've said it? Well, this does require a new kind of thinking. So there's a separation that has to happen for everyone who has reached a particular level successfully. And again, I want to propose to you that we all take the one size fits all bus. We're all dropped off at the same point. And we're all wondering sort of where to go next.

But the answer is not to take a new bus. The answer is to craft an entirely new kind of transportation. It's a heck of a metaphor. And in a nutshell, the transformation that I'll be inviting you to make now and during Season Two, is to move from being a great follower to being a great diagnostician.

A great adherence to a one size fits all system, or approach that worked for you to being an awesome diagnostic of your current way of managing your tasks, blocking your time. And that there's a discontinuity between these two mindsets, not like this one just naturally grows into the other. They don't. And what I'm offering you here by telling you this business about being a great diagnostician is not conventional wisdom, it's not a popular point of view.

But I argue, and we'll talk about this in Season Two, it's the only one that works, ultimately works. So, if you decide to say, "Hey Francis, I don't buy all this, I'm just gonna stick with what I have", as you're listening to me, you may be like others who do that, and, you know, decide that "I can't bother, it's too much work to go find a whole new mindset, and to become a great diagnostician. I'll just be a follower and just basically do a little bit (more) giving up and surrendering. And that's what it's like when you're aware that there's a next level of performance available to you. But the pathway to that performance, isn't one you already know. That it's easy.

It's you know, it's, it's understandable to say, "I give up, I don't have enough in me to go find this next level. And what does being a great diagnostician mean anyway, and the blah blah blah.

So you may decide that that's not for you. And I invite you, if you don't feel that way to consider that you can hit your aspiration, you can reach past the plateau. And you can move into a new zone of continuous improvement. And yes, or rather, BUT yes, there is a price to pay. And on the other side, the side that I've lived on since about 2008 is one in which you have an improved confidence. And the path forward (works) because it's a path that you've defined, and you discovered, and you can only discover it.

If you're a great diagnostician, or you become a better diagnostician, you'll develop a sense of self efficacy of, of capacity. You know, the way a master technician would fix a car, that it doesn't really matter what problem is happening in the car that he or she can fix any of them. And there's a kind of a quiet confidence that comes with that knowing that you can continue to repair that car, but in the case of a human being, you can continue to make improvements.

So I'm offering you sort of a break from what I might call the newcomer improvement paradigm, which is the one that people enjoy when there's a one size fits all approach at play. It's that they're trying to, as new people who are brand new, they're trying just to copy what's been done before or what's been offered before. And a newcomer who is picking up a task management improvement book or taking a course, for them, as I said before they make all these improvements all at once and everything that they do bears fruit. And there's a lot of movement in the beginning and in that paradigm, following the guru and being a faithful, consistent practitioner of a prescriptive system is what works.

That's that bus, that one size fits all bus. And that bus, people who follow, follow the rules and follow the descriptions do the best. And I know that you know that on that bus, there are also some people who kind of want to do it their way. And they don't make it. They fall off the bus and you say, "Oh, that's what happens when you don't follow the rules. That's what happens when you don't follow the prescription. That's what happens when you don't do it the way the book describes it."

But you say you need a better way of doing it. And then you go off, you don't do as well perhaps. That's what happens when you go use some crazy app that comes from...I don't know where...nobody's using that app! On that bus, it's easy, easier to make progress by simply following the instructions. Again, let's call that the newcomer improvement paradigm where a newcomer gets easy lessons and makes progress.

Let's suppose however, that you're beyond that, that you like me, you've been deposited by that bus at some point. And now you need a different way of tackling your task management. If so, I'm going to invite you to tune into Season Two, and hear more about the diagnostic based task management improvement. We dealt with it a great deal. In Season One, I'd say in Season One, we didn't have the phrase, one size fits all clearly defined. But if you go back and listen to in the archives, you'll hear us making progress towards what I'm today I'm calling the diagnostic based task management improvement approach. And this whole category of improvement is based on diagnosis.

So we're familiar with this kind of approach in other disciplines. And maybe in your area of expertise, you know exactly what I'm talking about. That in your maybe you're an engineer or architect or a teacher or, but you know exactly what I'm talking about. Because there are other parts of your life where you made the transition from being a one size fits all. practitioner inside of a newcomer improvement paradigm where you had those newcomer level, a ne comer type lesson, brand new, follow the rules. And you saw a transition from that, to becoming skillful at, and even taught, and even given tools on how to implement what we're calling the diagnostic based task management approach.

And over time, you may have seen yourself become a far better diagnostician than you ever imagined. And maybe even it happened, if you're lucky,... it happened and you didn't realize it was happening. But in this case, I'm going to propose that you can't make this jump not in today's world, not with the knowledge that we have in the training that we have, without being aware of the need to make a conscious shift in the specific direction that you need to go in and the importance of making that move consciously. And as you make it consciously. There are particular steps to take there are there's information to master there's research to comprehend. There is a bunch of strange language and there are different terms to wrestle with their concepts that just don't lend themselves to every day language because they've been made up for a particular purpose.

And at the end of it, or however at the end of it given that this is a diagnostic based improvement approach. Perhaps the opportunity for improvement could be limitless. Why? Because you're the one in charge, you could always diagnose yourself to another level. I don't know if that's true, what I'm telling you that this is the ultimate in task management, growth and improvement. But I propose to you that there's no way to continue to make improvements without following a diagnostic improvement approach, diagnostic based improvement approach. S

o some of the topics that we're going to be tackling during the next season, there's a few of them that have come to mind that I really want us to make progress on. And as I mentioned before, we're about tackling the wicked problems, the ones that don't have pat solutions that you can't just Google and find out "How do you do this? And how do you do that?" And even the definition of these problems is a tricky business.

So one has to do with email...the two that I've chosen, that I'm definitely going to highlight are email, and meetings. And two of them share some similar characteristics. If you work in a company, in particular, meetings, and email are a big problem. We used to think that they were technology problems. And that you just needed to have a particular technology in place or follow up particular practices. We now know enough to say that technology is a part of it. But the social side of these problems is huge. The task management side of these both of these issues is tremendous. And they all get wrapped up and combined in the culture of your organization in a way that makes it hard to find solutions. So this is not a problem, these two are not problems that are going to be going away anytime soon. But I'm on the search for experts in these areas, who can come on the show and tackle some tricky problems. In episodes that are coming up. We have actually already recorded one of them. And I plan to do quite a few more.

Why? Well, you may not have this problem as much, if you are a freelancer or a solo consultant, or someone who works in a small company, like I do, just with a couple of people. But the waste, that adds costs, ruins productivity, causes rework increases, not just overall costs, but unit costs, is staggering in the areas of email, and meetings. And I've not walked into a company or I'm not aware of a company yet that has metrics that are tracking these two points of failure.



So you would say everybody argues everybody complains. Everybody I've ever met complains about email and meetings, too many out of control. And the number of people who are measuring these two problems with a view to making improvements. I don't know. I don't actually don't know of a thing of any read of any of that heard of any. I'm sure they exist. But I'm gonna say I'm not come across them yet. Why? Well, let's go back to the mindset that we're picking up in season two, the diagnostic task management improvement is lacking. Diagnosis is weak.

So I've been in companies that tells me that, oh, they're solving their email problems because they're putting in instant messaging. Oh really? That's a solution? Or, we're going to put in new email software. Okay, okay. Okay, I see. Or we're gonna encourage people to, you know, be more effective in meetings, but what kinds of measures are you putting in place to do that? "Oh, we're just encouraging them you know, some of them will go to training and we're just you know, mostly encouragement. Measurement No, no, no, no, no measurements, no, nothing like that. No, nothing to add into their performance management, oh, no, no, nothing like that."

So those two issues, I say, proliferate because we don't know how to apply a diagnostic based improvement approach to either one. And that's why they're, they're proliferating. So during the next season, as you tune in, you can expect to come, listen, engage, and leave a far better diagnostician than when you came.

I promised that this would be a discontinuous kind of mindset. It doesn't flow naturally, from the follower newcomer improvement paradigm that most of us are on for that first part of our task management journey. This does not naturally follow that. However, it's really the only way to make progress.

So thanks for tuning into this episode. And in our next episode, which is going to be I believe, it's episode 32. I'm going to be having a conversation with Danielle Bailey. And here's a short excerpt from the discussion that we had. Keep listening.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>