

Ep #31: Reclaiming Control of Your Calendar (Time Management Series)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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You're listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast, Episode 31. We're talking all about reclaiming control of your calendar. You ready? Let's go.

Welcome to *The Less Stressed Lawyer*, the only podcast that teaches you how to manage your mind so you can live a life with less stress and far more fulfillment. If you're a lawyer who's over the overwhelm and tired of trying to hustle your way to happiness, you're in the right place. Now, here's your host, lawyer turned life coach, Olivia Vizachero.

Well, hello, how are you? I am talking to you from my hotel room in Rome. I just got in today. And I know I mentioned in the last episode, I'm kind of being a world traveler, right now; I'm bouncing from city to city. And it was my original intention to record a podcast episode in every single city that I'm in.

So, I could kind of take you guys with me as I travel. But I was just in New York just for a really short period of time, just a couple days. And it was such a whirlwind. I had a really packed calendar, and it just didn't work out for me to be able to record an episode while I was in NYC. But to kind of fill you guys in, I was able to, like I mentioned in the last episode, meet with two friends that I have only ever met online or through Zoom, because I met them during the pandemic.

And it was amazing. I got to go to dinner with one of them, we had such a good time. He treated me to an amazing dinner at an Italian restaurant, it was just so perfect. And then, I got to meet another girlfriend of mine. We have become like best friends since the very beginning of "quaren" times, as I like to call them. And we had this phenomenal lunch together. We talked for hours. It was so much fun being able to finally like hug and squeeze her in person, I just had the best time.

So, so far, so good. As far as travel is concerned. One of the things that I was thinking about, as I was making my way to the airport yesterday to catch my flight to Rome, was that a couple of years ago, I guess not a couple but like five years ago or so, I wouldn't have made the time to have

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dinner with one of my friends, and then have lunch with another one of my friends.

I would have told myself that work was too busy, and I couldn't fit it in. And I would have flown straight to Rome, I wouldn't have extended my layover in New York, to be able to stay there for a couple days. I would have just had that narrative about time scarcity in my head. And, I would have cut everything short, and probably would have been working a lot while I was traveling.

And even though I'm recording the podcast, other than that I'm not working. I'm not meeting with clients while I travel. It's just some downtime for me to give my brain a rest, get some really good ideas, prep for all of the exciting stuff that I have coming up.

So, it was wild to think about how much I've grown, and how I've transitioned, and how I've transformed, into a person who's so much more calm, much more intentional. And someone who really makes time for those memories, those really unforgettable moments, that you only get a few opportunities to create in your lifetime with friends.

So, if you are like old me right now, take this as your sign to become someone to start to make that transformation, that transition, to becoming someone who makes the time. Who makes the time to stay an extra day to go to dinner. Who makes the time to stay an extra day to go to lunch. Squeeze in those moments with the people in your life that really matter. You will be so grateful that you did, in the long run. You get one life.

I just wrote an email about this. I send out an email every Friday to my email list. And, it's just a little dose of inspiration. So, if you're not signed up for that, head to my Instagram, and there's a link in my bio where you can get on that list. So, you get those little doses of inspiration straight to your inbox.

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But I just wrote an email last night, while I was at the airport, to my list, talking about how you get this one incredible life. You get one chance at it. Make sure it's a memorable one. And I promise you, coming from the girl used to work a ton on vacation, I did doc review poolside. Bless my friend Nevila's heart, she has put up with me lawyering while traveling for several trips, back in my big law days. But you want to make sure you're making the most of your life. So, figure out where you can squeeze those moments in, and squeeze them in. All right.

Speaking of Nevila, she is getting ready to meet me in Rome. And, I think this is the first trip that we've taken together since I quit practicing law. So, she is in for a much calmer version of me. I'm sure she's excited.

All right, with that being said, I want to dive into today's topic. So, as you know, we've been talking about the three P's: people-pleasing, perfectionism, and procrastination. And now, we're in the time management portion of this series; really the fundamentals of the coaching that I do.

And we've talked about the mindset that you need to start to cultivate. I set you up in the last episode, talking about the overarching three steps that you need to do take to manage your time; reclaiming control of your calendar, planning your schedule accurately, and following the plan.

But what I want to do is go in and do a deep dive into each one of those three steps. So, there's no confusion about what it looks like to take action and make those changes, implement those changes, as you go through these three steps. And this is really the meat-and-potatoes of the time management series, these three steps.

You don't have to overcomplicate it, one of the things that I see people do, with time management, is when they're really struggling with it, they consume, consume, consume all of this time management content; I used to be guilty of doing that, too. And, it's too complex.

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You have to categorize between what's urgent and important. And there are a lot of tactics, and maybe you need to use certain apps. And while technology is great, I find that that is just a way that we are one step removed from what we actually need to be doing, which is following these three steps.

They're so simple. There really isn't much room for confusion, and you get to let it be this simple. I think people like to think that time management is difficult. And one of the things that I'm always telling my clients, is that it's not necessarily difficult, it tends to just be uncomfortable. And, we love to conflate ease with comfort. And, we want to make sure that we're using the appropriate terminology where it fits.

So, time management, these three steps; reclaiming control of your calendar, planning your schedule accurately, and honoring your plan. They're not difficult; climbing Mount Everest is probably difficult. I have a friend who just climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. And I'm sure that was a difficult challenge, right? This isn't that.

But managing your time, sticking to your schedule, controlling your calendar, not people-pleasing, starting work when you say you're going to, finishing on time instead of indulging in perfectionism. All of that stuff is uncomfortable. So, you want to figure out what type of discomfort comes with doing each of those steps, so you can implement them and overcome those negative emotions.

Now, one of the reasons that I love the simplicity of knowing these three steps, is that it makes it so easy to evaluate how you spend your time and what you're doing. So, I mentioned to you in the last episode, talking about if you always feel like you're behind, how you want to evaluate. You want to go through and identify the specific reasons that you're always behind.

And if you're working on time management, and you're struggling to manage your time, you, similarly, want to conduct weekly or daily evaluations. And those are going to be simple, too. You're just going to ask

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yourself; what is working? What is not working? And, what can you do differently, moving forward, to correct what isn't working.

You always get to bring it back to those three questions: What's going well? What's working, what's not working? What will I do differently? And, you want to bring that evaluation back to these three rules: Where did I not control my calendar? Where did I not plan accurately? Where did I not honor my plan? And then, why? Always asking why because that has so much really helpful, beneficial information, really great intel there.

So, why didn't I control my calendar? Thoughts that you're thinking, or negative emotions you're not willing to feel, right? Why did I not plan accurately? Did I do the math wrong? Why did I not honor my plan? Again, negative thoughts you're thinking or negative emotions that you're unwilling to feel.

So, you can use these three steps as a framework for consistently improving. And if you're evaluating and you're figuring out what you're going to do differently moving forward, you're always going to be making these small, incremental improvements. And, that's how you become wildly better at time management over time; it may not happen overnight. And, that doesn't have to be a problem, that's okay.

You're going to make consistent progress in this area, if you stick with it, practice these three steps, evaluate meaningfully, and keep going, keep tweaking to improve. Okay?

Now, let's talk about step one, reclaiming control of your calendar. And the reason I say reclaiming, is because most people aren't controlling their calendar. So, really, it's control your calendar, that would be step one. But for those who have ceded control over their calendar to the other people in their lives, we want to reclaim that control. All right, we want you in the driver's seat of your schedule.

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So, what does it mean for you to reclaim control of your calendar? First things first, I want you to check in with yourself and be really honest here; Do you think that other people have control of your time? Do you think other people have control of your calendar? A lot of my clients do. So, I want you to do a little bit of an audit here.

Think both, in your personal life and in your professional life, who has control instead of you. And if you've heard me talk about this before, you know where I'm going with this. I'm going to tell you that it's a lie, right? You're always in control of your calendar, you're always in control of how you spend your time; you always get to choose.

And if that feels like a really foreign concept for you, if that feels very untrue, I really want you to sit with that for a second. You can pause this episode, and just give yourself a few minutes to really think about it, and find the lie. Find where you're making the choice. Find where you're exercising agency and control.

One of the examples that people give me all the time, is that courts control their calendar. And I understand that a court can set a date, right, but you choose to attend the court date. I know it may not feel like it, but you do. You actually make a decision, and you choose to go, because you don't want to suffer the consequences of not going.

Also, a lot of people are able to reschedule court hearings and get adjournments, and get another date on the court's calendar. Same thing goes with closings. If you're a transactional attorney, people frequently tell me that they don't have any control over when the closing date is and that they can't move it. And then, a couple weeks later, we talk, and the closing date gets moved, right, for one reason or another.

So, I really want you to find the lie here, where you're telling yourself that you don't have control; you do have control, find it. Find where you're making the decision. Same thing goes with people with kids and their personal lives.

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You may think that your kids control your time, or maybe your spouse controls your time, figure out where you're making the choice. And again, this may be a challenge for you to find it, but really sit with it and find where you're exercising your own agency, your own autonomy.

Another way that I have people start to identify their agency and autonomy that they're exercising, is not to sound really dramatic, but think about what would happen if you were in the hospital. If you got into a car accident, God forbid, and you had to be rushed to the hospital. And, you were supposed to be at something.

And the narrative of whatever you were supposed to attend, you were telling yourself that you had no control over attending that or not. That you didn't have a say in the matter. That someone else made that decision for you and that you just had to abide by it. But then you don't go because you're in the hospital, right?

So, something else would happen because you're not there. Either someone would cover for you, if you had a court hearing, or things would get postponed; people would figure it out. But the plan would probably change. And, you'd figure out what to do from there.

So, I love that drastic example, just because it evidences that the world wouldn't come to a screeching halt, if you didn't attend something, all right; people would figure it out. So, think about that in your own life. What are the things that you feel like you really don't have control over? Who has control instead? Find those people, find those instances, and then find the lie. Where do you actually have control? Where are you making a decision on how to spend your time?

I also want you to find, what one of my clients calls the “creepy crawlers”, in your schedule. Now, creepy crawlers can either be things that are unplanned, and they make their way into your schedule. It can also be people who have access to scheduling for you, that come in and infringe on

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your calendar and make plans without your permission. They literally creepy crawl into your calendar. Right?

So, I want you to think about that for a second, and find the creepy crawlers into your schedule. Does anyone have access to your calendar? Do they schedule for you? I know a lot of people work in organizations, whether it's a law firm or a business, and people are able to see their availability. And then, they're able to schedule things based on the availability that they see.

If that's the case, we want to make sure that we eliminate that as much as you possibly can. So, you can go in and block off your time. And really limit your availability for other people to do that. Or, you can just take away the ability for people to schedule for you all together.

Now, again, remember, not hard, but uncomfortable. This may be uncomfortable for you to do. For you to go into your calendar, and operate differently than the rest of your team. For you to block off entire days, so people can't schedule for you. So, it appears that you're busy instead of available.

And if that does make you uncomfortable, I really want to challenge you to think about; why? What are the thoughts that are making you feel uncomfortable? And, get really specific about what uncomfortable you are actually experiencing? What type of discomfort you're actually feeling. Is it guilt? Is it worry, right? Those are two of the big ones. So, you want to make sure you're identifying that and asking yourself; why? What are the thoughts that are causing you to feel those emotions?

A lot of people just don't like to go against the status quo or the standard way that organizations operate. If everyone is always free and people have the ability to schedule anything on your calendar, it's going to feel a little foreign to operate differently, to be more boundaried, to block off time and have your calendar display that you're unavailable instead of free. Right?

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It would require people to email you probably, or give you a phone call, to ask you when you're available. When you'd be able to meet, rather than just being able to go into your calendar and schedule that automatically.

You could set it up to where you are only available at certain times of day. So, I teach a lot of my clients to have what I call, "office hours", where they maybe, in the past, have operated with an open-door policy and that has really led to mismanage time. So, instead of not being available at all, they just really limit their availability.

So, maybe instead of being available all day, they decide to have office hours, where they're available to be contacted by someone else between three to five, or two to four, or one to three, something like that. That gives them the morning to really get the bulk of their most important work done, free of interruptions. And then, they're still able to be accessible to their team members, to their clients, to other colleagues, opposing counsel, when they have those office hours.

Same thing's true if you have creepy crawlers who dropped by your office unexpected. I know a lot of people are working from home, nowadays, so maybe this is by way of Microsoft Teams™. or a phone call instead, or Jabber™; I know we used to have that at the firm that I worked at. So, maybe that's the case, that's how people are reaching out and getting a hold of you, or, they're swinging by.

And, you want to be the person who's accessible, but then, they come by, they ask a question, and then you make small talk, and then a half an hour goes by, and you lost 30 minutes of your day. If that happens every single day, that adds up. Or, multiple times a day. I used to be the office that people loved to swing by to have a conversation, because I was really personable.

And even though I love communicating with people, and getting to know people, and being really open and welcoming, it made me really

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unproductive, right? So, you want to get clear on when you're available when you're not.

Have those office hours, if it makes sense for you to have them, and be able to tell people, "Hey, I can't talk right now, I'm in the middle of something. But you can come back today at three, I've got time then." And you just plan on it, you build it into your schedule. You know that if someone comes by on announced, that you limit that interaction as much as you can. If possible, you limit it completely, so you don't get thrown off schedule.

You don't let other people have control over how you spend your time. And, if they're able to just swing by and spend as much time as they want with you, they're controlling your schedule. A better way to say that is, you're letting them control your schedule. But they're dictating, essentially, how you spend your time because you're not controlling it yourself. So, you want to reclaim control of your calendar that way.

Another example or pushback that I hear from people all the time, they're like; well, it's my supervisor who swings by. Or, my supervisor who calls me unexpectedly. And, I don't have control over that. They outrank me, what am I supposed to do?

And I really want to encourage you to tap into your resourcefulness, and get creative, and think about how can you still exercise control? How can you reclaim control of your calendar?

Now, one of the things that I teach my clients to do, is to head them off at the pass, essentially. So, if you know that a partner that you work with loves to swing by in the afternoons, or a couple of times a week, just to talk about a case. Reach out to them first and schedule a standing meeting, so they know that they're about to meet with you. It will reduce the need for them to swing by unexpectedly.

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Same thing if you are supervising others, and they love to come to you with a lot of questions, and it ends up being really disruptive to your day. Plan scheduled meetings: you can do it once a week, twice a week, you can do it every single day if you want to. But build that into your calendar, so you know to plan for it. You know when it's going to be. You're able to plan your other work around it, so you're not multitasking and interrupting yourself.

And you can also limit the amount of time that you spend in those meetings, in those exchanges. So, if you want to spend 15 minutes or 30 minutes, you can plan for that and then keep it to that timeframe. It's going to teach you how to be much more efficient and productive with the meetings that you have, when you actually decide on a timeframe for them, and you force yourself to stick within that time limit.

A big and common creepy crawler situation that I see in people's personal lives, is family members that call them unexpectedly, out of the blue. And a lot of people will have habits where they talk to their siblings or their spouse or their parents, multiple times throughout the day, or throughout the week.

And if that's you, and it sucks up a lot of your time, and you want to limit that, again, you can also decide; here's when I take these calls. Here's how frequently I take them, and here's how long they last. And you don't have to do this in a way that feels really restrictive.

I talk, on Fridays, to my friend, Shari. She's the person that I had lunch with, in New York. And, we talk for hours on Fridays. But we plan it into our schedule. I normally talk to her after I've gone to the market, and I've gotten everything that I need for dinner. And I'll start to cook dinner, and we'll talk for a couple hours about business and just our lives and everything.

But we've built that time, that really leisurely, luxurious amount of time into our schedule, so it's not like it's stealing from anything else. It's not like it's keeping me from accomplishing anything else. I've built that into my schedule. So, if you like to have lengthy conversations, that's fine, you just want to plan for that. Make sure that the math works.

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This is another reason that I love doing these time audits. Is to find out how much time do you spend on things like this; on talking with coworkers who swing by your office, or talking on the phone with friends and family members who call you unplanned, unexpectedly, and you just have the habit of answering. Because, again, you want to be accessible.

You're gonna start to decide, how accessible do you want to be? Do you want to be so accessible that it prevents you from managing your time? If the answer is yes, and you love your reasons for that, amazing. Chances are though, if you're listening to this podcast episode, and you're really trying to work on time management, you're probably not going to love your reasons, and you're going to want to make a change.

So, you want to be doing these time audits, gathering all this intel, learning about yourself and how you're currently spending your time, where you're ceding control of it and start to reclaim it.

Now with a boundary, you can decide, if you call me more than once a day, I don't answer, right, I call you back the next day. If you want to talk longer than an hour, I'm going to tell you that I have to get off the phone, and that I'll talk to you tomorrow or later in the week. You really get to decide how you show up, how you spend your time, and how you limit those interactions, so it works for your schedule.

A lot of people also spend a ton of time on the phone with their family, for one of two reasons. Number one, they do it because they feel guilty. I especially see this with clients who spend a ton of time on the phone with parents.

Their parents call them and of course they do, they want to talk to you; you're their children, they love you. And maybe they're a little bored, especially if they're up there in age. So, you might be a form of entertainment for them.

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I also find people, whether it's friends or family members, they love to buffer; avoid something else with a form of instant gratification or pleasure. They love to buffer with conversations with friends and family. So, you may notice that someone is using a conversation with you for that reason, to accomplish that. And if that's the case, it's alright for you to say, "You know what? You've got to call someone else. I love you. And, I can't talk right now."

Just because you're not available to talk, right now, because you decide you're unavailable, that's plenty good enough reason. Just because you're not available, doesn't mean you don't care, doesn't mean you don't love someone. And, it's okay, if they don't love your lack of availability. That's all right. We get to let them not love it; we get to let them be a little uncomfortable about it.

And that's going to be one of the main themes here with this first step, with reclaiming control of your calendar. You're really going to have to exercise feeling a little worried, feeling a little guilty, about having boundaries. About being really boundaried about how you spend your time. About not being as available as maybe you have been in the past. You're just going to allow that negative emotion to be there.

And it will decrease, because what you're going to prove to yourself, as you start to be more boundaried with your time and control your calendar more than you have been, you're going to see that people don't mind. And that is going to be so freeing for you. You're going to see that the world doesn't stop spinning on its axis.

People are really okay with you limiting your availability and being more in control of your calendar. They will take what you give them, they really will. So, you get to limit what you give them, it gets to be okay, and they will survive it; you will too.

Now, the pushback that I get here, from people who have that guilt come up, who have that worry come up, who have that fear come up, around

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setting boundaries and being more in control of their calendar. They say to me, “Well, what if someone's upset? Well, I want to be accommodating. I want to be responsible. I want to be responsive.” And I think, you can be all of those things and still be very boundaried with your time.

I don't think that I'm inaccessible, or that I'm irresponsible, because I'm very boundaried with my time. People still get access to me, but on my terms, not on their terms, right. And it's no one else's job to respect my boundaries around time, other than mine.

I see that happen all the time with people, they say, “I can't believe that this person is just so disrespectful of my boundaries. They don't respect my time. They don't respect my schedule.” It's not their job, it's your job to do those things. So, I think you can do both. That's absolutely true. You can be boundaried and be accessible, and be accommodating, and be helpful, and be responsible, and be responsive, all of those things.

But I do want you to give some thought to, what do you care about more? Let's say one of those things, it's not necessarily an either/or, but something has to beat out the other. All right. So, I want you to think about; what do you want more?

Do you want to be accessible, or do you want to manage your time? Do you want to people-please other people, or do you want to manage your time? Do you want to spend time making other people comfortable, or do you want to manage your time? Do you want to be hyper responsive, or do you want to manage your time?

Those are really important questions for you to ask yourself and answer. And you want to be brutally honest with your answers, here. Okay. You want to know and love your reasons for ceding control of your calendar if you decide to cede control over it. Most of the time, you're probably not going to love your reasons.

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And if that's the case, you want to make a different decision about how you spend your time. And it's probably going to require you to feel those uncomfortable feelings, that I mentioned earlier. Now, again, that'll be temporary. Because you start to get the result of spending your time how you want to spend it. You start to get the result of having a lot of control over how you spend your time; what you do with your time, what you're able to accomplish in a given amount of time.

And that feels really powerful and really empowering. So, it'll become pretty addictive. Once you get the ball rolling, with controlling your calendar and reclaiming a lot of that control, you're going to want to do more of that. You're going to be much more restrictive about who gets access to you, when they get access. Because you're going to be able to accomplish so much more of your best work, when you're controlling your time and you're not letting in those creepy crawlers.

Couple other examples of creepy crawlers, just so you can be on the lookout for them is, unscheduled phone calls. Being in your inbox constantly, throughout the day. And if someone emails you, feeling like you need to get back to them immediately. So, you drop what you're doing, and you respond.

Allowing people to schedule for you, at all times of the day, rather than within predetermined times that you've set up. Letting people linger, right? Letting people draw out an in-person meeting or a virtual meeting, right? Being someone who's unbounderied. If a call is supposed to be an hour, at the end of an hour, you gotta wrap it up. And, building the skill set to become someone who's really capable of doing that; Ending a call on time, even though it might be a little uncomfortable.

And especially if you have a gift for gab, which a lot of my clients do, this is going to be tough, because you like talking to people, it's fun. But you can start to see how impactful, in a negative way, it is to let things go on longer than you planned for, right? So, you want to not let other people linger, and you want to not linger yourself.

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You want to limit that open-door policy. You want to create those office hours, instead. So, those are some examples that I see, where creepy crawlers come into play here, and some tweaks and changes that you can make, in order to limit them. All right.

Ultimately, like I said, this is why we want to be doing time audits. So, you can see where you're not controlling your calendar, where you're ceding control to other people. Figure out who you're ceding control to, find the lie, figure out how you're actually in control, how you're actually exercising autonomy and making a decision, making a choice.

And then, figure out what you would need to do differently, in order to control your time. All right, in order to reclaim that power, reclaim that control. And decide, what do you want more; to people-please and be constantly accessible, or do you really want to be someone who masters managing their time?

If you do want to be someone who masters managing their time, it starts with reclaiming control of your calendar. Okay? So, that's what you're going to do this week. Really identify the places that you can reclaim more control over your calendar, so you can control more of your time.

All right, my friends. That's what I have for you this week. In the next episode, we're going to talk all about planning your schedule accurately. All right, I can't wait to dive in to step two of how to manage your time.

Until then, have a beautiful week.

Thanks for listening to *The Less Stressed Lawyer* podcast. If you want more info about Olivia Vizachero or the show's notes and resources from today's episode, visit www.TheLessStressedLawyer.com.