

Permanently Fixing the Weekly Review

Hi, this is Francis Wade, and welcome to a *Permanently Fixing Weekly Review*—a video from My Time Design 2.0.

I'm want to start off by telling the truth. The truth is lots of weekly reviews just simply aren't getting done. People are having a tough time with them. They're burdensome, they're long, they're getting skipped, and are seen as necessary, but very, very hard to do. But the truth is, most of us want to be as effective as possible and we can see that, depending on the time management system that we're using, that the weekly review is essential to it, the problem is, there are stuff just falling into the cracks, and that's happening because we're not able to complete the weekly review with enough rigor, frequently enough, with enough depth, by doing the complete review, a host of reasons, but the fact is we have time demands, or items that are falling through the cracks as a result of the weekly review being a burden or too difficult to complete. What we want—we do want to manage ourselves in such a way that absolutely nothing is missed, but here's the key, here's a solution to the problem. It's to actually the effect on upgrade between scheduling and listening. Changing the balance between the way we schedule and the way we list.

But how do we do that? Simple--we come up with a new commitment, we look at a different kind of solution, one that runs counter to what you've heard in many time management systems, I'm going to look at the method for implementing the solution. But it all comes to changing the balance between listing and scheduling. So let's start by talking about listing.

Well listing has a long history. It goes all the way back to maybe some of the founders of the American Republic. Benjamin Franklin used to say, "Make your list for the next day on the night before leaving work." Great advice, right, and lots of people follow the strategy of making a list of the things that they have to do, often called the "To Do" list. The result of making a list is that you end up with one grand list. Not a problem, as long as the number of items on the list is pretty small. When the number of items on the list grows to the 10s and then 100s, then it stops working as well, but luckily, many time management systems have come up with a way of dealing with the length of one grand list, and the solution that they came up with was to come up with lots of different lists, so just to give you one example of a system that advocates coming up with different lists.

Several other systems also say the same thing, and what they advocate is breaking up the one grand list into lots of different lists, sorted by priority, context, location, urgency, time length, cost, interest, level of commitment, project, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. There are lots of different ways of dividing up one grand To Do list into lots of other small lists that can be managed in a more, sort of, reasonable way. However,

there is a problem, and the problem comes in the way that listing is done. Well let's take the example of a student's To Do list. So the student is just a typical student, they've made up a list of items to do, they're studying for the statistics final, they're taking vitamins, they're delivering survey results to a Professor Smith, just a list of the regular kinds of items that you would see a student engage in. the problem is, and this problem becomes more of a difficulty when the list becomes either longer or more complex, so where is the time dimension?

So each of the items on this list all take time, so for many of them there's actually a due date, so studying, for example, for the final in statistics has a due date, there's going to be an exam, so obviously the time that's being spent to study for the final needs to be scheduled before the actual date of the exam, but also the student has to make a choice, how much time am I going to commit to that particular final? How much time am I going to commit to studying so that I can pass the final? What grade do I want to get and how much time is required?

So the student has in mind the amount of time that they want to put in to study for that particular exam. So when they look at the list they come up with an estimate of how much time to spend on each of these items on this particular To Do list. It happens quickly, it happens subconsciously and you and I do the same thing. As soon as we look at a list of items that we need to do, we immediately come up with a time estimate, and we immediately start to think about when we're going to do that particular item, when in time. What time we're going to start and what time we're going to end. It's automatic, it's subconscious and it happens in an instant.

But here are some of the questions that we ask ourselves. Maybe I should deliver the results to Professor Smith on Tuesday night, yes. When was my girlfriend free again? Is she free on Saturday night? Boy I wonder if I can hand in my paper on Thursday morning that should be just in time for the deadline of the Thursday noon. When did my parents promise to put that money in my account, the phone bill is due on the 17th, did they say that they'll get it in on the 11th? I think I should exercise on Tuesday and Saturday nights. Yes, I think that's it--this week that's what I'll do.

So this all happens in the mind, it happens very quickly, the thing is though, because it's all mental, there's a possibility of mistakes that could be made. I don't know if you noticed it, but I actually made a mistake. I scheduled to deliver the results to Professor Smith on Tuesday night and I also scheduled the exercise for that very same night. In other words, I scheduled in a conflict. Hmm? No accident because I was doing it as I was going along and I was doing it in my memory. So our memories aren't great places to build schedules. Typically though, that's exactly what happens. When you use a To Do list, or even many lists that are built up by priority, urgency, context, whatever it is, the schedule that is attached to each item, the time estimate and the time you think you're going to start the item is all stored in memory.

Memory—yes, memory, but that's not a good thing? No, it's not a good thing. As a matter of fact there are now some explicit instructions that are given by some to not

only keep it in memory but to not put it in your schedule. So if you're to look at someone's appointment book—most people's appointment book what you'd notice is that it's being used to schedule items that have to do with other people, or engagements with other people. For example, this particular calendar has dinner with Dan and Amy, it has meeting with Steve at 2:30, a doctor's appointment at 4:00 and it has a board meeting at 9:00 a.m. This is also called a hard landscape, by the way. Noted because the items are difficult to move on your own, so you can't make an individual decision to change any of these items, they're all scheduled involving other groups of people.

So an appointment book, or a hard landscape would kind of look like this. The fact is though, some feel very strongly that nothing should be in a calendar except the appointments I just showed you. In other words, a calendar shouldn't be used to do anything except track hard landscape items. So forget about study time, that doesn't belong in the calendar, what belongs in the calendar is the actual schedule time of the exam itself, but not the study time. Why? Where did that come from? Well if you follow that reasoning or that process then when you go to use an electronic calendar like the one I have here, it really would be no different than the calendar that's used on paper. It's just a little bit fancier. Let's call it, for sake of argument, the 1950's style calendar, which is the appointment book. A calendar that's used to track appointments, if you use an electronic calendar only to track appointments or stuff that belongs in your hard landscape, then the truth is you're using it in the way a person from the 1950s would use their calendar. In other words, there's been no improvement, same method.

So why would someone recommend that you follow a system from the 1950s. Well here is some evidence, and similar evidence as can be found all over the internet and in different books, but here are some examples. So a fresh focus on productivity says—this was a blog—*it's been proven time and time again that using your calendar as a to-do list is an epic fail*. Still looking for the actual hard evidence on that. Schools for Thought said, *the fewer commitments you have on your calendar the more likely you are to keep them*—still looking for the evidence for that. On page 41 of a very popular book *Getting Things Done* which is a great book, the author says, "The way I look at it, the calendar should be sacred territory, if you write something there it must get done that day or not at all." This came from the Patrick Rhone blog, the reference to *Getting Things Done* book, and again I ask the question, what's the evidence of that, that the calendar should be sacred territory, where's the research that backs that up? Why?

Why is this true? I'm going to say that the belief that the calendar can only be used as a hard landscape, or it should only be used as an appointment calendar has become an urban myth. It's gone beyond our recommendation, and becomes something that we believe just because it's been kind of said a few times. The fact is the research shows that when it comes, for example, to project management, which is very similar to time management, there are many studies that show that making plans, using an explicit schedule, [inaudible 11:27], or is much better than other

methods that attempt to use memory. And I say that with some background, as an industrial engineer I was taught in my bachelor's and my master's programs that Gantt Charting was the standard for project management, along with other tools. And again, the study shows that those tools are far superior to attempting to plan projects, or plan activities just using memory.

Memory—It seems that when you restrict your calendar to only appointments, then you're forced to manage all the other activities that you need to get done in your memory, which seems to make sense back in the 1950s when there were limited tools, there was no such thing as the iPad back then, there was no such thing as a Blackberry Bold with the electronic calendars built in. There was no such thing as Scribe which is a brand new program that's just—in Beta actually—that gives you a whole new way to schedule and to plan your day which is actually superior to Outlook from what I can tell. Those tools didn't exist, but the fact is, this is 2010, and the tools do exist. So we do have access to calendars that are electronic, they are also portable. They're infinitely flexible. You could schedule stuff in 2020, 2050, as far out as you want. They're easy to use and they can be synched with multiple sources. You can back them up to your computer, you can back them up on the internet, you can back them up to other devices, they're very, very powerful and they're only getting better. And then you contrast that with the tools that were recommended in the 1950s and we've come a long way baby.

So why stick to the same methods that were used back then. You know, the new methods, the new techniques, the new technology that exist, allow us to manage our schedules and not use our memory. The old system however, where you have a list and a calendar, requires that you use memory. The fact is, each time you add an item to a list, there are two pieces of information that you commit to memory. How long it takes and when it should start, and when it should end, and all of that needs to be remembered, and that's a whole lot of memory. Then you might say, "So what." So what that you have to use your memory because you're remembering skills are pretty good, and you may so *what*, well here's a fact.

There are more time demands coming at us each day and if you haven't noticed you will soon, because between 1950 and the year 2000 human knowledge actually doubled. Scientific information doubles every five years. In the *Sunday New York Times* a current day issue has the same amount of information as someone saw in their entire lifetime back in 1750, the Benjamin Franklin kind of age.

Internet traffic is still doubling every 100 days, so the information that's flowing at us is flowing at us more rapidly, there's no wonder people are talking about information overload. But not only has the volume gone up, so have the channels. Just in the past five years Facebook and Twitter have come out of nowhere, to add more information, more connections, more time demands to our already full schedules. So the fact is, anybody who is still doing listing on a regular basis using lots of items—putting lots of items in lists is going to have a tough time if they're not having one already, because lists, if they're going to capture all of our other majority—the vast

majority—of the stuff that we need to do, time demands are going to become very, very long, and the future says they're likely to grow in length. So as I showed you before, as the list grows so does our need to use our memory. So what's predictable is as the list gets long, the bunch of stuff that we need to remember, grows with it.

Well, it's no wonder that the Weekly Reviews are so difficult, because as the number of time demands have gone up, so has the demand on our memory, and the fact is during a good weekly review every single item in every single list has got to be reviewed. Otherwise stuff is going to fall through the cracks. So they're long, and they're likely to grow in length. If we're going to review every single item, a lot of new stuff has got to be remembered. So reviews have become, already, for many people, have become long and tedious affairs, but the problem is not in the way that they do their listing. The problem actually lies somewhere else.

The solution, as I said before, is to rebalance the way we list, and the way we schedule, and it's simple. Expand your scheduling and cut back on your listing. Now how do you do that? Well, simple. As new items come up from different capture points, instead of adding them to a list you put them straight into your schedule. So from email, voicemail, people pads, and voice recorders, all different capture points that you use in your life to capture new items, new time demands. When you're entering them you put them straight into a calendar in one move. So the new review would look like—if you were to change the way you did your reviewing, would be very simple. You glance at the schedule, check out the time demands that are on the horizon, shuffle the items around and then use the latest portable tools – electronic tools – to get 24/7 access to your schedule.

That way you always change your schedule regardless of where you are. So I did a little bit of research and what I found is that actually this shift is already underway. The shift to this new way of scheduling – where scheduling is predominant and listing is waning in importance or is used on a very limited basis, is actually already happening and where it's happening is among students that are in college. So I found a study of the way that students use time management, this is done in the U.K., and what I found is that—and I thought this was astounding—that all the participants in the survey, in other words all the students, own a mobile device. Wow! So they all have access to electronic calendars.

When it came to the applications, the majority—55.7 percent were using software on their mobile phone, some were using software on Google—Google Calendar—some were using Outlook, and some were using Outlook web access. Then I also said, that the most used features were diaries and calendars. 49.4 percent compared to to-do list which was only 32.2 percent—whoa. That's 68 percent of students who aren't keeping a to-do list. Instead what they're using is their calendar.

Of course they all have time tables because they're all in school, and they all have classes. But they are already making the shift. They're shifting of using to-do list to using calendars. And when it comes to actually using their calendar, here's what

they're doing. They're considering deadlines, they're guessing task duration, they're considering task size, and they're prioritizing the items that are in their schedule. So let's assume that students are way more comfortable using technology than we are. What the study is showing is that they're using technology to schedule their time, they're using calendars to figure out the times they should be studying, preparing papers, meeting with their study groups, doing research, doing exercise, traveling, and so on and so forth. They're already making the shift that I'm talking about us making here.

So what are the benefits of scheduling more and listing less? Well, I'm going to tell you these from my own perspective because I made this shift several years ago, I used to keep multiple lists, and what I discovered, through my own research and doing some courses, was that if I scheduled more, I didn't need to list as much; and here is what I saw. I saw that I didn't need to use my memory as much. There is way less stress in trying to figure out – hmm? How many, for example, study periods do I need in order to pass that statistics exam—because I actually used this particular process when I was in school myself.

I found that I make more reflective reviews. So my reviews look at entire week, for example, of activity, and it's much easier to see what's happening at a glance than it is to look at a list of items and then attempt to juggle the duration and the time they start and they end in my mind.

I also found that the weekly reviews were much shorter, and instead a daily review of the schedule for the day got a lot more done than it does when I was doing way more listing. I also found that there's very little that gets lost when everything is in your calendar, because you don't need to schedule, or to review every single item in your calendar. Right now the practice I have is to review items that are in the next three days. Hmm—interesting, that's a lot shorter review than sitting down once a week and reviewing every single item that's in the list, which is what you must do if you do a weekly review that's built on long lists. Hmm?

So in My Time Design I actually put polls and take you through a method for growing the skill of scheduling. So My Time Design 2.0 is the time management program that takes 16 weeks, during which, here are some of the things that happen. First is, you analyze your current habit pattern, what are you currently doing. The second is, I show you how to determine which habits you want to adopt. So I don't recommend that you adopt any particular cookie-cutter system, or a prescription.

I don't say that you have to follow what I do, I don't say that you have to follow any predetermined set of habits. Instead, I show you how to determine which habits you want to adopt, you are in charge. The third step is I help you to set practice time to implement the different changes in your habit pattern that you want to make. It does take practice. And the fourth step, is I show you how to make them automatic and at that point you can stop practicing because they're automatic, and you don't have to think about them, then it's easier to put in place these new habits.

So what are some possible new habits that you could decide to learn? When you empty your capture points, as I mentioned before, you just empty them straight into your schedule, and you start to confront the fact immediately, that there is limited time and that each of the items that you want to do, do take up time. So you're actually scheduling as you are emptying your capture points, and making good decisions about where each item should go. What day and what time.

Another possible new habit is that during the day, and I do this twice a day, you rebalance your schedule, because the fact is there's a lot of stuff that happens during the day. You know, your boss calls you up and totally throws your project off and says, you need to stop what you're doing and work on this entirely different thing. So you need to come back after that happens and rebalance your schedule—a different habit. You also need to make a bit of a mental shift, and here's one that I think would be useful to anyone who has taken up a time management system that says that you must follow your calendar no matter what—simple. The idea here is we often think that once you set a schedule that you can't change it, it's like it has a certain perfection to it, a little bit like the Mona Lisa, that my schedule for the day cannot be changed. So you don't want to mess with the perfect creation like the Mona Lisa.

But I'll say to throw that out. Throw away your notion that your calendar should be seen as a perfect creation, and instead, think of your calendar as a doodle. So the mental shift is that your calendar is not a perfect creation that must be followed at all cost, instead, it's like doodling. You get together, you make some notes, you scratch some things down and you may use them or you may not use them. You may throw the whole thing away and start all over again, but it's just a place for you to organize your thinking. A place to put your idea down, your best idea down as to how the day should go, and then you can see you're free to erase the whole day and start all over again, or re-jigger it five times if you want. The thing is , you absolutely have the freedom to change your calendar as you go along. It's just a skill that needs to be developed. And when you make this shift, you start to see the items in your calendar and it's almost like pieces on a chess board, it's just stuff to move around.

So you move around the pieces on a chess board to give yourself an advantage, to win the game in this particular case. The same thing happens with your schedule. You start to see those items in your schedule, and they're just items that you can move around at will, and you can move them to any point in the future, any time of the day, they don't belong anywhere. Just because you schedule it for 8:00 in the morning doesn't mean you can't change it when you make up your mind. So you have no more attachment to an item happening at a particular time than you do to having rook in any particular position on your chess board. It's just that easy.

So if you want to take your system to the next level, this is the system that you use for managing your time, your own time management system. What I recommend is that you take the pressure off your weekly review, and instead of relying on lists, many lists, and lots of long complicated reviews. Instead make a switch to

scheduling, and spend more time upgrading your ability to schedule and use the new tools that are available.

So my invitation to you is to start your upgrade today. In My Time Design that's exactly what we do—we help you to upgrade all aspects of your time management systems including this one.

So this is Francis Wade and I invite you to come and check out My Time Design, and read how we'll work with you to upgrade your time management system.

Take care.

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