



This Is Your Life Podcast

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Michael Hyatt

Michele Cushatt: Welcome to *This Is Your Life* with Michael Hyatt, where our goal is to help you win at work and succeed at life. My name is Michele Cushatt. I'm your cohost. Joining me in today's conversation is Michael Hyatt. Hey there, Michael.

Michael Hyatt: Hey, Michele.

Michele: Today we're talking about email, one of our least favorite subjects. Do you remember that movie that came out in 1998, starring Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks, called *You've Got Mail*?

Michael: I do remember that. I love romantic comedies to begin with, but I love that movie.

Michele: I was thinking about it the other day. It was 18 years ago, but this whole concept of email was such a novel idea. Everybody went crazy over email. In some ways I think, "Oh, it has been 18 years; that's such a long time," but really, when you consider how much email has transformed our culture and our lives, 18 years isn't that much time.

Michael: No. Do you remember back in those days when you used to really look forward to getting email? You'd be watching your inbox and you'd get an email and it was like cause for celebration. Today most people I know...

Michele: Yeah, you'd hear the ding. You'd hear, "You've got mail."

Michael: But today most people resent it or at least see it as kind of a necessary evil. It's very different from where it was 18 years ago.

Michele: Well, I don't think we knew in 1998 that it would grow to become quite the beast that it is. Now email is indispensable in many ways, and yet it's like the bane of our existence. Every day we're bombarded with emails from friends, family, coworkers, spam, customers, companies, schools, you name it. We get email all the time.

To be honest, it's quite overwhelming. At times, it seems impossible to stay on top of. So, Michael, I hope you don't mind me asking. I'm going to ask anyway. Give us an idea of the volume of emails you or your team process in your name every single day.

Michael: Probably 400 to 500, maybe more. That was several months ago when I checked, but because we have so many online properties now between Platform University and 5 Days to Your Best Year Ever and the Get Noticed! theme and michaelhyatt.com and all that, there's I'd say probably 400 to 500, maybe more than that.

Michele: I want to point out those don't count the emails between your team, because you guys use Slack and other mediums to communicate back and forth. So really, most of those 400 to 500 are purely outside emails.

Michael: I can tell you this. We have two full-time people in our customer experience department... That's their full-time job. They just manage that email. They're getting back to people. They're asking us questions that are coming in from that email. They're forwarding to me stuff that needs my attention. Yeah, it's a lot.

Michele: I don't get nearly that much, but I could get maybe 50 to 100 real emails a day, and that is more than enough for me. I'm sure many of those who are listening right now know what it's like to have an email inbox that just feels like a black hole. Usually, I find people do one of two things. They either are completely married to their inbox, where they can't pull themselves away, or they ignore it and pretend like it's not there and they have an email inbox that's like thousands and thousands of emails that pile up over time.

Michael: I know. And I've seen tens of thousands of emails in people's inbox, and worse, they just feel like they're behind, chronically behind, not caught up. So that's part of what we want to address in this episode.

Michele: Absolutely. We don't want you to feel that way. If you're the person who feels like you are glued to your inbox because you have to stay on top of it or the person who tries to put the blinders on and ignore it, but it's still there, we want to give you four different steps today to take control of your email inbox so it becomes something that's a real tool for you and not a distraction or the bane of your existence, the means to your daily death. So Michael, give us the very first step to taking control of your email inbox.

Michael: *Make it a goal to empty your inbox every single day.* Again, that's your goal. You want to be able to go to sleep with every message processed. Now this doesn't mean you answer every message, but it does mean you've processed every message. There's a big difference. I'll explain that in a minute. But empty your inbox every day.

It's what some people call *inbox zero*, because you know it has been attended to. You know you've dispatched that email. You've dealt with it in an appropriate way, and you can go to bed at the end of the night knowing it has all been taken care of. So that's where I would start. Start with the end and work backward. What would it make possible if you were to get inbox zero every day?

Michele: I rarely do inbox zero. That's my confession for today. However, I have a goal of having under 15. That's okay, right?

Michael: That's not bad. Yeah, that's okay. I'm going to tell you something. If you have 15 or 20 unprocessed emails at the end of the day... By the way, this is a moving target, because as soon as you get inbox zero, some knucklehead sends you an email and you're back to having to start over again.

Michele: There's always one in every crowd, somebody who's waiting for 5:00 p.m. and they send you, like, eight emails.

Michael: But if you have 15 to 20 at the end of the day and that's all you have, that puts you ahead of 99.9 percent of the population, because that's not how most people manage their inbox.

Michele: I kind of use it as a to-do list at times. I'll leave them in there, and those become my to-dos for the next morning.

Michael: Yeah, that's exactly right.

Michele: Is that okay?

Michael: Yeah, that's okay.

Michele: I still can qualify?

Michael: I'm going to give you a pass.

Michele: Thanks for the pass.

Michael: So you can grow in this area.

Michele: Okay, sounds good. So the first step to conquering your email inbox is to make it a goal to empty it every single day, or if you're like me, 20 or under. What is step number two?

Michael: Step number two is *don't get bogged down; keep moving*. In other words, you have to have a workflow process that becomes for you automatic and second nature. You will get better at this over time, but this is key. People often get bogged down because they keep processing the same email message over and over again.

They read it. They don't take action. They let it sit in their inbox. Then a few days later they reprocess it. Nothing really ever progresses. Their emails just build up in their inbox and it becomes very disheartening very quickly because they don't feel like they can get any traction.

The key is that once you start processing your inbox, you have to move quickly. Read each message once and answer this question.

I got this from David Allen from *Getting Things Done*. “Is this message actionable? Is this message, the one I’m looking at right now, actionable?” In other words, “Am I being asked to do something?” If you’re listening to this, you might want to take notes, because you’re going to want to come back to this. If the answer to that question is “Yes,” there are only three possible actions. First, *do*. That’s right. Take action on the task now.

Michele: You’re saying doing it right away. Don’t put it off.

Michael: Yeah, do it right now.

Michele: Get it done.

Michael: Somebody asked you for a document. Somebody asked if they can have a meeting, whatever it is. I follow David Allen’s two-minute rule. If I can do what is being requested of me in less than two minutes, I do it immediately. This gets stuff off your to-do list before it ever gets *on* your to-do list. I don’t just want to keep adding to my to-do list. Sometimes adding it to your to-do list can take longer than actually doing the thing.

Michele: Now you’re stepping on my toes. Just back off, buddy.

Michael: The other thing, too, is it has the added advantage of making you look very responsive.

Michele: Very true.

Michael: If you could do it in two minutes or less, just do it and do it now. It’s like my friend Robert Smith says. “When would now be a good time to do it?” So do it. The second possible action is to *delegate* it. Pass the task along to someone else. I’m not talking about passing the buck, but often, someone else is better equipped to fulfill the sender’s request.

I’ve used this quote many times, but Dawson Trotman, who was the founder of The Navigators, once said, “I purposed never to do anything that others could or would do when there was so much of importance to be done that others could or would not do.” I’ve made that a motto for my life. In other words, you have to try to focus on where you add value and off-load everything else you possibly can.

If that message can be handled by somebody else... Like in my case, I don’t manage my own calendar, so if it’s a calendar request, I’m going to forward that to Suzie and she’s going to respond to it. If it’s something else that somebody on my team is better equipped to answer, I just forward it to them. I delegate it. I get it out of my inbox, and then I archive it.

The third action you can take, if this is going to require action, is to *defer* it. In other words, just consciously decide you're going to do the task later. Maybe it's going to take longer than two minutes or you can't delegate it to somebody else, but you can add this task to your to-do list or schedule an appointment with yourself to complete it. Either way, you're going to defer it.

So those are the three actions. If the answer to the question, "Is this email asking me to do something?" is "Yes," there are those three actions you can take: *do*, *delegate*, or *defer*. Notice they're all alliterative.

Michele: They're all very easy to remember. There you go.

Michael: I didn't think you'd miss that, since you're a speech coach. I want to get extra credit.

Michele: You've got it.

Michael: If the answer is "No," in other words, someone is *not* asking you to do something, then you have two options. First (write this down, because this is going to be shocking to some of you), *delete*. Yes, you can use the "delete" key with your email.

Michele: What? We can delete?

Michael: I know it's shocking, but determine if you're going to need the information later. If not, delete it. My own assumption (you're going to love this) is if it's really important, someone somewhere else in the world has a copy of it.

Michele: I actually like your logic, but that's still terrifying for me.

Michael: I know. Much to the chagrin of many politicians who when they thought they deleted an email it showed up later because somebody else somewhere in the world had a copy of it. Second... I really tried to think of a *D* word for this, but I couldn't. You can *file* it. If it doesn't require action, you can file it.

If you think you might need the information, file it, but I want to give you a really important tip here. Don't use an elaborate set of file folders. You can disagree with me on this, but I think this is the single most important piece of advice I can give you. Just file everything in the archive. Why? Because if it gets more complicated than that, it leads to procrastination. Trust me on this.

You're going to have to decide, "Well, should I file this under Brian because it was from him or under Kevin because it's *about* him?" Or what happens if the email covers more than one subject? Do you make copies of the email and then put one copy in each folder? Things can get really complicated fast. Forget all that. Just file it in your archive, and then let the computer do the heavy lifting of finding that email when you need it. Computers are really good at that.

Michele: Yes. That's exactly what I do. I've done that for the last couple of years. I used to have folders and all that kind of stuff. I finally got rid of that a couple of years ago, and it has been the best thing I've done. It's so easy.

Michael: Let's just review that really quickly. If the person is requesting something of you, you have to answer the question, "Am I being asked to do something?" If the answer is "Yes," do, delegate, or defer. If the answer is "No," they're not asking you to do something, it's just information, then you can either delete it if you don't think you're going to need it again or you can file it if you think you might need it again. By the way, if in doubt, I file it. It's that easy.

Michele: You just do that just in case. You can always delete it later.

Michael: Even with a Gmail account, they give you so much stinking hard drive space for free. I've never even gotten close to filling that thing up.

Michele: I haven't either. After a couple of years, I seem to have a lot of junk in there. Such good advice. The point of this whole second step is not to get bogged down, to keep moving. Michael has provided you with your responses depending on whether or not that email is actionable or not. If it is, do, delegate, or defer. If it's not, delete or file. It's that simple.

So hopefully we've repeated that enough. We may make sure that's in the show notes as well so that way you have it. That tool is so easy for you to just move right through your email and keep you from that email processing paralysis.

Michael: I want to say that initially, when you start doing this, it's going to feel cumbersome, because you're going to have to kind of go through by rote and say, "Okay, is it actionable, yes or no? What are my options here?" But after a while, it becomes second nature. It's just like practicing tennis or doing any sport where the repetitive motion builds it into your muscle memory. That's what you want to do here, so you can move through your inbox and do it quickly and not spend all day in your inbox.

Michele: Yeah, who wants to do that? That's no fun. All right, we have two more steps for you, easy steps to conquer your email inbox. We will get those to you in just a moment. However, before we continue this discussion, Michael, you have a free resource you wanted to offer to your listeners, correct?

Michael: I do. I hear from people all the time...I get emails, messages on social media...who regularly feel like they're overworked, they're overwhelmed, and they're nearly burnt out. I know it's because they're working too much. So I've put together a free e-book called *Shave 10 Hours Off Your Workweek*.

If you feel like you're not getting the most important things done in your life, I've outlined some effective strategies. This e-book is going to help you be more productive, find more free time, and feel better about your work and feel better about your week. All you have to do to get it is go to michaelhyatt.com/10hours. It's totally free. You'll get this resource as a complementary bonus for signing up for my newsletter.

Michele: Ten hours. That's more than a workday, like half of a full day. That's amazing. I could do so much more with that extra time in my week. All of you have to sign up for this today. You simply need to go to michaelhyatt.com/10hours, and they'll just put in their email, correct?

Michael: Yeah, just put in their first name and then their email address, click "Submit," and then you'll be able to download it. Again, it's free, and it's as easy as that.

Michele: Great. Thank you, Michael. I hope everybody takes advantage of that. Now let's go back to our conversation about how to conquer your email inbox. If you are drowning in email... Maybe you're scared to death to look at your inbox because it's just too much for you. We have four easy steps for you today to be able to get a handle on it and to get to that place where you can have inbox zero every single day.

So far we've talked about the first two steps that Michael had for you. The first is to make it a goal to empty your inbox every single day. He talked through how you can make that happen. In addition, the second step is to not get bogged down. Don't get bogged down. Keep moving. When you see an email, rather than processing it day after day after day, do something about it. If it's actionable, do, delegate, or defer. If it's not actionable, then delete or file. What is step number three?

Michael: Step number three is to *use keyboard shortcuts and avoid the mouse*. This is just one of my personal pet peeves, but I think it's a productivity step that's really important. The mouse is horribly inefficient as an input device. The good news is that nearly every mouse action has a keyboard equivalent so you don't have to take your hands off the keyboard. In Mac OS 10 for example, you could even create keyboard shortcuts for any menu item in any software package. Do you know how to do that? Have you ever done that before?

Michele: No, I haven't. I'm a mouse user. I'm so ashamed right now.

Michael: No, don't be ashamed. But it could be faster. For you PC users, just be patient with us for a second. Click on the "apple" in the upper left-hand corner, go to System Preferences, and then what you're going to find is an option called "Keyboard." You click on that and go to "Shortcuts." What you can do there is click the "plus" button, and then you can add a keyboard shortcut.

This will work for just about any menu shortcut you want to implement as a keyboard shortcut. It's, again, very easy to do. You just have to try it on your own. My personal goal is to never use the mouse. Every time I do, I have to take my hands off the keyboard. It doesn't sound like it would cost you much time, but it does add up.

The other thing you can do with regard to this is use a simple keyboard macro program. The one I use is called Keyboard Maestro. What I can't do on the Mac through the keyboard shortcuts is launch a program with a keyboard shortcut. (I know I'm getting a little geeky.) Every program I use on a regular basis I have a keyboard shortcut for, so I don't have to futz around with going down to the dock and pulling that up and clicking on it. I just hit a keyboard combination and I'm right there. Even if it's not loaded or if it is loaded, it'll flip to that program.

Michele: Now is Keyboard Maestro simply a Mac program or is there a Windows...?

Michael: It's definitely a Mac program. There are for sure PC programs available like that. I can't recommend any because I'm not a PC user, but I know they're available. All you have to do is look for a macro processor or a keyboard macro processor.

Michele: All right, there we go. So the third step is to use keyboard shortcuts and avoid the mouse. As Michael said, it can actually save you time that you don't realize you have. So let's move on to step number four. What is that?

Michael: Step number four is to *let email rules filter the low priority stuff*. If you haven't discovered email rules, you're really missing a great time-saver. Almost every email program out there allows you to create email rules, including Outlook, Apple Mail, or Gmail, which are really terrific because they do those right on the server.

It sounds a little geeky, but they're not that difficult to use. What they basically work on is a trigger. They say, for example, if I get an email... I'm on the board of a seminary, and whenever I get an email from the seminary, I automatically route that to a folder. I'm not going to look at those every day, because it's not my vocation; it's my avocation.

I put those in a folder so they're queued up for me, still unread so that I see there are messages in that folder that need to be read, but I let the email rule do that. Or if I get a receipt, I let the email rule filter that out to a receipts folder. I said before that I don't use a lot of folders, but I do use a few folders for things like that so I can get to them really quickly. There's another application out there that is really terrific called SaneBox. Are you familiar with that?

Michele: No, I'm not.

Michael: SaneBox is amazing. Michele, you must sign up for this.

Michele: Oh no. Okay, I'm writing it down right now. SaneBox.

Michael: What it does is it sorts your inbox before you ever get to it. For example, in my inbox I'll have a SaneBox folder that's called "SaneLater." It takes, for example, all of the newsletters I get, all of the things I subscribe to, promotions, all that stuff. It keeps it out of my inbox. It puts those in a special folder called SaneLater.

You can create your own folders and train it to send messages to that automatically. For example, if I get a receipt from the Apple Store, if I drag that into the receipts folder that's part of the SaneBox thing, it knows thereafter that every Apple receipt it ever gets goes into that folder.

Michele: Wow, that's amazing.

Michael: It *is* amazing. It's a lot easier to use, frankly, than email filters. A lot of people get hung up on those. It's a little bit geeky and it kind of scares them. But SaneBox is super easy. It comes configured right out of the box to take the most common kinds of emails you receive and put them in folders so you don't have to give the same priority to every single message.

Michele: Does it sync with your Gmail, like your Google box or Mac Mail? It works with all of those different mail applications?

Michael: Yep. It works with all of those. You're going to give it access, so it'll scare you the first time you do it. You're going to give it access to your inbox, and then it's going to go in there at the server level, before it ever hits your email client, like if you use Apple Mail... Do you use Apple Mail?

Michele: I do.

Michael: So maybe you have a Gmail account. It's going to sort it before it ever gets to your email client. The only thing that's going to be in your inbox is the stuff you really want there, which is probably professional and personal messages from real people, not newsletters, subscriptions, promotions, receipts, all that kind of stuff. It'll sort that out. Now here's another one. This is another software tool.

Michele: Is this another one I'm going to have to download? Do I need to get my pen out again?

Michael: Totally have to get this one.

Michele: I'm really excited. Believe it or not, I'm excited about SaneBox. Go ahead. I'll trust you.

Michael: This one is called Unroll.Me.

Michele: Oh yes. Everybody needs to have this.

Michael: Have you used this?

Michele: I actually was just talking to my assistant about it about two days ago.

Michael: What Unroll.Me does is you give it access to your inbox... It kind of goes a step beyond SaneBox. It takes every email that's a subscription where it has an "unsubscribe" link and segregates them out and gives you a list of all those, where you can either decide to consolidate it in a once-a-day or once-a-week email, so you're not seeing all these individual things hit your inbox... You can put it in the Unroll.Me one email so you don't have to mess with each one individually, or you can say, "No, just unsubscribe me."

I went through the other day... I couldn't believe this. I hadn't done it for a while. I had like over 300 email subscriptions that I unsubscribed. I didn't have to go into each email and try to find the "unsubscribe" button and wonder if it was going to work. I just told Unroll.Me to unsubscribe me, and I did it really with one click, because I said, "All these right here I want to be unsubscribed from," and it handled all of the details.

Michele: First of all, it baffles me that we can end up subscribed to 300 different things.

Michael: I know. What was I thinking?

Michele: It happens all the time.

Michael: And it happens incrementally. Like the frog in the kettle. You get boiled one degree at a time. You think, "Oh, that sounds cool. I'd like to hear from that person or that company." Then *this* sounds cool, and sometimes you just buy stuff and don't realize you're also subscribing to their hourly newsletter. Unroll.Me really solves that. I got Gail hooked up this weekend and she was ecstatic.

Michele: Now you've given me two fabulous to-dos that I need to do some time in the next day or two. SaneBox and Unroll.Me are on my list. I can't wait. As we wrap up today's episode, I have one final question for you. Do you have any advice for the person who is so far behind on email they'll never catch up?

Michael: Yes, I do.

Michele: That person who has 10,000 emails. What are they supposed to do? Just block off a week to take care of it?

Michael: No. What you need to do (and I have a blog post we'll link to in the show notes) is declare email bankruptcy. You just have to realize you have more debt than you can pay back. You don't get to do this very often, but you can do this. I'm giving you permission. If you're listening to this, I'm giving you permission to do this. Here's what it means. You're going to

take every message in your inbox, except maybe the last 20, and you're going to archive them. They've essentially been archived already, but you've not called it an archive.

Now you're going to put into practice some of these positive email disciplines and practices we've been talking about. You're going to get them out of sight so they're not draining your psychic energy and you're not feeling guilty and ashamed. Those are completely archived away. And you know what? If somebody says to you, "Hey, I sent you an email two weeks ago and you still haven't responded," what you're going to say is, "I am so sorry. Somehow I missed that," or whatever.

Michele: "Somehow it got deleted."

Michael: People are going to come back to you. If it's really urgent or really important, they'll come back to you. You're not getting to them now anyway, so just do yourself a favor and get them out of your field of vision and put them in your archive where they're out of the way.

Michele: Then after you've done that, after you've declared email bankruptcy, make sure you go back and use these four steps Michael has given you today to conquer your email inbox. It makes no sense to purge your account and then not put good practices into place.

Michael: That's right. It would be kind of tantamount to declaring bankruptcy and then going out and applying for more credit cards and getting yourself right back in the same position you were. You don't want to do that.

Michele: So true. So these are the four easy steps Michael has delivered today. First, make it a goal to empty your inbox every day. Second, don't get bogged down; keep moving. Third, use keyboard shortcuts and avoid the mouse. Fourth, let email rules filter the low priority stuff. If you're not familiar with those email rules, it's not hard to figure out. Just take a little bit of time to get those set up and it will help you immensely.

Well, if you enjoyed today's episode, you can get the show notes and a full transcript at michaelhyatt.com. Do us a favor before you go. I promise it will only take you a very short amount of time, less than a minute. Head over to iTunes and take a moment to rate this podcast. You can even leave us some comments. We would love to hear from you. This is huge in terms of improving our ranking in iTunes and keeping this show and its content visible to those who really need it. So thank you ahead of time for helping us out. Any final thoughts today, Michael?

Michael: I would say one big tool that could replace email for a lot of your correspondence, particularly internal correspondence, is Slack. It's an alternative to email. It's something I use with my team. Michele, you're familiar with it. I cut my email by 83 percent (I blogged about this) in one week just because we started using Slack. For all internal communication and a

few external contractors we use Slack, so I never even have to do email. It's a delight to use. It's something I actually look forward to.

Michele: It's very user-friendly, very easy to use.

Michael: Super.

Michele: Well, thank you for joining us today. Until next time, remember: your life, your one and only life, is a gift. Now go make it count.