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 today, and joining me in the conversation is Michael Hyatt. Hey there, Michael.

Michael Hyatt: Hey, Michele. How are you doing?

Michele: I'm doing great. How about you?

Michael: Fantastic. I'm loving this spring weather. Spring is my favorite time of year. It's just great to be here.

Michele: I agree. It's starting to slowly get warm, which I love. It's making me want to get out and do more, which is a good thing. Today we are actually talking about productivity, which I am very excited about because I'm really hoping you can help me.

Michael: I think I can. I'm going to share with you my best stuff, and if this doesn't help, I don't know what to say.

Michele: Then I'm sunk. Great. That's wonderful. What an encouraging way to start this conversation. Well, the truth is that few people are as productive as you are, Michael. I think of myself as a high achiever. I can usually get a lot done in a fraction of the time you might expect. I mean, I'm a full-time working mom with kids and all of that kind of stuff.

But to be honest, when I look at all you're able to accomplish in a day and I see all of the new products you're rolling out, the way your team has grown exponentially over the last year, and how you're launching new things (a new book and all of that), I sit there and think, "How in the world does he do it?" I mean, really, Michael… Sometimes you kind of make me feel just a little bit lazy.

Michael: Well, I'm sorry for that. That's not my intent. But I will say this. A team makes a huge difference because the more you can focus on your own unique ability, the more productive

you're going to be. You know, when I'm trying to do something I'm not particularly good at or passionate about, I'm as slow as the next person. I'm not productive. I'm not effective. I'm not efficient. But I'm going to have more to say about that at the end of this podcast, so I'll save my thunder for then.

Michele: You'll sit here and make me wait until the end to get that, right?

Michael: Right.

Michele: Well, I mean, really… The point of all of this and what I have grown to learn about you is that over time, you have learned the art of maximizing your time. You have learned the art of being able to basically come up with some productivity hacks to make the most of the time you have, because you do have your own business.

You do run a growing business with a fairly large team. At the same time, you have a wife and a family you spend a lot of time with and invest in, so I know for a fact that it's not like you're working for 20 hours a day and sleeping for only an hour at night. I mean, you have a functional, pretty healthy calendar in spite of how much you're accomplishing, which tells me you have some great insight on how to make the most of our time.

Michael: Yes. I'll say something else. You just triggered my thinking about something. To me, it's not so much about more productivity; it's about creating more margin for the things that are truly important. I think there are some people who just want to be more productive so they can do more, but their workload never shrinks.

They're taking work home with them because they're still trying to be productive. They're trying to do more, and that's not the kind of life I want. I want a life that has time for the things that matter most, including the people I love most and the things I love to do most. The only way I've figured out to do that is to be more productive at work so I have more time to spend on those other things.

Michele: I love that because you just, with that one comment, succeeded in shifting the whole purpose of why we're here. Rather than just trying to achieve more, you are using these productivity hacks to make sure your time is invested in what's most meaningful to you.

Michael: Yes. Absolutely.

Michele: I love that. All right. Today we're not going to talk about how to work harder but how to work smarter. That way, you can invest in the things that matter most in your life. Michael is going to give us his *top 10 productivity hacks so you and I can make the most of*

our work hours without working more hours. I love that. You're going to give us basically 10 different hacks, so let's start with the first one. What's the first?

Michael: Okay. The first one is to *eliminate online distractions*. I love the Internet. I know you do too. We live in such an amazing time when everything is at our fingertips. We have access to so much information, so much news, so much connection, but it can also be a huge problem.

It can be an enormous distraction, and it can keep us from doing the things we ought to do, because… You know how it is. I mean, you go to Facebook, and you think you're just going to check your news feed. Somebody posted an interesting article, and you click on that. Pretty soon, you're down a rabbit hole and you can't get out.

Michele: I don't know anything about that. I've never, ever done that before.

Michael: Well, I know. It happens to us all. It happens to me. That's why I think you have to limit your time online. One of the things I do is put my phone in airplane mode so I'm not getting notifications, so I'm not getting bugged when I'm trying to get important work done. On a Mac (I don't know about on Windows computers), you can turn off notifications.

It's really simple, and if you don't know how to do that, look online. I'm not going to try to explain that and make it visual, but you can turn off the notifications. One of the best things… I used to use this all the time, but not so much anymore. There's an application called Freedom.

Michele: I was actually just looking at that yesterday.

Michael: You were? Okay.

Michele: I was. It used to be called something else, and I can't remember what it was called, but it's an awesome little tool that basically blocks out… Oh, here's what it used to be called. It used to be called Anti-Social.

Michele: Yes. That's what it is. Yes. Absolutely.

Michael: But now it's called Freedom, and it's at freedom.to. What it does is basically close off the parts of the Internet you don't want to be able to access when you're trying to be productive, okay? For example, you say, "I need to do research when I'm writing, so I can't close off the whole Internet, but I don't need to be on Facebook. I don't need to be on Twitter. I don't need to be on LinkedIn."

You can tell it exactly what websites are prohibited, and then you can tell it for how long. You can say, "For 60 minutes, I don't want to be able to access these sites. I have to work for 60 minutes, and then maybe I'll give myself a reward." The only way to make those sites accessible is to completely reboot your computer, okay?

Michele: Oh. Okay.

Michael: That's more trouble than it's worth, so you just stay knuckled down and get your work done, and then you can reward yourself with a little social media. But I think that eliminating those online distractions is crucial if you're going to be productive.

Michele: All right. Put your phone into airplane mode or get an app like Freedom (which used to be Anti-Social), which helps you shut down all other distractions. I even go into my office where I shut the blinds and the doors and everything so there's nothing around me.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: You could also try noise-cancelling headphones. If you're working… I work from home, and last week I had kids home on spring break the whole time, so for small periods of time, I would have to go shut down to get work done. I would just use headphones, close the door, and do whatever I needed to do in order to get that done.

Michael: That's a great way to do it.

Michele: Eliminate online distractions. What would be the second hack?

Michael: The second one is to *schedule time alone*. You know, we schedule meetings with others. We may even schedule one-on-one time with the people who report to us, friends, family members, or whatever. But I want to talk about what Jason Freed calls the *alone zone*, which is time when it's just you doing your work. When it's important, I put it on my calendar like it's an appointment, like it's a commitment. Here's the value of it.

When people ask me if I'm available for that time, I can legitimately say, "Oh, I have another commitment then. What about this?" I treat those commitments just as sacredly as if they were with somebody who was outside of my company or with a team member. So now Suzie, my assistant, blocks time on my calendar which we call *think time*.

That's time when I'm just trying to be creative, kind of create, invent, come up with new product ideas, new blog post ideas, and new book ideas. Those are every week. I have at least

two "think time" blocks or "time alone" blocks, and those are commitments to myself. That's where I really move the needle and really get productive.

Here's what happens to most of us, especially those of us who are in the corporate world or an organization. You spend a lot of time in meetings. Meanwhile, all of the work is piling up. If you're not careful, you end up going home and then doing your real work at home because there's no time to do it during the daytime, because you're locked in these meetings all day.

Michele: Yes.

Michael: So to schedule time in your day (not at night but in your day) that you actually grab and say, "This is the time I'm going to actually get my work done so that I'm not dragging it home. I'm not letting it encroach upon my family time, my time with my friends, my hobbies, or other things that are important to me," is a key thing. I think the people I know who are the most productive regularly do that: schedule time in the alone zone.

Michele: Yep. Schedule time alone. Excellent. What is the third hack?

Michael: The third hack is to *batch similar tasks together*. I wrote a post a while back, and maybe somebody on my team can give the link here. We'll put it in the show notes as well. It's called, "How to Create More Margin in Your Life." In that post, I talk about something I call my ideal week. There's also a chapter on this in my new book, *Living Forward*, where Daniel and I talk about this concept.

Basically, it talks about a template where you set up kind of your ideal week. In other words, if you had 100-percent complete control of your time, how would you organize your activities? One of the things I do, Michele, is organize similar activities together. For example, the morning time every day is always my time to do what Stephen Covey called *sharpening the saw*. This is time for spiritual growth, intellectual growth, and working out.

So from about 5:00 in the morning until about 8:30 in the morning is my alone time. I don't take phone calls. I'm not online. I'm just getting that most important cultivation of my soul and my inner life done. Then I batch it by days, so Monday is the time for my internal team meetings. We do the podcast on Monday.

That's kind of an exception to the rule, but for the most part, this is the day when I have my team meetings. I've already had three team meetings today. Then Friday is my day for external meetings. I got this idea from Don Miller. He called it *friendly Fridays*. I used to take external meetings all during the week, and it kept goofing up my weeks.

I would be trying to create something, trying to write, and then I'd have a lunch appointment with somebody or go to coffee with somebody. It was just too much back and forth, and I found that if I batch things together, I kind of get into the groove, I really get productive, and I can get very efficient. So Fridays are the days I have external meetings, and oftentimes they're back-to-back, one after another.

I just put them all on Fridays. If somebody who's outside of my company wants to meet with me, it has to happen on Friday. Not everybody will have the freedom to do that. But then I have other times for creative stuff. Like if I'm going to write blog posts or do a bunch of outlines for blog posts, I'll sit down and do a bunch of them.

I'll just blitz through it because you kind of get in the headspace where you're productive and focused on that one thing, and you can get very efficient at it if you do that. Even podcasting today… We're doing two podcasts in a row because we're batching them. The setup and all of that stuff takes a little bit of time, and it's much more efficient if we can do them back-to-back.

Michele: So great. I remember learning this lesson from you several years ago. This has been very transformative for me as that mom who's negotiating her career and her family at the same time. I have certain days when I do certain things, and then I block off certain days when I refuse to schedule anything. That has been just huge for helping me to get more done while still being faithful to my primary responsibility as a wife and mom. So that has been really big. Batch similar tasks together. What would be the fourth hack?

Michael: The fourth one is to *identify your must-do's*. This was kind of a game-changer for me when I started it. I use a task manager. I start with a task list every day. I use a task manager called Nozbe. There are plenty of others out there that do a similar thing, whether it's Todoist, Trello, or whatever you're comfortable with. The tool is not as important as making a list is, but here's what I do. I take all of the things I would like to get done that day (usually for me it may be 8, 9, or 10 different things I'd like to do), but then I identify the must-do's.

What are the three things I absolutely, positively must get done today in order to have a win, to be successful and productive? That allows me to focus on what's really important, because I'm just like anybody else. I get interruptions during the daytime. I get this message from a team member or somebody else asking me to do this. If you're not careful, the urgent can take precedence over the important.

Michele: True.

Michael: The must-do's are the important things. Now I follow the *getting things done* methodology David Allen articulates in his book by the same title. I use a context tag. This is

going to get a little geeky. In my task manager, I have things like errands, calls, or things I'm waiting for. One of the tags I use is "Must Do." The three items that are must-do items are the items I tag with "Must Do." Those are the only three things I see on my to-do list until those three things are done.

Michele: Oh, wow. Okay.

Michael: Once those things are done, I'll go deal with the five or six other things I could do. But then at least I get to the end of the day thinking, "Okay, I didn't get everything done, [which I rarely do], but I got the most important things done. I got the must-do things done." Does that make sense?

Michele: Yeah. Absolutely.

Michael: Okay.

Michele: You add that tag on your Nozbe?

Michael: That's right. Yep.

Michele: All right. Good to know. Identify your must-do's so that way, the most critical things get done even if not everything gets done. I'm very encouraged, by the way, by the fact that you say you don't get everything done every day.

Michael: Never. Here's why. Think about this for yourself, or anybody listening to this… There's always more to do than you could possibly accomplish.

Michele: Yeah.

Michael: If you're a high achiever or reasonably accomplished person, you have an endless supply of things you want to do. My former business partner, Robert Wolgemuth, said, "You know, if you were a bag boy in a grocery store, you would still have a to-do list that was a mile long. You'd figure out a way to take that job to the next level."

It's true. I think it's not just me but probably the people who are listening to this podcast as well. There's going to be an endless supply of tasks you have to do, so don't feel bad if you don't get them all done. Just make sure you get the most important ones done, and you can have a pretty successful life if you do that.

Michele: I love that. All right. Let's move on to the fifth one. What is the fifth productivity hack you have for us today?

Michael: Okay. This is to *eliminate, automate, and delegate*. This is kind of the framework or premise of Timothy Ferriss' book *The 4-Hour Workweek*. That's how he organized it. If you haven't read that book… Have you read it?

Michele: No.

Michael: Okay.

Michele: I've read pieces of it, but no I have not. I need to read it.

Michael: You have to read this book. It will give you so many ideas. I don't endorse everything in the book, but there are few books that have stimulated my thinking about productivity more than that book has. Again, it's called *The 4-Hour Workweek* by Timothy Ferriss.

Michele: It's by Timothy Ferriss. Yep.

Michael: We'll have a link to it in the show notes. I read it with my mentoring group. I've probably read the whole book about three times. You want to make sure you get the new expanded version of it, but it's great. I'm not going to talk about eliminating and automating, although those are huge for productivity. I want to focus on the delegating part of it, okay?

Michele: Okay.

Michael: If you're going to be productive, you have to get good at delegation. We did an episode on this: "How to Delegate Even If You Don't Have a Staff." You can start small, so you don't have to have a big team to delegate. This is not just for executives. I think everybody has to get to the place where they can delegate, even if they don't have a team. Sometimes you have to delegate sideways. You can even delegate up if you're skilled.

But try to get more focused on what you're best at. The problem is that oftentimes when people are just starting out (this is a total rookie mistake, but it's a mindset), they say, "You know what? I don't delegate, because it takes me as long to explain it as it does to just do it myself." Okay, here's the fallacy of that thinking. That's true the first time, but let's say it takes twice as long the first time you delegate it to somebody, because you have to explain it.

Maybe you create a screencast. Maybe you write some documentation, but you're trying to offload something you either don't like to do or aren't very good at. You're going to delegate it to somebody, and it's going to take longer the first time you delegate it. But if you do it well, that's the last time you'll ever do it.

Michele: Yes.

Michael: That's where the time saving comes in. So my goal is to ultimately delegate everything I don't like or I'm not good at. I'm pretty good at that. I stay focused on a handful of things that I am good at and that I love today, because I practice this thing called delegation. Now I want to give you a reference to a blog post I wrote a while back.

Let me just turn to it. By the way, let me set this up. This came out of a discussion with my daughter Mary. She said, "Okay, dad. I get the delegation thing. You've talked about this on and on. But how do I know what tasks I should delegate first?" In this post… It's cleverly called, "What Tasks Should You Delegate First?" okay?

Michele: Profound.

Michael: In this particular post, I do a two-by-two matrix and talk about what you should delegate first, second, third, and fourth. It will give you a ton of ideas. So yeah, I would start there.

Michele: You're going to include that link in the show notes though, correct?

Michael: Yes.

Michele: All right. Excellent. So look there for what tasks you should delegate first. Now I love that you have become so good at this, but in all fairness, you've been working on this for a long time. So for the person out there who doesn't feel like they're very good at delegating… I would just encourage them that it comes with practice, right?

Michael: It totally comes with practice. It's like anything else. You have to be willing to be bad at it in order to get good at it.

Michele: Well, it feels so risky. I think that's why it's hard for us to delegate. It's because there seems to be so much risk involved, so you have that high-risk feel. Then on top of that, like you said, the first time you delegate actually takes more time. If we're already in this very reactive place where we're barely able to keep up with our to-do's, we feel like we can't afford either the risk or the time it would take to delegate.

Michael: Yeah. That's why I make a distinction in another post called "The Five Levels of Delegation." This is a post where I talk about how you can mitigate the risk so it's not so risky. For example, level-one delegation says this: "Do exactly what I've asked you to do. Don't deviate from my instructions. I've already researched the options. I've determined what I want you to do. Just execute on my plan." Level two: "Research the topic and report back. We'll discuss it, then I'll make the decision, and then I'll tell you what I want you to do."

Level three: "Research the topic, outline the options, and make a recommendation. Give me the pros and cons of each option, but tell me which you think I should do. If I agree with your decision, I'll authorize you to move forward." Level four: "Make a decision, and then tell me what you did. I trust you to do the research, make the best decision you can, and then keep me in the loop. I don't want to be surprised by someone else."

Then level five is the ultimate delegation, but you don't start here. "Make whatever decision you think is best. No need to report back. I trust you completely. I know you will follow through. You have my full support." Those are the five levels of delegation, and with somebody who's new, I'm always starting at the first level. As they gain my trust, I work up. That keeps a lot of screw-ups from happening.

Michele: Yeah. It happens over time, which is very encouraging for me and other people who are in that place where delegation is just so hard. You kind of know it's necessary, but it's just so hard to actually do it.

Michael: Yeah.

Michele: So it's good to know it wasn't always this easy for you.

Michael: Definitely. It just took practice. I made some bad decisions. You know, there was a time when I didn't supervise so much. I would not just delegate but abdicate, and that can be bad too, so you have to check up on people.

Michele: Mm-hmm. All right. So far, we've talked about five of Michael's top 10 productivity hacks. The first is to eliminate online distractions. The second is to schedule time alone. Third, batch similar tasks together. Fourth, identify your must-do's versus all of your to-do's. You have to identify the ones that absolutely must be done. Then, fifth, eliminate, automate, and delegate. We have five more yet to come. However, before we continue on with these productivity hacks, you have some exciting new information to share.

Michael: Yes I do. If you're in the process of trying to build an online following or if you'd like to do that because you have an important message you're trying to get out to the world, whether it's information about a product or a service or just a cause you're trying to get out there, I want to tell you about a major shortcut you can take. On April 12 (it may be that time by the time you're listening to this), we're posting a series of three free training videos about how to skyrocket your impact online.

In the videos, you're going to learn eight simple tweaks you can use to blow up your blog, generate more traffic, get more subscribers, reach more people, and all of that, and have more

impact for your message. My favorite part of the three-part training videos is that you can see all of these applied to a specific couple. We do a makeover of their platform, so we take it from where it is to where they'd like it to be.

You'll see the whole transformation in front of your eyes, and you'll hear the incredible results they get when they apply these eight tweaks. Again, that's all free information. You can find three training videos at platformuniversity.com/skyrocket. That's all part of our spring Platform University membership drive.

Michele: All right. Those are three free videos to help you basically skyrocket your platform. I mean, this is just a free resource, so I highly encourage everyone listening to check it out. Again, it's at platformuniversity.com/skyrocket. I'm going to check it out as well.

Michael: Awesome.

Michele: This is in addition to all of the free productivity hacks you're giving us today.

Michael: Yeah. Double benefit.

Michele: So much fun. Double. All right. We've already talked about the first 5 of these 10 productivity hacks. I will recap those again at the end, so if you missed them, I will go over them one more time, but let's go ahead and dive right into the sixth one.

Michael: The sixth is to *hire virtual assistants*. I don't know of anything that has increased my productivity more than having a virtual assistant has. I wrote about this in an e-book that is available on Amazon for the big price of $2.99. It's called *The Virtual Assistant Solution*. Get the subtitle. *Come up for Air, Offload the Work You Hate, and Focus on What You Do Best*.

Michele: Ooh, I like it.

Michael: To me, that is the great benefit of having a virtual assistant. It really does enable you to focus on the tasks that move the needle in your business or organization, to offload the stuff that drains you, the stuff that's exhausting, the stuff that (frankly) you're not very good at. In the e-book, I talk about how you can figure out whether or not you can afford a virtual assistant.

I'm going to tell you there are hundreds of people I've talked to (maybe thousands by this time) who haven't thought they could afford virtual assistants, because they weren't thinking about it in the proper economic way. They weren't thinking creatively enough about it. I help you do that in the book. Again, it's only $2.99.

I also do recommend a company we've talked about on the show before. They're not a sponsor, but I am an affiliate for them. It's called EA (like executive assistant) Help. You can find out more about them at michaelhyatt.com/eahelp. I've used several virtual assistants from them. They are a first-class company, and they make it easy because they handle the recruiting and training and get you the best possible people.

Michele: Let's just be honest. When it comes to hiring people, that whole process of finding, identifying, interviewing, and training the right people is such a tedious, long process. It's very risky. They've already done the vetting for you ahead of time.

Michael: That's right. That's why I think it's so valuable to use a service like that. Absolutely.

Michele: It's so hard because, again, that first objection is, "I don't have the money for an assistant," but being a business owner for a long time… My husband and I both have learned that certainly you have to guard your budget and certainly you have to be fiscally responsible, but you cannot build your business and make money without investing money at the same time.

Michael: So true.

Michele: You just can't. All right. The sixth productivity hack is to hire virtual assistance. Again, this goes back to enabling you to do what only you can do, which makes your enjoyment of your job that much higher. What is the seventh?

Michael: Seventh is to *invest in coaching*. I used to talk about investing in education, but it's really more than that. Coaching is more than that. I've written a post on this too. I know I'm giving you guys a lot of posts today, but this one is called "3 Ways to Go Further, Faster," and it's about the benefit of coaching. It doesn't mean necessarily hiring a coach.

You can get coaching today by reading the best, most important information. I just read this book (I haven't read it yet) from Amazon called *Extreme Productivity: Boost Your Results, Reduce Your Hours*, because I still need coaching. As productive as you think I am, I still know there's room for me to get even more productive, so I'm constantly investing in coaching and investing in education. Beyond that, you can sign up for specialized classes. You can go to conferences.

Michele: Yep.

Michael: There are a lot of ways to get the kind of coaching you need.

Michele: Well, the point is to never stop being a learner, being someone who's always learning, always asking questions and inviting input. Sometimes that's investing financially in a personal coach, and sometimes, like you said, it's being very well read.

Michael: Well, if you don't think you're as productive as you want to be, how much have you invested in getting coached in that area, whether it's through podcasts…? By the way, one of the best podcasts on this topic is Erik Fisher's *Beyond Productivity*. It's a terrific podcast, and there are others as well.

But investing in books like *The 4-Hour Workweek* by Timothy Ferriss, which we talked about, or *Getting Things Done* by David Allen… If you want to be more productive, start there. There are a lot of resources available. If you're not productive, you're not trying hard enough. There are plenty of resources out there.

Michele: Yeah. There are plenty of free resources as well as very financially low-risk resources you can totally invest in, so invest in some kind of coaching, whether it's a book, a mentor, an actual coach, or whatever it may be. It may be a podcast. But invest in some kind of coaching. What is the eighth productivity hack?

Michael: *Acquire better tools.* You know, sometimes we labor along with substandard tools, out-of-date software, or out-of-date hardware. We think we're being cost conscious, but honestly, we're being stupid. Because if we would invest in current tools…

Michele: How do you really feel about that, Michael?

Michael: If we would invest in current tools, we would be able to work faster and more efficiently, get more done in less time, and probably make more money. I was talking with my accountant recently, and we were just kind of talking about my business. One of the conversations we had was… This was actually a couple of years ago.

She said to me, "Well, do you have any personal vices? Do you buy racecars or vacation homes?" I said, "No, we live a pretty modest life, but I do invest in gadgets." She said, "Well, tell me about that." I said, "Look. I'm the kind of guy who has to have the latest computer, the best software, the greatest smartphone, and all of that stuff."

She said, "You know what? That's totally okay because it makes you more efficient and it's a good investment." I started thinking about that, and I thought about this illustration. Stick

with me for a minute. If a new smartphone will save you 10 minutes a day six days a week (let's just take Sunday out for the sake of illustration), that's 52 hours a year.

That's an hour a week. An hour times 52 is 52 hours a year. Now if you make $50,000 a year (by the way, I know most of the people in my audience make more than that, because I just recently did a survey and found out 70 percent of my audience makes more than $70,000 a year, but let's just take $50,000 a year) and you're working an average of 40 hours a week, that's $24 an hour. That's what your rate is. So 52 hours of your time are worth $1,248.

So if investing in a smartphone is going to save you an hour a week, it's worth it to you because it's worth $1,248. A smartphone is going to cost you way less than that. That's how you have to think about investing in tools. "Is it going to save me time I can invest in more high-value activities that will bring a greater return to my business?" Does that make sense?

Michele: Absolutely. I mean, I think of the times I've hung on to a computer that was so outdated and antiquated. It was running so slowly, and I was constantly waiting, rebooting, and all of that. But I was trying to squeeze out an extra year or two for my computer. I was wasting time.

Michael: Yeah. I even believe in this when it comes to Internet access. If I can jet around the Internet, get my research done, and all of that faster, it's worth it to me. I have the fastest Internet Comcast offers. So right now, I'm getting a download speed of 250 megabytes per second, which is lightning fast. But it makes me so much more efficient, and it's totally worth it. I use that all day every day.

Michele: All right. Acquire better tools. That may be a smartphone, a laptop… It could be just as simple as a task list like Nozbe, which you mentioned before, and other things like that. They're just better tools for managing your time.

Michael: Yep.

Michele: All right. Let's move on to the ninth. What is the ninth productivity hack?

Michael: This is a tough one for most of us. *Get better at saying no.*

Michele: Oh no.

Michael: Yeah. I still struggle with this, although I've seen major improvement in the last year because my team has really been on my case about this. I've written about it extensively, so if

you search my blog, you'll find a bunch of articles. But I think one of the best posts I've written on this is "How to Say No When You Feel Pressured to Say Yes."

In fact, Mike, if you're online, you can look that up and post it for us, and we'll put a link to it in the show notes. But you know how it is. You get that e-mail. Somebody is begging you (or, worse, shaming you) and trying to get you to do something you know you don't have time to do.

Michele: Yes.

Michael: Here's the ticket. You have to learn the power of a positive no. It has three parts, and I elaborate on these in the blog post, but it basically works like this. It begins with saying yes to yourself and protecting what it important to you. It's a zero-sum game. If you say yes to somebody else, you're going to have to say no to somebody else or something else, something in your own life, so you have to say yes to yourself first.

But the power of a positive no has three parts. It begins with affirming the other person and their request. I'm going to give you an example of this in just a minute. We don't have to shame them or make them feel guilty for asking. That's too often what other people try to do to us, and I don't want to do it to somebody else. So I start by affirming their request.

I'm going to give you an example in just a minute. The second part of a positive no is to continue with a matter-of-fact no that sets clear boundaries. I also like to avoid leaving the door open by saying maybe. Sometimes we do this. "Well, maybe…" But that doesn't really shut the door, and it's not letting your yes be yes and your no be no.

I think it's much cleaner, much better, if you just go ahead and make a clean no right at the beginning. If you reconsider later and decide you want to do it, you can let them know. So first, affirm the other person and their request. Second, continue with a matter-of-fact no that sets clear boundaries. Third, end with a yes that affirms the relationship and offers another person a solution to their request. Let me give you an example.

I used to get requests from people all the time for me to review their book proposals. When I was in the publishing world and that was my job, I was happy to do it, but now I just don't have the time. So I get these all the time, and we have a template now that says something similar to this. Let's just say somebody named Bill asked me to review his book proposal.

Maybe it's somebody I met while I was on vacation or somebody I met while I was having dinner. He asked me to review his book proposal. Here's what I say. "Bill, congratulations on your new proposal. Very few authors make it this far. Thanks for your interest in having me

review it." Right there (this is the first aspect of a positive no), I affirm him. Then here's what I say. "Unfortunately, due to my other commitments, I'm no longer able to review proposals. Therefore, I must decline." No ifs, ands, or buts… It's a very clear boundary.

Then I continue (this is the third part) and say, "However, I can give you some guidance on how to get published. If you haven't already done so, may I recommend that you start by reading my blog post 'Advice to First-Time Authors'?" So I'm pointing him to another resource. It's not me. It's a post I wrote, but it's not going to mean my personally reviewing his proposal. I'm pointing him to a free resource.

In this particular e-mail template, I also say, "I've also published an entire audio course [which you and I recorded, Michele] called *Get Published*, which distills my 30+ years of publishing experience into 21 learning sessions. You can read about it here." Then I finish up by just saying, "I hope you will find this helpful. Best of luck with your writing. Sincerely, Michael." That's a way to make it positive but still say no.

Michele: I think that what's interesting (you mentioned this at the beginning) is that you turned that into a template, which helps you, again, with this productivity thing. You might get dozen of such requests every day. You can't draft a new long response every single time.

Michael: Well, that's exactly right. That leads to the tenth productivity hack, which is to *use templates for everything*. I read a book probably 15 or 20 years ago called *The E-Myth Revisited* by Michael Gerber. I highly recommend it. In the book, he talks about why small businesses don't work. One of the reasons they don't work and one of the reasons entrepreneurs fail is that they don't construct repeatable processes, work flows, or templates.

What I would encourage you to do is… If you're going to do some task you envision yourself doing repeatedly, template it. In other words, create it as if it were a prototype that was going to be repeated over and over again. For example, when I write a blog post, I don't just begin from scratch. I have a template for that which has seven different parts.

I have a blog post on this called "The Anatomy of an Effective Blog Post." We'll get a link in the show notes for that. That's one example of a template. We were talking about e-mail. I went through one time, and over about a two-week period, I categorized all of the different requests that were coming in to me.

It was everything from asking me to invest in a business, asking me to consider a board assignment, asking me to give to a charitable cause, to asking me to review a book proposal. The list went on and on. I think I came up with maybe 30 of those different requests that were

typical. Then, over time, every time I would get one of those requests, I would write the response as if it were a template I could reuse in the future. Then I'd save it.

I saved it as an e-mail signature I could easily grab when somebody sent me that request in the future. That made it much easier to say no. It made it much easier for me to be helpful, and it made me way more efficient because I wasn't recreating the wheel from scratch every time I addressed that request. So templates are huge.

Michele: Mm-hmm. What about the person who would push back and say that that's not very personal, that you're being insensitive to the needs of the person who's writing?

Michael: Yeah. I think there's a place for personalization. Usually I personalize it in the front part of the template, but here's the thing. What about if you catch me when I'm tired and I just don't want to help you? I just fire off a response.

Michele: You might not write a great e-mail.

Michael: Maybe I just fire off a response that's not that helpful. Instead, what I do with the template is give you my most helpful information where I've really thought about it. So trust me… You're going to get a far better response, a more helpful response, if I use a template than if I just try to come up with something off of the top of my head.

Michele: I mean, that's really very profound. I use templates as well, and I'm far more sensitive to the needs of the person when I'm sitting down and being thoughtful about a template than when I'm frantically trying to get e-mail done in the middle of everything else.

Michael: Yeah. You're trying to search for that link, that post you want to share with them, or some resource, and you can't really remember what it is. Just do that the first time. Create that template, and you'll use it forever.

Michele: Absolutely. All right, let's go back through all 10 of these productivity hacks, which are excellent. First, eliminate online distractions. Second, schedule time alone. Third, batch similar tasks together. Fourth, identify your must-do's. Fifth, eliminate, automate, and delegate. Sixth, hire virtual assistance. Seventh, invest in coaching. Eighth, acquire better tools. Ninth, get better at saying no (which I feel like I need to repeat one more time).

Tenth, use templates for everything. Those are some pretty amazing productivity hacks, Michael. I really enjoy and appreciate all of them and have put many of them into practice already, but I'm going to ask you for more because I think we need to do kind of like a buy-10-get-1-free deal. I'm asking you for an eleventh one.

Michael: Okay. Here's an eleventh one.

Michele: Okay. Good.

Michael: That is to *understand your own unique ability*. Here's the deal. You're never more productive than you are when you're doing what you love and what you're good at. You're never less productive than when you're doing what you hate and what you're not good at. So if you understand… You can ask the people around you, you can search your own heart, and you can observe where you get your energy over time.

What do people compliment you on? Where do you seem to get the greatest return for the investment? Begin to identify the things that are your unique ability and increasingly, over time (you can't do this overnight), farm out the stuff you're not great at or you don't like. Focus on where you're the best. That'll make you more productive than anything else you could do, anything else we've talked about here will.

Michele: You know, sometimes that just takes setting aside a little bit of time, which is one of these productivity hacks (schedule time alone), just to get very clear on what it is you are uniquely able to do.

Michael: Yeah. I want to recommend another resource. There is a book by Dan Sullivan, and it's called *Unique Ability 2.0: Discovery*. It's a book and workbook where you can actually work through the process of identifying your unique ability. Megan, my oldest daughter who works with me in the company, and I both did this. We actually hired Dan Sullivan's team to take us through the process and identify our own unique abilities, but the book will do it for you as well. I couldn't recommend it more. It's a tremendous resource.

Michele: You have given us an incredible amount of information today, Michael. I can't even think of another episode where you have delivered this much quality content in one single podcast, so thank you for that.

Michael: Thank you.

Michele: For those of you who are listening, if you enjoyed today's episode, you can get the show notes as well as the full transcript at michaelhyatt.com. If you'd prefer to watch the video, you can do that as well, and you can find the entire video posted at michaelhyatt.com too. But do us a favor before you go. This is so important.

Please take just a minute (maybe a minute and a half at the most) to head over to iTunes and rate this podcast. It's the best way for us to get this information into the hands of the people

who need it the most. We would truly appreciate your taking the time to do that. I know I've asked you for 11 hacks today, but do you have any final thoughts, Michael?

Michael: Yeah. The final thought is that you can get better at productivity. It's like a muscle you exercise. The more you focus on it, the more you learn about it, and the more you practice it, the more productive you'll get. So you just have to have the intention to start with and then begin to educate yourself.

Michele: Absolutely. You've set that example in showing us that you're even reading a new book on productivity right now, so that's excellent. Well, thank you, listeners, for joining us today. It's always an honor when you take the time to spend the afternoon, morning, or evening with us. We love it.

Until next time, remember: Your life, your one and only life, is a gift. Now go make it count.