



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 my friend Michael Hyatt. Hey there, Michael.

Michael Hyatt: Hey, Michele. How are you?

Michele: I'm doing well. It's a good week. How about you?

Michael: Great. You're not feeling overwhelmed?

Michele: What a nice transition. That was so good. Well, actually, I feel overwhelmed probably the majority of my life, but I'm working very hard to change that and to get some more balance in. I think it's part of being that type-A achiever. I tend to put more stuff in my schedule than I should. Have you ever been there?

Michael: Uh, yeah. I do talk about this a lot, and mostly I'm preaching to myself, because I tend to overcommit and then I feel overwhelmed and then I have to go through a season of pruning where I cut back. In fact, I said to my team today... We had a call and we were talking about the current state of my calendar, which feels overwhelming. I just said, "You know, I think the nature of living things is that they have to periodically be pruned."

If you're in a phase in your life where you don't feel the need for pruning it could be because you're not growing, but if you're growing, that's a sign of life. If you're growing and there's life there are going to be times, probably with some relative degree of frequency, that you're going to feel overwhelmed. It's okay.

Michele: That's a great way to reframe it. I usually sit there and go, "What's wrong with me that I get myself in this situation again?"

Michael: I do the same thing, but there's nothing wrong with you. You're just in a business that's growing. You have speaking that's increasing. Your book writing is increasing. The demand for Michele is growing.

Michele: I like the sounds of that, except for the overwhelm that goes with it.

Michael: Here's what happens. We think we can just keep saying yes without doing the hard work of saying no. It eventually catches up with us and we have to prune because we can't support everything and some stuff has to be cut back.

Michele: Here comes a nice personal question for you. Maybe it's what you just said earlier. When's the last time you found yourself in this exact position?

Michael: This morning.

Michele: Oh, excellent. Not that I'm happy for your pain, but for all of us it's so good to know that you experience this too on a regular basis.

Michael: What happened to me is that I overcommitted this summer. We're recording this in the summer and usually the summer is a slow time for me, but I decided to produce this new course this summer and, of course, I underestimated how much work it would be.

Michele: You've never done that before.

Michael: I was saying to my son-in-law last week, "Every important thing in life happens because we underestimate what it will cost." I think that's actually probably a good thing. When you got married, you had no idea.

Michele: No idea.

Michael: When you had kids, you were clueless. If you really knew what it was going to cost... I know Jesus says, "Count the cost" and all that, but if you really knew what it was going to cost you probably wouldn't get married. You probably wouldn't have kids. You probably wouldn't write a book. You probably wouldn't speak publicly. You probably wouldn't do all of the things that now looking back on you're really glad you did.

Michele: That's very true. I can totally see that. Well, if you are in that place where you are overwhelmed, you are not alone. I know you promised you'd never do it again, but you did it anyway. You said yes too many times. Now you've found yourself in that place where you're

completely overcommitted and you probably hardly recognize yourself at this point, because all of those bad character qualities are probably coming out, which is what happens.

Today we're going to talk about eight secrets to escape the overwhelm. If you're in that place, you are listening to the right podcast, because Michael has some great advice for you on how to better understand the dynamics that get us overwhelmed and then what to do when it happens. You have eight secrets for us. Right, Michael?

Michael: Eight secrets, and I think these will be really helpful. Again, I'm just preaching to myself and if you guys want to listen in, that's fine.

Michele: For those who are listening, I have my pen handy, so I'll be taking voracious notes. I told Michael before we recorded that I'm kind of considering this a counseling session.

Michael: It'll be mutual counseling.

Michele: So just picture me sitting in the recliner taking notes about all my dysfunction with my over-busy schedule. All right, let's move on. Secret number one to escape the overwhelm. What is it?

Michael: The first secret, which is always the first, is *accept responsibility*. If you're overcommitted and feeling overwhelmed, you have to acknowledge, I have to acknowledge, "I'm in this state because *I* made these commitments. Nobody forced me. Nobody held a gun to my head."

As long as I'm the victim or I'm playing the victim I'm powerless to change. I'm going to be overwhelmed from now until the end of time. The truth is I have a choice. You have a choice. I could decline the work. I could delegate it. At the very least I could negotiate the deadlines, but I can't blame somebody else because *I* said yes.

Michele: This is a really important first step. It shifts us from being in that place of victimization to being in control of doing something different. I had to face this at the beginning of the summer. You know this, Michael. I decided to take almost two full months off of my blog and social media for multiple various reasons.

I had some significant projects I wanted to dive into, but I needed my focused attention, as well as I wanted to focus on my family. What really prompted it was a feeling of being overwhelmed. Everything was going too fast. Too many things were vying for my attention and I felt a victim to it. I didn't feel like I had a choice.

Then all of a sudden I realized, “Wait a second. It’s *my* social media platform. It’s my choice. Nobody is holding a gun to my head.” Then when it came to my blog, “It’s my blog. Nobody is holding a gun to my head. I can choose to do something different.” It started with me taking responsibility that I had gotten myself in that position where I was overwhelmed.

Michael: That’s where it always begins for any kind of behavioral change we want to see. We have to own it, because as long as we’re playing the victim we’re not in control, but once we say, “You know what? The reason I’m overwhelmed is because I overcommitted and I am the one who said yes...”

As difficult as that may be to say, suddenly we feel a sense of release because now we know we can change. The secret to changing that is to just not say yes as much. We’re going to talk more about this, because it’s not as simple as saying, “Oh yeah. Just say no more.” There’s more involved.

Michele: There’s a lot more involved. Okay, let’s move on to the second secret, which helps us to dive into that subject a little bit deeper.

Michael: The second secret is to *confront your fears*. The reason I often overcommit is I’m afraid to say no. Sometimes I’m just afraid of disappointing somebody or maybe I’m afraid I’m going to get fired or I’m not going to get enough work or I’m going to miss an opportunity.

I’m a recovering people pleaser. You and I have had this discussion many times. I readily admit it. It’s a constant temptation for me, and maybe it is for the people listening to this broadcast as well. Being brave is often looking someone in the eye and just saying, “No, I can’t do it all.” I want to make sure I’m setting my priorities, not someone else.

I had this situation a couple of weeks ago, where I came in after missing several airline flights, getting home a day late from a conference that was supposed to be a day and a half that turned into a three-day travel hell ordeal, and I came home utterly exhausted. I don’t know how much you know about the Enneagram test, but I’m an Enneagram Three, which means my image is really important to me and how I’m perceived is very important to me.

So I made the decision that I was going to stay home from church, something I rarely do. Church is an incredibly high priority for me, but I made the decision and I sent a note to my pastor, because I’m in leadership, and I just said, “I’m not going to be there today. I’m really sorry, but I’m utterly exhausted and I need to rest.” That was really difficult, because my fear was that he would perceive me as a slacker or I was somehow shirking my responsibility, but I just had to say, “I think he’ll be okay.”

Michele: It will be all right. The worst would be going to church and being a miserable person to be around. Then you would have been perceived badly.

Michael: Yeah, totally. I just think there are times when we have to confront that. I think one of the biggest ones is FOMO, fear of missing out. See if this rings true: "If I say no to that speaking engagement, maybe nobody will ever ask me to speak again. If I say no to that guest post on that really important blog, maybe I'll never have another chance. If I say no to that media interview, maybe my book won't sell." Whatever it is.

That fear drives a lot of the reasons we get overwhelmed, because we're coming out of a scarcity mentality, which we've talked about on the show before. I have to remind myself of what Gail always reminds me of: there's more where that came from.

Michele: That's a great motto to memorize and to repeat. So simply, you begin by accepting responsibility, which Michael said is always the first secret. Second, confront my fears. You may have to just sit and unpack, "What am I afraid of? What fears are driving this behavior?" What is the third secret?

Michael: The third secret is to *reduce the drama*.

Michele: Yeah, don't get personal. Come on.

Michael: If I'm honest, I have to admit that I often get overcommitted because it makes me feel important. In other words, it meets my need for significance. Rather than dialing the intensity down I sometimes dial it up. It oftentimes shows up in my language. I might be prone to say things like... People ask, "How are you doing?" and I'm like, "I'm going crazy" or "I'm about to lose my mind" or "I feel so out of control" or "If something doesn't change, I'm going to have a breakdown" or "I'm about to go off the rails," or whatever it is.

Well, I may not say these things out loud, but they're still part of my internal dialogue. This kind of hyperbole... That's exactly what it is. You're not about to go crazy. You may feel overcommitted, but you're probably not about to go crazy. It's really not helpful.

Michele: Doesn't it become almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy? The more we talk about that we start to actually mimic behaviors that we resemble it.

Michael: I'll tell you, one of the things we have to be careful of is prophesying the future, in a sense, where we're speaking these things into existence and affirming the worst elements of ourselves. I've found it enormously helpful to dial down the intensity of my language and be

more thoughtful about my word choices and especially avoid this kind of extreme language. It just gets me all jacked up and is not helpful at all.

Sometimes when I feel overwhelmed... I love my staff for this. Suzie and Jim on my team, who do my executive support, or even Megan who runs my company... When I talk like that, they're really quick to not react in kind or to feed that but just to listen and then say, "Okay, so let's talk about that. What could we do to make you feel some relief here?"

Michele: I'm even thinking when I use that kind of extreme language... When I get overwhelmed I tend to verbally process, so when I get overwhelmed my language can actually make my feelings of overwhelm increase more and more and more, and it's not helpful. I think you're so right that simply changing the way you speak about that can change your emotion. Not that you don't necessarily need to make some significant changes to your schedule but simply that language change can help you endure it a little bit better.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely.

Michele: All right, so the fourth secret.

Michael: *Keep it in perspective.* When I find myself overcommitted, I have to recognize that this is likely a season, probably not a sentence. It's not like it's going to be like this forever. We've been going through all this remodeling, which has been very overwhelming to Gail, but we're almost at the end of it. We're just finishing up the landscaping now.

I've had to remind her a few times... She is usually positive and energetic and all that, but it could be overwhelming for her. We have vendors coming and going and all this stuff, a lot of chaos. I just said, "Babe, this is almost over. This is just a season." To keep it in perspective.

I remember several years ago I was leaving the SCORRE Conference to actually go to work at the Chick-fil-A Leadercast conference where I was going to co-emcee it. I remember Joy Groblebe, who was my manager at the time and works with you now... She said, "Just think. In less than 48 hours you'll be done and on your way home." Man, that put it in perspective.

Michele: It changed everything, didn't it?

Michael: It changed everything, because I realized I can do almost anything for the next day or so. It worked out fine.

Michele: It's like putting a finish line on it. There are times I'll even circle the day on the calendar, or something, to remind myself that when this day comes I can sleep all day if I want to.

Michael: It's easy to think it's going to last forever, but just to remind yourself and give yourself a goal post. Once you cross the finish line, so to speak, take some time to celebrate and realize that period of overwhelm is going to come to an end.

Michele: All right. So far we've talked about the first four of eight secrets to escape the overwhelm. How to reclaim your sanity. That's the promise of today's podcast. The first secret is accept responsibility. Second, confront my fears. Third, reduce the drama. Fourth, keep it in perspective.

We have four more secrets coming up to help you get a little bit more balance on your overwhelmed life, but right now, before we move on, Michael, I know you have a very special event happening really soon that you'd like to talk about, and it's all about one of your favorite subjects.

Michael: Well, you know that I'm kind of a productivity geek.

Michele: Yes, you are.

Michael: This upcoming event is my first ever Free to Focus Productivity Summit, and it's going to be awesome. I'm interviewing a panel of thought leaders, including Cal Newport, who wrote *Deep Work* (I know you finished that recently, a book I loved), Greg McKeown, author of *Essentialism*, whom you and I have had the privilege of interviewing, Gretchen Rubin from *The Happiness Project*, Sean Covey, Jason Fried, and a handful of others.

It's not that many, but about eight hours of content, people who are reshaping the whole productivity conversation and leading us into what I think is a new way to think about productivity. This is going to be awesome. The beauty of it is it's completely free and it's completely online. You have to register for it, but you don't have to go anywhere to participate.

Michele: That's pretty incredible, because all of these names you mentioned are the kinds of people I would love to sit down with and learn from and ask questions and all of that, and you're basically saying you're making that available to me for free.

Michael: That's right. There are only eight of them. My staff said, "Look, let's not make people feel more overwhelmed," because some of these online summits are 20 or 30. I did one last year that had 24. It's too much. So I said, "Who are the seven or eight people that if I could really learn from..." We went after the A list and every one of them, thankfully, said yes. These are the people I wanted to learn from, because I want to take my productivity to another level and I want to empower people to do the same.

Michele: Okay, so tell us how we sign up, where we can get all of that information.

Michael: This starts on September 1, so you don't have much time to register, but you can go to freetofocus.com/summit. Sign up there and we'll send everything to you that you need to know to attend online from wherever you are and, again, the cost is free. It doesn't cost you a cent.

Michele: So once again that's freetofocus.com/summit. It's absolutely free. It starts on September 1. You don't want to wait. You need to head over there right now and get registered as soon as possible. It's absolutely free. I keep asking you this because I want to make sure that "free" part is true.

Michael: The free part is there. Yep, absolutely.

Michele: That's incredible. I'm going to be signing up for it. I can't wait to see all that you've put together for us. Now we need to dive back into our topic today, which really fits very well with this Free to Focus summit, because it's all about how to escape the overwhelm, how to reclaim your sanity.

If you are in a place where you are completely overwhelmed with your schedule and your life and you want to know how to dig yourself out, Michael is giving you eight secrets to do just that today. So far we've talked about four: accept responsibility, confront your fears, reduce the drama, and keep it in perspective. We still have four more to go, Michael, so let's go on to number five.

Michael: *Triage your calendar.* Here's what I mean by that. Overcommitment is ultimately a calendar issue. It means you don't have enough white space or margin in your calendar. You're booked wall to wall and your calendar has been eaten up with appointments. If you're in this situation, perhaps you can negotiate your way out of some commitments in order to buy yourself some additional time.

This happened to me a couple of weeks ago with you. We had some podcasts scheduled. I was running late on some preparation I was doing for this course I was creating. I made the commitment, you made the commitment, so we asked if we could reschedule. Here's the deal. I think it's really important to be a person of your word, to keep your commitments.

I don't want to be the flaky kind of person who cancels on people or doesn't show up. That's never good. It's not good for your brand. It's not good for your service or your business you're trying to build, but it doesn't hurt to ask. I know enough about you to know that you're an introvert, so the opportunity to get out of an appointment was probably a welcome thing to you, right?

Michele: I didn't mind too much, let's just say.

Michael: Awesome. So to triage your calendar means that sometimes you just have to go through and say, "I know that was a good idea, but I'm not going to do that." Here's another one. I've had six weeks of nonstop travel and I'm weary from traveling. I got back (this was this weekend) and Saturday night I said to Gail, "We have a vacation that starts next week." This is not this week but next week.

I said, "I really think we ought to make that a staycation, because when I think about traveling and going through airports and checking into hotels and not having my stuff and forgetting stuff and being in an unfamiliar surrounding there's a certain stress that goes with that. So what if we cancel our plans and make that a staycation?" She looked at me and said, "That's like the best idea I've heard in the last week."

Michele: Oh, I love it.

Michael: So we're going to do that. By the way, we're going to be intentional about that, because if you stay at home the temptation is to work. So we're going to be really intentional and we're going to create a plan for what we're going to do that's not work during that time.

Triage your calendar. Go through your calendar and ask if there are things you can negotiate your way out of completely. Are there things that could be delayed? Are there things that other people on your team could handle for you just as well, maybe even better? Triage your calendar. Get yourself some white space.

Michele: Sometimes all I do is rather than having things spread out over five days, moving it to only two days. Just having blocks of time can sometimes ease my overwhelm.

Michael: Great idea.

Michele: All right, triage my calendar. What is the sixth secret?

Michael: *Do the next most important task.* Sometimes people get overwhelmed because they think of all the stuff that has to be done, but usually everything that has to be done doesn't need to be done now. Some of it could be done tomorrow. Some of it could be done next week.

I practice what I call *intentional procrastination*. On my to-do list on any given day I have three and only three tasks that must be completed. I start with the most important and then I go to the second most important and then I go to the third most important. When the third most important is done, I'm done for the day.

Partly I can do that because I've learned through the years to eliminate stuff that's not essential, to automate much of what's left using either technologies or rituals, or whatever, and delegate what's left from that so that I'm focused on what I and only I can do. So just do the next most important task and stop worrying about everything else.

I love this verse from Matthew 6:34, where Jesus says, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Maybe to take a little license with that, "Sufficient for the day is its own task." There's only a finite set of tasks that have to be done today, and you can get it done.

Michele: I love that. So maybe my to-do list for today that was 28 items long might have been a little bit too robust, is what you're saying.

Michael: We did a survey recently that had about 3,000 people in it. We were doing some research for this new productivity course I'm creating. Get this. We found that there was a direct correlation between the number of tasks people have on their task list and their level of happiness.

Michele: Really?

Michael: Yeah. In other words, once people start to get on all their task lists... I don't care what to-do list manager you have, or whatever. Once you start getting more than about 50 tasks, you begin to feel overwhelmed and your sense of well-being and happiness goes down.

Michele: That's very interesting. I'm making a sidenote about that. I'll have to evaluate my task list later. So you just finished talking about do the next most important task. Rather than

seeing a hundred things that need to be done, look at the next most important one. That's all you need to look at. What is the seventh secret?

Michael: This is one I love, and it's so easily overlooked, but it's so critically important. *Get sufficient rest.* I don't know about you, Michele, but I can tackle almost anything provided I've had a good night's sleep.

Michele: I could not agree with you more. This has become significantly important to me. I'm all about the rest, let me tell you.

Michael: When I get tired, as Gail could attest to, I lose perspective and I find it difficult to focus and it's much easier to become distracted. Two hours in the morning after a good night's sleep are way more productive for me than two hours at night when I'm worn out and try to just grind it out.

Oftentimes, when I have something I'm feeling overwhelmed about... Maybe I'm working on a speech or trying to write a chapter or a blog post, or whatever, and I feel so overwhelmed, so burnt out. I'm discouraged. I literally feel discouraged. Gail will often say to me, "Honey, why don't you go to bed? Go to bed early. Get up another hour early. It's the same difference time-wise, but you're going to be twice as productive in the morning." She's always exactly right.

Michele: I used to think that if I had a lot to do I just needed to cut into my sleep time, you know, cut an hour or two out of my sleep time to get it done and I would sleep better getting it done. I don't believe that at all anymore. Like you said, I absolutely refuse to give up my sleep time, because I know how it helps me to be so much more productive tomorrow.

Michael: I do too. I protect it like crazy. As you know, I have the practice of taking a nap after lunch almost every day. Even when we were on a video shoot last week, we carved out time. We ate lunch and I said, "Look, I need 20 minutes." Nobody makes fun of me.

Michele: Well, I make fun of you a little bit, but your family doesn't.

Michael: Nobody makes fun of me on the set because I'm employing everybody. But I'm so much better. All my energy is restored and I don't have that sleepy, dozy, distracted kind of self. I'm alert and awake. So my practice is I go take a 20-minute nap, get up, drink a cup of coffee, and I'm ready to hit it, and I'm as fresh as I was at the beginning of the morning.

Michele: My naps are a little bit longer than 20, but I do take one almost every day. All right, get sufficient rest. What is the final secret to reclaiming your sanity?

Michael: *Decide to change.* At the end of the day, it's up to you and it's up to me. No one else is going to take responsibility for building margin into your life. That's probably not going to happen to you either. In fact, everyone around you is probably trying to figure out how to get more out of you. It's like a conspiracy. It doesn't make them bad people. It's just the way things work.

To move away from being overcommitted and feeling overwhelmed you have to establish boundaries and you have to enforce them. If you struggle with this, I highly recommend that you read *Boundaries* by Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. I've read it several times. Get the subtitle: *When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life.* It's an awesome book.

Michele: Great resource. If you are completely overwhelmed right now or maybe you find yourself in a state of being overwhelmed pretty much every day, we have hope for you. Today Michael has given you eight secrets to escape the overwhelm and reclaim your sanity. These are so practical. Michael and I have both shared here we live this out every single day, because our personalities, the way we work, tends to get us in that position of being overwhelmed quite often. You're not alone. This really does work.

The first secret is to accept responsibility. This is always first. That means you have the choice to do something different, which is actually really good news. Second, confront your fears. Third, reduce the drama. Fourth, keep it in perspective. This is not going to last forever. Things will come to an end. Fifth, triage your calendar. This may require you to get rid of some appointments or block them or figure out some new plan for your schedule.

Sixth, do the next most important task. Rather than looking at all hundred of the things you need to get done, just look at one. Seventh, make sure you get sufficient rest. This is far more important than you realize. Eighth, decide to change. I have one last question for you, Michael, before we wrap up this episode. I think this is really important considering the culture we live in. How do you deal with overcommitment when you find yourself in this culture right now that values busyness as a sign of success?

Michael: I think you have to rage against the machine. You have to realize it's not sustainable, that, again, you have more power than you think. If that culture is that way and you really can't change it... First of all, I would challenge that belief. I think you have more power than you think, but if you come to the conclusion that this is just a culture that is not going to be congruent with your values and the lifestyle you want, you may need a different job.

Now here's the important thing. It doesn't mean you're going to have to do it tomorrow, but it means you need to set the intention that you're going to find a way out, because there is more

at stake than you can possibly imagine, starting with your health, your sanity, your well-being, your family, and all the rest.

There are jobs out there that won't suck the life out of you and will pay you well. I would start with that intention. Don't start with, "Well, there's nothing out there" or "I'm just stuck" or "I don't have the skills," or whatever it is. Just set the intention and then trust that the opportunities are going to open up. Then you can begin to work toward it.

Michele: Great word. Thank you, Michael. If you enjoyed today's episode, you can get the show notes and the full transcript at michaelhyatt.com. Can you do us a favor before you go? It's not going to take you very long. I promise. Just head over to iTunes and rate this podcast. This is huge for us in terms of improving our rankings in iTunes and keeping the show visible so others can discover it. Thank you ahead of time for helping us out. It really means a lot. 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.