

Power Up Your Productivity: The Ultimate To-Do List Makeover

Hello there and welcome to School of Sellers. This is Episode 2 and today we are getting into all things productivity. And truth be told, this is one of my very favorite topics to talk about. If you know me in real life, you know that I'm very particular about my systems and the way I approach certain tasks and I love being organized and getting things done. However, if you would've told me 10 years ago that I would be giving anybody tips on being productive and organized, I would have thought you were crazy. When I talk with people about organization and productivity, people often assume that I have always been this way and that it comes naturally to me. But that is very far from the truth.

We talk about being type A or type B and while I can totally relate to a lot of those traits in both of those types, I also believe that your type is fluid. I don't think that you are born being type A or type B and I certainly don't think that just because you identify as type A right now doesn't mean you can't switch later on down the road. I was very much a type B person in every sense of the word in every area of my life for probably 25 years and it wasn't until I had kids and a business and a super busy life that I realized that I needed to make a change. So, I'm here to tell you today that if you are type B and loving it, great. I kind of am jealous of you because I really miss those laid-back days. However, if you are type B but you are in need of a refresh, a restart and you just really need to get your shit together, it can happen. It is a learned trait, change is possible and today I'm going to get you started in the right direction.

The great thing about this exercise that I'm going to share with you is that even if you are currently identifying as type A, this trick will work for you too and in fact, you'll probably love it. It all stems from some very common missteps we take when it comes to doing our daily tasks and it also has a lot to do with how we use our time. I know that sounds simple but let me explain. As backwards as this sounds, I truly think that my shift from type B to type A started happening the less time I was given. So, once I was teaching and doing TPT full-time and I started growing my family, I had less and less time to devote to the things that I was so used to having infinite time for and I was forced to really make the most out of my time and that is when my journey with productivity started.

Really being productive is all about your time and how you use it. With any job whether it's TPT or teaching or something totally different or just your personal life or your family and home life, we are all about the lists. Right? We are very much a list-making society and teachers especially are list lovers. I know you can relate to my love of lists. I probably have no less than 100 lists going at any given time in multiple places. So, let's think about our to-do list for once. The very foundation of productivity is your time and how you're using it. When you are faced with any window of time whether it's a half hour, a day, a week or month, one of our first steps is always sitting down to make that to-do list which is a great step. There is no better feeling than putting all of your thoughts and tasks and obligations onto a piece of paper so that you start to feel little bit more organized and like you're moving in the right direction.

For a lot of people, our productivity missteps start to occur when we start executing the items on our to-do list, when we actually sit down and say okay, I'm ready to go, what's on my list. A couple mistakes that we tend to make regarding our to-do lists: one is looking at the tasks and deciding to do the most desirable tasks first and then kind of trickle down the list, leaving your least desirable tasks for last.

This is a problem because when we start with our most desirable tasks, by the time we get to our least desirable tasks, we either are (a) out of time or (b) we don't have enough energy or brain power to accomplish this least desirable task. Another problem with this is that oftentimes our least desirable tasks are the most important. These are actually the ones we should be doing first, things like writing a blog—I know I hate writing blog posts. If we save these for last, they're either going to be done half-ass or, more commonly, they're not going to be done at all and what happens is those tasks get pushed to the next day's list and you say well, that's okay, I can just do it tomorrow. But guess what happens tomorrow? You attack your list in order of most desirable to least desirable and that thing at the bottom, that thing that's probably important, never ends up getting done. In fact, it gets dragged around from day to day until it's just this constant rain cloud following you around every single day even though deep down it's on your list, you're still never going to get it done.

Another very common to do-list mistake is not finishing anything on our list. We get bored with one task and decide to move onto the other and before we know it, we are list hopping, going from task to task and at the end of the day, you are left with 10 things that are only half-finished and that is way worse than if you had completed one or two items from start to finish and could save the rest of the items for the next day. Hopping around from thing to thing on your list is the kiss of death in terms of productivity. So, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking okay, well, this is easy then. All I have to do is start doing my list from least to most desirable and making sure I finish one thing before I move to the other. That is definitely a step in the right direction. However, today I'm going to propose that you do something that's even better because I have gone through this process. I have gone from making all of those mistakes to then trying to fix those mistakes and even that wasn't working after a while.

So, today I'm going to talk to you about the priority plan and this is a very simple way to weed out what needs to be done and what doesn't need to be done. And it sounds simple and it is simple, but it is life changing, my friends. The priority plan is something I mentioned in my presentation at TPT Forward last year in Austin and since then I have fine-tuned it a bit. So, if you would like materials to kind of help you through the priority plan after this podcast when you sit down to do it, you can get those materials www.erinmwaters.com/priorityplan. However, the priority plan is very simple to describe and you can do it even without those materials. You're going to make a T-chart, a two-column T-chart. On the left side of the column, this is your first step, you are going to list every single job or task or to-do item associated with your business, any task that is small, big or in between. Literally, anything that shows up on your to-do list or crosses your mind of oh, I need to do that, write it down. This might take a while. I suggest spending at least 10 minutes to do one giant brain dump in that left-hand column or if you prefer, spend a week working as you would normally work and make sure you are keeping track of the tasks that you are spending your time on. This is a very authentic look at your tasks. But you can do it either way.

Once you have a complete list of things that you need to do for your business, you're going to look at the right-hand column and this is where you are going to record the goals that you have for your business. I urge you to select no more than five goals and when you're writing these goals for your business, I want you to keep in mind your goals that are big. We're not talking about small, short-term, specific goals. We are talking big picture goals, goals that can't happen overnight and goals that are really going to move the needle of your business once they are accomplished. Think big here. An example of a big picture goal would be to grow your email list. You can't grow it overnight. It's not something that's going to happen right away. It's definitely a long-term goal but it's super important to the success of your business. The bigger your list, the more customers you can reach and the more sales that you can make in the long run.

Once you have written down one to five big goals, you are going to connect both columns. Starting with the task side, you are going to draw a line from each task to the goal that it directly serves. So, for example, if one of your tasks is creating a lead magnet to get email signups, you will connect that task to the goal of growing your email list. Now as you make your way down your task list, you will find a couple things: one, you will realize that some tasks connect to more than one goal which is fine. It's great actually. So, draw as many lines as you need to. And you will also find on the flip side that some tasks don't align with any of your goals and that's okay too. Once you have gone through all of your tasks and aligned them each with the goals that you have created, you are left with something magical. You now have a list of priorities for your business and non-priorities. The priorities are items on your list that are directly aligned with goals and they are directly serving those goals and the non-priorities are those tasks hanging out on your list that—guess what?—aren't even going towards any of your goals. These are the things that matter and the things that don't matter.

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