



TRANSCRIPT

Episode 19: Your To Do List is Hinderling You (& What To Do About It!)

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Get Organized HQ podcast. I'm your host, Tasha Lorentz. Every week we share practical strategies for less stress and more peace as we dive into all topics, life and home organization. I'm so glad you're here for this week's episode.

LISTS SHOULD HELP US MAKE PROGRESS

Something that I've learned about myself over the years is that I am a list maker. It's interesting because I'm not necessarily the most methodical, organized person, naturally, but when I have a lot of things to do, I want to write a list.

And today I want to dive in to a couple of ideas about writing lists and really how we can write good lists that help us and serve us well. And some lists or maybe some ideas that we project onto our lists that can actually leave us feeling even more defeated and behind, which is the opposite purpose of writing a list, right?

When I'm writing a list, I want to get my life together. I want to start making progress. I definitely am not writing a list for the intent of feeling behind. So let's talk about a couple different types of lists.

A JUMPSTART LIST

And the first list that I would recommend everyone make, in fact, I'd recommend you make this list today after you finish listening to this podcast episode. Or if you're a multitasker, do it while you're listening to this episode.

But that is a jumpstart list. A jumpstart is simply writing down the next three or four things that you're going to get done to really up your momentum, get your day going at whatever point in your day you are in.

So sometimes I hit a mid afternoon slump and I'm looking around and I've got work to do for work. There is laundry on the floor, there are dishes in the sink, there's stuff all over the countertop. You know, all of the little things that pile up.

And if I'm feeling maybe overwhelmed or maybe just unmotivated, I don't really feel like doing any of the things that I need to get done. It can really help me to make a jumpstart list and to say, okay, in the next 10 minutes, what are the things that I'm going to do?

SIMPLE TASKS

I need to start getting a few things checked off the list here. And so I make a literal list of things as simple as take all of the shoes that have gotten scattered all around all of the entrances to our house and put them away in

the closet where the shoes go.

That task is going to take me two minutes. I could almost do it faster than I could write it down. But I go ahead and write that down.

Take the coffee mugs and the plates and the cereal bowls that have accumulated around my desk to the sink so that they're not on your desk anymore. Make the bed. Start a load of laundry. As you can see, these are really quick tasks that I'm writing down.

HELPS GET YOU OUT OF A SLUMP

I'm not really making a list because I'm afraid that I'm going to forget to do one of these things or that it's going to slip my mind or I don't know how to do it or I'm holding onto it for later.

Like, I'm planning to do these tasks in the next five to 10 minutes, but seeing it written out as I'm going to do this and then I'm going to do this and next I'm going to do this, it can really help me get on track and get moving. And so if you're feeling in a slump, try making a jumpstart list.

I know it feels silly, but write down the things anyway and then check, check, check. And just getting that burst from checking things off the list, even if they're really small and quick things can really get you moving. Not only are you getting that boost from checking things off a list, but you're also getting things done.

SEEING VISUAL PROGRESS

And I think a jumpstart list really serves well to show that sometimes it doesn't take very long to make a ton of visual progress in our spaces. It is really easy to look around at a messy

countertop or a cluttered room and to think, oh, it's probably going to take me an hour to clean this up and maybe to get it all the way in tip top shape. Maybe that would actually take an hour.

But I bet you in five to 10 minutes there are some little tasks that you can tackle that will make a huge difference. So jumpstart list is the first kind of list.

A TO DO LIST

Now I want to talk about our traditional to do lists. So are you a to do list maker? I am very much a to do list maker. I make many to do lists. I make master to do lists. So these might stretch over the course even of months. Like these are all of the things that I want to do.

I make monthly to do lists. I make weekly to do lists. I make daily to do lists. I find it so helpful to have a list of what I'm going to do. And actually one thing I've noticed about my to do lists is that if I have a very clear to do list, I am much more likely to get up in the morning and get going and get something done.

When I don't know exactly what it is that I'm going to do, that's when it's really hard for me to get started. Because before I can start, I have to do the work of figuring out what I'm going to do.

A WISH LIST

So I find to do lists to be really helpful, but they can work against us in some cases. And that is when your to do list is, is actually a wish list. So a wish list is everything that you would like to get done if you had unlimited time, unlimited energy, or like, let's even be a little bit more realistic.

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A wish list might be the things you want to get done if you have no interruptions today. If everything takes exactly as long as you're expecting it to take, you maintain your energy all day. You never hit a slump and feel like you need to take a break. Like if those things happen and you have a day that really lines up pretty well, then these are all the things that you want to tackle today.

UNEXPECTED INTERRUPTIONS

But even with that, I think we all know that the phone can ring and you're on the phone for three hours when you weren't expecting a phone call today. You can get a call and suddenly you're going to an appointment or you're having to go pick someone up. Your plans can change at the drop of a hat.

And that can totally throw off all of the things you were planning to do today. And that's not to mention the times when you just hit a natural energy slump. I do that sometimes.

I remember several months ago, I literally fell asleep on the floor of my office. I don't even know why I was that tired, but I just was not feeling it. I laid down on the floor of my office and I took a nap. You know, that was not on my to do list for the day and those things happen.

And I think that that is why it's so important to differentiate between a to do list for the day, what you're actually going to do, and a wish list, which is what you would like to do.

A TRUE TO DO LIST

And here is the key difference. Your to do list should only have the non-negotiables for today. And it should honestly be incredibly short. No more than five things, maybe only two or three

things depending on what is on your list.

You want your to do list to be ridiculously attainable. These are the things that when you go to bed at night, you can lay down on your pillow and think, okay, I got the most important things done today.

We can deal with tomorrow and what's most important in tomorrow, when tomorrow comes. But this was what was most important today and I got it done.

So your to do list should not be a list of things that's going to take you eight hours of your day. Honestly, tackling your to do list might only take one or two hours, but these are the non-negotiables and that allows you to set yourself up for a successful day even with interruptions. You are telling yourself, I am going to work these things in whatever else happens in my day.

WHEN TO USE A WISH LIST

There is still a time and place for the wish list. Because as much as there are days when I lay down on my office floor and I fall asleep, I've had a handful of days in my life where, man, I am firing on all cylinders. There are no interruptions. I am rolling through my tasks and getting tons of stuff checked off the list list.

That is not every day. But I have had those days. And a wish list is such a useful tool on those days because that is when I can turn from my to do list when I finished all of the non-negotiables for the day and say, okay, what else would I like to get done? I have more time, I have more energy availability. What can I do next?

And the wish list is so helpful there because

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wish list items are really great items to get done. We're not saying they're not important. They're just things that we are not going to beat ourselves up at the end of the day if we didn't get to them.

SUMMING UP THE DIFFERENCES

Okay, so are you seeing the difference between a to do list and a wish list? A to do list is we're absolutely getting this done today. We're keeping it short, we're keeping it super attainable.

A wish list is, I'd love to get these things done today. And if I have time and I have energy, I'm going to work on these things. But I am not going to allow myself to feel any guilt if I don't get all of these things done today or any of those things done today. If there are days where you don't get to your wish list at all, that is perfectly okay.

ONE MORE SECRET

And one more secret about the to do list and the wish list. Sometimes things that are on your wish list today and tomorrow and the next day they might get moved to your to do list eventually.

So maybe you have a, some paperwork you need to fill out for the doctor's office and it's due on Friday and so on Monday it's on your wish list. You know, if I get to it, it'd be great to get that paperwork knocked out.

And on Tuesday, yeah, we're still going to put that on our wish list. If I have a few minutes, I'm going to sit down and figure that out.

But by Wednesday or Thursday, that task might move off of your wish list and onto your to do

list because it has become more urgent. And that kind of thing happens all the time.

START WITH A CLEAN SLATE

And so remember the principle of starting each day with a clean slate. Don't roll over your to do list and your wish list from day to day and say, well, this was on my wish list yesterday, so it has to be on my wish list today.

Every day is a clear slate and a fresh start. And think about what is most important to you to get done on that day, regardless of what happened yesterday.

PROJECTS VS. ACTIONS

Now, I want to talk a little bit more about the specifics that you're finding on your to do list and your wish list. And so this isn't necessarily a different kind of list, but this is a tool you can use to help you write better lists. And the question is, are you writing projects on your to do list or are you writing actions on your to do list?

So if you've ever read the book *Getting Things Done* by David Allen, I think he talks about making a next actions list, and that is exactly what it sounds like. It's taking a project and it's saying, okay, what are the baby steps that I am going to take to get to the end result?

And the funny thing is, sometimes it's actually a little bit challenging to be able to tell at first glance if what you're writing down is a project or an action.

DETERMINING THE DIFFERENCE

But if you're looking at your to do list and you're thinking, I am having a hard time getting

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started on this, like, I see that it is on my list to schedule a dentist appointment. I mean, that sounds like an action, right? I mean, I just need to call the dentist and schedule an appointment.

Well, if you've moved recently and you haven't picked a dentist that you're going to go see, maybe that's more of a project. Maybe you need to break that down even further and say, okay, I am going to first action, find five dentists that are in the area, you know, within 10, 15 miles of our house. I'm going to find five dentists.

The next action is I am going to read 10 reviews on each dentist. Next action is I'm going to pick my favorite and I'm going to give them a call.

That is three different actions that you're taking to do what seemed like one simple action of scheduling a dentist appointment.

IF YOU FEEL STUCK

But if you're ever feeling stuck by what is on your list, my guess is that that task needs to be broken down even further into very bite sized pieces so that you know exactly what it is that you want to do next. And that little trick can really help you write effective to do lists.

I said earlier in this episode, I find that a good to do list really helps me to get going first thing in the morning. But a good to do list has to be really clear about exactly what it is that I'm doing.

So pay attention. Are you writing down projects or are you writing down actions? And if you're stuck, see if you can break it down even further.

BRAIN DUMP

Now, the last type of list that I want to talk about is a brain dump. And I'm sure you've heard all sorts of things on the Internet. Laura has even done some videos on the Get Organized HQ YouTube channel all about brain dumping.

And this is where you just put a blank piece of paper in front of yourself and you write down absolutely everything that you can think of on a topic or not on a topic at all.

Sometimes your brain just feels full and you're thinking, I've got to get this stuff out of my brain. And so I'm going to write down house projects, I'm going to write down appointments that need scheduled, I'm going to write down work deadlines, I'm going to write down all of it.

IT CAN ALSO BE SPECIFIC

You can also do a little bit more of a specific brain dump. So I've done brain dumps before where maybe I'm particularly overwhelmed by a work project. And so my brain dump is really focused on what do I need to do for work. And I'm writing all of those things down.

And this is a really useful tool and it can actually help you because I have found that if everything is just kind of floating around in my brain, living up there, it's hard for me to really quantify how much I actually have to do.

And I can actually overestimate how much I have to do when it's all just kind of floating around as tasks in my brain. I can feel like I have 100 tasks to do because they're constantly flitting through my brain and, and I'm not sure what I'm forgetting, but when I write it down sometimes what I find is, oh, I mean, I probably

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have a dozen tasks to do, but that's a lot different than a hundred.

GIVES YOU CLARITY

And so a brain dump can really give you clarity and help you see. Okay, maybe this isn't quite as big and overwhelming as I thought it was. And even if it is a pretty big project that you're tackling, or if you have a lot on your plate with lots of little projects, it at least lets you see, see what is happening in your brain.

And you know that you have everything safely in one place, so it's not all on you to remember all of it. And that makes a really big difference.

Now you can take your brain dump one step further. So you can just write it all down. That's great. Gets it out of your head onto paper.

MAKING IT MORE EFFECTIVE

But if you want to make your brain dump really effective, and if you even want to tie it in with your to do list and your wish list, like we were talking about earlier, go through your brain dump and start highlighting, circling, rewriting in a separate list, just pulling out and calling attention to the tasks that are most important.

Because odds are, when you do a brain dump, there's going to be something like, I have clothes that have been sitting in the washing machine for over 24 hours and I need to move them to the dryer before bad things start happening.

And there's also probably going to be something like, you know, I would really like to call someone and ask for a quote on doing a little retaining wall landscaping project in the backyard.

PULLING OUT THE URGENT ACTION ITEMS

Like, the urgency of those two things is probably pretty different. I want to get the laundry moved, like, as one of the next things that I do. If I call a landscaper this week or next week or even next month, it probably doesn't make that big of a difference.

It's just one of the things that was kind of living in the back of my brain. Like, oh, yeah, I don't want to forget about that. I'm hoping we actually get around to doing that.

And so going through and pulling out those urgent action items that you're saying, oh, like, this needs to get onto my to do list for today, or maybe at least onto my wish list for today, that can really help you prioritize.

NOT EVERYTHING REQUIRES IMMEDIATE ACTION

And what you'll find is there were things that were living in your brain, taking up mental energy that, like, honestly, even if you forgot them, nothing bad would have happened. You would have remembered later it wasn't that urgent.

And so that can kind of just help you separate out the tasks that are in your mind and realize not everything that's in my brain is actually requiring my immediate attention.

And so I can focus on these things that I've pulled out and identified as important and for the time being, I really can let the rest go. It's all safely kept here on my brain dump anyway, and I can come back to it at any time.

So I hope these tools and these principles of

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writing lists can help you write better lists so that they are better tools to serve you for getting the best things done so that you can go to bed every night feeling at peace, not feeling guilt for not getting enough done, but knowing that you prioritize what was most important to you and to your family.

Thanks so much for tuning in to this week's episode, and I will see you next week.