



JAMES SCHRAMKO

Winning the Week with Demir Bentley (Productivity)

You might not win every day, but you can win the week, says Demir Bentley. He and James discuss his new book that aims to simplify productivity.



Demir Bentley

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 965. We're going to be talking about winning the week. I've brought along a new friend of mine, Demir Bentley. Welcome, Demir.

Demir: Hey, thanks for having me.

James: Now, I've never met you before. I just want to get that out there early. I've been introduced to you by our mutual friend, [Ron Reich](#), who is a partner of mine, a legendary copywriter, marketer, sales phenom. And he said, You should talk to these people, Demir and his wife, they've got this great book *Winning the Week*. they're on the same sort of phase as you, you'd like each other. And I said, Let's do it. Let's have a chat.

So I thought, let's have a meeting of peers, we'll talk about productivity. And our mutual lens here is to help our listener with a few tips, techniques, ideas, thoughts around how to be more productive, and I believe you're a productivity expert. They did send me a bio, I feel like I should probably read it.

Demir: It's de rigueur.

James: You're a productivity expert and co-founder of Lifehack Method. You're the Wall Street Journal bestselling author of *Winning The Week*, which I downloaded onto my Kindle and had a little read through, *How To Plan A Successful Week, Every Week*. And he helps clients kick butt at work to live their best life when they go home. That's lovely, lovely intro. Welcome.

Productivity from a generational standpoint

Demir: Yeah, well, thank you. Yeah, I mean, our mission is to create a generational change in what we call the productivity problem. And what I mean by the productivity problem, it's a bit of a paradox in that, you know, even my clients who've been working for decades, I have clients who are in their mid-70s, and I ask them, like, you know, a lot of my clients feel like they are overworked. Are we just getting weaker? Are we like, wimps?

You know, has it always been this hard, and we're just getting progressively more complainy? And they all assure me, no, it is actually getting much harder. And I see both that the expectations are increasing at work, but also, really, when you consider it, like, 360 degrees, I mean, we expect more from ourselves as human beings, right?

You know, our great grandparents did not struggle with personal development aspirations and being the most enlightened human being that they could possibly be, but also be an incredible lover to their spouse, but also be the most incredible inspiring father, but also at work, be this like, powerhouse, Elon Musk, Oprah Winfrey type, you know, trailblazer.

And we just, we've got these huge expectations that are placed upon us, but also these incredible expectations that we place upon ourselves. And it just means that people are getting squeezed harder and harder.

James: And I think our previous generations, they didn't have technology interfering with their life. In some ways, life was a bit simpler. You know, someone would bring milk to their front door and bread, they'd go off to work, they'd come home, they would listen to the wireless, and go to bed. I mean, people used to get more sleep before the invention of electricity, right? From the research I've done.

Demir: Yeah. I live down here in Colombia, when I go to the supermarket, there's three brands of milk. When I go back to the United States, I just get freaked out, there's like, 17 brands of milk. I mean, it's like, who can handle 17 brands of milk? There's just so much paradox of choice and choice overwhelm that's built into our society, it's absolutely incredible.

Anyways, I say that simply to say that our mission is to help people become the most productive, organized version of themselves, so that they can actually break through and create the life that they really want to be creating. And also, you know, as an extension of that, would love to break this chain and really create a long-term, generational change in the productivity problems so that our kids grow up in a very different relationship to work and success than we did.

From workaholism to a balanced lifestyle

James: And I think both of us have experienced both sides of this, right? I was reading that you used to wear your work as a badge of honor, you know, proud New York workaholic, grinding, and then you'd come home and have a glass of wine and just, like you feel like you've lost the week, that's just an abridged version. And you went on this mission to find ways to improve that.

I worked in a job that was essentially a seven-day-a-week job, and I too, used to work every day. And I was proud of my work ethic. No one worked harder than I did. And I needed to change my life, too. I had this overwhelming sense of, wait a minute, there's no way I'm going to do this till I'm 65, and then switch it off like a light switch, and then sit around on my ass doing nothing. Like, that's a false narrative. So, my thought here is, is it possible that it's as easy as just changing the way that you view life to make significant changes?

Demir: God, I hope so. So I mean, unfortunately for me, I didn't have the kind of enlightened moment that you did. I mean, I was actually, you know, I went to the hospital and had a chronic illness that was very nearly about to kill me. So for me, I wish I could say that, you know, that I realized something. Unfortunately, I was forced to realize something because my body was just giving out.

And I see a lot of my clients coming to me, in a weird way, with a willingness to keep working, but their body is telling them, No, we can't, you know? And so that's sort of the place that I came at, came to it with. I mean, I have helped facilitate a lot of, I guess, realizations and changes around productivity and perspective around work-life balance before the heart attack.

I always say, like, Let me be your heart attack, to my clients. Like, let me be that thing that slaps you across the face and makes you wake up and realize that there's a different way to live your life. Because once you have the heart attack, I mean, yeah, it does stop you in your tracks and helps you get perspective, but it comes at a tremendous cost to your health, a cost that can't be undone no matter what you try to do.

So, you know, my hope is that we can get people to that place where they stop and have the realization you had before they have the kind of health crisis that I had.

James: It's actually pretty common, isn't it? I coached [Ryan Levesque](#) for many years, and he started his online venture primarily because he had health issues, he just couldn't work anymore. I definitely got warning shots across the bow. I had people in my life telling me, If you keep this up, you're going to kill yourself.

There was a two-and-a-half-year period where I did my day job as a general manager, but I also started my online business, which was my, that was like digging an escape tunnel. And it's like, am I going to get free before the prison guard finds my tunnel and shuts me down? Right? It was the great escape. It was the great escape, and I made it, I made it out to the woods, and I made it - I remember, The Great Escape was one of my absolute all-time favorite movies, and I think it had Steve McQueen in it.

But in any case, I made it out, never looked back. And I went on to publish a book as well, [Work Less, Make More](#). So we're really in the same phase. Of course, I went on a similar journey, I went and read as much as I could about productivity and all the classics, and we've had some of those guests on the show, like [Jay Papasan](#) and so forth, all the systemizers and [systemology](#) type people have come and shared their wisdom.

How Demir approaches the productivity question

I'm curious to know, what approach did you end up with and what kind of tools are in your toolkit to help our listener to go down this path?

Demir: Well, you mentioned some people that I really, really admire. I mean, Jay Papasan and Gary Keller, I think they're both - *The ONE Thing* is a productivity Bible. And I could go on and talk about people who I emulate. The way that Carey and I think about it, and ironically, it's exactly the way that we conceived of it in the beginning, is that there's - in medicine, you can be a researcher, or you can be a clinician, right?

And a researcher is out there at the very cutting, bleeding edge, understanding, you know, how enzymes interact, right? I mean, they're doing work that's so deep and so advanced, they don't even know necessarily what the application of it is going to be. They're just breaking that new ground. And clinicians are much closer to the client. They're really saying, Okay, let's take these studies, let's take this science, and let's see how we can actually integrate it into people's lives to make a benefit.

So Carey and I, for many years, it was almost a decade that we were in practice before we even wrote a book, because we sort of thought, This isn't our seat at the table. We're here to actually work with people to take the ideas from great books like Gary Keller and Jay Papasan and all the other greats of the productivity space, and really integrate them into what we call the Lifehack Method, which is just a fully integrated tech stack, if you will, or like a methodology for just running your life from Monday to Sunday night. Right?

I mean, that's sort of what we're focused on, and it felt like that was what was missing. I have this analogy that I love using. I feel like most people, if you wanted to go buy a bicycle, you'd go to a bicycle shop. And if the owner says, you know, you say, I just want a bicycle, I'm just going to ride to and from work. And they say, Sure, no problem, James, here, come on outside, we got everything that you need.

And they show you this big dumpster full of bicycle parts and say, James, there you go. Everything you need for your perfect bicycle is right there. You'd probably say, That's not what I'm talking about. Like, I'm not asking for disconnected parts. I don't care if it's all there, I don't really want to put it all together, I really would just like to buy a bicycle that I could get on and ride.

And it felt like the productivity space, and it really still is like this, is very disconnected, incredible, powerful ideas. You read these books, and you go, Oh, my God, this could change my life, but you don't quite know how you're going to run it from Monday to Sunday. Right? And so that's really where we've always seen our seat. And we've coached with over 50,000 people, really, in the front lines of their life in the trenches, trying to take some of these great ideas and put them together and make them go.

The smallest lesson with the biggest result

James: Nice. So what does that system look like? I mean, obviously I've had an insight to it, I know you've got some steps there, some practical steps for people. The obvious frame is you're saying, let's have a look at this by the week. Like, you might lose a day or two, but you can win the week. That's your premise, right?

Demir: Yeah. So when we wrote a book, the idea was, hey, what's the least that we could coach with somebody on that would change their life forever? And in fact, I even challenged myself, I said, if somebody reads the book and never pays me a cent, never coaches with me, the only interaction they ever have with me is reading the book, what's the smallest thing I could teach them that would have the biggest result?

And it really was our methodology for winning the week, which we uncreatively called the Winning the Week methodology, right, or the Winning the Week Method. And the premise of it is simply that most people tend to approach their days as if every single day is exactly the same, as if they need to be perfect in every single day. And as if every single day is sort of a win-loss score.

What sports and productivity have in common

And what we want to do is sort of say, almost like a baseball team has all these innings, right? You can lose an inning, you could lose two or three innings, and you could still win the game. So this idea that you get by zooming out a little bit from the day, you could actually bring a lot more of a humane approach to your week, and yet also be much more successful in the goals that you're trying to target.

James: So, I noticed you aligned the sports analogy with productivity. And I was curious about that. Because in sports, you know, a team wins and a team loses. If you're playing life like a sport, who's the loser?

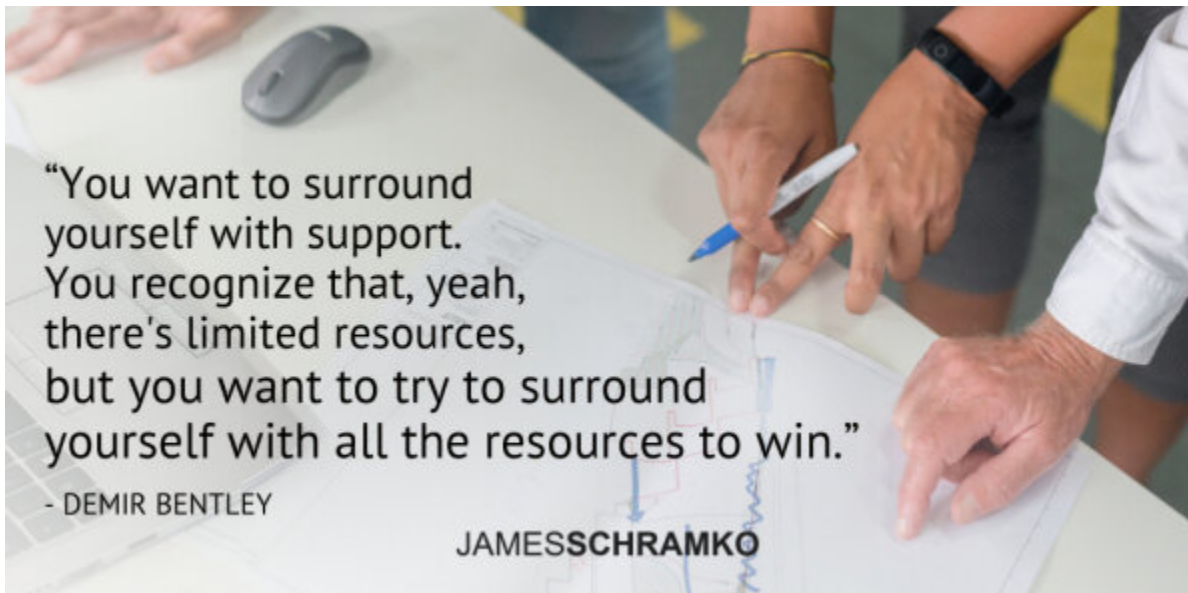
Demir: I mean, I think the truth is, is that we don't have to have bad people in our life, to have opposition and to have competition, right? The truth is, is there's not enough resources for everybody to get everything done that they want. Even your wife, let's take the person who loves you the most in the world and wants the best for you in the world, they're going to have an agenda, and they're going to be pursuing their agenda, and their agenda is not going to perfectly line up with your agenda.

And there's moments, if you're married, you're out there, you know this, there's moments when you take an out, right, when they win and you lose, their agenda wins and your agenda lost. Now, that's not to say that it always needs to be that kind of oppositional take, it just to say, what I love about the sports analogy isn't the competition, isn't the idea that you win and somebody else loses.

What I love about the sports analogy is the idea that when we think about sports, as opposed to war, you have this idea that you can play a lot of games, you can even lose and learn from your losses. You can develop, you can integrate, you can level up and go from playing high school to college to pro baseball. In sports, there's a common understanding that you'll have coaching, and that you won't be doing this all by yourself, that you'll have a team of people that's supporting you.

So I think the part about the sports analogy that appeals to me isn't as much like that I'm going to win, and you're going to lose, although, frankly, there is a bit of that in life. I think it's more just this idea that it helps us realize that we are the star player in our game. And I have so many people who are treating themselves in such a stingy way.

They're being stingy with resources, they're stingy with self-love, they're stingy with rest and recovery. They're stingy with coaching, they're stingy with investing into improving themselves. They're so stingy. And I say, Listen, in your world, you're the most important person. In your story, in James's story, James is the most important person, he is the hero of this story.



“You want to surround yourself with support. You recognize that, yeah, there's limited resources, but you want to try to surround yourself with all the resources to win.”

- DEMIR BENTLEY

JAMES SCHRAMKO

So for you to be so stingy with yourself, for you to hold yourself down in that way, just doesn't make any sense. You really want to treat yourself like the Serena Williams of your life, the big star. You want to surround yourself with support. You recognize that, yeah, there's limited resources, but you want to try to surround yourself with all the resources to win.

And so I like that idea in sports. The sports analogy is, I do a whole chapter where I peel that and say, Let's talk about all the things I love about that analogy. But I just think at a high level, I would love for people to be thinking, Yeah, let's play this like a game, and I'm the star of the game.

James: Well, I think most people have a default setting of being selfish. But I think they maybe lack the foresight to leverage themselves. So the way I look at it, I guess, because I have a sport that's a little more solo-oriented, right, because I surf, and a lot of the time I'm doing it by myself, it's become the best metaphor for me because it's me evolving. It's a very difficult sport, the playing field changes every time you go out. The equipment is very particular.

And what I'm really trying to do is create a better future version for myself. Like, each day that comes, I want it to be like positive Groundhog Day. That it's lacking drama, that it's enjoyable, that I'm doing things I enjoy with people I enjoy. The really interesting for me is I was wondering how my model of what I do fits with your model. That's what, as a selfish person, we're all selfish, I think, what's in this for me? What can I learn from it?

James's week versus the Lifehack Method

Because I don't do a weekly planning session, I don't sit down and do some of the things. But there are definitely some commonalities in the way that my weeks roll, versus the way that you teach it. For example, my podcasts are scheduled into my scheduler automatically.

So when I open up the week, my appointments are already set for me, I've automated what could be a manual planning process, instead of sitting down thinking, what would be the highest impact this week? I should record a podcast. I've got calendar slots that are prefilled, by the time my week rolls through, and here we are, we're on a podcast that was pre-scheduled before the week that was automated.

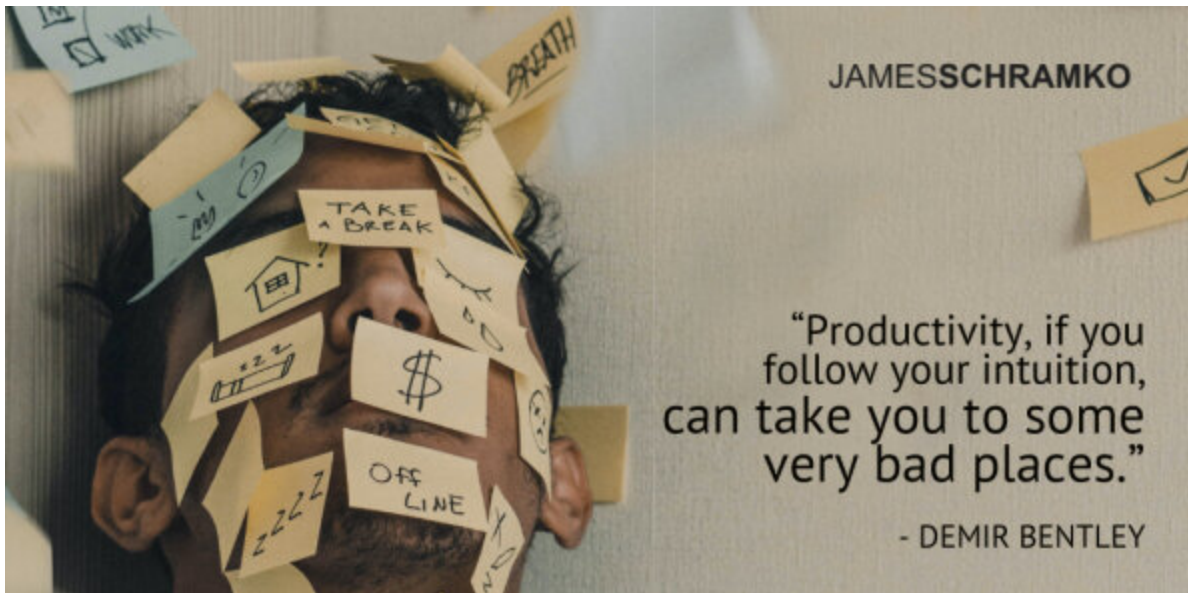
So I think that's like, the ultimate form of leverage, a leveraged automated pre-scheduled week. And then I block things so that there's absolutely no encroachment on my days off, and so forth. So I can look forward to that, do a little bit of work at the front of the week, and have a lot of free time at the end of the week, is the way that I look forward to my week. So if you were to say, at the end of the week, did you have a good week? I'd say, absolutely. It was a great week.

If you're not intuitively productive...

Demir: Well, you know what I found about people who are really truly successful, is that they're the lucky few who have been able, through trial and error or through superior intuition, they've been able to back into a lot of the techniques we talk about in the book, but they never really made it explicit, right? They never really said, Oh, this is how I do it.

But when I look at their week, they are doing a weekly pre-planning, they are planning in such a way it's respectful for their energy, meaning that the tasks that they're taking on is well-matched to the energy that they have at that point of the day or the week. And so you know, but then when I explain to them what they're doing, they say, Oh yeah, I never really thought about it like that. But that is sort of what I'm doing.

And so what we're trying to do for the people like me, the people for whom productivity didn't come intuitively, what we're trying to do is actually break it down into principles that somebody, and there are unfortunately, a lot of these people, again, I'm raising my hand, I really was one, you know, for whom this productivity thing didn't come intuitively, and I didn't fall backwards into it.



I really had to stop and dissect a lot of what was actually working for people, put it to work in my life, take some counterintuitive, sort of left hand turns when I thought I should take a right, and boil it down into a path that somebody could follow, because I feel like this is one of those, I don't know if you know the scene from Indiana Jones, where he has to step on the right stones that spell the right word, and if he doesn't, then he falls through to his death. I feel like productivity, if you follow your intuition, can take you to some very bad places.

James: Yeah, sure. My favorite scene from that movie is where the guy is like swinging around his saw, like, [swishing sounds], and then Indiana pulls out a pistol. That's how I coach people. Like they're just so busy and just doing so much. And I'm just like, boom, here you go, this is the answer. This is the one bullet you need.

Do you want to have a chat about the process? I wrote it down. I thought it was quite insightful. The first one, this is what you do each week, right? You review. Is that right?

Planning your week - isn't it obvious?

Demir: Yeah. So when we talked about winning the week, you know, our principle here, and I referenced this before is, how can we write a book where we can teach somebody something where if they never coached with us ever again, they would be getting the most powerful, most important part of our coaching?

And really the smallest, most important thing that you can do to win your week is to plan your week. Now, most people will nod their head and say, Yes, of course, of course I know that. In fact, we surveyed 5000 people who managed between five and 50 employees. So you know, hotshots, people who were trusted, manage people, we asked them about the most important productivity techniques.

At 94 plus percent of people in their top three said planning the week was one of the most important techniques to win your week. Okay, great. Sounds like we all understand this. Right? Well, then we went back to the same 5000 people, and we surveyed them. And we said, Okay, have you been planning your week for the last four weeks? Because we wanted to get a sense. Okay, great. Everybody knows this is the case, are we doing it consistently?

Less than one percent of people had a four-week streak, of the 5000 people who said that planning was one of the most important things to win their week. So the weird thing about planning is when we wrote a book about planning, a lot of people sort of said, Well, yeah, but everybody knows that, right? Sure. Everybody says they know it.

But if you actually dig in and look for people who genuinely plan their week, you will find that it is far and few, the kind of people who are planning the week, every single week. And the other thing is that when we actually dig into their planning process, we've got five key steps to planning your week that if you're missing one of those steps, I would consider your plan to be not even, it's like Pinocchio, you can't even call it a real boy. It's not even a real plan, right? And most people are missing one of those five steps.

Can you plan your week in half an hour?

So all we wanted to do for the world is just enter one small line of code into the broader code base of the world, which is, this is how to plan your week in 30 minutes or less, to experience the highest possibility of success that you can have. And so yes, the methodology really is letting us show you how to create a winning plan for the coming week in 30 minutes or less with five steps.

James: So you could set it in a recurring alert in your scheduler or a Slack bot in your Slack to plan the week. And the first step, review?

Demir: Yeah, so, well, actually, it's funny you say that, because we actually, in our community, one of the things that we do with our community of 2000 people is every single Friday, twice on Friday, one for people on Australia and Asia and one for people in the US and Europe, we'll get together. And we'll have hundreds of people on a Zoom call, planning our weeks together, to create that kind of group accountability in that five.

And we step them through those five steps in less than 30 minutes. And people say, you can't plan your week in 30 minutes. And we do it, we put them right through on the other side. It's like a roller coaster. But I think that's to say that I think accountability is important for your pre-planning.

An idea that's been around forever

James: Oh, I think it's huge. Like, in my higher level programs, I have a weekly group call, and we have a framework. And the way we end that framework is the one thing. And it was before their book, by the way. So I just want to put that out. We've been doing this for a long time.

Demir: No, I think, isn't it funny? I mean, this is a side note, but I believe that some things, it can pop up independently, because almost like human consciousness is like, ready for this idea.

James: Of course they can. Like it's, if you have gone to search for a domain, someone's already bought it and doing the exact idea that you had to do it. Like, that's validation. We do arrive at it. And I think going back to what you said before, you're simply putting a codec for things that we intuitively know, it's like, if I go back to my great grandfather, or my grandfather or my parents, they were doing things that they didn't know what the name is, but they might have been highly effective at it.

But now we've got a codec that could describe it, if we were using a Dyno label maker, that's for the older ones in the crowd, it'd be what the label you would put on that technique. I think NLP is a bit like that. And hypnosis. They're putting labels on what intuitively persuasive people are already using those tools, but they just didn't know what they're called. Right?

Demir: Exactly, exactly. And I even had somebody review our book, and you can't respond to people who review your book, but he said, I can't believe these people wrote a book on planning your week. This is so obvious. And in our first chapter, we actually say, Yes, of course, this has been around since the ancient Greeks, right? I mean, planning your week is not a big idea. So why are we still struggling with it? Right.

James: Yeah, I think you quote Seneca somewhere in there.

Demir: Yeah, yeah. I mean, we talk about the resistance that we have to planning. So it's just an irony. And I think that, let's go through the five steps. But one of the things is when you put it to somebody like this, if I can show you how to do it in five steps in less than 30 minutes, would you be more willing to plan your week, if you knew it wasn't going to become a three-hour anxiety ridden, fear ridden, like, you know, exhausting marathon through the worst parts of your week?

And most people say, yeah. And so what we're here to do is just try to make it as simple and as easy as possible for you to decide to take that journey. Okay?

James: By the way, you just set off my Tom Hopkins red flag alert. It's a sales technique. If I could, would you? I used to ban my salespeople from using that technique, because it became so well-worn that it puts up a roadblock for people. So you can change the scripting to something like, Hey, we've discovered that there's just five ways, that if you do this in 30 days, it actually sets your whole week up for success. And I'm happy to share that with you. That's a non-red flag way of saying the same thing.

Demir: Love it. Love it. I think it's a better phraseology.

James: So, review.

Removing the resistance to planning

Demir: So yeah, let's go through the steps. So step one is to remove the resistance, because what you have to understand is that because most of us have had bad experiences with planning, we might not even remember the bad experiences we've had with planning. It could be that we tried it and it failed. It could be that it - I mean, let's be honest, even done right, planning is considering the worst parts of your week right now. Right?

So you're basically accelerating all the most fearful, anxious parts of your week into a 30-minute session. So of course, your animal self, your body, is going to have a physical revulsion to it because you're engaging in something that's unpleasant, right? And so the first step is to really start to recognize where's that coming from, and also create an environment where you can actually almost change, tip the scales towards wanting to do it versus not wanting to do it.

And in the book, we go through a bunch of examples with us and with our clients of how people have done that. But in short, the first thing you have to do is recognize there is resistance to planning and put a plan in place to overcome that resistance. Sounds simple. It's a little bit harder in practice, but it's actually simple conceptually.

Determining your number one priority

Number two is to choose your number one priority, and this would just be copy and paste everything that Gary Keller and Jay Papasan say, it really is just about the one thing, choosing that thing that's the most leveraged thing that can make everything else in your life easier or unnecessary, and being disciplined about saying, Hey, things can be on my to-do list. That doesn't mean they're the priority. The priority is that thing which comes before all other things that gets me the most progress and moves my life forward. So that just gives you radical clarity to start your planning process off.

Interrogating your calendar

Number two is what I call a calendar interrogation. Now, most people will call it a calendar review. The reason I call it a calendar interrogation is because a review is so passive. The word review, Oh, I'm just going to review it, like you're looking at movie times online. To really get the truth out of your calendar, you sort of got to beat it up, you've got to sweat it like a witness on the stand, right?

You've got to come at it from different angles and try to catch it in a lie, right? Because the truth is, is that, there are things that should be on your calendar that aren't. And there's things that are on your calendar that shouldn't be, right? And so to really get to the truth of your time supply, you need to go in there and really interrogate it with that intention.

And once you've done that thoroughly, and we have a sort of checklist you can go through that can make you feel like, okay, yeah, I've done this thoroughly, then you can actually really lean on your calendar and trust it in a way that I find that a lot of people don't.

David Allen from *Getting Things Done*, you know, one of the things he talks about is the trusted system. And I find that so many people use tools, but they don't trust their tools. And it's because they actually don't do this kind of calendar interrogation. So people have a calendar, but they don't actually trust my calendar.



I will tell you right now, if you told me that my life depended on my memory, or my calendar, I would choose my calendar 100 percent of the time, because I know it is far more accurate than my memory.

Time to triage your tasks

And that kind of relationship to your calendar means that you can actually move forward to step three, which is triaging your task list.

So if your calendar represents your time supply, your task list represents your demand, right? Your demand for your time, right? So these are all the things that other people want you to do, or you want to do with your time. And so we have to go through this and triage it like a triage doctor from the Napoleonic Wars, right?

I mean, when we've got way more things to do than we could ever humanly do, then you're just like a doctor with all of these casualties coming in from the frontlines. You cannot help them all, you have to have a classification system to say, These are the ones I'm going to help. These are the ones that don't need my help right now. And these are the ones that I am going to allow to die. And if you think that that sounds hard, imagine what it's like for a doctor, right?

So if it's hard for you to say, Oh, I really want to get this task done, you know, I have to get it done, imagine how much courage it would take to be a doctor and saying, I can't help that patient, and in trying to help that patient, actually more people will die and I'll do less good overall. So I'll just in step four by saying triaging isn't about being ruthless, it's about being ruthless so that you can do the most good with your time.

And you can't do the most good with your time if you're not willing to recognize the basic fact that you're not going to get everything done that would like to be done this week, that wants to be done, that's coming at you to get done.

You know what to do - now when do you do them?

And then step four is to marry the two together and calendarize your task list.

So once you've got a really reliable calendar, and you've triaged your task list, and you understand your number one priority for the week, this is where Pinocchio becomes a real boy, it's time to marry them all together and take the things that you say that you're going to do and give them an actual time in the calendar when you're going to do them.

And we have some provisos like putting in flex time and anticipating the chaos that's going to meet you in life. But really part one of the book is that five-step process. Part two, which I won't go into here, is really, if part one is about how to make a plan, part two is about how to follow the plan.

And we talk about some advanced tactics that we've learned over the years of coaching people on how to just, when you're in the trenches, make sure that you can still make that plan, you know, bring the plan home, even in the face of chaos.

James: Got it. So I'm chatting to Demir Bentley, this is episode 965. We're talking about winning the week. Demir's got a website, winningtheweek.com.

What would you do differently?

So one of the things you mentioned in the book is hindsight. And I think you use that exact word. But looking back, right? Reviewing how the week went. I liked that a lot. I feel like that's one of my best instructors. And the key, of course, is to make changes or adjustments as a result of what you've learned. I imagine that's part of the process.

Demir: Yeah. There's such a thing called a learning loop. And it's so natural that many people do this without even having ever called it a learning loop. But really, it's just the simple discipline of doing something, taking some kind of action, taking a pause and learning from the action, what went right, what went wrong, what could I have done better, and then going in and taking that new information into another round of that same action.

And so I sort of humorously in the book talk about being on the worst soccer team in our league. Even though we practiced hard, even though we really wanted to win, even though we're sick of losing... We weren't really terrible athletes, but the truth is, is our coach didn't have a learning loop in place where we were learning from our common mistakes.

And if you don't just take that little bit of time to stop in your week and say - I love that you mentioned the book *Groundhog Day* - If I can go relive this whole week, if I could just step into a time machine and go back to Monday, what would I do different? It's simple as asking that question. Right?

Or, you know, even the positive side of it is, what would I double down on? What did I do so good that I should have done more of it? Or I need to do more of it next week? And you know, people try to make a Mona Lisa out of this. I mean, it really takes 30 seconds, right?

I mean, I tell people, if I put a gun to your head, and I asked you, what is the number one thing you would do differently this past week, if you could go back in time machine, it doesn't take people hours to answer the question. It's right at the top of their head, they know what it is. So if you trust yourself, and you just lean on your subconscious, this is not a painstaking process. It can be very fast, it can be very easy.

James: I find that I'm doing it instantaneously. So if a diary appointment looms on me, like each night, I look at what's on the next day, my wife says, What's on tomorrow? What's the schedule? And we just pull open the phone, I have a look at the schedule. I'm like, Okay, I've got this podcast, I got a coaching call. This is when we'll do our preschool drop. We'll have lunch, I'll have a surf, we'll do a pickup, and then nothing, right? So we'll just sort of run through it.

But sometimes I'll look at a thing and I'll go, Oh, crap. You know like, why did I allow this to get into my schedule? So that's the moment I realize that I need to make sure that I address my filter. Don't let these ones get into my schedule again. Or I got to this point when I had quite a lot of people on a coaching roster. At one point, I think it was 35 people. And they were recurring around in my schedule. It's 17 now, because I stopped selling about four years ago.

And I used to look at them and like, I'd feel differently about each of them. So I thought, you know what, I need a scoring criteria. So I built up this matrix, and I'm like, how much do I enjoy working with this person? How big a result can I get for them? Are they famous or not? Like, are they a good referral source if they do a good job, or people happen to find out that I'm coaching them? Do they have the means to be able to implement things we talk about?

Those sort of things, and I'd give them a score. And through that, I was able to just filter out and clean up and only work with the ones that really light me up and energize me. And I found that that carries my energy through the week. There's literally calls where I see them in the schedule, I'm like, really excited to catch up with this person. And that can be done. But you have to pay attention to how you feel, whether it's in hindsight or whether it's in the moment, and adjust the filters, adjust the matrix.

Demir: You just gave a perfect example of what I call the Groundhog Day question. If I could go back, right, what would I do differently?

And what did you do right?

Another one is, you know, this idea of, with a double down question like, What did I do right? And so a good example is last week, my baby and my wife were sick with something we're in this, and there's something going around, and they were sick. My wife needed my help.

But also I could feel that maybe something was coming on. And one of my things is, as a productivity coach, I hate canceling calls. It's just a bad look for me, right? I mean, it's just, I hate canceling calls, I'd love to be my word, if I say I'm going to be somewhere, I want to be there. And so I just had a long week, an abnormally long week for me, and I was like, right on Friday afternoon, just three more calls, let's just push through, let's just get these done.

And I stopped and I said no, I'm rescheduling those calls, I need to help my wife. And frankly, I can feel that I'm at the edge too. Well, fast forward, my wife did very much appreciate. She was at her breaking point and did very much appreciate that. So I got big kudos. But more importantly, I did end up getting that cold. And my wife went way down, was, you know, sick for a week, and I was probably sick for like, a day, I've still got a lingering cough. But I was sick for maybe like one day.

And I think it's - I can't prove the counterfactual, but I think it's because I had the foresight to say, You know what, it's like being a skier at the end of a long day of skiing and think, I could do just one more run. And that last run is that run where you break your legs, right? You know, because you're thinking, Oh, I'm good for one more run. It's like, Nah, man, you should probably - if you think you've got one more run, you should stop right now.

And I felt like, oh man, if I just squeezed it out, I could get those last three calls. And I thought, No, you know what, let's step away. And I find myself in my review this week, I looked back and I said, Wow, actually, there was a really great call. I think I would have paid for it for another two weeks. If I just pushed a little bit harder, I might have gotten way sicker. Does that make sense?

James: It does, and I found if I need to reschedule something with my clients, which doesn't happen very often, they're super respectful and appreciative. They realize, because they know that I value my time so much, that if I'm doing something that calls me away from what we had already planned, that I've already thought it through, and there must be a valid reason for it, and they accept it.

Demir: Yeah, that is trust.

James: It is trust.

Demir: You got trust there.

James: Well, I have a lot.

Demir: That's amazing.

James: I'm really only working with people I trust these days. I mean, half of my business is tied to partners and I have a long-term, in-the-trenches relationship with those people. I love the most working with the same people over and over again. And that means that you can get all that initial stuff out of the way. And then you just move into the real high performance stuff. And it doesn't have an end date. It just keeps getting better and better and better. It's super exciting.

Demir: That's great. That's amazing.

James: So, have you partitioned your week in terms of the way you time block?

A guard against time blindness

Demir: Yeah, I mean, again, I'm sort of 10 years into time tracking. So we talk about a lot of the greats of the productivity space. I don't think Laura Vanderkam gets enough for her tremendous book, 168 Hours. I think it's one of the greatest books in productivity. If you haven't read it, and you're hearing it for the first time, push it to the top of your list, it is absolutely incredible.

And what she inspired me to do when I read that book is start time tracking. And so usually three or four times a year, I'll time track to get rid of the time blindness that we all accrue, just a sense of we think we know where our time is, but it sort of creeps, that time blindness and that time fuzziness creeps back in.

And so yeah, I've been doing that almost 10 years now, doing some form of time tracking. I think I got a better methodology when Laura Vanderkam's book came out. But even before that, I was doing some form of that, trying to optimize within a week. So we talked about learning a lesson. I think the best kinds of lesson that you learn come from real observation and real fine-grained data.

I mean, sometimes it's hard to convince a client to want to do that. But there's just no better data than to get in there and track your time. Sometimes I even have clients do what I call an energy tracker. I'll explain what that is in a minute. But really getting in there and seeing block for block of time, Where's my time going? Where might I be misusing time? Where could I take better advantage of time?

When you're the best source of information

But it also, over time, when you play that game, years and years and years, you start to get what I call a sort of a thumbprint of you. Because I think that in the productivity space, we're all looking for that perfect like, external template. And I love Tim Ferriss, so I say this with love in my heart, like, Tim Ferriss, please show me the template for how to live my life. And I will just do that thing, when really, you know, although you have so much to learn from Tim Ferriss...

James: I'm not subscribing to that. Tim Ferriss, go and have four or five kids, then come back to me and tell me about productivity. Like, it's a joke, otherwise, seriously. A 20-something-year-old kid knows nothing about living a normal life with a family. So you have to take it all with a grain of salt.

Demir: I respect that perspective. I respect that. But my point here is, there's nothing wrong with looking for information outside of you, but you are the best source of information. Your energy, your time utilization, your unique challenges. If you've got five kids, you know, if you've got to get up at four in the morning because you run a factory, I mean, there's things about your time that nobody else can anticipate, and for you to get in there and really start getting curious - when am I in my best energy? Right? Is it Monday or Friday? When is my best utilization of my time? When can I do certain types of work?

And so yeah, you know, over time, I've really been able to learn about myself. And here's, you know that somebody's really dialed it in when they tell you about their schedule, and you think, I've never heard of that before. So for example, one of the things that I do that a lot of people think is weird, is I'm a productivity coach.

I'm all about time, freedom and lifestyle. And I work four hours a day, seven days a week, for 28 hours total. And people think, Wow, you don't even give yourself a weekend? That's brutal, man. And what's interesting is, I would have thought that that was brutal, even just five years ago.

James: I think it's brutal. Sounds brutal to me.

Demir: Yeah, but here's - and I wouldn't even recommend it for somebody else, right - but by playing this game continually, I realized that the weekends were screwing up my entire habit stack. Like, giving myself out of every seven days, trying to get a habit together and build momentum for five days, and then dropping it for two days, and then putting it back together, I realized that I actually felt so much better when I just got up at the same time every day, did the same habit every day, and utilized what - you know, Stephen King, the writer, he doesn't call it deep work - but it really is, like every day, you have a certain amount of crucial, vital life energy, and I - instead of trying to squeeze the juice a little bit too hard on Monday through Friday and then relax a little bit more on the weekend, I've just found for me that my perfect day includes three to four hours of good work. Like, my perfect day, if I had a billion dollars and didn't have to work again for the rest of my life, I would design a day when I did three to four hours of some kind of stimulating work, because that is my definition of the perfect day.

Would I push this to anybody else? No, I'm not going to write a book called The 7-Day Workweek. I'm not here to tell anybody else that that's how they should be structuring their day. But for me, in a truly counterintuitive way, having stumbled backwards into it, I just find that it works so well for me. And I've come to really love it.

And just to give you a completely different example, I have a client who takes Wednesday off, the whole day of Wednesday. And she just found that with her client base, and the people she worked with, they hit her so hard on Monday and Tuesday, and required so much of her in the first two days of the week, that she was dead by Tuesday and then trying to drag herself to Thursday and Friday.

And so she said, Why am I doing this? Why not just give it on Monday and Tuesday, take Wednesday off, and then come back and give it again on Thursday and Friday? And before she told me that, I had never heard of another person taking a day right off in the middle of the week. She loves it. She's been doing it for years.

James: Well, pretty much every real estate agent does that, like, seriously.

Demir: [laughs] I didn't even know that.

James: Yeah, because they work on Saturdays, auctions and stuff, they always take a weekday off. Because I used to sell Mercedes-Benz, there was usually a day of the week where they're not at the office, not working. But I think for about four or five years now, I've taken four days a week off, and I've stacked my work week to three days. So I only block 15 hours.

I have 15 hours of work inventory per week. That's it, not negotiable. And it's been transformational. But I'm probably different to you. I'm still going to drink coffee, I'll still wake up when I wake up. And I'll still do surf-related things as a hobby. I like to read. But my daughter has hardly seen me work because I shadow her preschool, three days a week is when I do my calls.

The other four days, I'm just 100 percent present. And that's what makes me happy to be a fully present parent, you know, for all these early years. I can never get these years back. I've already learned that with my first batch of kids, you know, like, because I missed out on some of them because I was working seven days a week. And so I'm making up now. It's the Yang to the Yin.

I'm actually at a slightly different phase, even to where you're at. I've let go of a lot of the things that people do.

Demir: But doesn't this make the point?

James: Yeah, that everyone's going to have their own formula.

Demir: Yeah, yeah. Well, I think there's principles, right?

James: Definitely principles.

Demir: I think every single person should plan their week. I think there's principles that aren't going to hurt you and probably will only help you. But I think at a certain point, once you go past a certain point, the best source of information to be looking into is you.

James: On that point, we all have the hardware, right? But I do feel like some people are missing the software. And the aim of a podcast like this is to upgrade the software, new software. I have installed a lot of software into my brain to get to the operating system I've got now. And I want to share that. I mean, that's what I do with my own clients. I share that knowledge.

I was literally on a call yesterday, and one of my clients is feeling burnt out. And I've said, You pick a day of the week, and you put a line through it for the rest of eternity. And that is your day. That is your recharge, your reset, your refresh, your rejuvenate. It's unimpeachable, like, no one can take that day from you, no matter what. If they want to talk to you, it's the day after, right?

And he said, I'll do it. And I said, I'm not sure I fully believe you. But I'll find out from you next week how it went, right? And so we'll see. But I'm often prescribing that. There is a lot of resistance for people to let go of always working, and I've been there, you've been there. And that's because there's too strong an attachment for time equals money. And when I destroy that myth, and we find leverage, then it's sort of open season on the calendar.

Having a schedule against not having one

But I also want to talk to your point about the calendar and the principles. I resisted - a lot of people listening to this are entrepreneurs, right, so they're not in a job - I resisted having things in the calendar. I used to think my definition of success was like, I'll do what I want when I want with whoever I want. But that was a little bit short sighted, because by the open nature of my schedule, like, I was always available, and I was always able to work.

And when I committed to the schedule and said, Okay, I'm going to have on and off times, I will commit to having future on times. That's my compromise. But by default, when I have an on time that automatically makes the rest of my schedule an off time. And as I said, I've been doing it probably for half a decade now, almost. And it has been transformational. Like, to have four days off every week, it actually - the silence can be deafening.

Let's say you're sitting there, and you don't have to be anywhere, there's not something you have to do, you're not being told what to do for the first time in your life, for a lot of entrepreneurs or new entrepreneurs, this is frightening. Oh my god, I'm not under the pump, I'm not under pressure, I'm not grinding or hustling. I've actually can do whatever I want. Crap, what do I want to do, who do I want to talk to, what am I going to do now?

Demir: I wilted under that. I got it down to doing one day a week of work. And I found that I was deeply unhappy. Deeply, deeply unhappy.

James: Yeah, it's not for you. Definitely not for you. [laughs]

Demir: [laughs] I mean, I'm willing to come back to it again, in the future, because I'll be a different person, you know, when I come back to it. But at the time, when I did it, I realized that it did not make me happy. And then iterate it to something that was still 20 hours a week. But, you know, I like a little bit of everything. I like a pizza with all the toppings.

James: I think it's good to know your number.

Demir: I like my day to have a little of everything. Yeah.

James: I think the principle here is to have an inventory, have a weekly inventory of hours as a guideline, and then decide how you want to make that mosaic, right?

Demir: So true.

James: And sometimes, entrepreneurs show a screenshot of their scheduler, and it's blocked with like, 16 calls a day for five days a week, right?

And then squeezed in there is like, the kiddies' soccer game, or the little girl's concert night, or whatever. I'm like, I feel so sad for your family and your life right now, like, this is not a brag, this is absolutely not a flex, this is an admission of absolute and utter failure. Like, get your sh*t sorted.

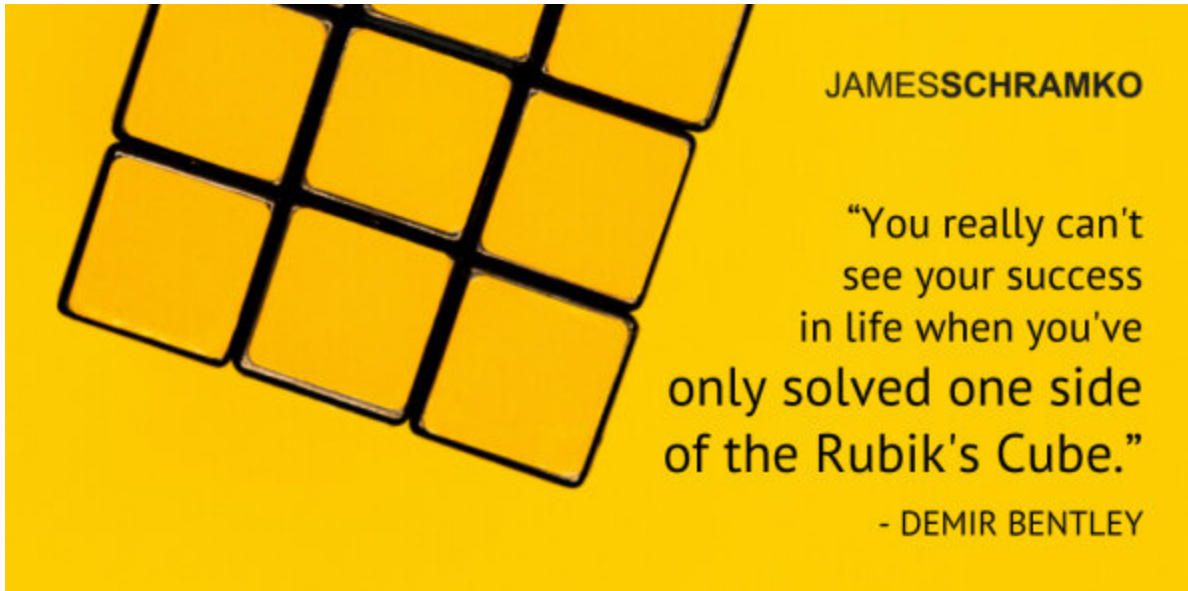
The lifestyle factor

Demir: You're going to love this story. And I'm not going to name names, because that would be rude. But I had a client come to me who had worked with somebody really high up in the space. And I honestly was like, Why are you working with us? I mean, at that point, I was like, you are working with this really highly-placed person in the space. They're amazing.

And she agreed, this person is amazing. They're building a whole empire. They're a powerhouse. They're incredible, and they're pursuing their dream, but I don't want their life. I've gotten close enough to them to see their life. And I don't want that. In fact, I'm a bit repulsed. Not by that person, they're amazing, but the life that they've built is repulsive to me.

And when I look at you and your wife, and working less than 28 hours a week, and you know, traveling all over the world, and having a kid, and we're hoping to homeschool our kids, that's actually a lot closer to the kind of life that I'm looking to build. And the fact that we've built a seven-figure business, which, you know, again, in our space is not a big deal, you know, that's not like a big number. Right?

James: But it's certainly something to feel proud about. It's awesome.



Demir: You know, living here, living in Colombia, you know, seven figures is like being part of the super rich, you know? I mean, really, you know, so it's just one of those things where, I call it like solving the Rubik's Cube. You know, you really can't see your success in life when you've only solved one side of the Rubik's Cube.

What's so frustrating about a Rubik's Cube is you think you've got one side solved, and then to fix the other side, you have to break the side that you solved. And so I think the reason we admire people who can solve a Rubik's Cube, is because it's so hard to solve the puzzle on every single side, at the same time. And a guy such as yourself, I can tell, like, you've got a lot of personal time, you've got some deeply meaningful work time, but you're not overdoing it, right? Gets to spend time with your kids and be present for your family.

That's the kind of thing that I think people look in and say, Wow, that's not just somebody I admire for their business prowess. That's actually somebody I admire, because they're solving the Rubik's Cube in a really elegant way on all sides.

James: And the Rubik's cube can be solved with an algorithm. You know, like, one of my kids could solve any Rubik's cube or any of those things within seconds, because he learned the algorithm. And that blew me away. It's like, wow, you know, some people will struggle their whole life and never be able to solve a Rubik's Cube, but it's actually a learnable algorithm, which is what you've done with Winning The Week. Right? So well done on that.

Demir: I certainly hope so.

James: Yeah. This is a great discussion. You know, we've come at it from some similarities, but also some differences, which is what makes this sort of environment interesting. It's been great to connect, very first time I've ever met you and I feel like I've known you for all my life, which is great.

Would you trade places with this person?

The real things to take away from this is to, yeah, if you are seeking out mentors or coaches or you're going down a path, I call this false goals, but it's really worth having a little game of, would I trade places with this person? And I can honestly say, I do play that game, you know, would I trade places, especially if you ever feel a little tinge of jealousy, or they're such a big baller, they're \$10 million dollar whatever...

Almost every single time when I look deeper into it, and I do get to see into places other people don't see, I'd say, You know what, I really wouldn't trade places with that person. And if I do find someone I would want to trade places with, I'll see, what can I learn from them? What are they showing me? What are the clues here, the breadcrumbs I can follow and improve my software upgrade that operating system to make changes, to be open with the possibility that I have to change something to get to the next stage.

Demir: Yeah, and I mean, it's funny that you say there, so I guess the final thought for me is, you know, when Carey and I broke free, and we achieved financial independence and career - and you know, we've got financial freedom, career freedom and time freedom, weirdly, like, we got filled with this sense of guilt, like it almost was like, why us and not other people? Like we felt so bad, you know, and part of what we did in the book was we really wanted and we really challenged ourselves to say, like, what is the one thing that we could do to support people in creating freedom in their life?

And I'm telling you, honestly, if you never pay me a cent, if you never see me again for the rest of your life, or for the rest of my life, I can tell you that the smallest thing you can do to secure your success is setting a plan for the week. I did not make it up. It's something that our forefathers have told us for many, many millennia.

But it's just something I think needs to have a resurgence right now. And especially in our chaotic, overwhelmed lifestyle, it brings a degree of control, it brings a degree of power in a world where you can very easily feel powerless and out of control.

James: I love it. Take back the control. I mean, we're seeing slow moving, slow living movement is rising. I've let go of a lot of things that used to hold me back. Like, I don't have project management tools. I don't have to-do lists. I don't beat myself up of all the things that I'll never get to, I'm just realistic about it, I probably won't get to it. Right? And that's okay.

So we actually control the ability to let go of that burden. And so taking control, taking responsibility, use the tools in the toolkit. Have a look at [Winning The Week](#). It's an interesting book. Demir, thanks so much for coming and sharing.

Demir: Oh, thank you, man. Thank you so much.

James: There we go. Episode 965, Demir Bentley from winningtheweek.com. And yeah, appreciate you listening, viewing and being a part of this.

MONDAY / 01

MONDAY
MEETING
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@ 9AM

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WEDNESDAY / 03

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