



179: Stop Overworking with Megan Hyatt Miller

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to the Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 179.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

But first, let's chat about today's sponsor, KiwiCo. I'm beginning to feel that antsy anticipation for summer all around me here in North Carolina. My girls are almost done with their junior year of high school, kids in the neighborhood are playing outside later, and talks of summer plans and activities fill my Voxer feed. I love how easy and fun KiwiCo has made it to keep STEM projects top of mind as we transition into summer. After we enjoyed the Maker Crates, I followed my own curiosity online to learn about the crates and projects available for younger kids and find some end-of-school gift ideas. With eight different great lines for all ages and interests, there's so much to choose from. The Atlas Crate caught my eye in particular for being rooted in adventure and appreciation for world cultures. It would be such a fun way to explore the world for the whole family all summer long.

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Now, onto today's episode where I'm talking with author, president and CEO at Michael Hyatt & Company, Megan Hyatt Miller, who is also the co-host of the popular business podcast Lead to Win. As Michael's oldest daughter, Megan and I have a few things in common, as we're both in business with our dads. Together, she and her dad have written a book called *When at Work, Succeed at Life*, and it's all about what it could practically look like to free yourself from the cult of overwork. Years ago, Megan found herself at a crossroads where she felt like she had to choose between being present with her family and being present in her work, and that's where we'll start off. Listen in.

Emily P. Freeman:

Hey, Megan. Thanks so much for joining me today.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Emily, thanks so much for having me. I'm really excited to talk to you today.

Emily P. Freeman:

Well, I feel the same way. Listen, I read something that you wrote and as soon as I read it, I immediately did what I needed to do to find you and bring you on the podcast. I know everyone's wondering, what did you read that she wrote? But I read about where you shared several years ago, you and your husband, you had a growing family, your role at your company was also growing, and you described a time where it was really clear you were at a moment of decision. The company needed a chief operating officer and you were the woman for the job, but you didn't know how you could step into that role without working long hours away from your family. You described it, I think the phrase that caught my eye was it was an impossible choice. I'm just curious if you could share, in that moment and during that time, what were some of the fears and hesitations that you felt?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yeah. Well, let me give a little more context for people who haven't read that story yet. My husband and I now have five children, they're ages 20 to two, and we're apparently just committed to being parents literally forever. We have a big family, but this was quite a few years ago when we only had four children. We had recently adopted our younger two from Uganda, that was 2011. Then fast forward a couple years, I'm working in the business with my dad, Michael Hyatt. We're in business together and he asked me to be the chief operating officer at that point.

It felt like the next right thing for the business and for me personally, but as many people know who have children who are adopted, if children are available for adoption, they have usually some kind of special needs, even if it's just the trauma of all the things that made them available for adoption. I'm looking at my kids and I'm thinking to myself, if these kids are going to heal, if they're going to be in a place where they can thrive, then I've got to really be available to them as their mom. I need to be able to pick them up from school, I need to be able to take them to therapies, I need to be able to really engage. I can't delegate that to someone else and I can't just do it later. It's like this is the window right now.

I really was facing this impossible choice of what am I going to choose, my career or my family? I went through a lot of scenarios in my mind, could my husband become a stay-at-home dad, could we get a nanny and how would that work, trying to think through all the things. At the time, the decision that felt really clear was neither of those things would be a good choice for the circumstances that we were in, that the kids really needed me. So I started thinking about is there a third way?

I happened to hear a woman CEO speak at a conference I was attending, and she was talking about how after a season of being really out of balance, that she had draw a hard line in the sand and decided that she was going to be done every day at 3:30, she was going to pick her kids up from school, and that there weren't any opportunities after that time of the day for her and her business that were more important than her kids. It just opened my mind to thinking about maybe there was this third way, this way to win at work and succeed at life, as we talk about in our new book by the same name, my dad and I have this book.

I really began pursuing that, and I went to my dad and I said, "Hey, I want to say yes to this, but if I'm going to say yes, then this is what it's going to have to look like. It's going to have to mean I can be done every day at 3:30. I need to pick up my kids after school," I mean, I literally took a page right out of this

other woman's book, "I'm going to need to not travel very much for work, because again, my kids need me. I'm not going to be able to do very many evening dinners with clients, things like that. I mean, I'm really going to have to constrain my work day into this very narrow window and get a ton of stuff done in that period of time. If you're up for an experiment on this, then so am I." He said, "Well, if you think you can produce the operating results, I'm game for giving it a try."

That was a lot of years ago now, and we've just continued and it's absolutely worked. It's been a really neat journey of choosing not to choose between my career and my family, but instead, looking for that third option we call in the book, the Double Win, winning at work and succeeding in life.

Emily P. Freeman:

This is fascinating to me because I feel like a lot of us, we kind of set our own boundaries, like I'm going to work between these hours, or just like what you said, which I think is beautiful, what a beautiful solution. My question to you, Megan, is were you able to stop at 3:30?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yeah.

Emily P. Freeman:

I know it sounds like you were.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

I was.

Emily P. Freeman:

Are there any things that you're like, this felt ... What, practically, did that look like?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Here's the thing that made it easier for me, and I think it's a great takeaway. I was so clear on my why for this, on the need for constraints. It wasn't just some nebulous work-life balance. I really defined what does a double win mean for me, as a mom, as a professional. I knew that those kids needed me and that compromising their needs was just flat out not an option. The consequences to that would have been very significant. I don't want to tell their story, that's their story to tell, but suffice it to say it would have been significant. They needed that for me.

What that meant is I had these really hard boundaries that forced me to have to get very creative in how I accomplished what I accomplished, but also very clear on what my priorities were when I was at work. There was no time to waste and there was no time to spend on things that were not high leverage. We all have the same amount of time, there's 168 hours in a week period and what are we going to do with that time, right? Well, I think there's not enough time to do everything. We all know that, we've all tried and failed. I mean, it's literally impossible and I think anybody that tells you otherwise is just either delusional or dishonest. But at the same time, there is enough time to do the most important things. That's where the clarity comes in, what are those most important things for you?

Emily P. Freeman:

Now, here's another question that comes to mind. What if you have too many most important things? How

do you discern which one is most most important?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

I think that's a really good question, and for sure, this is a process of self discovery of self-reflection. I mean, I don't think this kind of clarity is fast or easy. I think there's some work involved with it and it's really valuable, but defining your non-negotiables in three areas. Before I tell you what the three areas are, I just want to say a word about non-negotiables. Non-negotiables don't mean, as you're thinking about this, what are all the things I'd like to do in an optimal environment, in terms of how I take care of myself, my family, and how at work. We're not talking about ideal. We're talking about what is your baseline of non-negotiable, that if you don't have these things you're not going to be able to perform at your best. But it's also not pie in the sky, the stars have to align and everything has to be perfect, because we all know that's not going to happen very often.

When I think about this, I think about the minimum effective dose. This is going to be different in different seasons of your life. For example, when we adopted our youngest daughter, who's now two, she came home with some medical special needs. I mean, I wasn't sleeping, there was just so many things that were disruptive about that first season. Thankfully, we've moved on from that now, but be gentle with yourself around that. But the three areas for these non-negotiables are self-care, relational priorities, and professional results. Self-care, relational priorities, and professional results.

For example, in the relational priority category, there's so many important priorities, relationally. You can think about your friends, you can think about your extended family. For me, it just looked like a few things though that I was like, okay, these have to happen every week. Number one, I've got to pick my kids up from school. Number two, and again, these are totally subjective so there's no right answer for this, this is just for me, these are my answers, I want to go on a date night with my husband one night a week, and we do that. I want to go to church with my family on Sunday. I mean, that's really my relational non-negotiables. It's pretty limited.

I think if you feel like you have too many non-negotiables or too many priorities in your life, and that's common, I think it helps to look at okay, but really what are the non-negotiables? Then another one for me, relationally, is having dinner with my family at the table five nights a week. Now, what's not a non-negotiable that's a part of that is that I have to cook every meal or that it has to be fancy or that it has to be on real plates. That's all totally negotiable. What I want to do is sit down at the table and look my kids and my husband in the eyes and hear about their day, because I know that's important for our connection long-term. That's kind of what I'm talking about here. What can we let go, but then what do we really want to prioritize that's most important?

Emily P. Freeman:

Well, I know some listeners might hear all of those wonderful things and think, "Well, yeah, Megan, but that's not going to work for me because," because we all have the yeah, but what abouts, right?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yep.

Emily P. Freeman:

If you could tell us some of the myths that keep people overworked and unable to focus some of those

non-negotiables?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yeah. Well, I mean, I think first of all, that work is the primary, if not only, orientation for our life. I think that's what our culture says, that we're either getting ready to work, working, or recovering from work. In reality, we are full orbed human beings, and actually, our work and our performance at work, our ability to make a meaningful contribution, whether that's in your own home as a stay-at-home mom or whether you have a career outside of the home or you own a business or run a ministry or whatever it is for you, that your ability to contribute in a significant way is actually aided by attending to other parts of your life. Not that you have to spend equal time in all those areas, of course that wouldn't make any sense, but that you just need to be aware of work is not the only and primary orientation of our life, that there are other important things.

I think the other thing is that work-life balance is a myth, we tell ourselves that. A lot of the reason for that is because we've been disappointed by the solutions that we've been given. I think about all the articles I've read in magazines or people's Instagram videos or whatever, and it sometimes just feels like we're being sold a bill of goods, that really this is impossible because we've never been given the tools to do it. What we've tried to do in our book is really walk people through a very tactical process of not only defining what the double win is for them, but walking through the process of understanding the idea of constraints, defining constraints for yourself, and then really figuring out how to translate that into your schedule and your calendar in a way that makes sense for you and in your season of life.

We're not talking about perfection or idealism. I mean, with five kids and a business and all the things, I can promise you, there are not very many days where my life looks perfect, but I think we have to overcome our own limiting beliefs that it's not possible and we have to expand our mind that this idea of work and the rest of our life don't have to be in conflict. They don't have to fight with each other and be competitive with one another, they can actually be mutually reinforcing in a way that's really integrated and healthy and fulfilling.

Emily P. Freeman:

So much of life, I think, and the way we think about life, is about what we do. It sounds like to me, one of the principles that you're saying without saying it is also learning to undo some things. Then that is often creating space for ... I mean, just that one thing you said, Megan, which is to remember that all of life does not revolve around work, either getting ready for it, going to it or recovering from it. That right there can be really transformative if we really believe it.

A couple of things that have really helped me, one is the Full Focus Planner, hello.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yeah, yes. Thank you.

Emily P. Freeman:

That has been such an amazing tool for me, which I never thought I would be someone who buys four planners a year so that I could have 90-day plans for my life, but it's really helped because what it does is it reminds me of my own non-negotiables and it helps me on daily basis to prioritize, okay, what are those three most important tasks for today? If the other things don't get done, then I think knowing, well, they're there, they're written and I can move them till tomorrow.

I'm curious for you, practically, when you pick those kids up at 3:30 or whatever the time is, clearly you have work things swirling in the back of your mind. I mean, you have to, right?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yes, absolutely.

Emily P. Freeman:

Do you have any practices, we talk a lot here about practices on the Next Right Thing podcast, are there any even unconventional practices that you engage in to help you undo what you've been doing all day at work?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yeah, I think that's a really important topic and something we don't talk enough about, that transition. If we're going to have constraints in our life, if we're going to have a hard start and a hard stop to our workday so that we really can attend to other parts of her life and be present for the people we love and the things that are important, then you're right, we have to have some kind of transition, because it's really hard. Transparently, I struggle with this, transitioning from CEO head space to Mom head space and looking at homework and thinking about dinner and doing a project at the island in the kitchen. The question is, what are the things that can help make that transition easier? I'll tell you one that sounds probably what you might be thinking about and the other that might be just a little bit funny.

The one that is my best advice on this, I would say, is that we need a ritual in place to wind up the things at work so there aren't so many open loops in our minds. For me, this is my workday shutdown ritual. We talk about this in the Full Focus Planner. There are four rituals in the planner that we talk about, including a workday startup ritual, a workday shut down ritual, a morning ritual, and an evening ritual.

In your shutdown ritual, rather than leaving emails unanswered, Slack messages unanswered, phone calls that still need to be made, I try to do those things in a short period of time, like 20 or 30 minutes at the end of my day, so that when I leave my office, I'm not trying to wrap those things up. I find that what is so counterproductive to being present with my kids after school is if I'm trying to do email on the kitchen counter while I'm also walking them through homework and getting snacks and thinking about dinner. I find that I get snappy and irritable. I'm just like, "Hey, don't bother me for a second. I need to think about this." I can't be in two places at one time, as much as I would like to try. That workday shutdown ritual has been really helpful for me.

The other thing, and this is kind of a funny idea, I change into loungey pajamas when I get home from work. I pick my kids up from school, I get home, it's about four o'clock by the time we get everybody and get in the door. I go straight to my closet and I take off the clothes I've been wearing for work and I put on some cute, comfy PJ's that if somebody came over I wouldn't be totally embarrassed for them to see me in. But it's like a mental cue that says, "Okay, now you're home. Now you're not Megan against the world, now you're mom Megan." That's a softer place, that's a more open place. I've done that for years and years and it really helps. Sometimes I'll take a walk too. My husband, Joel, loves to walk and so sometimes we'll take a walk after I get home with the kids. That's really nice as well. But I do think everybody has to answer that question for themselves because it's tough to be present if you don't.

Emily P. Freeman:

That whole situation around the kitchen island where you're having an inbox open and making peanut butter and jellies, that is a situation for sure.

Megan Hyatt Miller:
Yeah, right. It's a situation.

Emily P. Freeman:
I think we can all relate to that quick feeling of feeling like you're going to snap at someone or you have 10 million things floating around. My morning ritual is one that I feel like I have established well, it's my shutdown ritual that I'm still in process with that one. But that one, that's probably the most important one.

Megan Hyatt Miller:
I think it's really important. The biggest challenge to that, I even found this week, I got a little bit over-scheduled this week, I'm getting ready to go on sabbatical for a month and I looked at my calendar and I didn't have enough time blocked for that. That is the key, the key is putting that 20 minutes on your calendar at the end of the day and not scheduling your meetings or your appointments right up until the time you have to leave and go do something else. I think that's the battle to win. It's not so much what you're doing, it's making space and holding that space for that time, in my experience.

Emily P. Freeman:
It's so much more difficult to hold space on the calendar than it is to fill space on the calendar.

Megan Hyatt Miller:
Absolutely. Man, that is so true.

Emily P. Freeman:
It takes double the effort. Do you have a certain time, do you actually turn your phone off or not open your computer until a certain time the next day?

Megan Hyatt Miller:
I don't have that ritual. I don't know, I've gotten pretty good at not doing work things on my devices. One thing that helps me with that though, I do not have any notifications turned on. We use Slack primarily for our internal communication tool at our company and I don't have any notifications turned on on that. I don't check it, I don't check my email when I'm off. We have a deal in our company that if there is an emergency, someone will call or text, so I know if no one's calling or texting there's nothing that's on fire that I have to look at until the next day. But I think that can be a great strategy.

I also turn my ringer off so I'm not seeing that stuff, as long as everybody's home. I also have kids that are driving and out, so it might change that if they're they're out doing something so I can hear them, but that has really helped me. But I think that can be a great strategy, but the notification thing is big. If you're getting pinged every time you get an email, every time you get a Slack message, it'll just drive you bananas and you can't maintain that ability to be present with people because you're constantly pulled out of it.

Emily P. Freeman:
Yeah. Notifications are not our friend, I have found.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

They're not. They're the devil, I think.

Emily P. Freeman:

I think they're of another world and it's not a good one.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Right, no.

Emily P. Freeman:

Well, I talk a lot about having certain kinds of mentors in our lives, specifically for me, a no mentor, which is someone who helps me find my strong no and set some boundaries, and then yes mentor, which is a person who encourages me to say a brave yes when I might be more inclined to retreat or not say yes to something. I'm curious if you have any yes and/or no mentors in your life and people maybe who have modeled this double win lifestyle for you.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yeah, that's so great. I think I've had a number of different people over the years, and I love this way of categorizing it, I've never thought about it in this way exactly and I absolutely love it. I think my yes mentors are probably my husband and my dad. Probably nobody more than my husband has championed my yeses. He pushes me to say yes to things that scare me all the time. I feel like, and I tell people often, I'm scared every single day of something because I'm constantly pushing myself to do things that are out of my comfort zone, that I'm not quite sure I can do.

Right now I'm in the process of leading a big racial diversity initiative within our company and really starting some hard conversations and getting wise counsel from other people. That's a scary thing to do, as a white CEO. I mean, I've never done that before. I don't have any leadership skills that are necessarily directly applicable to that. I'm doing something that's totally new and that's scary. Joel, my husband, has just been really instrumental in saying, "No, you need to do it. You need to lean into this. You're going to make mistakes, it's okay, but this is really important." I think that's been helpful.

My dad is another person who not only are we business partners, not only are we father and daughter, but he's also one of several coaches that I have. He really encourages me that I can do stuff, that I can say yes to things that seem impossible and I can find my own way to do that. That's been really important for me. I'm an Enneagram 4, and so doing things in my own way matters to me, it needs to be congruent with my values and how I think about things. I think he's been a huge champion for that.

In terms of the no mentors, I'm trying to think if I have anybody that has been someone I have a personal relationship with. I think there are people that I read or that I access in other ways that certainly have had that influence in my life. But the woman that I mentioned in the conference that I attended, in the story I told at the beginning of our conversation, who was the CEO and had decided to be done every day at 3:30, I think this is the importance and the power of seeing people who are like us in some way, but maybe ahead of us, draw a hard line in the sand. It really inspires and empowers us to say, "Oh, well, if she can do it, then maybe I can do it. That worked out okay for her."

It's like we have to see somebody go first, especially when it comes to setting what seem like risky

boundaries, like what will people think of me? I remember thinking, well, my male executives who report to me, will they take me seriously professionally if I'm leaving to go get my kids every day at 3:30, or now 3:00? As it turned out, they did. They've been amazing about it and all the things, but it was so helpful to see somebody else do it first. I think she's been that in a way for me as well.

Emily P. Freeman:

We have a lot in common, Megan. We are both in business with our dads.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

It's so great.

Emily P. Freeman:

I co-run hope*writers with my dad and then our business partner, Brian Dixon. People often say, "What's that like?"

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Right.

Emily P. Freeman:

To me, it's really normal. It's like, "What do you mean, what's that like?" I don't know what that's like, it's like a fish in water. But any unique challenges or gifts working with your dad?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yeah, I love it. People ask me this question a lot, and I think one of the reasons, besides just curiosity and you probably get the same thing, people have really terrible horror stories of working with family. Our own clients ask me a lot about this because they're trying to figure it out or they're coming out of a hard situation. It can go sideways pretty easily. I always say, if you have a good and healthy relationship, it could be awesome, and if you don't, run, because it's going to make it more of whatever it is.

But the thing that I love about it is we already have such a natural way of communicating. We didn't have to learn how to communicate, we were already communicating. He's done such a great job of seeing me as an equal, as a peer, that we're really partners. I'm really grateful for that. I think the other thing that has made it work well is that we give each other feedback in real time. The other day he sent me a text message that rubbed me the wrong way. It was totally unintentional on his part, but I just interpreted it through a negative lens. We talked about it, it was fine. Then I did something similar a couple of weeks before that. We talked about it, it was fine. We just really keep short accounts with each other and we're really for each other. I think that makes for a great partnership of any kind, but especially when you have that dual relationship of family members plus business partners or working together.

I also think we've been intentional about being formal in certain areas, like contracts, expectations related to our roles in our partnership. I think people get in trouble sometimes when they don't make their expectations explicit in writing and then they have different interpretations or memories of it. That can be problematic in hindsight or down the road. I think that's really important.

But I really love working with my dad, it's so fun. We think so much alike, we have so many fun ideas together that I would say it's just an absolute joy.

Emily P. Freeman:

Well, that's beautiful. I love that description of whatever the relationship is, it will probably be more of that.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Right, right.

Emily P. Freeman:

So just pay attention as you move forward.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Just keep that in mind.

Emily P. Freeman:

Right. Well, we don't often have guests on the Next Right Thing Podcast, so it is truly an honor to have you with us today, but I'm curious to ask you something I ask almost every guest that we've had, which is, Megan, what is your next right thing?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Such a good question. I think probably a couple of things. I've been in my new role as the CEO of our company for a few months now. I think the next right thing for me is to continue to delegate some of the operational responsibilities that I had previously as the chief operating officer and really lean into the visioning of our company for the future, to lean harder and harder into that futuristic space of imagining the possibilities of the future and then starting to put some hard edges on those so that I can mobilize my team to go make that happen. That's one of the great privileges of the job that I have and the work that my team and I get to do together. I think that's the next right thing.

The other next right thing is that I am training right now for a Tough Mudder. I really have focused on my fitness in the last eight or 10 months or so. In November, my husband, Joel, and I are going to go compete in Texas in a Tough Mudder, which is like an obstacle race, like a Spartan race or something like that. There's mud involved. I'm basically terrified and excited about doing that, but that is the next right thing. Actually, I know it's the next thing, I'm not a hundred percent sure it's the next right thing.

Emily P. Freeman:

Maybe you could report back, was it the right thing or in hindsight?

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Yes. Right, exactly.

Emily P. Freeman:

That's excellent. Well, best of luck to you in that, Megan.

Megan Hyatt Miller:

Thank you.

Emily P. Freeman:

And thank you for sharing your time with us today as we move forward, hopefully, towards double wins

in our own next right things.

Thanks for listening to episode 179 of the Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of refusing to overwork can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow, because while it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, the deeper truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives. You can learn more about Megan Hyatt Miller at michaelhyatt.com, where you can find articles she's written about habits, team culture, and goal setting, as well as that book she co-wrote, *Win at Work, Succeed at Life*. Speaking of goal setting, you can also find a link in the show notes to the Full Focus Planner that we talked about, and that's the daily planner that I use for my life these days.

Well, as always, you can find me at emilypfreeman.com and on Instagram @emilypfreeman, where most of the conversation and connecting happens these days. Well, in closing, I'll leave you with a quote from *Win at Work, Succeed at Life*. "Work is only one of the many ways to orient your life. There are several domains besides work, but family, friends, community, physical and emotional health, and all the rest are easily marginalized while pursuing career ambitions. The cult of overwork obscures the fact that success is only sustainable when most of these domains thrive together, which is a challenge. Life is multi-dimensional, and success is too."

Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.