



## 185: Why Makers Struggle to Get Things Done

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 185. 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. If you're listening in real time, I'll be taking the next few weeks off and we'll come back just in time to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the podcast. I still remember where I was sitting in our public library, when I submitted the first episodes to iTunes back in August of 2017. But we'll talk about that in our next episode.

For now, if you are in a season of decision fatigue because of work, church, schooling, parenting, or just life circumstances in general, this episode is for you. Listen in.

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I read a line the other day that I keep thinking about. It's from Wendell Berry's novel *Hannah Coulter*, that I have been quoting a lot from lately. Here's the line, "People are living as if they think they're in a movie. They're all looking in one direction toward a better place and what they see is no thicker than a screen." What they see is no thicker than a screen. I'd love to know what Wendell Berry had in mind when he wrote that, or rather what the character Hannah had in mind when she thought it.

But I deeply resonated with it, even though I can't fully explain why. Maybe that's part of what I'm noticing in myself over the last several months, I'm resonating with a lot of things. I'm holding pieces and parts, fragments, and flotsam. I'm collecting, but I'm not arranging. I like the collecting, collecting is good and necessary. Collecting is part of what I do, I collect stories. I collect ideas, images, conversations, beauty, poetry, and quotes, but collecting is not creating. Collecting is not making. To speak plainly, yo, it's been a minute since I've made stuff, and that is true with two small exceptions.

One exception is actually this podcast. For four years, these 10 to 15 minute podcast episodes have kept me sane. Crafting something with a bit of a slant, something to help create space for your soul and mind, to take a breath before we make our next move. I've loved doing this. I will love continuing to do this, but it's not very much content every week. Second, as maybe silly as it sounds, posts on Instagram or something that I have continued to create. I don't post every day, but I do post every week in those small squares, photos, images, and captions are a form of making for me these days. Sometimes it's the only form I get.

I do write privately, and of course that counts too, but it's inconsistent at best. I hope you don't hear this as a complaint, but just a statement of the facts. In 2009, Paul Graham wrote an excellent essay called *Maker's Schedule, Manager's Schedule*. Every now and then I pull it up to read to remind myself, no, I'm not crazy, and I haven't lost my creative edge. I've just become accustomed to working in a manner that is directly opposite from how I'm wired. Now, if you've never read the essay, here's the gist. Paul Graham writes that there are basically two types of schedules, a *Maker's Schedule* and a *Manager Schedule*.

Here's a quote directly from the essay, "The manager's schedule is for bosses. It's embodied in the traditional appointment book with each day, cut into one hour intervals. You can block off several hours for a single task if you need to, but by default you change what you're doing every hour. When you use time that way, it's merely a practical problem to meet with someone. Find an open slot in your schedule, book them, and you're done." Now, I wonder if that sounds familiar to you. I think about my Google Calendar, all the Zoom links we're all getting all the time, Calendly signups. The year of the pandemic, I think everyone operated on a manager's schedule, grownups and kiddos alike.

We almost had to order our lives that way to get anything done, and maybe even to keep ourselves grounded in something. Listen, there's nothing wrong with that type of scheduling. Not at all. Paul Graham suggests that most bosses are on the manager's schedule. That's just how it works. He calls it the schedule of command, but he writes, "There's another way of using time that's common among people who make things, like programmers and writers." He says, "They generally prefer to use time in units of half a day at least. You can't write or program well in units of one hour. That's barely enough time to get started."

I'm going to keep quoting, "When you're operating on the maker's schedule, meetings are a disaster. A single meeting can blow a whole afternoon, by breaking it into two pieces each too small to do anything hard in. Plus you have to remember to go to the meeting. That's no problem for someone on the manager's schedule. Because there's always something coming in the next hour, the only question is what. But when someone on the maker's schedule has a meeting, they have to think about it. For someone on the maker's schedule, having a meeting is like throwing an exception. It doesn't merely cause you to switch from one task to another, it changes the mode in which you work."

Now, that was a long quote, but I thought it was worth sharing. Maybe you're not in your head right now, because you're realizing that you're a maker who's been operating like a manager. Either because of necessity, your job description, or because you think a manager's schedule is the only right way to divide your time. Now, speaking personally, I've known for years now, thanks to this essay, that I do my best work when I can arrange my schedule as a maker. But increasingly over the last several years through co-founding *hope writers* and attending grad school. This has been a season for me of doing my work on a manager schedule. Again, it's not a wrong schedule, but it does limit the kind of work that I'm able to do.

Now, I have managed to find a few workarounds. For example, one day of my work week is reserved for no meetings at all. I cannot tell you how helpful that day has been for my creativity, not to mention my personal wellbeing. But if I'm honest, over the last six months or so with the demands and transitions of my work with the pandemic. I have not been as vigilant to honor the boundaries of that one day, and meetings have crept into no meeting Wednesday. But things are beginning to shift, I can feel it, and taking a little bit of time next month as part of that. But it's not nearly the whole. So why am I telling you this? Well, it's because I sense there are probably a fair amount of makers who can relate. That's not to say that

those who thrive with manager's schedules aren't also prone to burnout and overwhelm too. That's just not fully what this episode is about.

Instead, I want it to give voice to anyone who's struggling with decision fatigue in a similar way that I am these days. That's because your actual day-to-day schedule requires from you a level of divided attention, and relational energy that keeps you from engaging in your creative work. Of course, we understand that we will always have to go to some meetings. This is part of our modern life, but in the words of Paul Graham, all we ask from those on the manager's schedule is that they understand the cost. Maybe now is a good time for me to reframe that question for you. Do you understand the cost, you the maker? Have you been bullying yourself on the inside, because you can't seem to gain any traction or make progress on your creativity ideas? Are you worried, maybe you don't have any creative ideas left to make progress on?

If you sense it's time to make a change in your rhythm of life, but you aren't sure what changed to make or how. I would love to help. There's no need for me to reinvent solutions for you. The best solutions are going to come from you. Because the truth is, you already have everything you need. You just might not have the space to access your inner knowing, because of all the outer noise that's coming at you in the form of your manager's schedule. If you ask me, it's time to practice some intentional reflection to begin to name what's really going on, what you really want to do, what you need most, and how God might be inviting you into this next season of your life. Whatever that season is, whether it holds a major transition or even just a small tweak.

Now, if you've been listening to me for a while, you already know my favorite go-to tools for reflection are making lists. By the way, not one of them is a pro-con list. So what are they? I'll briefly review a few of them here. First, a life energy list. This is a tool to help you pay attention to your actual right now life, to intentionally discern your yes and your no before it comes time to make any decisions at all. To name what is really going on without passing judgment on yourself. All you have to do to make this life energy list is to ask yourself two questions. In the past month, or of course you can choose a different period of time.

First question, what has been life draining? The second question is, what has been life giving? These two questions alone could help you move through your days with more awareness of what's working in your schedule and how it's impacting your soul. Second list, a gratitude list. This is the eat right and exercise of spiritual formation. The often given, but seldom taken advice. Countless studies show keeping a list of things you're thankful for can have a profound impact on your mood, your sleep habits, your levels of generosity, and your mental health. If you're a maker who's been keeping manager hours, start a gratitude list.

Finally, a happy list. This is a fun list. A list of things you've read, watched, listened to, or my favorite, things you've made. Did you make a budget or a scarf? Did you make room in your closet? Did you read a fantastic book or article, listen to a podcast episode, or a song? Did you watch a great movie or a favorite show? Write it down. What a list of happy things to remember, and this list in many ways, documents the things you're collecting. While collecting is not creating, oftentimes creating begins from something you've collected. So what are those things that you're collecting and paying attention to? A few things that have appeared on my made list lately, I made a plan for July. I made Pioneer Woman's tomato soup. I made a joke that John laughed at. I made time for myself. I made a few key decisions and I wrote them all down.

That brings us down to one reason why all this matters so much. Because whether you're someone who keeps a maker's schedule or a manager's schedule, the truth is we all have a need to create space to make. In my episode about How to Stay Grounded During the Election Season, I mentioned a podcast episode of On Being with Krista Tippett and her guest Arlie Hochschild. Arlie is an author and is the creator of the field of the sociology of emotion. She talked in the episode about the social impact of emotion submitting that our stories are felt rather than merely factual. Here's the quote I shared in that episode, she said, "We all need to be makers. If you want to make a social contribution and help build a public conversation about the big issues of the day, you have to really be good at emotion management. It's a contribution to the larger whole to be really good at that."

Well, guess what, if we aren't tending to our soul, if we're moving through life borrowing someone else's rhythms, then we are simply not able to show up emotionally aware. Which means our ability to access creative solutions, to draw sound conclusions, and to make key decisions will be greatly hindered. Yes, it matters how we organize our calendar. So make a life energy list, make a gratitude list, make a happy list, and all of these lists are not just for lists sake. It's to help you pay attention to what's happening in your life. It's to help you access your inner knowing. It's to help you hear the voice of God. Of course, you can pull out a blank sheet of paper and start those lists today, or you can use The Next Right Thing Guided Journal that I created. That has guided space for you to make those very lists on a monthly basis. You can find the journal wherever books are sold.

But here's the invitation, to the extent that you are able, with the amount of your schedule that is within your control, find a way to arrange your time and your days that will support how you are uniquely designed. You might only get a little window of that on a weekly basis. I encourage you to take it mostly. Remember, you're not a robot. You're meant to breathe in and out. Some seasons are for a deep inhale and others are for a long exhale. God built a rhythm into creation around us and it's mirrored within us in birth, life, death, hellos, goodbyes, joys, and sorrows. We carry this rhythmic pattern with each inhale and exhale that sustain us. So name the season you're in now, and know that it's right and good for seasons to change.

Sometimes the chains won't come unless you take some action, but don't be fooled by the world. The action we're often invited to take is the action of pausing, of waiting, and of clearing the decks. Here's to paying close attention and naming what we see as we do our next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 185 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this understanding of the difference between a maker's schedule and a manager's schedule. 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 bigger truth is our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

As I've mentioned before, I'll be taking my own pause from creating new episodes for a short time. But until then you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman or online at emilypfreeman.com. If you want to join me in making these three lists and more, grab a copy of The Next Right Thing Guided Journal. Which is a beautiful journal designed to walk you through a practice of reflection over 12 months time, to help you keep your life in mind as you make your decisions. Now listen, you can start the journal at

the beginning of any month. Do not let conventional rules keep you from growth and from your own transformation. By convincing you that you have to wait until the end of the year to reflect on your life. No, ma'am. Grab the journal that you started and never picked up again, or pick up a copy of *The Next Right Thing Journal* for the very first time and just move forward already.

Your life is waiting for you to see it, to name it, and to do your next right thing. While enclosing, I'll read Psalm 23 in a version that you might not be as familiar with, but one that helps me see the words of the Psalm in a bit of a new light. It's the New Century Version, and it reads like this.

The Lord is my shepherd. I have everything I need. He lets me rest in green pastures. He leads me to calm water. He gives me new strength. He leads me on paths that are right for the good of his name. Even if I walk through a very dark valley, I will not be afraid because you are with me. Your rod and your shepherd's staff comfort me. You prepare a meal for me in front of my enemies. You pour oil of blessing on my head. You fill my cup to overflowing. Surely your goodness and love will be with me all my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever. This is the word of the Lord.

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