CHRIS'LL DEAL WITH IT episode notes

STUDIOS

EP 10 - Taking Time For Making Mine

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> *Back on Episode 1, you talked about ideas turning into viruses. Well, I've been infected with one. My new project's going to require a ton of work over a long period of time. This doesn't scare me, but I'm struggling to carve out the time to do the work. I have a family & kids to care for, demanding job that requires 50-60 hours a week, and a dizzying array of other responsibilities. Can you share some mindsets & techniques that can help me find consistent time & discipline to make this project a reality?*

- The business of our lives is likely the #1 reason most people don't complete & ship their passion projects. It's hard work!

- There's quite a few mindsets & techniques that can help, but they're all going to have different levels of effectiveness depending on your project, situation, and personality.

Breakdown - 7 Techniques That Have Worked For Me:

1. **Consistency > Fits & starts**

2. **Accountability**

3. **Deadlines**

4. **Tailor your workflow to the needs of the work**

5. **Prioritize**

6. **Carve out the time**

7. **Understand your boundaries**

1. Consistency > Fits & starts

- Do the work even when you don't feel like doing it

- If you only do your project in spurts, it's hard to maintain momentum. You'll tend to spend unbalanced amounts of time on different sections of the work.

- It also stretches out the already long time you're anticipating for your project. This can lead to frustration since over that time you'll likely have new ideas that have to be put on the back-burner.

- Have a minimum & maximum every day

  - Your minimum target should be something you can easily fit into your usual time window for the work: A word count, minutes painting, repetitions of a movement

  - Your maximum target should also fit into your usual time window, and be a reflection of when you're really focused & in the zone

  - Example: When I'm writing a novel, my targets are usually 500 to 1,500 words per day, 5-6 days a week.

- Counts are traceable, something you can track over time. Some people write these on a calendar for a visual so they don't break the streak. They're also sharable, which can be a strategy for my next point:

2. Accountability

- There's varying schools of thoughts regarding telling others:

  - Extreme 1: Never tell another soul until the project is 100% complete

    - Upside: Nobody will be disappointed if you abandon the project

- - Downside: Lack of support & understanding. It also eliminates possibility of asking for help/advice in the project's development.
  - Extreme 2: Telling everyone all the time
    - Upside: Accountability - being asked how it's going, getting offered advice & resources to help your project
    - Downside: Falling into the trap of talking about a project instead of actually doing the work. All that feedback can lead to paralyzing fear of failure that can sink your motivation before you even start
- Find a balance somewhere between these extremes
  - If our asker's case: They'll probably need family support to carve out the time & resources needed for the project.
  - It may also impact their day job - are there opportunities to carve out some time from the work week to work? The most common technique will be working on your project during your lunch break. Colleagues might start wondering why you're going off on your own.
    - This comes with some warnings, which I'll discuss more in point 7.
  - You'll need to get creative if you're tied into childcare constraints - so think of project time as a series of trades & sacrifices: Take a long lunch 2-3x per week, and trade that extra time at lunch for some e-mail catch-up work at night after the kids are in bed.
    - E-mail is lower-energy so shifting it to a time when you're creatively exhausted is a great trade-off.

3. Deadlines

- Deadlines for passion projects tend to fall into one of the following categories:
  - **Self-imposed:** I want to have a complete first draft in three months
  - **Performative:** The curtains go up / the contest entry deadline is on a set day & time. *The show must go on!*
  - **Mandated:** You're under contract to submit your project by a specified date

- If you're considering self-imposing a deadline - be honest with yourself: Will it help push you to do good work, or just pile on unnecessary anxiety?

4. Tailor your workflow to the needs of the work

- Turning ideas into finished work can take so many forms.

- There's a balance to be found between the needs of your lifestyle, and the form you're creating in. Writing a book is very different than putting on a ballet recital or creating oil paintings

- There's never a one-size-fits-all solution for all creative projects you'll have in your life. And your life certainly changes across your many projects.

  - What worked for my last book probably isn't going to work the same way on my next one.

  - The more you gain skill in a task, you'll gain proficiency & confidence

  - There may be changes in family, work, or living arrangements. This will impact the time, location, or resources available to develop your project.

- A significant project likely has multiple elements to work on, such as:

  - Developing ideas

  - Research

  - Planning or Building a scaffold *(such as an outline / draft / initial sketch / concept document)*

  - Creation

  - Editing & Refinement

  - Marketing

  - Selling

- Each phase of a project has different requirements for the time, focus & energy required - not all of them have to be done at the same point of a project.

  - However, you'll want to try and wireframe these requirements at the start of your project.

- Identify which areas you can work on at specific times & places. Can you work on 2 or 3 of those areas concurrently?
- This will allow you to better segment your workflow

5. Prioritize

- It's easy to get bogged down in the minutia that comes at us each & every day

- It's far better to go into a day having clearly identified the 3-5 things that are vital to a successful day.

- When balancing a day job, family, and your project - don't feel any guilt in making sure your project is always one of the items on that list!

- Schedule those priorities as best you can - push back less essential duties

- What can you say no to in your daily life? TV, social media, busy-work projects that aren't a good use of your skillset?

- I recommend trying to batch tasks - especially e-mail!
    - Again, try to align work on these batches to times of the day that match the energy & focus needed to complete them
    - Doing this reduces the amount of context switching

- Context switching
    - Adds time required to complete tasks, sapping mental energy along the way
    - Tabbing between windows, or back & forth between focus work / e-mail / Slack / your phone . . . It makes us manic and unfocused.
    - I feel it's one of the major unrecognized drains of time in our lives.

6. Carve out the time

- No matter how much any of us can optimize our days it may not be enough to do our project justice.

- This is especially true for me - that's why I'm a member of the 5am club whenever I can

- I don't prescribe to the "morning person" / "night owl" designations people use to describe themselves. These limit us for no good reason.

- For sure we have patterns to our days, weeks, seasons, and periods of our lives.

- All I'm saying is to recognize you have the power to change those patterns to fit your dreams.

- Those early morning hours in particular can be precious: They're quiet, unhurried, and full of creative potential.

  - You're coming right out of a dream state, where your brain has been busy making subconscious connections.

  - In my case, I'll always try to do creative writing in these early morning sessions, to take advantage of my deeper connection to that subconscious creative energy. I'll save editing & production tasks to later in the day or after the kids are in bed and I'm creatively drained.

- If your particular project can't be done in the wee hours of the morning - then consider moving certain day-job or household tasks to those early hours. This can open up time later in the day for your project.

  - Just be sure to let everyone know what you're doing: Avoid trapping yourself by getting a jump on the day and then getting sucked into a twelve-hour, non-stop workday. That's a fast-track to burn out!

- Since our asker has a family & kids, they likely want to reduce the impact of their early rising. I'd recommend a wrist alarm, which I use to silently wake me.

- I also recommend good sleep hygiene such as keeping any & all screens out of the bedroom, helping you to get better rest.

7. Understand your boundaries

- Identify potentials for conflicts of interest at the start

  - For example: Does your personal project rely on proprietary knowledge or resources that belong to your employer?

  - Will your project, once completed, directly compete with your employer?

- Be diligent and try to view the project from your employer's perspective: Never forget that their perception = their reality. Even if you don't intend for there to be a conflict, one may be perceived if you're not clear on your intentions at the start.

- Don't steal time: From your family, your employer, or your mental & physical health.

  - Just because you're passionate about your project doesn't mean you have to spend every available moment on it

  - Rest & relaxation are even more important, since you're effectively working an additional job by working on the project.

  - Be intentional with your R&R: Watch videos relevant to your project, or things that inspire you creatively. It's okay to take mental and/or physical notes on things you learn during these times!

- Be wary of multiple projects at the same time

  - Is it better to do a few things well or a bunch of things with mediocrity?

  - Avoid fracturing focus: Dedicate different times or spaces for different projects

- Make sure you properly pace your work & expectations for completion

💬 Episode 10 Quote:

from Shane Parrish from one of his recent Farnam Street newsletters:

> *Tomorrow-self knows that no one builds a wall all at once. It's going to take a month of consistent effort from the time you start before it's done. Tomorrow-self wishes you'd stop thinking about the wall and focus on one brick.*