

CHRIS DEALS WITH IT

episode notes




EP 70 - Year, Quarter, Week, Day

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For the first episode of 2025, I'm reviewing the year, quarter, week & day technique I use for structuring my time & objectives.

There are four time scales along which I structure my time:

1. Year: I give each year a theme, which provides part of the scaffold underpinning my aspirations and targets for the year ahead.
2. Quarters: These four pivot points during the year allow for reflection. Deep dives that validate progress, alter methods, or re-establish direction.
3. Weeks: Where themes, goals, and methods meet the reality of life. Large goals are broken down into concrete actions that become scheduled into a weekly plan.

4. Days: The magic happens! Time is allocated, reactions are made, and life is lived.

1. The Year

- Often, the quietest period of my year is the week between Christmas & New Years.
- While I'm typically reflective leading into the holidays, it's during this final week where I do a full, end-of-year review.
- This review starts with reflection:
 - How did my theme carry through the year?
 - Review my goals
 - Go through each of my 13 principles, one-by-one, assessing where I'm living in accordance with them, and where I'm falling short. (I did a long series on these principles - Episodes 32-45)
 - It's worth noting that my principles have been in place for a long time now. They are core to who I am and who I wish to be in the world. These have proven to be a powerful guide, regardless of where I'm at or what's going on in my life. Or what my theme for the year is.
- Regarding theme:
 - Each year I develop the theme for the upcoming year.
 - The theme tends to be a single word: An overarching approach towards the year.
 - It's not something tied to a specific goal or singular aspect of life.
 - Themes are intended to be flexible: A mentality to help adapt to things as they happen during the year
- After reflection and landing on a theme, I usually have multiple pages of notes on things I'd like to do, changes that I'd like to make, and ideas I want to explore. From here I get more concrete on planning the year ahead:
- Over the past year, I've begun to shift away from a goal-heavy approach:

- Goals can involve a lot of effort to track
- Make it harder to explore new opportunities that come up during the year
- Or to reach to life changes
- It can be daunting when you inevitably fall behind or lose interest in goals that weren't realistic or well defined.
 - It's really hard to predict what you're going to want to do months later.
- Instead, I've become more focused on [Lifestyle Centric Career Planning - the phrase coined by Cal Newport's work.](#)
 - Identify your desired lifestyle
 - Then, work backwards to see how your family, career, skills, education, methods, etc... all need to adapt to migrate closer to that lifestyle.
 - This helps provide clarity on the why: Lifestyle decisions are put into clearer context.
 - When you're clear on what is most important, it's easier to communicate these desires not just to yourself, but to your family, friends, employer, mentors, etc...

2. The Quarter

- In a 52 week year, we're gifted with quarters of 13 weeks each.

(Fans of the show will understand my obsession with the number 13)

- Each quarter has unique features: Weather, amount of daylight, holidays, and opportunities. These create unique mental, physical, and emotional landscapes:

(

I live in the northeast United States, so my quarters may be different for you)

- Q1 - Jan/Feb/Mar: The days are short on daylight and there's a chill in the air. There's a tendency to spend more time indoors. Plans have a high potential to be altered by weather.
 - Patterns here:

- Fewer events to travel to
 - A lighter calendar lends itself to consistency of progress on personal & professional tasks
 - Tendency towards less exercise, fewer walks to aid thinking,
 - If you live with a family, you may have less solitude
 - If you live alone, you may have more solitude
- Q2 - Apr/May/Jun: Spring brings a sense of renewal. A world refreshed and budding with possibility. People come out of hibernation-like mindsets, uncoiling lots of energy and creating momentum.
 - Patterns here:
 - There's much more physical activity: More time outdoors, days getting longer.
 - Nature is in bloom: Vibrant colors, more animal activity, more visual variety
 - Springtime for many comes with religious & spiritual high points: Easter, Passover, Ramadan, Vesak, Holi, and many more.
- Q3 - Jul/Aug/Sep: Long, warm days that gift early risers with sunlight. Early morning walks, beach vacations, long afternoons and evenings outdoors.
 - Patterns here:
 - Can be a tendency for more activities & commitments on your schedule
 - The longer hours provide more opportunities for exercise and being outdoors.
 - For those with kids - summer can create logistical changes with school out of session.
 - Depending on your field, the summer months can also have a slower pace due to vacations and more languid attitudes

- Q4 - Oct/Nov/Dec: The winter months feature plenty of color outdoors and festivities galore: Halloween, Thanksgiving, and the holiday season.
 - Patterns here:
 - More gatherings of family & friends - potential for lots more travel
 - Tendency for things to get frenetic with get togethers, sports, gift-giving, holiday parties - to the point where it can get overwhelming
 - All this activity tends to create less consistency in routines
- Given the unique patterns and feel to each season, these natural break-points in our year are great opportunities to take a pause and dive deep into where we're at.
- I typically do this during the final days of each quarter: March, June, September, and then my end of year review.
- I go through the following steps in my quarterly review:
 - Review previous quarter - did it go as planned? any major shifts or changes to account for?
 - Review the year's theme - how's it going? how should it be adapted in the quarter ahead? Occasionally I've gone so far as to create a sub-theme specific to that quarter that highlights a specific aspect of my life.
 - Update yearly goals - am I on pace to complete what I set out to do?
 - I'll do another review of each principle: Am I living in accordance with them? What shifts do I need to make to align with them better?
 - I'll review key elements of life management: My budget, task list, project statuses, health, etc...
 - I'll do a detailed layout of the 13 weeks ahead - reviewing commitments in my calendar. I'll label each week as either calm, busy, or hectic.
 - Based on the reality of each week - I can manage expectations when managing life at the weekly time scale.

3. The Week

- As time management gets more granular, the amount of time needed for reviews and reflection should decrease.
 - My weekly review tends to take less than an hour.
- I'm empowered by a theme, clear on my plans & goals, and focused on the methods & assets available to accomplish things in life.
- At the weekly level, it's all about planning and accountability:
 - Check timeline for quarter - specifically the next 2-3 weeks ahead
 - Will it be a calm, busy, or hectic week? Do I need to get more done in the week ahead in anticipation of hectic times to come? Or do I need to be realistic that less will get done because the week ahead will be crazy busy?
 - We'll have a family meeting - ensuring my schedule is aligned with the family's needs. I have to react to their needs as well.
 - I'll do a quick check in on projects & my task list. What elements of these should be completed in the week ahead?
 - There's a reconciliation of bills, financial plan, and random notes & ideas (both physical and digital) that have piled up during the week: Cleaning up the catch-all places I've created to act as a second brain during the churn of the day-to-day
- It's important to have a consistent break-point to your week.
 - There's no rule that your week has to start on a specific day.
 - At one point, I did this every Sunday afternoon - but found that this would often get interrupted or pushed ahead into Monday due to family plans.
 - A few years ago I switched to Friday early afternoons. It tends to be the quietest part of my work week, and I like to get it done before picking the kids up from school
 - Starting my weeks on Saturday is awesome - since it gives me two complete days, typically free of work commitments, to make progress on personal and creative goals.

- I have bandwidth to think carefully and calmly about major events coming in the weekdays ahead: Challenges I may encounter, opportunities that might arise, etc...
- As important as that consistent break-point is - I still need to be flexible. If there's a long holiday weekend, travel interruptions, whatever... I've got no problem shifting the review to Thursday or over the weekend. The weekly time scale doesn't always have to be 7 days precisely.
 - As with all of this: Sometimes you just have to react to life, taking it as it comes.

4. The Day

- For me, I still enjoy working off of a small, roughly 5×7" notepad - one sheet with my tasks & goals for the day.
- Around the end of the work day, I like to create some separation between professional and personal life.
 - I'll review my inbox - is there anything pressing that should be taken care of?
 - Do a quick check of my weekly plan
 - I'll write out the following day's to-do list.
 - For major tasks, I will block out focus time on my calendar to work on them, leaving some wiggle room between meetings or mandatory tasks whenever possible.
 - I check my calendar to see if anyone has birthdays or anniversaries coming up.
 - This practice has been a wonderful way to keep up with friends and loose ties from over the years!
 - I keep these dates as recurring yearly events on a Google Calendar separate from my main calendars, but visible as an additional layer.
 - I'll leave room in the following day's schedule for unscheduled, unplanned tasks.

- There's usually a careful balance: Somewhere between planning down to every minute and completely 'free-wheeling' my days.
- During weekends or on vacation I'm much more lax regarding time blocking and to-do list. Even though it's less structured, I tend to always have a list covering what I want to get done over that time.

Curious about my personal theme for 2025?

[Sign up for my once-a-month newsletter.](#)

That's where I tend to provide more personal and create updates.

January 13's newsletter will highlight the what and why for this year's theme.

Episode 70 Quote:

Today's quote is courtesy of the theoretical physicist Richard Feynman

You are under no obligation to remain the same person you were a year ago, a month ago, or even a day ago. You are here to create yourself, continuously.