

**Episode: The Problem With To Do Lists**



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[Design Your Dream Life With Natalie Bacon](#)

## Episode: The Problem With To Do Lists

Welcome to the Design Your Dream Life podcast where it's all about designing your life on your terms and now your host, Natalie Bacon.

Welcome to the podcast. I want to start by saying thank you so much. So many of you have shared this podcast, and I know that because people are coming to me and they are telling me that you referred them, or you sent them an episode and they've been listening ever since. So I just want to say thank you. I really appreciate that.

I think it's so important that people learn the tools that I'm teaching. Because as a student of my own work, I know how powerful it can really, really be. And my goal here with this podcast is always to bring you new teachings that you can apply to your life, to really grow and enhance your, your way of life. You're living your relationships, your health, your business, your money, your family, all of it. So today we are going to talk about, to do lists.

I hate to do lists. I don't use them. I've never used them. I'm trying to think of a time when I really relied on to do lists and it had to be over 10 to 20 years ago. I have been using my calendar instead, ever since. And I talk about my calendar as if it is my parent and as if it is a verb.

So I will say things like calendar that, or I'm calendaring because I use my calendar. I use G Cal as the boss of my day. And I want to really persuade you that that is the best option for you as well. Here's why, when you operate with a, to do list, it is something that never ends and it makes you feel like you're in a rush. And of course the list doesn't make you feel that way, but you perceive it that way because you have a thought, Oh my gosh, I have so much to do.

I'm never going to get all of this done. There's so much on my list. I was coaching one of my clients and she said, I feel like I'm always putting out fires. Like I'm always behind. And this is what happens with the, to do lists because with the, to do list, you're working on fitting in what you have on that list with what's going on in your life.

So if you have five things that you want to get done on your, to do list for this week, and you don't have them on your calendar in time slots, then you will go about your life and you will do other things that people are asking you to do. And you will try to squeeze in whatever is on your, to do list. So it leaves you thinking and feeling a little bit overwhelmed, a little bit rushed a little bit like you are putting out fires instead of being the leader of your life.

I want to give you some examples. So when someone emails me for an opportunity, it doesn't really matter who it is. The first thing that I do is look at my calendar and I am never in a rush. So I have my calendar planned out weeks in advance, definitely for the immediate two weeks. So when I operate like this, if something comes to my attention and someone wants me to do something and it's within a two week period, I rarely say yes, unless for some reason, something else got canceled and I can squeeze it in.

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Or like I gave you the example of how I signed up for a reading course. I was able to start that right away because I worked it into my personal development time that I already had on my calendar. So when something comes up, that's new and different that I want to incorporate into my life, or it could be an event or an appointment.

I look at my calendar and I add it to my calendar immediately. So I think it's useful to look at your calendar every single week in a deeper way, meaning in a longer way, maybe it's an hour where you're really making sure for the upcoming week, everything is planned. Maybe on Sunday nights, you do this or Monday mornings and you make sure you have the week ahead looking really tight and neat and organized, and you know exactly what you're going to do at exactly what time and exactly what result you're going to produce.

And I say this, and I know some of you are cringing a little bit, and you're thinking that it takes out the spontaneity in your life. And it's so rigid. And what I find is that for those of you saying that typically, in fact, as far as I know, a hundred percent of the time, people who say that don't have the results that they want. So really, really successful people are also really, really disciplined. This is why, when someone is late, if you're a disciplined, successful person, it will bother you because you value your time so much.

So I plan down to the hour, down to the minute in time blocks on my calendar, but it doesn't mean that I'm overworking. So I have my personal development time on there. I have my walks with Penny. I have, when Penny goes to the dog walker, I have my personal appointments. I have our weekend plans. So recently Steve's family came into the city and we had a whole afternoon and evening with them. I had that on my calendar.

So it's not that there's no fun or downtime there is, but you have it on your calendar so that you're doing it from your highest self. And what I mean by that is when you are in the moment, your brain doesn't ever want to do the thing, because the thing is kind of hard. So if you put goals on your calendar or a project or something, nine times out of 10, when the time comes to do it, your brain will come up with all the reasons that you have to not do it in that moment.

This is because your brain would rather continue on the path that it's on because it's easier. It's a lot harder to transition and do something different. But if you plan ahead of time with your prefrontal brain, you can plan your goals. This is why I was able to achieve my income goals for the year in six months. This is why I have my new program planned out on my calendar week by week down to each lesson.

And I know when it's going to be finished, I know when it's going to launch, I have it all planned out. So there's no rushing around. There's no overworking, there's no urgency, but I produce at such a high rate really quickly because I don't operate from a list of things to do. I was trying to

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think of any area of my life, where I keep lists. And there is one area and that is for the grocery store or any sort of shopping.

If that's the case, I will keep a running list on my phone. And any time I think of something like maybe I'm getting ready in the morning. And I noticed that I'm out of a makeup swabs, I'll grab my phone and add makeup swabs to that list. And typically we grocery shop or have grocery shopping delivered once a week.

So that's the only time I keep a list. Otherwise, any type of event, any type of project, any type of appointment, like I'm looking at my calendar right now. I have an optometrist appointment later this week. So I have that blocked out on my calendar. I have a meeting with one of my team members. I have my Grow You coaching calls. I have I'm recording this podcast. I have a hair appointment. I have all of these things on my calendar in time blocks. And then I also have the projects that I'm going to complete this week.

So I have that. I'm going to complete three lessons for the new business program that I am coming out with. Now, if something comes up unexpectedly, which is what people always ask about, I can move things, but the way that people ask me about this, it sounds like this would happen often. This does not happen often.

So recently Penny was sick. That would be a time where I would adjust things. So if I needed to cancel something and take her to the med vet or her vet really urgently, that would be the exception, but on a weekly basis, it's really not happening all that. Often. One of the biggest objections that I get with this method of planning is obstacles that come up. But typically these obstacles are obstacles that you already know about. For example, kids is a very big obstacle that comes up a lot in my coaching.

And it sounds like I have a new baby at home. And it's something that's really hard for me right now. I'm not getting a lot of sleep. How do I plan for that? Or I have all these goals on my calendar and my kids are interrupting me all of the time. I love obstacles like this because you can plan for them ahead of time. Meaning your kids are going to be there forever. It's not an unforeseen obstacle.

Like Penny getting really sick out of nowhere. So for the obstacles that you know are there and in your life, I want you to turn them into strategies. It's just like goal setting. So you say, okay, what is getting in the way of me calendaring? What is getting in the way of me putting things on my calendar and following through, and you write down what those obstacles are.

For example, kids, lack of sleep, whatever else it is, fill in the blank. And then you write down a list of strategies that you come up with to overcome these obstacles. Now, most people want my

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ideas for strategies to overcome their obstacles. And I offer that right when I coach it's something I do. And I'll give you my thoughts on it, but I'm telling you, your brain is so powerful.

If you ask your brain, what's a possible solution for this, and you start writing your brain is going to come up with so many more good answers than I can give you because you know your life, you know, the help that's available. You know, if you have Friday afternoons typically free and you can adjust your calendar for Friday afternoons, like you're going to know your own life better than I will. And your brain is so, so powerful.

So when you have objections like this and you have obstacles, I want you to turn them into strategies. Another question, I get a lot with this method of planning and not using a, to do list is how much time to give something. And the truth is, you know, that answer, but I want to offer to you that the best way to find out how much time to give something is to guess the first time and adjust as you go.

So the first time I recorded a podcast, I had no idea how long it would take. So I gave myself an hour, I put an hour to record the podcast. Then I realized I actually needed a little bit more time to research an outline. So I have about two hours on my calendar for outlining, researching and recording the podcast. And that's what I do.

But I decided to give it that much time after analyzing what was working and what didn't. So what I find is that someone will try this method. They will put everything from their to do list onto their calendar in time blocks, and then something will take twice as long as they thought. And so they will make that mean that they're failing at this when the reality is, it's just a skill and you're sort of sharpening this skill.

So instead of thinking that you did it wrong, it's no, I didn't do it wrong. I just underestimated the amount of time this would take. Now, if I don't get something done in the amount of time that it takes, I will either move it to a different day or I will do it during a time where I normally don't work. So not that long ago, I was editing the podcast book and I mistakenly decided to wait to edit it until about a week before it was launched.

Well, I had a hundred summaries to edit that my team wrote, and I decided that I wanted to rewrite a lot of them. So I didn't have this planned on my calendar. And it was a planning mistake on my part. And I decided in order to not hold up the production of this book and my team that I was going to do it on a Monday night and finish it on Tuesday.

Normally I don't do that. Normally I stop working sometime between four and six, and this was an exception and I decided I really want to get this done. I don't want to hold up the rest of the team, knowing what I know now, I definitely would have put more editing time slots on my

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calendar along the way. But this was the first time that I had created such a big book with the help of my team.

So it was an opportunity for me to learn as a boss and a team leader and CEO. It also an opportunity for me to revisit how I calendar. I never made that mean, Oh my gosh, I'm working too much. Oh my gosh, I don't have control. You know, where do I put this on my calendar? I just decided, okay. I normally don't work at nights, but I am going to make an exception here and do this so that this can get done.

So you're always in charge of your time, and when you do this method of planning, you will find that you feel really energized and empowered because you are not responding so much to other people. I like to think of magazine issues. Now I don't really get any physical magazines anymore, but there was a time when I did. And you notice that every single month there's a new issue.

And every single season there might be either a special edition or a different type of content. And I think about how the company plans ahead for all of it and they do so in such a professional way that it's as good as done no matter what. And that's kind of how I want you to think about your life. So if you have goals, you can do this for your goals. If you have habits that you want to incorporate, you can do it for your habits.

Meaning if you want to start reading 45 minutes a day, you can put that on your calendar to do from 6:45 AM to 7:30. And if you want to lose 10 pounds, you can put exactly what you're going to eat every single day. And when you're going to work out. Now, right now, food, isn't one of my focuses.

So I don't really have food on my calendar. I have big business projects. I have events I have when I update my budget, I have my self study and my morning routine, I put what's on my calendar that I need to know to do so I don't need to put shower on my calendar because I'm always going to know to shower when I get up. Does that make sense?

So you want to look at your life and look at that to do list and move everything from your, to do list into time slots. Now, I want to tell you that this will be painful. I recently did this for my new business program, by the way, if you want to get on that list, just go to [Natalie Bacon.com/interestlist](http://NatalieBacon.com/interestlist). And that's all one word. So I was putting all of the actions and results that I need to do and create for this program on my calendar.

And it was painful. It was tedious. It was not the most fun I've ever had. And I say that, knowing that those are my thoughts, but I don't really think that that's a problem. I say that because I don't want you to expect it to be this amazing fun experience. When you move everything from your to do list to your calendar, it's a new habit. It's a new skill.

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And even when you're in the habit of it, like I am anytime there's a new project that you add to your calendar, it's a really, really tedious process. And that's okay because here's the thing. When I go through the massive list of things that I want to do for this program, and then I put them on my calendar, even though it takes a long time, it took probably two to three hours for me to do this, you know, over two months ahead of planning what I need to get done every single week and took a lot of brain power on my part and thinking about my team and all of it, the result is that I know exactly when it's going to be done so every single day and every single week, I just follow my calendar.

My prefrontal brain, my highest self has decided ahead of time, what I want to create. And so I'm just following through. I love to use the example of parenting yourself. Think of having a child and feeding your little boy, a really healthy dinner. And you decide ahead of time that that is what you're going to feed him compared to letting him decide in the moment, whatever he wants to eat.

If you decide ahead of time, what to feed him, he ends up eating a really healthy meal, and that is really good for his longterm health. If he gets to decide whatever he wants to eat, he's probably not going to pick the healthy thing. And this is because he's always going to want, what's really pleasurable in the moment, which isn't the healthiest. The same is true for you following through with whatever it is in the moment.

What I mean by that is when it's time to do something, your toddler brain comes out and wants to have cake for dinner. It wants to have the sweet thing. It wants to go for a walk or even do laundry. Instead of doing the hard thing that's on your calendar, like go to the gym, sit down and work on your business, whatever it is. And that hard thing is eating the healthy meal.

This just goes back to that motivational triad versus your deepest desires. So your motivational triad, remember you are always seeking pleasure, avoiding pain and trying to be efficient. That is your primitive brain, but you also have this higher brain, this prefrontal cortex, where you get to decide ahead of time, what your deepest desires are. So that is why in the middle of the night, you wake up with your baby, even though you're tired and you would rather be sleeping, there's a deeper desire to take care of your child that overrides the need for sleep.

So your calendar can operate as a reflection of your deepest desires to overcome that primitive. I want to do what feels good in the moment. Action. If you operate from a, to do list instead of calendar, it's a lot harder to overcome that primitive desire to do what feels good in the moment, because you don't actually have a plan.

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All you have is a never ending list that you sort of want to get done, but also don't really feel compelled to do it quickly. I know that in the beginning of doing this type of planning, it can be a little bit hard, especially with the follow through. So here's my advice for that.

Number one is to break down what you need to do and to even smaller increments. So I know that I always want to get dressed and look my best every day. So I plan my outfit the night before I put it out ahead of time, basically set yourself up for success, put your workout, clothes out. You sort of rig your environment, such that it makes it a lot easier for your brain to do the hard thing.

So if I know that I want to coach myself, but doing it for an entire hour, seems like too much time. I don't want to fight with my brain about that. I want to say, okay, we're just going to start really small. So just do it for 15 minutes. And so then you just put that 15 minutes on your calendar and you start there and you meet yourself where you are. The second piece of advice I have for you is to know that you can always go back to the old way. So a lot of times when we start something new, our brain freaks out and I like to remind myself, I'm the one in charge.

I can always go back to the old way. So there's no downside to giving this a try. For example, when I quit drinking, I decided I can always drink again. Alcohol, doesn't have this power over me. It's neutral. It's just alcohol. If I want to start drinking again, I can start drinking again. Or, you know, whatever else it is in my life that I've decided my brother once said to me, nothing is irreversible. I love this.

So think about trying this, even if you have resistance and tell your brain, yes, it's going to be hard. Expect it to be hard, do it anyway, and know that you can always decide to go back to the, to do lists instead of calendaring. Just make sure that you don't decide in the moment to go back. So if ever I've had the desire to drink alcohol, I say, I can always redecide to start drinking alcohol, but I'm not going to do it when I have the urge to drink.

So let's say it's new year's Eve. And I'm like, Oh, you know, I kind of want to drink with everyone else. And they're all drinking and what's just one glass of wine or champagne. And so I say, okay, well, I'm not going to make the decision in the moment with my primitive toddler brain. That's desiring the pleasure.

I'm going to make it with my prefrontal brain the next morning. And I've never woke up and thought, yeah, I want to reopen that chapter. So the same is true for you. Just don't make the decision to stop calendaring in the moment when you're supposed to be following through, follow through, and then decide when you don't have that urge, that desire to sit on the couch and watch TV instead of work on your goal. Right? Decide when it's your planning time. Okay? I tried it this way and I'm done.

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I don't want to calendar anymore, but I'm telling you, when you live your life this way, you exceed your own expectations and you do it in a way that's surprisingly easy. And what I mean by that is I might not want to do the thing in the moment, but I do it. So there's a little bit of resistance potentially to transition into that new thing, whether it's record new lessons for course, or something else on my calendar.

So there's a little discomfort there, but then I just continue to do it in that way. And it's shocking how things are just accomplished so much more quickly. And with an ease that I don't know, there's another way to do. So this program, for example, that I'm creating will be complete without any drama, without any worry. It's just on my calendar. And I do it. If you are struggling to do the thing, that's on your calendar, come get coaching because that's where you need to work on your own self accountability.

That's where you need to work on, Hey, what am I thinking and feeling right before? The thing that is on my calendar and what I say is just expect to not feel like it. If you're transitioning into something and it's uncomfortable, like welcome to the party. For some people, things are really easy, right?

So I get up and get fully dressed, hair and makeup every day. I like the process. It's pretty easy for me, but for you, if that's something that you're working on, just expect it to be difficult and do it any way. Cause that's when you build that self respect. And when you become more accountable to yourself, you set even bigger goals because you know, you're going to follow through. So I want to encourage you after listening to this episode, to put everything that's on, any list that you have on your calendar.

It's as simple as that and get in the habit of checking your calendar every day, all day, I have it up in the background. Anything that comes in, if I want to add it, I'm typically planning a couple of weeks out and try this for a couple of months and see how much more productive you are. But also how much more free time you have, if you do your planning, right. So the goal is not to plan so that you're overworking. The goal is to plan so that you are living the exact life you want to be living.

It's so that you're a producer, so that you're a creator of your own life so that you are successful in the ways that you want to be successful. I have lots of downtime and people assume that I overwork and it's not true. Recently my favorite thing to do during downtime is to read books instead of listening to them on audible.

I still listen sometimes, but I'm loving reading books and journaling and taking walks and enjoying downtime. It's so much fun. So I don't want you to use this method of planning to not give yourself downtime, but when you give yourself downtime, it's downtime that you've

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decided intentionally ahead of time, right? It's like parenting yourself. That toddler for dinner is going to want all of the sugar, but that is not how you live the healthy life.

So you train yourself instead of doing what feels good in the moment you do what you've decided you actually want your life to be like. And sometimes that feels good and sometimes it doesn't, but no matter what you follow through, all right, throw away those to do lists, get calendaring. I will talk with you next week.

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