

**She Said/She Said Podcast with Laura Cox Kaplan**

**Title: “How to design your life for more meaning and more tranquility!”**  
**#TIMEMANAGEMENT #PRODUCTIVITY #INFLUENCE #OVERWHELM #TRANQUILITY**

**Episode 213 Part 1 and Episode 214 Part 2**

**Guest: Laura Vanderkam, author “Tranquility by Tuesday”**

**SHOW OPEN**

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Building influence is something anyone can learn. It's an investment you can make in yourself and it can hold the keys to achieving your dreams and having the life and impact you want to have. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. I've learned a lot over three decades about building and sustaining influence and how using it and using it effectively can make a big difference in your life and career. Here on She Said / She Said podcast, we're digging into the different dimensions that help us build and sustain influence.

You thought being an influencer was just for social media? Think again. Whether you're starting a business, raising money for a cause, negotiating a promotion, running your household, or trying to connect with those who don't share your views, understanding and using the different dimensions of influence will increase your chances of success, whatever your goals may be. Listening to She Said / She Said podcast is a smart, efficient investment you can make in you. I'm really glad you're here and I'm excited we're on this journey together.

**EPISODE 213 INTRODUCTION Part 1 of 2**

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey friend, welcome to the podcast.

Today we're talking about time management and productivity. It's a favorite topic of mine, and based on downloads for episodes when we focus on this topic, you love it too.

Folks don't always think about the connection between time management and influence. ... but this week's guest brings a couple of additional dimensions to the topic... and to the connection between those two concepts.

Laura Vanderkam is a time management and productivity expert. Her new book -- which is out this week -- is called “Tranquility by Tuesday.” there's a link for you in the show notes for this episode where you can purchase the book.

Laura's focus is not just getting more done, it's about bringing greater calmness to your life. With that, hopefully the ability to increase our focus and to devote more mental energy to those topics and projects that are most important to us and to those people in our lives who are most important to us as well. It's that approach to calmness that enables us to be more present, while still getting all the things done that have to happen in a given day or week.

This isn't magic, of course, but I do think you'll hear some perspective that might surprise you and that will challenge conventional wisdom about a few time management practices.

A couple of other things about Laura before we jump in — this is her 9th or 10th book — I think all but one of her books have been on time management and productivity or have been parables on the topic. She also produces two regular podcasts including her daily podcast BEFORE BREAKFAST. She is a regular public and corporate speaker, writes countless articles and blogs on the topics of productivity and time management , .... Oh and is Mom to five children ranging in age from 2-15 with whom she gets to explore time management and productivity concepts every single day!! To say this busy mom gets a lot done in a day is an understatement!

This is also Laura's second appearance on she said/she said podcast . We first met in mid 2020 when I asked her to join me on she said/she said podcast to talk about work from home strategies with kids! We actually touch on that topic again in part 2 of this conversation.

We cover a lot of ground in this conversation, including the 9 core time management concepts in Laura's latest book.

Laura also shares suggestions on alternatives to things like planning for the week ahead on sunday.... And the two-minute rule. If you aren't familiar with these approaches, stay with us, we'll explain them and talk about alternatives that might work better for you.

Laura's 9 rules are based on her expertise and study of the topics of time management and productivity for the past couple of decades, as well as a very specific set of research questions she created and explored with research subjects for this latest book. The results are very interesting and in some cases tackle some long held beliefs we've always heard about the best ways to manage our time.

A COUPLE OF QUICK THOUGHTS ABOUT INFLUENCE RELATED TO THIS CONVERSATION....

- In Laura's case, finding new ways to tackle a topic that is as old as time --but that continues to evolve just as our society has evolved around work and life. The importance of staying not only current with your expertise, but continuing to challenge yourself to look at accepted beliefs and whether they still make sense.
- We have more tools today to manage our time than at any point in history.... And yet we seem to feel like we have less time. It's a really important dimension related to time management.
- The other point I would make is around INVESTMENT -- specifically how we invest in ourselves -- it's a theme that runs through she said/she said podcast
  - In this case, strategies that we can learn and invest in that can help us bring our best selves to whatever challenges we face in the world. And how some of Laura's approaches can help us build greater career resiliency, also the role that mindset plays in how we think about and manage our time.

Because my conversation with Laura ran almost an hour— and because I'm sensitive to trying to help you maximize your time, I've split the conversation into two episodes — episode 213 that you are listening to now. And then episode 214. But rather than posting part 2 next week, I've posted the two episodes back to back. So if you have the full hour to listen, you have two great episodes. If you only have a ½ hour or so, these shorter episodes are a little easier to navigate. Based on feedback from a few listeners who didn't like having to wait until next week for part 2 of a conversation, or they didn't like the little cliffhanger with Andrea Koppel in Episode 210, I thought we'd try it this way to see if that works better for you. So please be sure to let me know.

Finally, Before we jump into the conversation with Laura .... If you are new to she said/she said podcast welcome! Please be sure to FOLLOW or subscribe to the show wherever you are listening to this podcast. Each week I'm bringing fresh perspectives about career and life and most importantly how to build and sustain influence. I don't want you to miss a minute and I promise to do my best to make the time you spend with me a good investment in you.

And now, here is Part 1 of my 2 part conversation with time management and productivity expert Laura Vanderkam....

## **EPISODE 212 CONVERSATION**

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Laura, welcome back to She Said / She Said!

Laura Vanderkam:

Thanks so much for having me back.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, I'm happy to have you and I'm really excited to talk to you about this latest book. It's called *Tranquility by Tuesday*. Why *Tranquility*? And how does it relate to this bigger topic of time management? We don't always think about those two things going together, so maybe talk about why this concept.

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, I think a lot of people feel very much like life is chaotic. There's things happening all the time, stuff coming up unexpectedly, constant inputs. We're managing work. We're managing families, our various other responsibilities, and in the midst of all of this, people are not necessarily looking to get more done. They are looking to feel like life is calm, like they are happy with the way they are spending their time.

And so tranquility really gets at that. One of the synonyms is serenity and I'd like to think of my readers as hopefully achieving this calm, this sense of serenity, as life is just swirling around them. Because I think a lot of us... We keep telling ourselves, "Oh, life will be calmer next week and then I'll be able to deal with this," or, "Life will be different next year and then I'll be able to do this." But it's not going to be. Let's just let go of that and try to build the lives we want right now.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Well, you and I were talking about... Before we started. You've been working in the time management field for more than a decade, more like 15, pushing on 20 years at this point. And you've done some interesting things over that period of time, but you first got your start by time tracking yourself. Maybe talk a little bit about how you got started in this work.

Laura Vanderkam:

Yeah. Well, I was fascinated by the idea of where our time goes. Everybody has the exact same amount of time, so we have a very clear way to compare various people and people over time and how we can look at that and see very big societal shifts in terms of how people spend their time. It's one of those topics that's also fascinating because how people think they spend their time is not necessarily how they actually spend their time. Because time keeps passing, it is incredibly easy to spend it mindlessly and to tell ourselves stories about where the time goes that are really just about how we wish to see ourselves and are not based on collected data.

And so I find that gap so fascinating that I was like, "Well, I've got to study that." So I have had thousands of people track their time for me over the years. As you mentioned, I have tracked my own time. At this point I've been tracking time continuously for myself for over seven years, which probably says a lot about me that I have done that. But it's just eye opening. I don't think anyone has done this exercise and not been intrigued to see where the 168 hours in a week in life really goes. And so I had people track their time and out of that came some ideas of how we could maybe spend time better, some best practices I saw from people who were managing very full lives on how they found time for the things that still brought them joy, even in the midst of all the responsibilities.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

By my count -- six of your books are on time management. You've written other books, but this is book number six, right?

Laura Vanderkam:

Probably something like that.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's so interesting because there's a lot of material in it that I think is different from what you have produced before and so it's really interesting within this space of time management that you continue to find new epiphanies or new ways of thinking about this material. So I really love that. Let's get into, Laura, the meat of this book. You studied a number of participants... Or I should say you got several people... What, 150 or so to participate in a study. Maybe talk a little bit about the process that you went through and then we'll get into the meat of the book.

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, like anyone who's trying to offer self-help advice, I have my ideas about how the world works and things that you might want to try in your life, but I really don't want to waste anyone's time. And so I wanted to find out for sure if these time management rules that I had, these ideas that I had, were truly helpful. So I recruited 150 people to work with me for 10 weeks. My research team asked them all sorts of information at the beginning, how they felt about their time. They tracked time for a while.

Then over the course of the next nine weeks, they learned nine time management rules. They would get a short essay about that rule. They would answer questions about how they thought about that rule and how they thought it might work in their lives. I would prompt them a couple days later to see how it was going and then a week later check in. How did it work? Did they follow the rule? If they did, what happened? If they didn't, what happened? Did it work as they thought it would? How did they feel differently about their time? And then I kept tracking how they felt on various dimensions of time and happiness over the course of the study.

And so at the end of 10 weeks or so, I could see if you do these nine rules what happens? And the short answer is that you feel better about your time. Different dimensions between how

you felt yesterday or feel in general. It's about 15%, 16% better about your time overall. Certain dimensions were much higher. For instance, people felt 32% better about how much time they were wasting. They were less likely to waste time on things that were not important to them. So those were all great discoveries and my promise to people who read this book is that if you try out these nine rules, you most likely will have similar results. So this is all statistically significant with a broad range of people. So I'm very hopeful that you will also feel better about your time and feel like you're wasting less time even if you don't really have a whole lot of time to waste in the first place.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You also talk about in the book that while this is not a treatment for depression, at the same time, many of these rules, maybe all of these rules when taken together, can actually increase your overall happiness. And for some people who are maybe not diagnosed as clinically depressed but are struggling with being blue or being sad or being motivated, these things working in tandem can actually help them pull out of that without medication.

Laura Vanderkam:

I certainly am not trying to take the place of proper psychological care, mental health care, for anyone, but many of these things do in fact improve your emotional wellbeing. Just as an example, one of the rules is to move by 3:00 PM every day, just to get a little bit of physical activity before 3:00 PM every single day. And it turns out that people who move regularly do in fact feel better. It's one of the best mood boosting tools we have out there and is in fact equivalent for people who do have mild depression as pharmaceuticals. It's about the equivalent of that in terms of various studies that have been done.

But so building that daily into your life, building in adequate sleep, so giving yourself a bedtime. Most people have to wake up at a certain time for their various responsibilities, but then they go to bed at a time that doesn't reflect how much sleep they need in order to wake up at that time. So encouraging people if you find out that you need seven and a half hours of sleep and you need to wake up at 6:00 AM, guess what? You need to be in bed at 10:30. This is not rocket science, but if you do this day after day after day, you feel better about life. You feel more capable of dealing with what life throws at you just because you are in a stronger mental state from having taken care of yourself.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. There's so much that's packed into this book that is... What's very consistent with your approach. You are very practical, very straightforward, very realistic about the demands that people have on their times. I should also say too for those who don't know you... And I know many of my listeners do know you. They're fans like I am. But you're also the mom of five children who range in age from twoish to what, 12, 14, something like that?

Laura Vanderkam:

Yeah. Two to 15. I've got quite the range.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You have quite the range. So you are a busy gal just in and of itself and you work full time. You've got two podcasts. You're producing all these books. You're doing a ton of public speaking. You pack a lot into your day, so you know of what you speak and you also know how important it is to have practical, realistic solutions for people. So I absolutely love that.

One of the things that caught my attention right off the bat as I was reading through this latest book... One thing that surprised me is this idea... It's rule two, to plan on Fridays versus spending that time on Sunday to plan for the week ahead. Laura, talk about why you think there's a real benefit to Friday versus Sunday.

Laura Vanderkam:

So I have been planning my weeks on Fridays for years and I really am a bit of a Friday planning evangelist as a result of what I have seen at work in my own life. If you want to throw the five kids idea out there, again, this is what allows me to manage my life with the work, the five kids, everything else that's going on and still feel like I'm mostly staying on top of things. Not always, but mostly. So first, Friday planning takes 20 minutes Friday afternoon. Make yourself a three category priority list for the upcoming week. What are the most important things for you to do in terms of your career, in terms of your relationships, and for yourself? Figure out what those things are. Maybe steps towards your larger goals, whatever they are. Figure out when they're going to happen. Put them on your calendar for the upcoming week.

Then you can look at what is already on your calendar for the upcoming week, various responsibilities you have. What logistics need to happen? Are there any tough spots coming up? Are there things you can get rid of? Are there things that you don't want to do that can disappear? Are there things that can take less time? Are there difficult situations you need to solve? A team is meeting late and it looks like the kid's camp show will be that day or whatever. There's just a million things that if you take a little bit of time to look at your week holistically you can figure out. And so it doesn't take long to do this, but you get a sense of what is on your plate? You get yourself a sense of how you are going to deal with it and then you are done.

The reason to do it Friday and ideally Friday afternoon... For one, it's what an economist might call a low opportunity cost time. Most of us are not sitting there on Friday afternoon saying, "I am excited to make progress on my personal and professional goals right now." We are sliding into the weekend at that point. Nobody wants to start anything new, but you might be willing to think about what future you should be doing. So if it was just going to be wasting time... You're sitting around waiting until it's okay to sign off or leave the office or whatever. You may as well repurpose this time and turn it into really what will be some of the most productive minutes of the week.

The other upside of Friday versus Sunday is that if you need to do something that involves places with business hours, they are probably open on Friday, whereas they will not be on Sunday night. So if you realize you need to make an appointment... You're like, "Geez, my hair

really needs to be cut before this big event that I've got cutting up." Well, guess what? You can call the salon on Friday. They may not be open on Sunday evening. So that's something that you can do or make a doctor's appointment or just a colleague. If you need to reach out and get a meeting on the calendar for the next week, you can't guarantee that your colleague or client or whatever is on email Sunday night and probably they shouldn't be. So it's a little bit better to reach out to them on Friday, which is a respectful business hour time and get it on the calendar then.

But the last reason, and I think this is really the most important one, is that a lot of people start feeling Sunday afternoon like they're already in their Monday morning mental space and some people call it the Sunday night blues or the Sunday scaries. Even people who like their jobs can experience this. And it's not that they dread going to work. It's just that they know there's all this stuff waiting for them and they don't have a plan for how they are going to deal with it. Whereas if you make that plan on Friday, you can go into your weekend feeling good and then you get to enjoy Sunday and keep that Sunday feeling through the end of Sunday as opposed to taking a big chunk of Sunday to plan the upcoming week.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Do you have tips on maybe how to best utilize some of that Sunday time so that you take the planning you've done on Friday and really start the week off on a strong point? Because you're not necessarily suggesting that you just plan on Fridays and put it aside and never look at it again until you get to the next week, right? What do you do with that planning once it happens?

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, certainly you can look at it and you should look at it every day to have it somewhere that you're going to keep looking at what your priority list is for the week and your calendar and all that. I'm certainly not suggesting that you don't, for instance, when you leave work each day, look at what you have the next day so you've got the outline of the next day and figure out what you need to do and anything new that's come up you've done with it. This is the long range planning to figuring out your week holistically.

But honestly, I don't think you need to do as much Sunday night as people tend to. Definitely you don't need to lay out your outfits for the week. I prefer if I'm making lunches, I'll either do it in the morning or do it while I'm cooking dinner so it's time that I'm already in the kitchen. I don't like to turn time that could have been relaxed into "getting ready for the week time." I think we spend a lot of life in preparation of one day for another. I'm trying to get people out of that habit. But I think one of the best things you can do on Sunday night is plan something fun. Stretch out your weekend. Have a potluck dinner with friends. Go to a Sunday night exercise class. Go for a walk with your family. Go volunteer somewhere. But do something to stretch out your weekend and so that you're focused on that rather than what's coming up Monday morning.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And what you just said relates to one of the other rules about creating these experiences that let us make memories. Let's talk about why that's important, why creating those experiences and those memories is so important as it relates to time.

Laura Vanderkam:

So one of my rules is one big adventure, one little adventure. And this rule is that every week you should plan at least two things that are out of the ordinary and fun, exciting, memorable. One big adventure, which is something that could just take three to four hours, so think half a weekend day. And one little adventure. So this could be something that's an hour or less, could fit on a lunch break, could fit on a weekday evening, not too extensive, but just something little that's out of the ordinary and different.

And the reason to plan in these adventures is that they do make life memorable. So much of adult life is absolutely the same day in and day out. You get up. You get the kids ready. You get them off to school or daycare. You go to work. You come home. You have dinner. You get the kids ready for bed. You watch TV. You go to sleep. You get up. You do it again. There is absolutely nothing in that time that is memorable. And when we don't remember where the time went, it is as if it is gone. Whole years can disappear into these memory sinkholes that are just measured in the changing heights of children. Like, "Oh, look how much you've grown. It didn't feel like it was three years since I saw you last because the three years were exactly the same."

And so it can sound a little depressing that that's adult life, but it doesn't have to be. If we think back to young adult life, many people have a lot of memories of say high school, college, their first job out of school, and it's because everything was new. You were experiencing things for the first time. You were doing different things. You were trying different things. And you can't recapture that exactly as a middle-aged adult with responsibilities, but you can capture some of it.

And if you have a week where you do something different, all of a sudden it's not just another week. It is the week when we went to that new state park that we've never been to and climbed up that mountain and we all had donuts at the top. This is the week where I went and saw that sculpture garden that's 15 minutes away and I took a long lunch break and went and walked around it for 30 minutes and came back to the office afterwards. These are these little things and they just make life more memorable and they make time feel less like this slick linoleum floor that we're sliding along into death. It's just a little bit more rich and full and makes us feel like life is really happening.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

And a whole lot less and a whole lot less depressing as well.

Laura Vanderkam:

Exactly. Exactly.

**CLOSE EPISODE 213 PART 1 OF 2**

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey friend, sorry to interrupt, but this concludes part 1 of my conversation with Laura Vanderkam. We'll pick up the conversation right where we left off in Episode 214.... you'll find that Episode right after this one, and it should pop up automatically if you are following or subscribed to she said/she said podcast wherever you are listening to podcasts.

In the meantime, if this is all the time you have today, thanks for joining me.

As always I'd love to hear your feedback on this or any of our She Said/She Said Podcast episodes.

So please be sure to hop on and leave a review wherever you are listening .... or you can go to my website she said/she said podcast .com and share your thoughts on the contact me form. Also on the website, that;s the best place to find the links we mentioned in episodes. you'll find links to Laura's book, her FREE downloadable time management spreadsheet, a full-free transcript of this episode, and a few other things.

Again, The best place to find the full show notes is on my website at she Said/She Said Podcast .Com

Friend, thanks again for joining me today. I hope you found this investment in yourself worthwhile. Until next week, you take care. I'll talk to you soon.

She Said/She Said Podcast is produced weekly by She Said/She Said Media.

## **EPISODE 214 PART 2 OF 2**

### **SHOW OPEN**

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### **PART 2 Episode 214**

#### **EPISODE OPEN:**

Hey friend, Welcome to she said/she said podcast. In this episode -- episode 214, we're continuing our conversation with time management and productivity expert Laura Vanderkam. If you missed part 1 of our conversation, please be sure to back and download episode 213.

To quickly recap, Laura's new book -- which is out this week -- is called "Tranquility by Tuesday." There's a link for you in the show notes for this episode where you can purchase the book.

Laura's focus is not just getting more done, it's about bringing greater calmness to your life. With that, hopefully the ability to increase our focus and to devote more mental energy to those topics and projects that are most important to us and to those people in our lives who are most important to us as well. It's that approach to calmness that enables us to be more present, while still getting all the things done that have to happen in a given day or week.

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This is also Laura's second appearance on she said/she said podcast . We first met in mid 2020 when I asked her to join me on she said/she said podcast to talk about work from home strategies with kids! We actually touch on that topic again in part 2 of this conversation.

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Laura also shares suggestions on alternatives to things like planning for the week ahead on Sunday.... And the two-minute rule. If you aren't familiar with these approaches, stay with us, we'll explain them and talk about alternatives that might work better for you.

Laura's 9 rules are based on her expertise and study of the topics of time management and productivity for the past couple of decades, as well as a very specific set of research questions she created and explored with research subjects for this latest book. The results are very interesting and in some cases tackle some long held beliefs we've always heard about the best ways to manage our time.

Here is part 2 Episode 214 of my two part conversation with Laura Vanderkam....

### **EPISODE 214 CONVERSATION:**

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Wow, okay. You make a real distinction between what's happening in the moment and then what's important. Maybe talk about these two concepts and how they underpin a lot of this book.

Laura Vanderkam:

Yeah. Well, one of the reasons that I want to get people in the habit of planning on Fridays is I want them to shift their mindset from planning being just about what is happening to what is important. I think a lot of times when people do think about schedules and planning and all that, they're like, "Okay, well, my schedule is I have these four meetings tomorrow," and that's fine. You do, but why do you have those meetings? What are those meetings accomplishing? What goal is being advanced by your attendance at that meeting? Hopefully there is something. Hopefully that's happening for a reason, but you want to be aware of what that is. Are these

meetings advancing you toward goals that you or your organization have and how are they doing so? And as for how you spend the rest of your time, it's not just, "I'm checking email. I'm answering my email." Okay, well what are you doing with your email? Is this response somehow moving things forward toward a goal that you or your organization may have?

And so getting people to really think about what is important for the week as opposed to just what is happening this week. I could tell you what's happening this week. The kids are going to camp and I have to turn in this assignment, but what is most important as I am doing this week? Well, maybe it's that this child has a camp show and she'd really like her siblings there and so I need to organize everyone to get to it and to have that happen and to know that she can feel that what she's doing is valuable and that we are all supporting her. That's a little bit different than focusing just on logistics and things like that.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Not all tasks, not all goals are created equally. We have lots and lots and lots of things and you just ticked off a number of things that might fall in the category of maybe smaller tasks, things on your to-do list that don't require super deep thought. Maybe talk about the difference between those things from a time management standpoint and how you recommend tackling them.

Laura Vanderkam:

One of my rules is to batch the little things. And what this means is that we often wind up with a lot of small tasks on our schedule and we can't necessarily get out of them. You have to do it at some point. But the problem is people tend to do them whenever. They do them when it occurs to them, when they see them, when they're bored with whatever else they were doing. And that can distract you from thinking about bigger things or having longer periods of open time when you might have been able to concentrate on something more intense.

So I ask people to come up with a small window of time in which to batch these little tasks. There are ways to learn to identify them. I have a list in the book of how you can figure out what is a little task, but for many people it's things like paying bills or responding to invitations or quick non-urgent responses to things, filling out forms, buying things-

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Scheduling.

Laura Vanderkam:

All that stuff. And so create a window for those that's not your peak time. So I try to batch a lot of stuff on Friday. I plan on Friday afternoons, but some point on Friday I work through what I call my Friday punch list. And that is when I pay bills, I respond to non urgent invitations. If there's something that's on my list that I need to do but I haven't done during the week, that's when I'll try to do it.

But many people can't push everything off until Friday, but you can designate say 30 minutes in the mid-afternoon, which again, it's not your peak time. Most people have more energy in the morning when they'd be better able to focus on bigger stuff. And so just give yourself a window, say 1:00 to 1:30, when you're going to respond to all that stuff in one fell swoop. And then it's not cluttering up your schedule the rest of the time. You're not sitting there in the middle of figuring out your biggest business problem, being like, "Oh, I've got to go fill out that form for HR." Just don't do that. Don't do that to yourself. You deserve to really spend your time on the things that matter.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. And it really allows you to get into that deep thought in a way that when you're constantly ping-ponging from one thing to the next, it's almost impossible, especially if you're doing really focused work, which we all have to do at one point or another.

One of the other things that I especially loved and that really resonated with me and that I think will resonate with so many people listening is the stories that we tell ourselves and these false narratives that we sometimes have running through our heads about, "I'm so busy. I'm so busy. I'm so busy." And I'm sure that legitimately you are, I am, whatever. But maybe talk a little bit about those false narratives and how they might be code for a couple of other topics that we often talk about on this podcast.

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, I think that we can cling to the idea of being busy and having no time for ourselves, because sometimes it's easier than deciding, "Well, maybe I do have time and it won't be perfect, but I could make it happen." One of the narratives that I talk about, one of the rules, is three times a week is a habit. So I encourage people to identify whatever something is that they would like to do, that they may be doing some but are feeling like they're not doing as much as they want, and aim to do it three times a week.

So one common example is something like family dinners. People talk themselves into this narrative of, "We never eat together." And then you track time for a week and you realize, "Oh, well, actually we did once or twice. It wasn't sit down Norman Rockwell style roast every evening at six o'clock, but it did happen once or twice during the week." Say, "Well, great. Can we get to three? Could we just build in a third family meal in the course of the week?" And if you can, well, three times a week is a habit. All of a sudden we are the sort of family that's eating together.

Or people would have creative aspirations, but were maintaining a very convenient narrative that as busy people with big jobs raising families, they had zero time to do their creative pursuits. And the reason this is convenient is because then you can keep these perfect ideas in your head that you just don't have time to do, as opposed to actually doing something for 20 or 30 minutes three times a week that's going to be probably terrible in the first approach, but will get better over time because we all get better over time.

So it's easier to lament the perfect paintings that you are not creating in your head than to actually sit down with your paints and do something that's crappy when you've got 20 to 30 minutes to do it, but at least then you're doing it right. And some people just really don't want to do it and accept the mediocre. They'd rather hold it off as the perfect, which is not happening. We can unpack a lot of that, but I encourage people to think it's okay to do something small and not that great. At least I'm doing something. It will get better over time.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

That whole theme really resonated because those are topics... Perfectionism and imposter syndrome come up on this podcast a lot. I was curious if you found a difference between your female versus your male responses for this particular book as it relates to those two themes.

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, I think we all suffer from this to a certain degree. And I think many people can tell themselves that they're not doing X, Y, or Z. And certainly men have hobbies and things they would like to do as well. Maybe it's different things that society will tell you is important to do, but I think everyone has stuff that is important to them in life and that they would like to make time for but find that they're maybe not doing as much as they want. But what I want people to see is that there is a big difference between not as much as I want and none. Often how often things are happening in your life is in fact not as much as I want, but not as much as I want is something that can be changed. You can scale it up a little bit and having a goal like three times a week feels very doable. And that doable, practical aspect can allow really any kind of person to make progress on their goals.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Yeah. Let's talk about this concept of wasted time and how you talk about that in the book. It's pretty easy to know if you're binge watching a show... Okay. Maybe that could be considered wasted time, but maybe give us some insights on how we should think about wasted time.

Laura Vanderkam:

In general, I feel like when you're spending time mindlessly it is easy to waste it. And I don't mean staring at the clouds thinking deep thoughts. That's great. There's a wonderful John Keats's poem Ode on Indolence [inaudible 00:28:44] like lying cool-bedded on the flowery grass, looking up at the clouds. And I had people send that to me being like, "See? We should waste time!" I'm like, "I got no problem with John Keats lying on the grass. We should all lie on the grass looking up at the clouds." The problem is we don't do that. We sit there looking at people insulting each other on Twitter, which is a very different thing than staring up at the clouds thinking deep thoughts.

So I think that the key is whether you are spending time mindfully on the things that are meaningful or enjoyable for you or the people you care about. Now, nobody hits a hundred

percent. Nobody spends all their time on that. But the higher percentage of our time we can spend on that, the better.

And one of the rules gets at this. It's still with leisure time, but the idea is that we can upgrade our leisure time and spend it on things that are truly more meaningful and enjoyable than the mindless phone scrolling that many of us engage in. And this rule is effortful before effortless. And so challenge yourself when a spot of time does appear that could be leisure time to spend just two minutes doing something that takes a little bit more active engagement than just scrolling around on your phone. So it could be reading a book. It could be something like doing a puzzle, doing a Lego construction. A hobby, taking photos, drawing. Whatever else it is, but something for just a couple of minutes and then you can do the effortless stuff for the rest of the night if you want.

So if we're at the time... The kids have gone to bed. You have a choice. Are you going to start binge watching stuff for five episodes in a row? Well, you can, but before you do, read five minutes in that Agatha Christie novel that you've been putting off forever. Just five minutes and see what happens. A lot of times people keep reading because whatever they're reading is actually enjoyable so they want to keep at it. It's just they have to get over that slight hurdle of energy to make it happen. But even if all you do is read 10 minutes and then binge watch five shows, at least you have both in your life, whereas if you start with the binge watching, you're never going to stop in the middle and read your novel. So better to do the effortful stuff first.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. I love that. I love that. You also take on the two minute rule. A lot of people adhere to the two minute rule, which is essentially if you can do it in two minutes, then just go ahead and do it and get it out of the way. But you say maybe not. Maybe talk a little bit about why that might not be such a good approach.

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, this gets at the idea of... One of my rules is to batch the little things that we were talking about before. And so these two minute tasks are by definition the little things. And so many people would say, "Well, why should I do this? I have this two minute rule. If it takes two minutes, I'll just do it. I don't want to batch it. I don't want to maintain a list and do it some other time and have to get back to it. That seems very inefficient."

Well, maybe, but hear me out here because one, are you sure that's only a two minute task? Most people are really, really bad at time estimation. And so you think it's a two minute task, but in fact it's longer or it can boomerang that you think it's only going to take two minutes but then it's like, "Oh wait. I need a printer and my printer's broken. I have to go get ink." And it just keeps going on with this.

Third, you can very easily get distracted once you take yourself away from what you intended to do with a certain period of time. So let's say you've carved out an hour to work on this client proposal and then for whatever reason your colleague is able to reach you and she's like, "Can

you send me X?" You're like, "Well, it would only take 30 seconds to send my colleague X, so let me just go in my inbox and do that."

But whoa, wait, now you're in your inbox. It only took 30 seconds to send her the number she's asking for, but you start seeing all these other shiny new unread messages that you want to go through and next thing you're there for 20 minutes of that hour you carved out to work on the proposal. So it's better to say, "Okay. We'll get you soon," if you need to respond or don't even have your inputs on if you've carved out an hour to work on something and then get her the figures when you have a little batched time for answering that sort of thing. And then if you wind up in your inbox, it's not the end of the world because you weren't doing anything that was particularly high value or important at that point. So if you get pulled away it's okay.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

One of the offshoots of that is rabbit holing. And that tends to be something that I struggle with, is that if I take time away from whatever it is I'm supposed to be doing to do this one little thing, then the next thing I know I've gone down the rabbit hole and gone in a whole different direction and I turn around an hour, maybe two, later, and I'm like, "Wow. I really lost complete track of what I was working on."

Laura Vanderkam:

And this can happen in people's personal lives too. People can be working at home and they're like, "Did I take the meat out of the freezer for dinner?" And it's like, "Let me just go do that." And then you're in your kitchen, which guess what? Nobody put away the breakfast dishes. And so you're doing that and you're like, "Wait. That mug is broken. Let me fix the handle." And it can take all morning. And you didn't need to go take the meat out right that minute. You could have written that down on a list to get to later. And if the meat was out for six hours versus seven hours, that's really not that much different, but you lost that concentrated time that you probably could have used.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Don't you find, Laura... And I know you do a lot of your work from a home office just like I do. Don't you find that that tendency to do just what you said is... It's so intense when you're working from home because you're surrounded by these other parts of your life and it's all together. And so how do you avoid that? You can batch it, but do you have other tips and suggestions for how you avoid falling into that trap in the first place?

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, and definitely you can lower your standards. Dishes in the sink is not a crisis. The laundry still sitting there is not a crisis. If this is time you planned to work, you're going to work. You wouldn't stop and probably clean the whole office kitchen or start collecting everyone's laundry from around the office and go do it. So you have to have some of the same standards for yourself during your work day at home. And partly that's about managing the distractions as

well. This is so much better now versus in the deep days of COVID when many people's children and partners and everyone else were also on top of them. Thankfully most kids are back in school at this point so it's reduced that somewhat.

But I think it's also about knowing what you intend to do. I think that we can be more motivated to stick with things and ignore distractions when we are very clear with our intentions, that you know, "This is my hour for this proposal for this client that I really want to win." That's a more motivating thing than, "I have lots of stuff to do." Okay. We're going to go get the meat out of the fridge, because you don't care at this point.

And I think it's also a matter of managing your energy. So do the tough stuff when you're best able to handle it, which for most people tends to be morning. And then building conscious breaks during the day to boost your energy levels back up. So do something physical at some point in the day. Get your movement by 3:00 PM. Do something social, so you can call a friend or if your spouse is working from home or wherever you are, you can do some little social break as well. Ideally, maybe another break could be something more inspirational. Listen to inspiring music. Read something motivational or write in a journal or meditate or pray or anything along those lines. Could be maybe a third break to boost your energy levels during the day.

But if you do that, it's slightly easier not to get distracted because a lot of the distractions are about our brain needs a break and if you don't give it a real one, it'll take some other one. It'll invent a reason like, "Oh yeah, my colleague needs these figures this minute," or, "The meat needs to be out of the freezer." So it'll seize upon a convenient excuse. But if you give it real breaks, then it's a little bit more willing to tolerate the slight discomfort of sitting with something for a while.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. I love that. I love that. You talk about in the book the importance of creating backup plans, recognizing that life is not perfect and that you will be thrown a curve ball and somebody will end up in the emergency room, God forbid. But it happens, right? Life happens. So maybe talk about best practices for creating those backup plans and being kind to yourself as you think about the fact that your schedule is not going to be a perfect thing. It's a living document.

Laura Vanderkam:

So one of the rules is to create a backup slot and basically the idea is anything that is important to you in life doesn't need just one spot. It needs an extra one. And it's the equivalent of a rain date. If people go to graduations or whatever in June, there's often a rain date, which is that we recognize that things can go predictably wrong outside. It's right there in the rain date name. But we're not asking, "Will it be rescheduled?" We know it will be at a very specific time. And so you know not to put anything completely unmovable at that time, because if it rains that's where it's going. And it's actually a very convenient concept and I feel like we need more rain dates in life.

So if you have planned to have a sit down meeting with one of your direct reports that's really important... Really long term career discussion with him. And of course what's going to happen

after you've carved out this time to do it? Probably your biggest client has some huge explosion that day and, "Everyone, all hands on deck." You have to deal with it. Well, if it was important, where's the backup slot for it? "We planned to do it Tuesday afternoon, but just in case it's not happening, we're going to reschedule it for first thing Wednesday." And you two both know that Wednesday is where we're rescheduling. So it's not a question of if it will get rescheduled. It's when and you know the time so both of you know not to put anything immovable there.

And it's very hard to do this. I know everyone's very, very busy. They're like, "What? I need not just one hour for this thing, I need two hours?" Yes. In fact, if it's important to you, you do. But one way that you can get at this without making specific backup slots all over your schedule is to leave Fridays as open as possible. So don't schedule anything on Fridays. Yes, you can use it for your planning for the upcoming week. You can use it for your punch list time of your batching the little things, but don't put any meetings, any gatherings, anything that is schedule specific on Fridays if at all possible. Because that way when something happens earlier in the week, you have a spot to put all the stuff that got bumped and you can do that and still take care of it that week without borrowing time from the next week, which will no doubt have crises of its own.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

You talk about in the book how developing this as a practice can also lead to career resiliency. Maybe talk about why that's the case.

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, I think people need backup plans for everything in life. Just if this doesn't work out, what are you going to do? And I'm not saying you shouldn't be all in on your goals. I think it's important to recognize that sometimes stuff doesn't happen and sometimes it has nothing to do with you. The point of networking... It's not just collecting business cards. You want to know that there are a certain number of people who have been like, "Yeah. If you are ever thinking of leaving your job, call me. I'd love to work with you." And so if something does happen in your job and you don't want to do it anymore, you can't do it anymore, you've got options. You know to call those people and you figure out what your options are from there.

That is what having backup plans means. So we want to make sure we don't have all our eggs in one basket, that we have figured out if life doesn't happen as we would like it to happen, what else is there? And having those backup plans allows us to feel more calm and in control even if we know that life is ultimately unknowable because you know you'll probably be okay no matter what.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, absolutely. And having that calmness and the impact that has on our thinking, on our ability to manage ourselves to really think clearly, is huge. It's really huge.

Laura Vanderkam:

Yeah. Well, you feel more confident and even able to take risks in your current position and less willing to put up with anything bad because you have options. It really is freedom.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Absolutely. Laura, maybe talk for just a second about how respondents responded to the survey questions. Maybe the impact that adhering to these nine rules has had on their lives, what you heard from them.

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, that was the really fun part of the survey. Obviously I asked people how they were spending their time and how they felt about their time and they answered on one to seven point scales, but we had space for people to give qualitative responses as well. And a big chunk of the book is just people's quotes like, "I feel more relaxed about my time." "I felt this week went well. Even though I'm incredibly busy at work, I felt like I got to everything I needed to and that made me feel very good." "I spent time with a friend this week and I didn't think that was going to happen and now it did." Or, "This was the week where we actually did fun stuff." When people are planning adventures or a person who started going to a weekly tennis game on Tuesday nights comes back saying that she's all aglow.

These were the sort of things that I found from people. And not everything worked for everyone. There were people who couldn't do stuff for whatever reason or who objected to things that didn't work and I include some of that in the book as well. But given that people did see a statistically significant increase in their overall time satisfaction, I feel like that's reflected in the qualitative responses as well, that people were telling me about how they were enjoying life more, that they were feeling less busy, yet still probably getting more done. And I think that's amazing.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. It is amazing. Were there any surprises? Anything that you heard from people that you were like, "Hey, I really didn't expect that?"

Laura Vanderkam:

Well, I've been teaching these rules for a long time, so I feel like I've gotten a lot of the objections that people will come up with from different times. I will say that one interesting thing that people have... People's intimate relations with their partners improved in many cases.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Interesting.

Laura Vanderkam:

And that was not something I was sure people would share with me in the responses, but in many cases what was happening is that people were not just collapsing on the couch after

dinner until they were too tired to do anything else. They were actually thinking about how they wanted to spend their time. And when they rationally thought about how they wanted to spend their time, there were much better answers than watching TV for four hours until everyone is too tired to do anything else. And so I think that was perhaps a surprising response, but I am thrilled. I am totally here for it.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. That's great. That's really great. Okay, Laura, because we focus on influence and how we can build and sustain influence in our lives, maybe talk about what this concept of influence means to you in your work.

Laura Vanderkam:

Yeah. That's actually a word I have been thinking about a lot this year as one of the words that was in my mind in terms of goals. Not because I want to be this stereotypical Instagram influencer... Which I could never be in my wildest dreams, even if I tried. I'm kind of a mess in terms of hair, makeup, wardrobe. Getting my kids to all stare at the camera at the same time... None of that is going to happen so we are never going to be the Instagram influencer family in matching outfits doing cute things.

But I do think that influence means being able to share powerful ideas with the world and see people actually change their lives as a result. And that is what I am going for. I want people to come away from reading *Tranquility* by Tuesday feeling like, "I have the power to live the life I want, to actually enjoy day-to-day existence, even with all the crazy stuff going on around me. I don't need to wait for a calmer time in the future. I can have the life I want now." So that's what influence means to me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. Laura, it was such a pleasure. I'm so happy to see you again. I really love the book. We will include a link where listeners can purchase it. I'll also include a link to Laura's time makeover guide, which I think is absolutely brilliant. It's very simple and straightforward. It's also free. You can download it right from her website, but I'll include a link in the show notes for this episode. Laura, thank you again. Really loved it.

Laura Vanderkam:

Thanks for having me.

## **EPISODE 214 CLOSE, PART 2 OF 2:**

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey friend, thanks so much for joining me today. I'd love to hear what you thought of this episode, and of Laura's time management tips, and any that you have tried or plan to try.

So please be sure to hop on and leave a review wherever you are listening or you can go to my website she said/she said podcast .com and share your thoughts on the contact me form. Also on the website, that;s the best place to find the links we mentioned in episodes. you'll find links to Laura's book, her FREE downloadable time management spreadsheet, a full-free transcript of this episode, and a few other things.

I actually downloaded the spreadsheet and tracked my time for several weeks during the summer and found the exercise very illuminating.

It also strikes me that time tracking works similar to other types of consciousness exercises. I've been a big fan of WW for years for this reason because it increases my consciousness about what I'm eating. This time tracking exercise is simliar. But I'd be curious to know what you think if you have a chance to try it. Reach out to me on social media. You'll find me on instagram, linked in and facebook @ laura cox kaplan .

Again, The best place to find the full show notes is on my website at She Said/She Said Podcast.com

Friend, thanks again for joining me today. I hope you found this investment in yourself worthwhile. Until next week, you take care. I'll talk to you soon.

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