

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

*290. How To Manage Your Energy To Maximize Your Productivity With Google's Laura Mae Martin*

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:06](#)):

Hi, I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. Welcome to She Said, she Said Podcast. Here on this podcast, we talk about the building blocks and the micro habits that help us create real and lasting influence. What do I mean by that? Well, we're talking about the kind of influence that helps you achieve your goals and whatever it is in life that you want to accomplish, but perhaps most importantly, it's the type of influence that helps you create real impact and that enables you to truly

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:41](#)):

Thrive.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([00:44](#)):

Hey, friend, welcome to episode 290. How many times have you said to yourself, my email inbox is completely out of control? Or maybe you're like me and you just look at the first few emails and you basically avoid dealing with a problem that has been building for maybe over a decade? Friend? I wish I could say that I was making that up, but honestly, ever since we started using email, I feel like I've struggled with staying on top of it and not letting things fall through the cracks. This problem has only grown worse as we now have to monitor all the different messaging functions in other apps. Now, don't get me wrong, I love hearing from folks, but it can be daunting to stay on top of it all. Now, if you know me or you've been listening or following me on Instagram for any time at all, you know how much I love a good productivity hack, and if that resonates with you, you are going to love this conversation this week.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([01:48](#)):

But it's more than just getting more out of your day. It's about prioritizing to make sure that where you're spending your time is actually giving you the value, the output, and the impact that's most important to you. Spending a lot of time looking through hundreds of emails is probably not time well spent. Am I right? And that's time that all of us could be using to have more impact and to build more influence that we can use in ways that help us build support for whatever's important to us. This concept is at the core of my conversation this week in episode 290 with author and Google's productivity expert, Laura May Martin, Laura has spent the past 13 years building strategies and tools to help Google executives be their most productive. She's sharing these thoughtful down to earth approaches with us. Now, just think about that. Laura is the person who's helping the execs at Google make the most of those productivity tools that of us rely on every day, everything from email to calendars to document or organization.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([03:05](#)):

It's a tall order. Oh, and Laura is also the mother of three children under age five, and she wrote her terrific book, which is called Uptime, a Practical Guide to Personal Productivity and Wellbeing. She wrote the book while she was pregnant with her third baby, but she ended up finishing it after that baby arrived a few weeks early. Now just imagine that with two toddlers at home. Now it's important to note that this conversation isn't a conversation just about email, even though we talk about that, we also talk

about list funnels. We talk about zero based calendaring, weekly and daily themes for your calendar, managing your energy flow and dealing with urgent when urgent actually happens way too often to actually be urgent. So a lot packed into today's conversation. I have included links in the show notes where you can download or order Laura's book and also where you can download additional resources directly from Laura that we talk about in this episode. For now though, here is episode 290 with my new friend, the fabulous Laura May Martin enjoy. Laura, welcome to She Said. She said,

Laura Mae Martin ([04:22](#)):

Thanks so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([04:24](#)):

Well, I'm excited to have you largely because I mean, not only was I excited to meet you, but because I am such a productivity junkie, I love a good checklist. I love the concepts and conversations about how to be more productive and how to get more done in my day. So I was thrilled to learn about your book and to have a chance to read it and to have you here today.

Laura Mae Martin ([04:49](#)):

Yeah, I'm excited. Everyone says, who is this book for? And I always say Anyone with a to-do list, anyone who's looking to get more done. So as you said, that's everyone.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([04:58](#)):

So you have become Google's expert on productivity, but as I understand it, that's not necessarily the job that you started out in. Maybe talk a little bit about your career.

Laura Mae Martin ([05:10](#)):

Yeah, I started at Google in sales and I quickly realized that my skillset was not perfectly aligned. So I took, what was that, a StrengthsFinder 2.0 quiz, and it told me my biggest strength was harmony. So when I'm helping people feel in harmony and I'm in harmony and helping people feel that happiness, that's the best career path for me. And underneath that, it said, do not do sales. So I noticed that I was fulfilling my sales role, but I was really interested in how I was organizing my time, how I was managing all the client emails that were coming in, how I was organizing team events when we did big sales events. And so I started doing at the time, the 20% role, which was just on the side coaching people on some of these tactics that I was using. And so I had lots of different roles from that point in event planning and product management and some things that were a little more aligned with that harmony skillset. And then eventually I started working one-on-one with our executives and external executives on that idea of managing your time and energy and your calendar well, and so it just developed into a full-time role. But you're exactly right. I never would've in college thought I was majoring in this or anything like that. It just kind of developed from a natural skillset and then a need.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([06:33](#)):

Yeah. Was it also something that you found yourself digging into as you were kind of getting interested in the topic and you were working to dust up on the existing literature, or how did that develop?

Laura Mae Martin ([06:49](#)):

Yeah, I actually did the opposite. So I kind wanted to develop my own full thoughts around productivity and how I did things and how I'd always done things. And I didn't really want it to be tainted by other productivity books and things like that. I did dive into research something like meetings or how many times a day people are checking their email. I think that stuff is so fascinating and plays into our need to figure out how to control those things. But I really wanted to, even just the list making system, I wanted to put down on paper how I've been doing it for 15 years before I got other tips. And so I went that route. And of course, once I developed all the material at Google, I did read some of the top productivity books. And a lot of ideas are similar about how to manage time. But the good thing is a lot of things are different, and that's why I think it is so personal is not everything. One thing I really don't like is the Pomodoro method, which is talked about all the time in productivity. So I think it's just about finding what works for you and knowing that productivity is so personal and you have to customize your own workflow to really play up to your productivity. I think that's the biggest piece of it.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([07:57](#)):

Yeah. What is the Pomodoro method? I probably know it and don't know it by that name. Yeah,

Laura Mae Martin ([08:03](#)):

I was going to say most people setting a timer to focus on something for 20 minutes and take a 10 minute break and then 20 minutes, it's based on research that our brains think in those 20 minute kind of sprints. But for me, I find it easier to do more of a deep dive and then maybe take a longer break. And in the book I talk about how some people are really productive in the morning, and some people the mornings feel like, oh, I just cannot get anything done. I'm still waking up. And so again, it's just about finding those natural patterns about yourself and being intentional about it.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([08:33](#)):

I love that. I absolutely love that. So I think it's important to sort of set the stage for the conversation to also talk a little bit about the other aspects of your life. We can't separate what's happening at home, and if you happen to be a mom, many listeners listening are moms, you are a mom of three. I believe they're all under age five, if I'm not mistaken.

Laura Mae Martin ([08:57](#)):

Yes.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([08:59](#)):

Under age five. Yes.

Laura Mae Martin ([08:59](#)):

Four, two, and one. That's a

Laura Cox Kaplan ([09:00](#)):

Lot. You've got a full-time job. You've written this fabulous book. You've got three kids under five. There's a lot going on here. Maybe talk a little bit about the other aspects of your life as well and why this was so important to you.

Laura Mae Martin ([09:18](#)):

Yeah, I think that sometimes people say, oh, how are you productive when you have all these kids or all these things going on? But I think that it's actually why I had to develop a lot of these systems in order to be productive, because time doesn't just float by. When you have all these things going on, you really, for example, before I had kids, I had this lovely morning routine where I took all this time for myself and it just came naturally because no one else was there. But now if I want that same sort of intentional, peaceful morning, I really have to make the time for it and schedule it and think about it. Same with meal planning. When you're just cooking for yourself, it's a lot easier to just, what do I want for dinner tonight? But when you have five people counting on you, you really have to think through at the beginning of the week what's there to eat.

Laura Mae Martin ([10:05](#)):

So I think even though it seems like because there's so much going on, how do you get things done? It's actually because of all those things that I've learned that developing systems and processes that work make your life so much easier. And that's really once somebody asks me, what does productivity mean to you? What does this all mean to you? And it was always about taking the things that I have to do, shrinking those down so I can do more of the things that I want to do, whether that's finishing some work things so I can spend more time with my kids or really getting things good at home so I can take a business trip I wanted to take or whatever that is. It's about doing what you want to do more often.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([10:44](#)):

Yeah, I love that. Absolutely. Love that. Let's jump into the book. You titled the book Uptime. So why uptime? Why was that important? What does that mean to you?

Laura Mae Martin ([10:55](#)):

In the computer world, uptime is the time that a computer is on and productive and running. It's the computer's uptime, and so everyone has those times. No matter how fleeting, you can close your eyes and think about them when you're thinking, wow, I'm really killing it right now. I'm on top of it. I'm thinking of all the right things. I'm getting things done, I'm feeling good. And so I wanted a word that encompassed that zone and how to hit that zone more often. So that's what I'm calling uptime, that sort of calm accomplishment. I'm really in that zone of getting things done but also balanced while doing it. And then of course, the book talks about downtime and how most people think that's the opposite of uptime, but in fact, it's extremely important to incorporate, just like you need to restart your laptop and

shut it down occasionally to keep that runtime, you have to do the same for yourself in order to have that full uptime, and so they go hand in hand.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([11:50](#)):

I love that. I absolutely love that. I thought the fact that you interweave these concepts together to be so incredibly smart, because we talk about a lot on this podcast, the value of taking a break, taking a step away, you need that time in order to get perspective. It's what helps you become more creative. So I love that you incorporated that. I also loved, there were parts of the book we talk about not everybody's way of taking a break is the same. We're not all the same. And so maybe talk a little bit about what you found in the research about the importance of that and understanding your own biological rhythm. Maybe I'm not sure how you Right, it's sort of the way that you're wired essentially.

Laura Mae Martin ([12:42](#)):

Right? Exactly. Which is not something that you can really just make up or go along with what somebody else does. And I think that even the idea of just when you're in the weeds, just try to step back. That's a really hard concept already in the weeds. So I think it's more about the long vision of saying, I'm going to work downtime into my regular schedule where I always, no matter what, take a walk outside every day at 5:00 PM to unwind or I take a vacation every quarter or whatever that is, because it's a lot easier when you've pre-planned it than to try to in the weeds say, I know it would be good for me to take a break. But the interesting thing is when there are a lot of differences as far as how people relax, and for me spending time with my three young kids is relaxing, that certainly might not be the case for someone else.

Laura Mae Martin ([13:30](#)):

So it's about noticing those patterns. But when I do big speaking events and I ask people, okay, where do you think of your best ideas in the shower? Gets a lot of hands on a commute, workout, cooking, doing absolutely nothing with work. Then I ask your seventh meeting of the day, no hands, knee deep in your email, no hands. So I think it's differences in where you're getting that downtime, but the idea of its being a time that your brain is not active is the one consistency. And so that can come in different ways for different people. And it can also come at different times a day, which goes into the concept of power hours and off peak hours and looking at your own rhythms and saying, I know about myself that I am the most productive in the morning. So if someone asks me to do a big strategic decision-making meeting at 4:00 PM I can just feel it in my bones.

Laura Mae Martin ([14:27](#)):

It is not a good time of day for me and for other people, it's the total opposite. If I ask them to join an 8:00 AM meeting, they feel like, Ugh, that is just not where I'm my best. And so it's about finding those times and then doing the right thing with the other time. So if somebody says, Hey, I'd love to do a mentorship chat with you, I'm going to use some of that low energy downtime to do that versus my peak focus time. And so it's not about only working during your peak time and not doing anything. It's about, okay, I have a bunch of expenses to do. I'm going to slot them at a time when I know I'm already low energy and I'm not on. And so it's just about thinking through where the right things are at the right

time, and then of course having that downtime because it's not just to relax, it's where you think of your best ideas. It's like pour over coffee, just dripping down everything you've thought about all day, making this rich, bold summary of everything so that you're thinking longer term more creatively. It's just that holistic view.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([15:28](#)):

Yeah, I love that. And I love how you use the concept of being really intentional with the downtime because I think oftentimes, even if we understand, and of course we do, right? Everyone listening is really sophisticated and very thoughtful about how they manage their time. At the same time, I think when we talk about downtime, we sort of think that's sort of what you cram in at some point during the day. Maybe if you get lucky, not being as to your point, really intentional about scheduling your downtime, that is part of your schedule. That's something that you have to be really precise about, which I absolutely love. I think that's such an interesting way of thinking about it. And so incredibly important. I'd love for you to talk about, there were so many things that got my attention in the book and just interesting ways of thinking about these concepts in a way that we're a little different than things that I've read before.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([16:26](#)):

I've had Laura Cam on this podcast a couple times, she is fabulous and so incredibly thoughtful, but you tackle many of these topics a little differently than Laura does, and I love that because to your earlier point, these strategies are not going to work the same way for every person. So let's start with urgent and the fact that urgent is not all things are created equal on the urgency scale, and just because it's urgent for someone doesn't mean it's urgent for someone else. So I'd love for you to give us kind of your quick and dirty on how you think about urgent.

Laura Mae Martin ([17:04](#)):

Yeah, yeah. I love Laura as well. She reviewed my book for the Wall Street Journal, so that was a perfect fit because you are right. She has very similar and different ideas on all these topics. So with urgent, I think that a little bit what we were talking about before, some of the idea of urgent comes from this bigger mentality of the busy is important and this idea that the more stressed we are, and if you watch your language, sometimes it's more around, oh, how it is, fire drills, I'm slammed, I'm back to back. And when people say things to me like, oh, I'm sure you have so much going on, and I say something to them, I'm actually at the perfect level of commitment. It feels awkward because it's like nobody says that. That feels weird for me to say that I'm balanced. I'm in the zone, I'm focused on the right things at the right time.

Laura Mae Martin ([17:56](#)):

And so I think some glorifying urgent in a way has become a little bit popular, which it's a little more like that video game mentality. It's more fun to battle the urgent. In the book, I talk about my favorite out of office that someone put up that said, I'm on vacation if this is urgent, dial 9 1 1, which I just think is so funny because it's like if you're in advertising sales, what is truly urgent? But the bigger point being that urgent things come up, they come up and that's okay. And if they come up once or twice, you may need

to handle them. But I think when people say, I have urgent things come up every day, what I'm saying is that usually means, first of all, something's wrong in the system. If there's things coming up that are urgent every single day, then we need to address the process of how that's happening and try to get ahead of it.

Laura Mae Martin ([18:47](#)):

But that being said, again, there are still roles where urgent becomes part of the every day, but you have to then treat that it's one of your priorities. So I talk about, again, in the book, no surgeon schedules, well, patient visits or sorry, no ER doctor schedule surgeries throughout their day. Because what happens is patients come in and they'd have to say, I got to cancel this. I got to cancel this. No, their job is urgent. And so if that is your job, you may find yourself saying, Hey, I'd love to commit to this project, but I have to leave room in my schedule for things that inevitably come up with this role that's called making Room for Urgent. Or one executive that I work with just keeps one hour free a day. That is his time for if anything came up the morning of his whole team knows about it, they all organize around it and say, oh, we're going to talk to him at one.

Laura Mae Martin ([19:36](#)):

That's when he always has available for things that come up. And so his schedule doesn't totally blow out. And so you can use things like, is this urgent and important? If so, I feel good about totally wrecking my schedule for it and it's the right thing. Is it urgent, but maybe not important? How can I schedule time to deal with it later or address what I can now and do it later? So it's really just about how you're looking at it and then just being honest with yourself. If it is part of your role, then don't also commit a hundred percent and then try to leave room for urgent, commit 60% and leave the rest for urgent. I think people just sometimes forget about that piece, not right in front of you until it

Laura Cox Kaplan ([20:16](#)):

Is. But again, it's about being really intentional and understanding, being reflective enough to understand what's actually happening in your day-to-day, and then being really intentional about allowing that time. I absolutely love that. Okay. I'd love for you to talk about the concept of valuing your time, and I think that is such an incredible topic, especially for a podcast that is focused on women and our personal and professional development and getting as much out of the day as we possibly can, but also not forgetting that our time is valuable. And so maybe talk a little bit about your thoughts on how to get a handle on how to value your time.

Laura Mae Martin ([21:00](#)):

I think when people want to value their time, they instantly try to find this magic number, and it usually has to do with something about how much they get paid per hour at work, and that's their hourly worth. And I challenge people to go a little bit further than that and just think through things as small as if you are doing something every day for 20 minutes that could be solved and you wouldn't have to do it, how much would you be willing to pay for that? So you want to look at something you're doing every day for a year, how much time is that worth? What would you do with that time? And so I include a series of questions to ask yourself whenever you're thinking about what is my time actually worth? And it could

be I'm thinking about what would I pay to get an hour back of my time of something that I don't enjoy doing?

Laura Mae Martin ([21:47](#)):

That's usually the biggest way of thinking of it because if it's something you enjoy doing now, the value of your time is a little different because you're also getting the value of the activity. But questions, do I enjoy doing this task? Like we mentioned, will it take more effort for me to delegate it than it would if there's something that takes four hours to train someone on and it would take you an hour, now it's still a benefit of your time to just do it. What would I be doing instead? How would I be using my time elsewhere and how would that value me? Can someone else do it much better than me? In that case, it's definitely worth delegating. How much money would I pay to not do it? And one I like is, do I feel like I should do it? Because there's some people who they could delegate cutting their yard, but there's some weird sense of pride that when I do it, I feel like I did it.

Laura Mae Martin ([22:38](#)):

And so that has to be taken into consideration too. It's not always just exactly dollar for dollar should I be doing this? So I think it's just again about taking the time to actually think through things and then thinking about what's not a good use of your time. So I talk about my towel closet is just not perfectly neat, and I'm proud of that because I'm like, you know what? I go in here maybe once a month. We have guests. I didn't take the time to perfectly fold everything and I'm proud of the hours that I have saved throughout my life, not making sure that closet is perfectly neat and where I've spent the time elsewhere. And so giving yourself that permission to not do everything super well because you know that that's not a good use of your time in every situation. And just constantly having that trade off mindset about your time, if I'm doing this, what am I not doing? Is this worth it to me? How could I be doing something instead? So it's really just getting that wrapping around and now I feel like I'm so much of a shark about my time. I'm constantly thinking, is that the right use of my time? Could I be using my time better and thinking through that lens? Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([23:46](#)):

Yeah. I absolutely love that. I come out of the PricewaterhouseCoopers world and we had a concept of highest and best use and always asking yourself, what is your highest and best use? Is this something where the value added is better coming from me? Or is it better to delegate to a team member so they get the experience or maybe they're just better at whatever that happens to be. And I always love that concept, which when I read that in the book, it kind of reminded me of that as well. I love that.

Laura Mae Martin ([24:15](#)):

Yeah, I love that phrase. Yeah,

Laura Cox Kaplan ([24:17](#)):

It's great. That's a great way of putting

Laura Mae Martin ([24:18](#)):

It.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([24:19](#)):

We use that here at home quite a bit. This highest in best use.

Laura Mae Martin ([24:23](#)):

I'm going to start using that.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([24:26](#)):

Okay. Let's talk about one of my other really favorite parts of this book that I thought was so interesting. And again, maybe it's because I was drawing from my PWC days, but this idea of zero based calendaring, which I thought was so interesting, where you start with the nothing. So in particular, just to set the stage, I think that it can be really hard when you sit down to work with a client or when you sit down yourself and you're overwhelmed with way too much to do and you're like, holy, but Jolie, how in the world am I going to put all this together? And it can be so overwhelming that you don't quite know where to start. So maybe let's kind of start from that standpoint of where do you start and how does this notion of zero based calendaring help?

Laura Mae Martin ([25:15](#)):

I think when you're solving a problem, we sometimes go to that 10%. Okay, if I'm looking at my calendar, where can I knock off 10% of things here and there to make it better? But instead you want to go to the 10 x because it's actually similar effort levels to do a radical change versus a tiny change. And so that's when I get people thinking about, okay, if I could redo my whole calendar, and of course that's not always going to be possible, but the look of delight on people's faces when I'm coaching them and I hand them a blank calendar, it just gives them the feeling of I could design my own life. Just having that feeling of I get to choose, I get to think about what I want and where I would put it. It just gives you that mindset shift. Of course, you're not going to say to your manager, I've decided I can't go to your staff meeting not during my power hours.

Laura Mae Martin ([26:10](#)):

That's not realistic. But if you never make a plan of how you would want your ideal week to go or your ideal flow of your schedule based on your rhythms and your actions that you need to get done, it will never go to plan. It'll never even go 50% to plan. And even something going 20% to plan is better than just bouncing around, which is what most people do. And the idea of it being zero based, zero based accounting of course, is not looking at the budget from last year because of the endowment effect. We tend to just hold onto these things and place more value on things that we have is the psychology principle. And so I talk about zero based closeting, open your closet, it's a store go shopping, what would you buy right now? Or do you just keep that shirt? You've always had it.

Laura Mae Martin ([26:54](#)):

And so zero based calendaring is that same idea. If I was invited to this commitment to day for this long, this frequently, would I accept it or have I just always gone to this biweekly meeting and never really put any thought into it. So it's just a way of shifting your intention to say, would I take this on right now, right now, right now? And if I could, how would I block this? And what I usually tell executives is we're not planning for tomorrow here. We're planning for maybe three months ahead. Because you may have the ability in a quarter to say, starting next quarter, I'd like to do most of my one-on-ones on Monday. And that's the way my energy flows, because Tuesday I want to actually follow up from all those or whatever it is. And so let's think about designing your schedule far out and then implementing it maybe in waves or implementing it at a later date with communication.

Laura Mae Martin ([27:44](#)):

But it's just helpful to actually ask yourself, what do I want to see on my calendar? What would I accept right now? And little things, little things like I come out of my manager's meeting and I always have things I need to do, so I find that I need some time to focus after that, and I've always just had this meeting there, and I get frazzled then because now I'm in another meeting and I never get to those action items. And so something as small as a 30 minute block that you can start blocking in three months, that small change, one change can make a big overall difference. So it's just about finding those little

Laura Cox Kaplan ([28:21](#)):

Pockets. I love that. I absolutely love that. One thought that occurs to me as you were talking is what's the advice that you give people when they are forced in the course of their job, especially for people that are working for someone else and they have to be at their optimal during a time window that's not necessarily their highest or peak energy level. What's your advice for how to deal with that? You can't always rearrange things when there are other people involved.

Laura Mae Martin ([28:53](#)):

And I think a lot of my job is working with executives, but I make sure to tell people I'm also working with what I call the sandwich level where they have managers and they're managing people and they're taking on a lot of responsibility. That's actually where a lot of the pressure falls when it comes to scheduling and meetings and prioritizing and people who don't have full control of their schedule. And so I think that what I always focus on is what do we have control of? So the first activity as part of the zero-based calendaring is putting anything on your calendar that you cannot change. We know this, that your manager has their meeting at this time, we're not changing that. Or you have to go to this product review that is not up for discussion. But then what you can do is build around that and say, okay, because I'm asked to do this work at this time, that's not really my peak time.

Laura Mae Martin ([29:41](#)):

Can I maybe give myself a break before or after that knowing that my energy is usually in a better place if I can gear up for it a bit, if I have a meeting every Friday morning at 10, and I'm usually feeling slow, I'm going to just block nine to 10 for myself to prep for that meeting and not try to put something else there or be unrealistic about what I'm going to accomplish before that. And so just trading where you can,

whether it's I'm traveling for four full days Monday through Thursday, I don't have control of that. What I do have control of is what I put on my schedule Friday when I get back and what I can think through and prepare that for myself. And so it's really just about taking what you do have control over and using that to your benefit, because that's really the, I mean, in life, that's the only thing that you have is your own the things that you can control. And so you're saying, okay, I have these things. I cannot move from my calendar, but now with what's left, what can I do with that? Or what can I do to help future me prepare for that schedule? That's not ideal for

Laura Cox Kaplan ([30:46](#)):

Me. Yeah, that's such a smart way to think about that. Okay, I want to spend a little bit of time talking about email because it's the bane of my existence, and I know a lot of people feel the same way. Maybe it's generational, I don't know. Not that I think I'm so old, but I really am. But now with email, we also have inboxes in our social media as well. So you've got Facebook messaging and you've got your Instagram messaging and you've maybe got TikTok and you've got LinkedIn and you've got God knows what else, right? There's just a lot of things that you're trying to stay on top of. So this concept of inbox zero has always been aspirational and completely unattainable for me. Your hair would probably light on fire if I told you how many unread email messages I have. It's horrifying, but I've sort of grown to live with it over the course of decades. So let's talk about maybe some of your festives or literally I am in the remedial categories, this topic is concerned, but maybe some tips on how to begin to get the situation under control asking for a friend.

Laura Mae Martin ([31:59](#)):

Yes. So I think that just like you said, email is so personal and it's so in our faces, and it's such a sense of anxiety for people, whether it's work or personal. And for a lot of people, it's the first thing they look at when they wake up, the last thing they look at before they go to bed. And so whenever I'm coaching someone, I usually start with email because I call it the gateway to productivity. If we can wrangle that, you feel this sense of lightness that can then spread to things like your schedule and your energy and your time. But if you're working on those things, but then constantly in the weeds of your inbox, then you're taking a backwards step. Basically the 25 times or more, you open your phone to check your email every day. And so really what I go through is a three step process with people.

Laura Mae Martin ([32:44](#)):

The first step is taking everything out of your inbox that you don't need to see. And so a lot of times when people have these really high unread counts, it's either that they're on a lot of emails that they don't ever need to open, or it's that they're ignoring thousands and thousands of coworker emails, which is not usually the case. It's usually, oh, I've signed up for these things and it's just in the weeds. And people think if I'm not opening the email, it's whatever, it's just sitting in there. But every single email that comes through, if you are scanning the subject line to see if you need to open it, you're giving it an energy dollar of yours. You're shelling that out. So even all these emails coming in that you're not opening, they're still using some of your energy each day. And so simple, simple things like searching for the word unsubscribe in your inbox will quickly bring up all the emails that are not addressed to you.

Laura Mae Martin ([33:39](#)):

And I tell people, it's not about clearing every single email that's in your inbox, it's about finding the things that you don't need to get again in the future. So really, all these people that are sending you things are probably sending them once a week. So if you just look at the last week of unsubscribe emails and in Gmail now you can just click the button, unsubscribe within the email. You don't even have to go to the webpage or anything. Now you've saved yourself next week from getting a lot of those. So that can be a super simple one. And sometimes just stopping there can change a lot for people. They're saying, wow, now I'm really only seeing the things that I want to see. And now they start to get picky like, oh, I didn't catch this one and now everything that comes in is something I care about.

Laura Mae Martin ([34:20](#)):

So I'm going to start really thinking through like, I don't want this and I'm going to put it in a folder or whatever. So that can be step one. And then step two is popping the things that you really do need to see. So if your kid's principal emails you directly, the CEO of your company emails you directly, those things should look different in your inbox than if they email the whole school or if the CEO emails the whole company. If you're in a lot of meetings or traveling, you need to be able to open your inbox and have a general idea of what's in there. And so I create VIP labels for a lot of people, and it's basically if these three people email me directly, have those look red and important and come through so that I'm not missing anything. So the first one is getting out what you don't need to see.

Laura Mae Martin ([35:04](#)):

The second is really honing in on emails that are important. And again, if you only did those two things, you would still be in a really good place. So we haven't even gotten to the third step, which is that inbox zero. But those two small changes that I would say maybe take 10 to 15 minutes each, now you're saving yourself so much brain space in the future by cleaning that up. And then the third piece is, especially for a work role, is this idea of inbox zero, which I think of it like laundry. So inbox zero just means everything's out of the dryer. It does not mean that everything is folded, everything is hung up and every sock is matched. But it does mean I've taken out what I've gotten and I've put it into piles based on what I need to do later. So in the laundry example, that's your fold hang socks in the example of your email that would be to read, to review, to respond.

Laura Mae Martin ([36:05](#)):

Those are the three things I need to do with that. And where that helps is then I can go to bed with everything in laundry baskets, but I have no anxiety because I know exactly where that pink shirt is. I touched it, I put it in a pile, I know how much is in that pile. And then it also helps with energy, because I'm not using my peak morning focus power hours to read industry articles. What a waste. I'm really taking that one basket of things that I need to thoughtfully respond to and saying, respond, respond, respond, respond. Just like you'd fold, fold, fold, fold, fold. You really get in the zone, take the whole pile up to the dresser at the same time, and it just helps. So what happens with emails? People bounce around, oh, I should do this later. Okay, I'm going to mark that as unread.

Laura Mae Martin ([36:49](#)):

Did I see that before? Yes. I, okay, I'm going to respond to this. Oh, I should read this. I'm going to just bore this to someone else. I'm going to go back to inbox something new coming. So think about if you were doing your laundry that way, like one shirt, oh, this is a sock. Does it go with these pants? No. Oh, these are wet. I'm going to throw it back in. You know what? Every night I'm just going to turn the dryer on and deal with it tomorrow. That's how we do our email. And so you can see the inefficiency laundry wise and email is just so if you can only do one thing and it's cleaning up your email, it just leaves so much mental space for other things that you should be thinking about.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([37:25](#)):

I love that. I absolutely love that. Okay, let's jump to list funnels and how you group your list funnel category. So we're talking about checklists, of course, one of my personal favorite topics and personal favorite tools. Share some thoughts on how I can make these a bit more productive.

Laura Mae Martin ([37:46](#)):

I shared the list funnel system because I watched so many people make lists, and it's just interesting what people do. Sometimes they have a list of everything they need to do, and sometimes they have a list of one or two things they're going to do and they don't have a list of things they should do in the future. And sometimes they have a list and then I'll say, okay, when do you plan to do this? And they're like, actually, I don't know. I don't have room for that in my schedule. And so it's like they can be so helpful, but they can also be just so vague. And just today I thought of something I want to do in the fall when my son starts school, and I'm thinking, am I going to put that on my list of things I'm doing today? No, that doesn't make any sense.

Laura Mae Martin ([38:25](#)):

There's nothing I can do about it until August. And so the idea of the list funnel is to have a dashboard of everything that you could possibly do and realistically be pulling off of that list into a shorter format of what do I plan to do this week? Or what do I plan to do this day? And then putting that other list aside so that your brain is confident that it's taken care of and it's not looping in your brain like, gosh, I need to buy that birthday present. It's on the list, and I know that I'm going to look at that list again before the birthday comes up, and now I'm really focused on the things I said I would do today. And so it gives your brain that ironclad system of there is a place where everything's documented, and I have a routine of checking that place once a week and not getting to the point where I'm, oh, I forgot about this, or I didn't do this.

Laura Mae Martin ([39:13](#)):

And the way I organized my list, which I have my right now, amazing. Which I put in the book and the list that's in the book was true exactly what was on my list at the time I was writing it. You'll see it's like both summer camp registration and things that I had to do for work and returns I had to do from Christmas. So it was truly what I was doing. And I have found that there's really, of course, everybody has different roles and different responsibilities, but the categories that I give for the master, the main list is the types of things that almost everyone has things, personal things they need to do on the computer work, things

that they need to do, physical errands, they need to run calls, they need to make things that they've been meaning to buy returns or errands, those kinds of things.

Laura Mae Martin ([39:59](#)):

So the reason that you're grouping them by type of task versus any other way is because, for example, the other day I pulled up to the doctor's office and I was 10 minutes early. I could instantly go to my calls list and make a few calls, and they were all organized right there for me. Or if you say, you know what? On Sunday I am going to bring my computer to the park and get some stuff done. Personally, I now have a list already made of everything I need to do on my computer personally. And so by grouping them that way versus deadline or things like that, it's helping you get in the energy of doing them similar times and just having a way of saying, okay, I'm traveling this week and I'm not going to get as much off of my main list as I want.

Laura Mae Martin ([40:43](#)):

I give the example of my son came a month early and I was in the middle of writing this book. My chapters were due. I was of course like, oh my goodness, this is not what I planned. But he was healthy, everything worked out. But after I spent some time with him on maternity leave, I came back and my trustee main list was exactly where I went for everything I had dropped the ball on. I knew that there was a documentation exactly of everything I did not do and the deadline that it was due. And there's nothing more valuable than having that list of everything you haven't done that's so valuable for your brain. And so just having those categories and then working off those categories into an actual, and then of course, there's going to be days where you say you're going to do something and you didn't do it.

Laura Mae Martin ([41:28](#)):

Well, that is still on your main list so it doesn't get lost. So it's just way of workflow, and I think a lot of people think, oh, it sounds like a lot of work, but I give the example of the grocery store. If you just wander in without an idea of what you're going to make or where things are, that'll take you 40 minutes to an hour. If you spend seven minutes making a grocery list based on aisle and what you're planning to make, that seems like I have to spend seven to 10 minutes making a list. But then you're in and out of there in 20 minutes. So you actually are saving all this time in the long run by just taking that little moment to make a list and make a plan. Yeah.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([42:04](#)):

Do you have downloadables for how you structure your lists, or how do people sort of tactically tackle this sort of list making recommendation? Yeah.

Laura Mae Martin ([42:16](#)):

On my website at Laura May with an e, Laura May martin.com, I have under the resources tab the exact worksheets that I use for each part of that list funnel. And that was one thing I really wanted in the book because I have now read productivity books, and a lot of them are just, oh, just delegate and just, no, when somebody is overwhelmed, they need exact things to do. That's why I wanted the word practical in

the title. I wanted people to, and some of the reviews have started to come in from the book and people are saying, this is so helpful because it's exactly what I need to do starting today to get this done, or whether it's lists or whatever. And that's exactly what I wanted, is people to have actual tactical takeaways that you could start using right away.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([43:01](#)):

Because when people are overwhelmed, to your point, the last thing they want to do is then also think about a productivity system. They just want to put something into place, right? Again, speaking on behalf of a friend, I get this. Okay, Laura, I also would love for you to talk, I'd love for you to talk about the weekly and daily themes that really got my attention. I love that concept as well. Maybe talk about that for a second too.

Laura Mae Martin ([43:33](#)):

Yeah. The more that I researched and heard about very senior executives and super successful people, the more I realized that this is just something that they do. And I give the example of a surgeon and if a surgeon, you would understand that a surgeon would be crazy to say, I'm going to do an 8:00 AM surgery on Monday, and then a 10:00 AM follow-up appointment with a past patient and then an 11:00 AM new patient consult, and then 12:00 PM x-rays and a 1:00 PM surgery. You would say, no, that's crazy. Your energy will be all over the place. You're not going to be good at surgery. You need to do maybe Monday and Thursday in the or Tuesday follow-ups Wednesday, new patients Friday research. And that's totally normal for a surgeon, but for some reason we don't think that way for ourselves. So something as simple as meal planning, what's for dinner feels super daunting.

Laura Mae Martin ([44:27](#)):

But now if you have this schedule of I do meatless Monday, always a pasta Tuesday, new recipe Wednesday leftover Thursday, now you start to have some structure that you can work within, and it alleviates that stress. It also alleviates you having to say, oh, I've been really wanting to try new recipes. When am I going to do that? No, you have a day that's dedicated to it. And so when you think about your work schedule, again, you're not going to be able to say, I'm not doing any other meetings except my theme this day. But even if you're able to take a half day for a real theme or you say, I'm just going to try to block Fridays as my administrative or catch up day, because that's always when things throughout the week build up. Anything you can do to group together types of activities so that you're thinking about them and really getting in the zone for more than a little 30 minute schedule that can help so much in how you're thinking about managing your energy and your time. So whether it's meal planning or your workday, any of those things where you can say, this is my day to focus on this. So if you're a photographer Monday and Wednesday, I shoot Tuesday and Thursday, I edit Friday, I manage my website and post social media Saturday, whatever that is, just thinking through that can help so much when it comes to productivity.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([45:45](#)):

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

*290. How To Manage Your Energy To Maximize Your Productivity With Google's Laura Mae Martin*

Amazing. Absolutely amazing. Laura, what a treat to talk to you. I have loved these suggestions. The book is called Uptime, A Practical Guide to Personal Productivity and Wellbeing. I'll include a link to purchase the book in the show notes along with Laura's website. Laura, thank you so much.

Laura Mae Martin ([46:04](#)):

Thank you so much for having me. This was great.

Laura Cox Kaplan ([46:08](#)):

Okay, friend. Which of Laura's productivity tips was your favorite? For me, I think it might have been a tie between the zero based calendaring and the Weekly and Daily Themes. I loved both of those concepts and really this idea of intentionally grouping your to-dos and your appointments together to maximize both your flow and your energy. Just so much to love here and so many ways that Laura is helping folks accomplish more of what's important to them. That my friend is where real influence lies. With that, I would love to hear your feedback on this or any of our, she said, she said podcast episodes. I promise. I will respond to your email. Send me a message at [info@shesaid.media](mailto:info@shesaid.media), or you can use the contact link in the show notes. Or better yet, if you enjoyed the conversation, please leave me a quick review from wherever you're listening. I would really, really love your feedback. Thanks for spending some time here at She Said, she Said Podcast. I hope you found it a good investment in you. Until next week, friend, you take care and I'll talk to you soon. And remember she said, she said Podcast is a weekly production of She Said, she said Media.