

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:04] DC: It takes the right skills and the right innovation to design and manage meaningful print marketing solutions. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse, where we explore all facets of print and marketing that create stellar communications and sales opportunities for business success. I'm your host, Deborah Corn, the Intergalactic Ambassador to the Printerverse. Thanks for tuning in. Listen long and prosper.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:31] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Podcast From the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your Intergalactic Ambassador. More specifically, we are here with the Time Management Tips in 20 Podcast, which means I am here with Sarah Ohanesian. She's the co-founder and Productivity Coach at SO Productive.

Before we start, I need to give you a shout-out. I was just at the International Sign Association Sign Expo in Orlando. And someone I know named Corey stopped me and told me that he listened to our last podcast about processes and tools for time management on the plane, and he's adopting a whole bunch of them, and just stopped me to let me know that he thought it was just an amazing advice that you shared. So, thank you so much, and know that at least one person has taken you up on some of those tools you offered, and I put it in an extra little plug for Todoist because you know that you have me currently obsessed with my digital to-do list from Todoist, which links are always in the show notes for that and Asana.

Okay, we are actually going to be speaking about something that also has a lot of relevance. I just mentioned I was in an event. I can tell you that I went to the event on Tuesday to Thursday, which meant that Friday was my day back, and I thought I pretty much had everything under control. I was looking at my email. I was only gone for two days and relatively speaking, that's not a long time. But let me tell you something, I still spent my entire day, Friday, catching up with things and realized that I was doing a lot of half-assed responding and really being clear with people while I was away. Some of that is just answering quickly from a show floor, which maybe I've learned I shouldn't do. But we're going to focus this episode on how to reset when you fall behind. So, I'm going to turn it over to you.

[0:02:39] SO: Yes. I actually think spring is a really good time to think about this because we've got spring break, we've got people taking, maybe a week off from the office. So, when you come back, you've been away, I think one of the most appropriate things to do is actually give yourself a little grace and space and know that you might have to ease back into this time off. In a perfect world, give yourself a little more space in those days. Physically, as you're scheduling, when you're coming back into the office, having a little bit more time to actually get work done.

We've talked about this a lot on this show is when you are looking at your calendar, and you're realistically planning those days ahead, know that if you come back from a vacation, and you book back to back to back to back-to-back meetings and those first one or two days back, you're actually going to get more behind. So, I would say plan ahead and maybe even proactively continue to block your schedule for a day or two, so you've got a little bit of space to catch up. That's what I would say.

Now, the other thing I would set up is do have meetings to transfer knowledge. So again, in a perfect world, you'd have somebody who is maybe filling in for you, or helping you out, or helping you while you were gone. Schedule a time with them to do that debrief and transfer that knowledge because sometimes when we come back, we think, "What did I miss? Did something happen without me?" There's a little kind of anxiety sometimes, even around that. So, really good to take an opportunity to debrief, what did I miss, let's get back in sync. But give yourself a little space to actually ease back into it.

The other part of it is physically, mentally sometimes we need a vacation from the vacation. Have you ever had a trip like that, Deborah? Maybe it's a family trip, perhaps. But we're a little tired sometimes actually when we come back, so you might want to give yourself a little bit of extra space in those first few days. I think often, instead we try to pack it in, I would say just the opposite is going to benefit you the most.

[0:04:31] DC: Yes. I couldn't agree with you more. I used to say, "Okay, got to hit the ground running. Let me just get all these meetings that I couldn't do on Tuesday and Thursday and Friday morning." It did push me. I did end up working till nine o'clock at night on Friday, only because I needed to deal with that. So, you're right. Had I given myself a couple of hours in the morning, I probably could have banged out everything and stopped working a lot sooner than

that. We talked about just briefly for a second about digital tools to help you. Certainly, if you are on an Asana or some other team platform, giving yourself time to review that, instead of like, maybe needing to find someone and schedule a meeting, just make sure that you go through everything that happened, everything that changed. Then, if you have questions, you've left yourself some time.

So, I'm a big fan of blocking off a couple of hours on your calendar that first day and I agree with you, don't jump into a meeting. I mean, especially, imagine going to a status meeting and you have no status because you weren't there. What else can people do?

[0:05:35] SO: So, the other thing that can happen when we get back is we feel overwhelmed. It actually starts and now you feel like you're dumped on. So maybe you did have a relaxing trip, and now you're back, it feels even worse. That's when that overwhelm can really set in. You can even start to feel a little bit of burnout.

One of the concepts I like to just remind people of is that you do have control of your time, and we've talked about this a lot. Even when it doesn't feel like it, sometimes this could be as simple as like pausing, taking a deep breath. Not to get too woo-woo on us here, but just that act of like, "All right. Hoo." Take a deep breath and I got to realize that I can get back in control of my schedule, moment by moment of the day. Because if you don't, this becomes a runaway train, and you're very overwhelmed.

So, if you start to feel actually like your heart rate is going up, your breathing is increasing a little bit. You're like, "Ah, this isn't feeling very good." Literally, pause, take a deep breath, and I'd say, hit the reset button. Get back that feeling of control, because that's going to make us feel like, "All right, I'm just taking this one hour at a time." Again, this really happens in those first few days that we are back and we feel dumped on. So, kind of get back in control, feeling like you have some control over the time.

[MESSAGE]

[0:06:57] SO: I'm Sarah Ohanesian, founder of SO Productive, a productivity training and consulting company. Teams I work with get more done. They experience improved processes,

greater productivity, and increased efficiency, all without stress and burnout. If you want to improve your performance, or the performance of your team, visit so-productive.com and get started today. I offer conference keynotes, one-on-one coaching, and hands-on corporate workshops, all focused on increasing productivity and time management. Let's discuss how SO Productive can supercharge your organization. Links are in the show notes.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:07:40] DC: I mean, we have plenty of podcasts that focus on how to prioritize, how to look at a challenging inbox and deal with that. How to communicate with other people. So, we have some reference. Make some time while you're traveling home, in your car, or your plane, or however you're doing it even if you're just around the house and you're unpacking. Plug in Podcasts From the Printerverse, Time Management Tips in 20, and go back to some episodes because you don't want to just jump into, "Okay, I need some time to look at this inbox and see how I'm going to deal with it" and then be frozen, which happens to me often. Then, I just think, "Okay. You can't eat the elephant all at once. Let's start looking at" – I mean, you know how I look at it. What are the things that other people need from me? Let me do that first to get them away from me, and then handle all my stuff.

[0:08:34] SO: Absolutely. So, I have a couple of questions that you could ask yourself that could be helpful when you're in these moments of like, "I'm feeling very overwhelmed. What am I supposed to do?" So, couple of things that you can consider. What is the one action that you can take to move forward? And you can decide how are you prioritizing that. Is this the highest priority for you personally, for your company, for your team, at the moment? But take one action towards that. What I found is that burnout happens when we're busy, when we aren't making progress towards our priorities. So, we're working on stuff, we're checking on email, we're doing all this stuff, but it doesn't feel like it's getting us anywhere. It doesn't feel like it's moving us forward.

My goal for you, in asking this question is what is the one thing that's going to make me feel like I'm actually making some progress? Because that's probably the thing that you should work on next. Because mentally that's going to say, "Oh, I was productive in that 20 minutes or in that hour." I actually got something done towards the larger goal. So, that first question to ask is,

what is the highest priority for you in that moment? And then what's one action that you can take towards that priority?

I'm sure this makes sense to you, Deborah because we've talked about this a lot. This is that, take the bite, take the small bite of the elephant. Don't try to eat the whole elephant at the same time. Which leads us to that one step that you can move forward. Again, when you're looking at all the lists, Deborah and I have talked a ton on this podcast about lists. Deborah's got hers and Todoist. Mine is in Asana. When we're looking at that huge list, it feels long, it feels very overwhelming.

So, one of the things is to pick out those top priorities, one at a time, one at a time. One moment, one at a time. Because if you try, I can do these 20 things in the next day or two, it's going to feel overwhelming really, really quickly. We're one at a time with a reasonable timeline attached to it, and I think that's really key. When we get back, we feel like, "Well, I missed a week, so now I've got to do two weeks of work in one week." Be reasonable about what you can actually accomplish in those time periods. The question I would encourage you to ask is what's keeping you stuck?

If you're looking at something, and you're like, I feel you can't make movement on. Have you ever had that happen to Deborah, where you're like, "I can't like get ahead on this item." Really think about what is making you stuck. It could be that that task is just too big. That's often the problem. The task feels really big, like write a book. Well, how are you supposed to take a step towards that?

[0:11:06] DC: Or goal through your emails from vacation. That's trying to eat the entire elephant, instead of saying, "Okay, the first thing I'm going to do is go and see if any of my customers emailed me while I was away. Let's see if any of the team is looking for me." Then, maybe make little chunks and then within that, even prioritize that. But to your most excellent point, if somebody is asking you for 20 things in an email, then we have to re-go and look at that elephant again and say, "Okay. Of these 20 things, what do they need from me right now? Or can we reprioritize this? Or can I get more time on it?" Whatever it might be, that might be the test that you assigned to it. Get more time. Understand why this is needed on this day.

Which goes back to other podcasts we've done as well, about intention. Am I just being asked for this, because I always get asked for this? Can it be skipped this week? Can I get it off my to-do list until I'm back? Can I explain to somebody with some reasoning and understanding that, as we discussed, "Okay, you have a list of 20 things here for me that I need to do, can we talk for five minutes?" Or, "Can you just send these to me back in the order that is most important for me to get this underway?" Then, you could look at those other items that are not due today, and see if maybe there's some way of starting to get those resolved for later in the week.

So yes, I had frozen all – I'm very clear in this because sometimes I just stare at my computer screen and I'm like, "I don't even know where to start." Then, I hear you. And I say, "Don't eat the elephant. Just pick one thing and start there and move forward." To your other most excellent point, it does feel good. It feels good to get one thing crossed off, and then you feel some momentum. I did something. One thing is gone. I can do one more. That's actually what happened to me on Friday. I kept saying to myself, I kept looking at the clock and saying, "The clock is not what matters here. It doesn't matter what time it is. What matters is, do I have the strength and mental fortitude to do one more thing?" And then I did it. Then I said, "Okay, you can do one more. You can do one more." Yes, it was not 9pm when I finally stopped doing it, but I stopped doing it when I was like, "That's enough. I've got to get off this computer."

[0:13:50] SO: So, I actually have a term for this. I call this – this is a phenomenon.

Compounding productivity. It works just like compounding interest. You do one thing, and then you can do another because like your attention, your energy shifts your momentum. So, when you hear somebody say like, "We've got some momentum. We're on a roll." That's compounding productivity. That's what you can experience when you take one bite at a time. It actually positions you then to do even more.

But when we're in those moments of like, "I don't know what to do." You've got to identify what's keeping you stuck. Because it's not necessarily the task. It could be, you don't have the tools, you don't have the resources, you don't have the skill set. You don't know how to complete that task. So maybe you do have to ask someone else. Often, we have these things just kind of staring at us, lingering on our to-do list. So, my challenge for you is ask, why are you moving that thing on the date? You have that thing on your to-do list, you're like, "I'll do it next week. I'll do it the week after. I'll do it tomorrow." Why are you moving it? Because when you really kind of

dig deep and figure out why am I stuck, then you can probably solve the problem. That's a real key.

The other part of that equation is do you need other tools or resources or people to help you? I think a lot of times we've got stuff on our list, especially when we come back, we're like, "I got to help the team. I got to make up for what I lost." You might have things on that list that actually you can't do those things yourself, so you do need other people. So, the thing that goes on the list in those moments is ask Deborah for help. Ask this team member for help, not feeling like you have to do everything on your own.

Then, the final thing I would have people ask is, what's not serving you this week? You just got back from vacation. Is there something that you don't have to do, not forever, but just for this week. Maybe this is the week that your house is a little bit more messy, or this is the week that you get the groceries delivered. Giving yourself that grace of it's not forever, but just in this period of time, I'm going to kind of give myself a little leeway. If it's not serving me this week, I'm not going to worry about it.

[MESSAGE]

[0:15:58] DC: Are you looking to elevate your game, take your bottom-line customer relationships and events to the next level? Then I want to work with you. I'm Deborah Corn, the Intergalactic Ambassador to the Printerverse. I engage with a vast global audience of print and marketing professionals across all stages of their careers. They are seeking topical information and resources, new ways to serve their customers and connect with them, optimize processes for their communications and operations, and they need the products and services and partnership you offer to get to their next level.

Print Media Centr offers an array of unique opportunities that amplify your message and support your mission across the Printerverse. Let's work together, bring the right people together, and move the industry forward together. Link in the show notes. Engage long and prosper.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:17:00] DC: I have a quick question about the out-of-office reply email.

[0:17:06] SO: Sure.

[0:17:06] DC: Some of them are just like I'm out of the office and I won't be back until this date. By the way, these dates are getting longer and longer and longer. I received one last week that said somebody wouldn't be back into the office until April 22nd, which I guess is just a week if you think about it, but it was like from last week. So, it seemed longer. That's all it said. I've received other ones that are like a map of anything I could possibly need. If I need this, contact this person. If I need this, contact this person. I find them very helpful. So, what is your strategy on that? Then, what is your strategy on following up with all those people who have been delegated in your email? Is there some way that you could be preemptive versus reactive to it?

[0:17:56] SO: Absolutely. Really good question. I think this is about your style and your company culture. And also, what do you do? I mean, if you're in a business that services clients, which many of the listeners of this podcast are, if those clients need to be serviced, they really don't care if you're on vacation or not. So, I think it's very appropriate to drive right back in my –

[0:18:14] DC: Well, by the way, you could be at a work thing, like a big internal planning meeting, but I don't know. I just see dates. I'm just saying that everyone's on vacation.

[0:18:23] SO: Absolutely. Yes, great point. But I think it's appropriate that people know who to contact in your absence. However, it can be even more confusing if you've got 25 people on the list. So, I think keep it relatively simple. What I do is I've got Alexis on my team. She pretty much knows the answers to most things. And if she doesn't, she can text me and let me know, or get in touch with me to let me know that somebody really does need something.

So, I think very appropriate to make people feel comfortable that while you're out, there is someone that can help them get their questions answered. I think this goes back to kind of company culture and style. What is appropriate at your company? How do you typically like your employees to handle the out-of-office? But I like having an out-of-office, certainly, because it lets people know. I'm going to be a little more slow to respond. I also try to let people know that I'm out of the office, but I will respond. I'm on a work trip, so I will respond. Or I'm on vacation, so I

will not respond. I try to be a little more upfront with that. Here's where I am and here's what you can expect from me. So, I'm a really big fan of, I'm out, but here's what you can expect from my communication in the next few days.

[0:19:31] DC: Sometimes they just say, “I'm out of the office, so I might, maybe slow to respond” with no other information, which isn't always the best if you're having a crisis on your end, and you don't have anyone else to speak with. But I completely understand what you're saying and I don't think people should be reachable or everybody needs to know where they are 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and people should have a break and should not check their emails while they're on vacation, and be really slow to respond. Don't respond until you get back. Again, and then respond to me in order of your priorities of everything else. I mean, I think as humans, we can all with a bit of empathy, we've all been there.

So, let's end this podcast with saying to everybody, just have a little patience when you get those out-of-office responses with those people. If you are one of those people returning to the office, have a little patience and grace for yourself. It's okay to say, “I can't do all of this right now. But this is what I can do. This is what I can do tomorrow. This is what I'll do on Wednesday and Thursday.” You have tools, you have a calendar, you have a to-do list to put that on – look at me, I'm the coach. I'm the time coach now. You're rubbing off on me, Sarah. Any final words? I don't want to take your thunder. I know you're so proud of me for basically echoing everything you've taught me over the past few years.

[0:20:57] SO: I really am. You're a star student. I think this is the end of the day. It's about expectations. Most of the time, as long as I know what I can expect from you and what you can expect from me, we're going to have a great relationship. I think that that's what it really comes down to. Here's what you can expect from me. Here's what is going to happen in the next few days. Here's my expectations for myself. When I return, that's probably the hardest one to uphold, and giving ourselves a little grace in these moments. So, final word there.

[0:21:24] DC: Thank you so much. Thank you to everyone for your time and attention. Links to everything you need to connect with Sarah. Get some of these tools, are in the show notes. Until next time, time management long and prosper.

[OUTRO]

[0:21:40] DC: Thanks for listening to Podcasts From the Printerverse. Please subscribe, click some stars, and leave us a review. Connect with us through printmediacentr.com. We'd love to hear your feedback on our shows and topics that are of interest for future broadcasts. Until next time, thanks for joining us. Print long and prosper.

[END]

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Todoist: <https://todoist.com/>

Sign Expo: <https://signexpo.org/>

International Sign Association (ISA): <https://signs.org/>

Sarah Ohanesian on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarahohanesian/>

SO Productive: <https://www.so-productive.com/>

Asana: <https://asana.grsm.io/sarahohanesian308>

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