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Cec Busby (00:04):

Hi everybody. I'm Cec Busby, editor of Flying Solo. Welcome to our weekly podcast where we step inside the minds and lives of soloists and small business owners. Today's guest is Kate Christie. Kate is on a mission to change how peoples think about time as one of Australia's leading time management experts. She knows just what it takes to get the most out of your day with small business owners being amongst the most time stressed in the country. I'm absolutely delighted to have Kate on the show. She'll explain her top tips on how to make the most of your time and how to invest in time wisely. Welcome, Kate. Thanks so much for joining me on the show today.

Kate Christie (00:48):

Oh, it's so lovely to be here with you, Cec.

Cec Busby (00:51):

Ah, thank you. I hope that you've had a wonderful break and excellent holiday season, and you're ready to get on with the year.

Kate Christie (00:59):

I, I have, and I'm actually still kind of one foot in the holiday break camp and one foot in the, I really need to start working camp, so I, I think I'm sort of oscillating between holiday and, and not, so it's, it's lovely. <laugh>

Cec Busby (01:15):

<laugh>. And so any, uh, new Year's resolutions for you? What do you think about them?

Kate Christie (01:22):

Well, it's funny, I, I don't believe in New Year's resolutions. I, I think that oftentimes with resolutions where we are just setting ourselves up for failure because we have this moment in time where the clock kind of ticks over and all of a sudden you're in this new year and, and, oh, I'm gonna do all these things differently. And within weeks, if not days, it all comes crumbling down. And then we are full of recrimination and self-loathing and annoyance at our inability to maintain our resolutions. So I think that I, I haven't set resolutions for years and years. I don't believe in them. I, I'd rather go after goals and they could be set at any time of the year. You know, you don't have to wait for the clock to tick over to 1201 on New Year's Day in order to set goals for the year.

(02:18):

So, particularly, you know, from a personal level, absolutely. But as small business owners, I think that we're much better using our time at this time of year not to set resolutions so much as to reflect on last year, you know, what did we learn from last year? What worked well, what didn't work well? What energised us, what didn't energise us? What, what robbed us of energy? Um, where, where did we love putting our time? What products did we love working with? Which customers do we love working with, which customers don't? You know, I think our time is much better spent retrospectively analysing all of those things so that we can then make some decisions about how we're going to work in business this year based on that knowledge about last year.

Cec Busby (03:13):

Yeah, I think you're absolutely right because people often like just think forward and forget about what's, what they've just gone through. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> when, when what you're saying is, yeah, let's let, let's take a moment, let's reflect, let's go. This was great. This was terrible. Now this is how we can do things differently, or this is what we wanna plan for the next three months, six months, year ahead. Absolutely.

Kate Christie (03:39):

Whatever. Yeah. I think it's a, just a better way of setting ourselves up for success. And it's like anything else we else we do in business where we test and we measure and we analyse, you know, we have to look at our whole year holistically in the same way, test, measure, measure, analyse, and then work out what we're going to change as a result or what we're gonna do more of as a result of that analysis. And, you know, so that's what I sort of spend a bit of my time doing in January is a, a real sort of reflection on, on the previous year. Mm.

Cec Busby (04:12):

And, uh, even February, march still doesn't matter what ti <laugh>, what, as you said, what time of you it is. As long as you take that time to maybe set yourself some goals. Absolutely.

Kate Christie (04:22):

You know, it could be a spring cleanse, it could be a jump into autumn, you know, it doesn't have to be right now. It, it's any time where you have some time to stop, pause, have some brain space, you know, you can't sort of factor in and do this exercise in an hour between meetings on a Tuesday morning between 10 and 11:00 AM that's just not gonna work. You need a really good dedicated period of downtime, um, to actually think this stuff through, which is often why this time of year is good, because many of us do have that Christmas break. January is often quieter, and that's why it's a good time to, to reflect mm-hmm.

Cec Busby (05:08):

<affirmative>. Um, you have your own business, so obviously, uh, you know, the p plates of a small business owner and there is that, um, the fact that they are wearing a lot of hats and there's all the stats about how time poor small business owners are, but, so as your, your expertise is also, um, productivity, you're like one of the most renowned productivity experts we've got in the whole country. What are some of your tips that business owners should be taking on board to free up some time so that they make sure that they do what they need to do for the business, but also what they love?

Kate Christie (05:49):

Yeah, look, I, it's such an important question and, and the answer is really very much dependent on what stage of the business they're in. I think if you are, you've got listeners who are starting a new business this year, or they're, you know, a couple of months into a new business, then there is that acknowledgement. I think that you have to have the, you are gonna be very much a jack of all trades right now. You are absolutely in the thick of it. And unless you have an enormous amount of money that you are able to invest in your own startup, or you have angel investors or some sort of, you know, magic wand has been waived and you have a huge amount of money and time, um, which most of us don't, then there's that acknowledgement at the start of a sort of a startup business journey.

(06:42):

You will be wearing all the hats, and that's okay. Uh, it's, it's, it's almost even better because it's going to allow you to learn all the parts of your business. And, and that's very critical. You know, you do need to know everything about your business. So I think it's okay to wear all those hats. And what I would be encouraging you to do is in your calendar, just make sure you're carving out time for yourself as well, because you can't be working 24 7 a as your business becomes a little bit more established, or even your listeners who have very established businesses, then it becomes a different story. Uh, there comes a point in time where you cannot be the jack of all trades and you shouldn't be the jack of all trades because you are gonna be holding your business back. So, you know, the perfect, and often people will say to me, well, when is the time?

(07:38):

You know, when can I tell that it's time for me to outsource or time for me to get a staff member or time for me to free up my time? The time is usually just before you can afford it. And, and so take the risk, take the plunge, think about what can I outsource, what can I do myself? Do I need a staff member? You know, it's, the, the answer isn't always just bringing a, a staff member or an employee. You know, there's, you could bring in, you can outsource, you can, you know, get a consultant. You can engage someone for a few hours, um, on a sort of a contract basis. But what I would say is, in order to work out what you should be doing and what you can outsource or give some hats away, um, make a list of all the things you are really good at in the business.

(08:32):

And as the founder, it's usually the, the creation of the service or the stock or the product is the stuff you are very good at and the sales of that, because it's your passion. So anything that's highly revenue generating and is in your sweet spot of knowledge, you should retain, uh, things that are not revenue generating. So backend kind of stuff. Um, that's the stuff you should discard your hat and look for an expert who can do it for you. With that time, you then free up. I don't want you to pour all of that time back into your business. This goes to your question, Seth, of how do they find time? So outsourcing some of those hats that time that you then free up some of that should be carved away. A 20 foot barrier should be put around it, and that's time that you spend for yourself, for your family, uh, for regenerating, for re-energizing, for creating, for, for some strategic thinking. But you can't work all the time. And so it's that, you know, distinction between what do I need to do? And I would focus on revenue generation. What can I outsource? I'd focus on starting to get rid of the stuff at the back end.

Cec Busby (09:55):

Um, it's interesting though cuz uh, you know, you're going put some walls around it and make sure you carve out that time for yourself. But sometimes for a business owner, there can be these conflicting priorities where they go, I have to, I want that time to, you know, spend with my family or, you know, go to the gym or, or walk the dog, whatever the, the thing is that they wanna do. But then they're like, I need that time to work more on the business to grow the business. So I have the time to walk the dog and spend time with the family. <laugh>.

Kate Christie (10:29):

Yeah, it's a cycle, you know, it's crazy. And, and if you let it, it, it's a vacuum that will suck you in and you'll, you'll never come up for air. So I would recommend that you, you look at your calendar as a blank canvas and, and this time of year, this is the perfect time of year to do it because it's kind of the start of the new year. Or you could do it, um, the start of the financial year or whatever works best for you. But I would look at your year on a plate. So print out, um, an annual calendar or go and buy one. And the very first thing you should do is before you even sort of start thinking of, here's all the time I need to dedicate to sales and product development and service development. The very first thing you put in that annual calendar is your annual leave.

(11:15):

Um, because firstly, you need to look after yourself. It's the whole kind of fit your own oxygen mask first analogy. But more importantly, or equally as important is if we get stuck into our business year, time gets away from us and all of a sudden your calendar is gonna be so full that when you look at it and you think, I would love to take next month or for take two weeks off next month, you can't find two weeks in a row that are available because your calendar is so populated. So if you do it at this time of the year, and the first thing you do is you put in your two or three or four weeks and you'll leave across the year, that becomes sacred space and that is locked out. Um, the second thing I would do then put in is I would, if you've got kids, I would mark, um, school dates, school term dates, big school commitments.

(12:07):

So if you've got older kids, I'd be putting their exams in at the end of the year so that you have those days carved out in case they need you. Um, the third thing that I would then put in is I would put in, um, and you can colour code all these, you know, I, I use green for, um, annual leave. Um, I use yellow for family commitments. The next colour I would put in would be a nice bright red. And I block in strategy days, thinking days or half days. And I might do two or three a quarter, but I put them in as the third thing I populate my calendar with so that, you know, if nothing else, I know I've got annual leave locked away. I've got the big kid commitments locked in, and I've got some strategy thinking days locked in.

(12:53):

And then it's kind of well free for all in terms of, you know, meetings and, and work commitments and obligations. But everything works around what's already locked into that calendar. And from there, it's just a matter of mind management says it's, it's, it's being consistent and being, um, committed I guess to the calendar and not moving those things and not saying, oh, well I've suddenly got this opportunity, so I'm gonna get rid of those two weeks I'd planned for the family holiday. No, no. You have to be consistent. And yes, you may miss out in some work or better still, you get to negotiate with your, um, customers to say, I can't do it for those two weeks cause we're on a family holiday, but I could I do it the two weeks after. Um, so you have to, I guess, have a commitment to your calendar and, and lock those things. They're in concrete, they don't move, and then that way you are guaranteed of downtime. You're guaranteed a thinking time, you're guaranteed a family time and, and when all the dust settles, those are the more important things.

Cec Busby (14:00):

Yeah, I would totally agree. And, but it also seems like a great way to minimise any, um, impact that, that interruptions or, or business challenges might have because you, you've carved out that time already on your calendar and you know, the time that you've got to work with.

Kate Christie (14:20):

That's it. And, and there's still a lot of free space in your calendar once you've locked those things away. You've got a lot of time to play with and a lot of things that you can move around. But if you don't make a commitment to sort of self-care, family time, strategic thinking time for your business, then you are always gonna be working at pace. You're always gonna be chasing your tail. You're gonna be wearing all those hats, and you're gonna be carrying this enormous guilt that you're not spending time with your kids or your family or your friends because you are always working. Well, if you do it this way and you flip it around and you put those personal, you know, commitments into your calendar first, then um, you know, you are removing that, that opportunity for guilt. You are, you are actually giving yourself permission to have better balance.

Cec Busby (15:11):

I also love that idea of putting in time for strategic thinking because I think a lot of business owners are so caught up in the day-to-day of the business that they don't give themselves time to do that strategic piece.

Kate Christie (15:25):

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. It becomes, you know, it's, it's something I hear my clients say all the time, you know, I'm, I'm constantly working in my business. I I need time to work on my business. Well, you need to have the discipline to car that time out, lock it in, and then it's not negotiable. And then if you have a team, make sure it's locked in. Those, those times are locked into their calendar as well. So it becomes a, a team strategy day or a team half strategy day so that you are, you know, you are all working on the business together. Um, but it's, it just means that you are constantly having refresher periods of time where you're working on the business. And I would definitely be doing that at least quarterly, um, that way you can sort of forward plan quarter by quarter and, um, you know, your business isn't always evolving or growing. Mm-hmm.

Cec Busby (16:17):

<affirmative>. And when you're speaking to your clients, are there specific, um, I don't know, things that suck their time? I mean, I know there's always the complaint about email, email, email, email, like sucking the life out of people's days. Are there other things that are, are typical time thieves?

Kate Christie (16:38):

Look email's absolutely a huge one. Um, the second biggest, or equally biggest would be meetings. Um, whether it's meetings with customers, meeting with potential customers, meetings with suppliers, meetings with staff, um, you know, the meetings is, is a huge imposter people's time, um, between meetings and emails. Um, the current research shows that we are losing two full days a week just reading and responding to emails. And another day, depending on your, you know, how meeting heavy your business is, at least a day a week, um, just to meetings. And and most of your listeners have probably listened to this and think, God, I'm losing five days a week to meetings. So, um, they're the, they're the, the big ones. The other one, um, is interruptions. Allowing interruptions from, you know, customers from staff constantly being interrupted, you know, with the, for the call going from, you know, suppliers not having the ability to put your head down and actually get any flow work done because the phone's constantly going and you're constantly being interrupted.

(17:47):

Um, that, that's a huge one. Um, and, and interruptions cost us significantly. Every single time we're interrupted, our productivity goes down by 40% and it takes us about 23 minutes to get back into flow from the interruption. So being interrupted during the day. Um, and the easiest way to to measure the amount of interruptions is just keep a little spreadsheet next to you for two hours and, and just mark down every single time you're interrupted and who interrupted you. And, you know, just do a little bit of data capturing and, and the results will be really alarming. And, and from that extrapolate that it took you 23 minutes then to get back into flow. But if you're being interrupted every 10 or 15 minutes, you're not getting any work done. Cause you're never getting back into flow. Mm-hmm.

Cec Busby (18:36):

<affirmative>, <laugh>, that sounds nightmare world <laugh>.

Kate Christie (18:39):

It's, but that's kind of our world. Uh, that's everyone's world. Unless you have that discipline and you carve off that time where people can't interrupt you or you're not having meetings where you're not checking your emails, where you're actually able to put your head down and work for sort of 45 minutes without interruption, then you are not getting any work done. Which is why people start work really early and it's why they work really, really late because they're not interrupted. You know, how many times have you heard someone saying, you know, I love it when I get to work at six because there's no one there to interrupt me, or, I love it, you know, when everyone goes home from work or when the shop closes or when, you know, I can switch off, or I go back and do ev all my work at eight o'clock between eight and midnight because, you know, I get so much done. Well, you're getting so much done because there's no one there to interrupt you. You're staying out of your emails that are constantly pinging and you, you don't have meetings at that time of night. So they're the three things you need discipline around. And if you can get discipline around those, um, you will free up a a phenomenal amount of your time.

Cec Busby (19:48):

Kate, we've just gotta take a, a little break, uh, but we'll be back with more on that subject of dealing with those interruptions in just a minute.

Kate Christie (19:59):

Terrific.

Cec Busby (20:03):

Thanks for joining us, Kate. Welcome back. Now I, I would like to jump back into what we were just talking about before the break, um, which is managing those, those time interruptions. How can business owners deal with them better? What can we do? How can we make a strategy around it to ensure that, you know, we aren't getting tapped on the shoulder every five minutes or getting calls from clients that are constantly interrupting our flow?

Kate Christie (20:35):

Yeah, so look, there's a couple of sort of very simple strategies and it's obviously gonna be very dependent on the type of business each listener is in. You know, if your, if your business is a, a bricks and mortar shop and you are in the shop and customers are coming in, then you know, you, you have to, um, my advice would be slightly different to if you are running a business where you are working from an office at home and you're sitting at in front of a desktop. But generally speaking, um, depending on the nature of your business, what you need to do is you need to carve out interruption free time. Um, the, the best time to do that is in the morning. So the majority of us are morning people, or we have our, uh, best creativity, our best strategic brain, our best amount of energy and enthusiasm in the mornings.

(21:29):

So try and structure your working day, um, with tasks in the morning that are revenue generating type tasks. So, um, selling to your clients, delivering to your clients, creating new products or services, um, relationship management, networking, stakeholder engagement, marketing. So anything that's revenue generating, you wanna put into that sort of morning period of time. Cause that's when we're at our best. Um, then if you have a team, speak to the team about, you know, saying, look, from 8:00 AM until 11:00 AM we are going to work without interrupting each other. So if you have any questions for me or for each other, just take a note of them on a parking list or, you know, send an email, but we're all gonna have our email alerts off. Um, but, you know, record it in some way, but do not actively physically interrupt each other from say, eight till 11 or eight till 10 or however long you think your business can tolerate it.

(22:31):

And in that time, we're gonna work on our hardest, most important revenue generating task. And we're gonna give ourselves 45 minutes and we're just gonna put our heads down, bums up and, and get it done. Um, set timers, so just by little egg timer and, um, set the timer for 45 minutes and then challenge yourself to stay in flow for that period of time, at the end of that 45 minutes or the, you know, have a five, 10 minute break. And then try if, if your business is the type that allows it, go into your second highest value task and sort of repeat that until lunchtime. If you are in a bricks and mortar type business and you are actually front of house, then customers coming in are not interruptions. Customers coming in are your highest value tasks because they're revenue generating. And so you, you serve them with a smile and you generate as many sales as you can, knowing that when you have non-customer facing time, if there's other high value tasks that are revenue generating that you need to do.

(23:34):

So you might have, you know, two hours where you're not in the shop or you might have someone come in and run the shop for you for two hours or whatever the case may be. That's when you then set your little egg timer and focus on doing that task without interruption. Um, so, you know, if you've got a team, communicate with them why you're doing this, it's, it's because we will get more done. We will get into flow, we will have the ability to leave work and not have to work on work tonight if we work in this way. Um, so, you know, communicate it that way. If you are a sole operator and you are, say, working at your desk, um, and you are, you are wanting to get that heavy high value work done, put your phone on silent, put an out of office message on your emails, um, and, and the, the message can be as simple as on your, on your emails.

(24:30):

I've step, I've stepped away from the desk at the moment, or I'm with a customer, I will be able to respond to you. I check my emails three times a day and I, you can expect me to respond to you by close a business today. So you're not gonna annoy anyone or piss anyone off. They know that you're coming back to them. Have your phone on silent for that 45 minutes and, and your phone message should be something like, Hey, you've reached Kate, I can't take your call at the moment, but please send me a text message telling me exactly how I can help you and I will get back to you today. So again, you're not gonna lose customers, you're not gonna lose business, you're not gonna piss anyone off because you are being really clear in your communication as to when you are gonna be available and get back to them. But what you're also doing is you're setting some boundaries that are allowing you to actually get intense flow work done in a way that you're not inviting or allowing interruptions.

Cec Busby (25:25):

Um, so a couple of things I'd like to unpack from what you were just saying. The first thing is about, um, most of us being morning people, how do you know if you're a morning person and then, and that's the best time for you to get stuff done? What if, and if everyone in your team is a morning person and you're one of those people that's a night hour, well then how do you balance that so you can work well as a team and Yeah,

Kate Christie (25:52):

It's, it's so challenging. It really is. And I, I acknowledge it. Um, the, the research sort of does, you know, it's, it's interesting I've delved into this a fair bit. You know, we do have night hours and there are morning people, the majority of people, according to research, the majority of people tend to be morning people. So I would start from that premise. Um, in terms of answering your question of, well, how do you know, it's a really interesting one because for ages and ages and ages, I thought I was kind of nothing <laugh>. I didn't like getting up in the morning and I loved going to bed early. So I sort of thought, well, I'm not a morning person or a night owl, but what I did was I tweaked some habits. Cause I really wanted to sort of explore this cuz it's something that comes up with my customers all the time.

(26:44):

Um, my clients all the time. So I thought, I'm actually gonna challenge myself to become a morning person. Now, I dunno what the scientific literature on all of this says, but I actually set out with absolute determination to make myself a morning person. So what, what I did was I, I didn't set the alarm cause I, I hate waking up to an alarm and I hate the thought of making myself get up really early. So what I did instead was I had a pretty firm, um, deadline in terms of when I had to be in bed by. So I, I sort of set this rule for myself that I had to be in bed by about 9:00 PM and it's sort of gotten it, it's worked its way backwards. It's sort of around eight 30 these days, <laugh>, but I'm usually asleep by nine. And I then allow myself to wake naturally, which occurs anytime between say five 30 and six 30.

(27:41):

If it's five 30 ish, I'm just like, what the hell? And I snooze until six 30 and then wake up if it's six 30, I think, okay, well that's pretty reasonable. Then I get up and the first thing I do is I go for a swim. So I've got, at the last two years, I've got into making myself this habit, which has now become, it's an absolute habit and it's, I'm addicted. I go for an early morning swim and I come back and I have this routine and I get stuck into work and I get so much done and I work like a bloody powerhouse until about 1:00 PM. Um, and I take breaks, 45 minutes break, 45 minutes break, work like a powerhouse until 1:00 PM and then in the afternoons I do the lower value tasks, the cause I'm tired by then, and I, I do the stuff that's not revenue generating.

(28:29):

It's, it is process driven. It's easy. But I think my learnings from that are go to bed early, um, wake up naturally, and then have a really great morning routine that kind of wakes you up and gives you joy and energy. I get sunlight early, I'm exercising, I'm swimming, which I can assure you, especially in the middle of winter without a wetsuit completely wakes me up, <laugh>. Um, I come home and I make myself a smoothie in summer or a hot chocolate in winter. I sit down at my desk and I absolutely get shit done. And so I don't know whether I was always a morning person, I've just kind of tapped into it, you know, in my fifties or whether I've made myself be it. But the routine and that, that early morning drive for me is working, um, I've now experimented it with a couple of clients.

(29:20):

So I had a couple of clients who absolutely fundamentally work, were convinced that they were night owls and I challenged them to, you know, do what I was doing from and, and to force themselves to do this morning thing, to do some exercise to actually force themselves. And within a month they, I've done it with three people so far, and within a month, all three of them were just like, holy hell, I just, it's changed my life. I can't believe it. I must be a morning person. And, and I think, um, you know, we convince ourselves that we are one or the other and it's really just routine and habit. And I think that if you can force yourself to change your routine and force yourself to adopt new habits, then you can adopt very new ways of working.

Cec Busby (30:08):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, do you think that exercise is probably one of the best morning rituals?

Kate Christie (30:13):

Oh, absolutely. I, I, I really do. And it's that, um, commitment to it. You know, there's like, you know, I reckon of the seven mornings a week that I swim, there'd be five of them where I've grown and think, oh Christ, I can't do a swim today cause it's raining or it's windy or it's, you know, whatever. But I roll outta bed and I put my swimmers on and off I go and it's the commitment, it's the self discipline, um, and the exercise, it just gets everything moving and going and, and it wakes me up and I'm inspired and ready to go. So, you know, go for a walk or, you know, do some yoga or, but in some way force yourself out of that bed and get moving and get energised and it just sets you up for a magnificent, you know, morning of work.

Cec Busby (31:09):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I think that's a fantastic idea. I think we all need to probably spend a little bit of time on self-care in the morning, and those morning rituals are a great way to do that.

Kate Christie (31:21):

They are, it's, it's just a really beautiful way to start the day.

Cec Busby (31:25):

Now the other thing I wanted to unpack is, um, obviously a lot of our listeners are sold traders, um, solo operators often in like, you know, those professional services and they might be spending a lot of time working alone from home, so mm-hmm. <affirmative>, uh, and I think all of us through the pandemic probably have realised the number of distractions that we can get working from home. So what would be some suggestions you would have for anyone who's working from home that might be getting a bit distracted and finding their time getting sucked away by those distractions?

Kate Christie (32:06):

Yeah, yeah. Look, I I, you know, you're a hundred percent right with, you know, if happened with the pandemic and now this, you know, real movement towards a hybrid working environment and working away from the office. I, I think it's, again, it's about having boundaries and about having discipline. You know, if you've got, um, try and, and find a space in in your, your home, which becomes an office type space or an office cupboard, or whether you work in your bedroom and you shut your door, um, it's about communicating really clearly to the people you live with. You know, please don't interrupt, um, for the next half hour because I'm working on something or I'm going to be in a meeting, um, you know, at the start of the pandemic, I would just put notes on, on the door saying, don't knock, I'm on a video call or <laugh>, you know, I used to say to my kids, you know, don't come out on not a video call.

(32:59):

I remember one, one day really early in the pandemic, and my teenage son came out and walked the full breadth of the zoom call in his boxer shorts, <laugh>. And I said, I, I sort of motioned to him, I said, I, I am on a call. And he, he hit the ground and, and kamikazi kind of crawled across the carpet, all of which we could see. It was absolutely hilarious. So look, that's gonna happen. Um, but just to have those messages, um, communicate clearly, if you've got little kids, it's different. You're gonna have to try and work in 20 minute bursts. 45 minutes is just too long. If you're juggling kids and a work call. So, um, you know, I I think communication with the people that you're on the call with is always really good. Look, I've got my little kids at home, they're watching play school, but they may come and sit on my lap.

(33:52):

Everyone's used to it. Everyone knows, everyone's accepting of it, just communicated at the start. Um, in terms of non, you know, if, if they're not sort of customer facing type tasks, um, you know, set your little kids up next to you, um, you know, at the kitchen table and you work and they do their play-doh or their colouring and set them a task, you know, we're gonna set the oven timer for 25 minutes and if you can draw for 25 minutes without interrupting daddy or without interrupting mummy, then we're gonna have 20 minutes where we go and play in the backyard. You know, things like that where you just, um, you work around the people that you, you you're trying to work with, you communicate, and you come up with strategies that are gonna work for them and work for you.

Cec Busby (34:38):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, it's all, it also kind of about, um, identifying what you really need to achieve from your day as well.

Kate Christie (34:46):

Very much so. Absolutely. So at the start of the week, you know, make a master to-do list for your week if you are in most important big rocks that you have to meet during the week. On Sunday night, pick the two most important things you have to get done on Monday and then lock them into your calendar as a deadline in the morning. Because most of us, again, are morning people. Um, you know, set them up as anywhere between 25 minutes and 45 minute length tasks, lock them in and they're a commitment and, and turn up to those commitments in the same way as you would turn up to a doctor's appointment. A lot of this is, you know, self-discipline, but, you know, don't have a to-do list and think I'm gonna get a hundred things done today cause it's just not gonna happen. So just pick two things. These are the, the two highest value revenue generating tasks I must get done today. And if you have that mindset and you get through a week that way you've done your 10 most important high value revenue generating tasks of the week, that's magnificent. You know, so just be realistic in the goals that you're setting.

Cec Busby (35:54):

Yeah, I, I think a, a thing that you said there as well, like, don't do set, you know, a hundred things set, two things and, um, what's that Parkinson's law? Is it, you know, like the task will expand to fit the time that you give it <laugh>. So yeah,

Kate Christie (36:09):

That's Parkinson's laws all around deadlines. That's why you lock these things into your calendar. Parkinson's law is that a task will expand to meet the deadline, you know that to, to, to meet the deadline you've created. So if you don't have a deadline, you're not gonna get the task done. Um, if you've got a hundred things that have the deadline today, well that's just not gonna happen. Cause you don't have a hundred hours in your day. So just pick two things, give them a hard deadline, lock them into your calendar, turn up and get them done.

Cec Busby (36:38):

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And, uh, what about multitasking? Because we all think we are great at multitasking, but frankly, most of us aren't <laugh> and it's probably not a good idea anyway.

Kate Christie (36:51):

Look, none of us are, to be honest, uh, well look, that's not true. About 2% of the world's population can effectively multitask 2%. Um, they're so rare, they're called super taskers. Um, the rest of us mortals cannot multitask. Um, the only solution from a multitasking perspective is just to do one task at a time. When we multitask, where forcing our brain or, or if we quickly switch tasks, you know, from a ta a task A to B, back to a back to B onto C, we have multiple tabs open because we think we're gonna get more done. If we do 10 things at once, our productivity goes down by up to 40%. So that goes for every time you interrupted, you're multitasking every time your eye gets drawn to an email popping into your inbox in the corner of your screen, um, toggling between different tabs, having two or three computers open on, on your, on your desk, um, you know that all of that, taking a call while you are in a meeting, all of those are examples of multitasking.

(37:59):

And every time we do that, our productivity goes down by up to 40%. Um, it's, it's, it doesn't work. Stop doing it <laugh>. That's what, you know, you've gotta lock one thing, one task into your calendar for that 45 minute period and just do it. That then sort of fits in nicely with the concept of batching, where we batch like tasks together. So rather than sending five invoices today, one now and one in two hours time and one in three hours time, and two at when you go to bed, batch in 45 minutes on a Wednesday afternoon or whenever it is to do all of your invoicing for the week. Um, because we don't wanna be switching quickly between lots of little tasks. We wanna group small like tasks together and do them in one block of time to reduce that risk of multitasking. Mm-hmm.

Cec Busby (38:50):

<affirmative>. Uh, and what about Eat the Frog? You know how they say do the worst thing first? No. Yeah. Oh yes. Yeah. <laugh>,

Kate Christie (38:59):

You, you gotta love a, a dirty, ugly, hairy frog. Um, if it's, look, I think there's two options to this. One. If there's something that's been on your to-do list for a long time because it's a frog and you don't wanna face it, there's two options. Either you eat it and you make it the first task tomorrow morning and you just get it done or you take it off your to-do list and stop agonising over it. But make a choice and just get it done. Um, it's about starting, once you start the task and you get a bit of momentum, you'll realise that it was a lot easier than you actually thought it was gonna be. If you genuinely don't wanna eat the frog, take it off your list <laugh> and move on. Cuz it's just never gonna get done.

Cec Busby (39:42):

<laugh> don't saute it with garlic, <laugh>

Kate Christie (39:47):

<laugh>.

Cec Busby (39:48):

Exactly. Um, and I know we mentioned interruptions, but there, there also is, um, time should be set aside to take breaks. Yeah.

Kate Christie (40:00):

Time should be set aside for breaks. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Look, most people can work, you know, the podo technique sort of gets you to work for around 25 minutes before you, um, switch tasks or do something differently. I think it really depends on the person. You can very easily measure this, you know, set a time, start yourself on a task, set a timer, um, just set your, set your stopwatch on your phone, um, and work until you start to be, become distracted and, you know, oh, there's a butterfly or there's a bird, or I wonder if the postman's coming. You know, as soon as those thoughts start popping into your head, have a look at the timer. Um, if you can get to sort of 20, 25 minutes, it's a great start. My experience is that most of my clients that I work with can work for around 40 to 45 minutes in flow before they really need a break. So somewhere between that 25 and 45 minute mark is most people's sweet spot. Um, experiment, work out what your sweet spot is and then work to it. Um, and then break it up with a five to 10 minute break between each task. So you want your day structured as a series of sort of 100 metre sprints, your day's not a marathon, you want sprint break, sprint break, sprint break. Mm-hmm.

Cec Busby (41:22):

<affirmative>. But speaking of marathons and going back to our very first, um, bit of discussion where we were talking about the resolutions and, um, your, for setting goals instead, should we also be thinking about not just our goals for the next few months, but should we be thinking also big picture? What what's the goal for 10 years time? What, where do we see ourselves in the future?

Kate Christie (41:49):

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I love that question. And, and that's something that I spend, you know, a lot of time, a few times a year doing this. Um, I, every October I've got, um, you know, I'm a solepreneur. I've got an accountability group. There's four of us, um, every October we get together, um, for a couple of days and we carve that time into our calendars in January to say October, November. Here are the three or four days we're working together. And they're full strategy days where the four of us have a good couple of hours each where we dissect our business to the others and bounce ideas off the others. Um, ask for input, ask for advice, ask for introductions, ask connections, and we rotate amongst the four of us and make sure we all get done. We come out with a full plan for the following year.

(42:41):

Um, and then I revisit that in January, um, just to make sure that I'm working through everything that I set myself up for. Um, and, uh, have from that October session, I create a list of actionable items that I have to address and I break it down on a month by month basis. So by the time I get to around April, I've pretty much implemented everything I said I was going to. And so I then revisit it. Um, I then meet with those four people monthly, um, for an hour, um, one month for four hours, the alternate month. And we keep each other accountable and we implement against those, those annual goals, those five year goals, those 10 year goals.

Cec Busby (43:26):

Um, I wouldn't mind talking about that a little bit more because you, you mentioned your accountability partners and I think, uh, a lot of people are probably familiar with, um, you know, having a mentor, but an accountability partner is something that's a bit different.

Kate Christie (43:43):

Yeah, it is. It's very, very different. We're, we are all equals, we've built a relationship over probably six years, so we trust each other implicitly. We share a lot of information about our business that we would only normally share with say our accountants and our lawyers. There were sort of rules to the game in terms of trust, but also in terms of, you know, we give open feedback, honestly, and, you know, we are mindful of each other's feelings, of course, no one's ever kind of cruel or brutal, but we do have a rule that we want honest feedback. So there's been plenty of times where, you know, I've said I'm gonna do X or I'm gonna launch product A and I explain it to them, and then, you know, they've said to me, no, we think that's a bad idea.

(44:43):

It's off brand. Um, it's not gonna be good for these reasons, or your pricing's wrong or your niche customers wrong. And we give very frank feedback. It's like having an advisory board really. Um, you know, it's your board of trusted advisors that you can tell and share anything with and you know, you're going to get really honest feedback. Now, we don't always take that feedback on, I might say, well, thank you so much for the feedback, but I'm committing to doing this. And, and so you, you may or may not do it, but I know that they have my back, I have their back. Um, we've obviously all become very, very close friends. So it becomes now a more of a personal relationship where we have each other's backs and we're friends. But, it's completely different to having a mentor. It's a board of advisors and as a solepreneur, it's critical. I mean, they keep me going. They, they are the first people I turn to if I need help. They're the first people I turn to when I wanna celebrate. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,

Cec Busby (45:49):

It's fantastic, um, idea. I think it's something that more business business owners should adopt. Just, uh, as you say, having someone that keeps you accountable, that can also give you sound advice that's very valuable.

Kate Christie (46:04):

It is. It's, it's really critical and it's something I would strongly advise everyone listening to this podcast to do. If you haven't got it, you know, go and try and create it. Obviously you want, people in your accountability group who are in a non-competitive capacity, um, but who understand the nature of your business, who you like and respect, that you have a values alignment, that they can commit the time that you all want to commit to the relationship and, and establish some rules around how you're gonna work together. Um, and then, you know, honour and respect their time commitment and that relationship, and the value you will gain from it is, you know, you just won't believe the value. I've launched products that I hadn't even considered launching based on recommendation and advice from my accountability group where they said, go and do this.

(47:04):

And I said, no, no, I don't wanna do that. And they said, go and do it. And so I committed to it and I did it. And you know, they've been some of the most successful products I'd launched. I just hadn't seen them, you know, they were staring me in the face and it took the accountability group to say, why aren't you? And, and I had no reason for it. And, um, it's been some of the most successful stuff I've done, and I'm sure they've saved me from some of the most fateful stuff that I could have done.

Cec Busby (47:33):

<laugh>. And again, it was about you carving out that time and being able to have the time to do that and Oh,

Kate Christie (47:39):

Absolutely. That was part of my January. I've, I, I took responsibility for setting up this year's meeting. So I've, um, I've set it all up in the four of our calendars now, every single month for that hour, every alternate month before hours, October, November. We're doing it this year for a couple of days, and it's, it's locked away. It's sacred, and we don't, we don't mess with that.

Cec Busby (48:02):

So, just to finish up, if I could perhaps pick your brain on your number one tip. I know that's terrible thing to say to someone, but <laugh> your number one tip for small business owners that wanna be more productive and get more out of their day.

Kate Christie (48:19):

I think be really curious. Um, don't stop learning. Read the literature about productivity. You know, tap into experts. Get yourself a coach. Talk to your friends. What's working for them? What's not working for them? Um, don't assume that your, your lot is your lot because it's always been this way. Um, don't assume that you're not a wanting person. Be curious. Be constantly curious in everything you do in your business, including in terms of productivity. Try new stuff and, um, and have that passion for using your time in the best possible way as you can. You know, think about your time, the way you think about your money. It's an enormously precious, very limited resource that you have to invest for the greatest possible return. And if you start thinking about it as time investment rather than time management, then you are on, you are on the road to success.

Cec Busby (49:22):

Great advice. Kate Christie, thank you so much for being on the show today.

Kate Christie (49:27):

My absolute pleasure. I'll always love talking to you, Cec.

Cec Busby (49:31):

Thank you. Enjoy the rest of your day.