



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Episode # 42: A More Empowered Approach To Time Management**

You are listening to episode 42 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. So what does time management have to do with the power skills of influence, persuasion, and presence? Well, just like a high performance athlete, our success as leaders isn't just dependent on our skills. We also want to be looking at our mindsets and our habits.

These are the factors that create the environment in which we exercise the power skills. And the better the environment you're creating, the more successful you are in exercising the power skills. So come join us today for a discussion about how a high achiever can develop a more empowered approach to time management.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to Mastering The Power Skills, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to grow your own power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Hi, everyone. Today, we're going to be talking about high achievers and their relationship with time management. Now, the world of time management and productivity is broad and it's deep. There is so much research, so many experts, so many different approaches. You could spend a lifetime just sorting it all out.

I've always felt that it's an area where we should be educating ourselves regularly and trying new things out. But ultimately, the best approach for you is the one that you find helpful and easy to execute. It's the approach that's a good fit for who you are and what your circumstances happen to be.

And that also means that I'm not a time management expert. I'm more like an educated amateur, I guess. Over time and through a lot of trial and error, I've learned a number of techniques and approaches that work very well for me. And I'm always happy to share the good and the bad of what I've learned, but that's no substitute for doing your own experimentation and learning.

That's why this episode won't do a deep dive into a lot of time management resources and techniques out there. However, I am something of an expert in the people in large complex organizations who we would call high achievers. And I was inspired to do today's episode because I wanted to share with you a very interesting pattern that I've observed in the high achievers I've worked with during the 20 years that I've been a leadership coach.

Most listeners of this podcast are high achievers too, so I bet you'll find this one interesting. So let me tee this up for you. High achievers are almost always very productive, right? Their track record is usually very clear. They're demonstrably getting more done than other people. And they appear to be using their time efficiently and effectively compared to the average person.

So that observation probably doesn't surprise you in the least. But here's the interesting pattern. How come if this is the case, high achievers often feel that they aren't productive, that they aren't efficient, or they aren't effective, or at least they're not as productive, efficient, or effective as they "should" be? Because most of my coaching clients overwhelmingly have this feeling.

Now, I'm not saying they lack confidence or pride in their capabilities. They're not at all insecure. And this isn't an issue of imposter syndrome, or at least in the

classic sense of that phrase. But the majority of high achievers seem to have a nagging feeling that they're not doing a good enough job in time management.

They feel like they're barely staying on top of things and are perpetually falling behind. They can sometimes even feel like they're secret procrastinators, even when the evidence suggests that they really aren't in any material way.

Now, typically when we have this feeling, and I include myself when I say we, we analyze what's going on and we move into problem-solving mode. We ask ourselves questions like, do we need more resources? Do we need to take work off our plate or postpone it, possibly even indefinitely? Do we need a better time management or productivity system?

And we really like that last question, by the way. I'm sure there are a lot of listeners of this podcast who like nothing better than testing out a new time management approach or tinkering at least with your current system. I love going down that rabbit hole myself. And these are all good problem-solving questions to ask, by the way.

So you're on the right track because the fact is that if you are a high achiever, you probably do have too many projects and meetings going on. You probably do

have competing priorities and tight deadlines. The fact is that you really might need more resources, or you really might need to take work off your plate, or you really might need to upgrade your approach to time management.

These are not at all uncommon causes for that feeling that you have. That feeling that you're unproductive or falling behind. But, and this is a big but, these external factors clearly aren't the primary cause of that feeling because if they were, you would feel better once you implemented your solution, right?

And the reality is, yes, you do start to feel better for a while, but then time goes by and that feeling reemerges. You start saying to yourself the same thing. I'm not as productive a person as I could be. I'm not as efficient or as effective as others.

This type of dynamic, the reemergence over and over again of the feeling of being behind in your work is a clue. It suggests that if we really want to eliminate this feeling, or at least reduce it substantially, the answer isn't just solving the external challenges, the external things that are causing our feelings of being far behind. We need to identify the internal challenge as well.

So in other words, what I'm saying is, is there something in the wiring of a high achiever that makes us vulnerable to these feelings? And if there is, is there

something we can do about it? I think the answer to both of these questions is yes. So let's take a look first at the wiring of a high achiever, and I'm putting that in quotation marks, of course.

But what are some of the things that make a high achiever a high achiever? So we high achievers have a drive and an enthusiasm for taking on new challenges and projects. That's part of what makes us who we are in the first place. We actually like adding things to our to-do list. We like getting to do all the things, right? Or at least getting to do a lot of the things.

This means we end up with incredibly long to-do lists. Lists that are much longer than any human could ever really achieve. Now we could say our problem is the length of the to-do list. And by the way, when I'm referring to our to-do list, I'm referring to the total list of things we have to do versus, say, the smaller subset of things that we have to do for the day.

So the real problem isn't the length of the to-do list, but our relationship to it. We hyper responsible high achievers start to see our to-do list as an imperative filled with things that we must do versus what it really is, which is aspirational, filled with things about which we make choices. So if we have a long to-do list filled with things we must do, well, of course, we'll always have that feeling that we're behind, no matter how productive we are.

The other problem we high achievers have is that we're also often bad at visualizing time itself. We can have a bit of magical thinking when it comes to how much time a task will actually take or how much capacity we'll have in the future.

This blind spot makes it more likely that we'll be saying yes to new things that we actually don't have the capacity for. In other words, we over commit. And of course, further down the road, when the reality of what we've agreed to strikes us, we're going to again experience those uncomfortable feelings that we're falling behind, even when we're able to honor the commitments that we've made.

So the answer is yes. Yes, the wiring of high achievers makes them especially likely to suffer from feelings of lack of productivity, regardless of the fact that we are unusually productive and regardless of the fact that we can come up with solutions for the external causes of our overwhelm.

So given all that, what can we do about it? How can we reduce those bad feelings? Well, first we need to have a more realistic understanding of what our to-do list is. Whatever its format, whether written or a digital app like Todoist, that's my favorite, a component in a larger office suite of digital products or a project management app, I have friends who use those. You need to think of your to-do list, whatever its format, as a holding bin.

David Allen in his book, *Getting Things Done*, and other productivity experts have already pointed this out. A to-do list is a great way to take every task you encounter, whether big or small, dump it out of your head, and collect it in one central location so it doesn't get lost. There's probably no better tool for accomplishing that. But a to-do list is a terrible tool to use for other time management tasks like discerning how much you're accomplishing.

If you're using your to-do list as an indicator of how productive you're being, well, good luck. You're always going to end up feeling bad. You can't help but focus on how much you haven't yet done. You're going to start feeling stressed over time, and eventually you're probably going to start feeling frantic.

But in addition to having a more nuanced relationship with your to-do list and making sure that you're regarding it in the right way, I have another tip for you. It's a technique that is so simple that I didn't bother to try it for years. But once I finally started to do it, it made a big difference in how I felt about my productivity.

And I've given it to a few clients who have reported that they got good results as well. In other words, they started feeling better about their productivity. So now I'm sharing it with you so you can give it a try.



So this technique is what I call the have-done list. See what I'm saying here? It's the opposite of the to-do list. The have-done list is basically a list of things I just did.

So here's how I do it. Every day as I go through the day, I write down each task I accomplish, big or small. I do that in real time. I finish a task, write it down. I note every phone call, every email, every conversation, every report that I write. And it's nothing fancy. It's just two to four words at most for each item that I put on the list. And I include personal things too that I've accomplished as well, like booking a doctor's appointment or going for a run or buying a birthday present.

Now, you could maintain this list in any form, of course. It can be digital or it can be written. In my case, while I keep my complete to-do list on a digital app, Todoist, which I just mentioned, I have a bound organizer that shows each day two pages. So on the left page, I have my two or three priorities for the day and a short list of other tasks.

On the right page, I'm jotting down notes about what's occurring during the day. And I'm also writing my have-done list, which I categorize for myself in terms of work, personal, and health. But the categories don't really matter, they can be

whatever you like, or you can have no categories at all because you really can and should approach the have done list in whatever way works best for you.

And this is the magic of it. It's not the format of the have done list that's the important thing. It's not even the fact that you can go back and look at your list a week or a month later. Although I'll tell you later on about why doing that review also helped me.

The real magic of the have-done list is simply the act of writing things down. Because when you do that, over time you're rewiring your mind. You're changing your thoughts and feelings, the thoughts and feelings that a high achiever can have about not being productive or about falling behind because you're constantly reminding yourself how much, in fact, you're doing and achieving.

Yes, you still may need extra resources, or you may need a better time management system to be even more productive. But you're no longer carrying around those internal stressed feelings that somehow you're not pulling your weight. You have visual evidence that this is not the case.

So here's what I noticed, and also what some of my own clients noticed when they started this practice. In about a week or so, we noticed new feelings that we

were having, feelings that we hadn't had before. We felt more like we were on top of things. We felt more that we were managing our workflow instead of our workflow managing us.

Now, we still had lengthy to-do lists, competing priorities, and a lot of people and tasks making demands on our time. But we seemed to have a different relationship with all that. We felt more empowered to do something about that versus feeling resigned and worried about our situation. Quite frankly, we felt a sense of relief, and that's a pretty good thing to feel.

So I think you might find it very useful to experiment with your own form of the have-done list if you're regularly beset by the feeling that you're not as productive or as on top of things as you should be. You may still have to figure out good solutions to the external factors that impact your time and your task management, but you're likely to feel more energized when you do that. And that means you'll be better equipped to do successful problem solving versus going around in circles.

Now, there turned out to be a second benefit to keeping a have-done list, that I experienced at least, and I didn't expect it. I'm going to share that with you now. One thing that I've learned about myself is that, like most high achievers, I can

have a blind spot in my relationship to time. I referred to that earlier in the podcast.

I am so enthusiastic about learning new things and trying new challenges. That's a trait that I actually hope I never lose. It really enriches my life, and it brings me a lot of joy. But wrapped up as part of that is this feeling that I have, this fantasy really, that I have endless amounts of time to do everything I want.

Now, of course, I logically know that's not true, and I can force myself to sit down and analyze how long a task will actually take and how much time I actually have. But my enthusiasm often makes me reluctant to actually sit down, or it makes me over-optimistic when I do the analysis.

When I say this is a blind spot, I actually mean that. It's almost as if I visually can't see my time. I sort of give people the analogy that it's like being colorblind. You can understand the concept of colors and find ways of working with them, but it's not an automatic skill. You have to use more effort than other people do.

However, once I started to do the have-done list for about a month or so, I actually started to change. I began to intuitively understand how much time I needed for certain tasks. I could better predict how many tasks I could reasonably

accomplish in a day or a week, or even a month or a year. And I started to develop a wiser and more realistic assessment of my priorities and what trade-offs I needed to make, and what I needed to remove from my plate in order to ensure I met those goals.

It wasn't that I was doing an in-depth analysis of my daily have-done lists, although I did occasionally scan them. It was more like the fact that I was doing those lists allowed me to see what I had been blind to before, kind of like putting on a pair of glasses when you're nearsighted. All of a sudden, I could see my time and how I was spending it in a much clearer way than I had before.

It's also interesting that just like putting on a pair of glasses, the have-done list didn't permanently fix my blind spot because anytime I had stopped doing the have-done list, I get a little bit cocky or overly confident, then in about a week's time, I start sliding back into my old over-optimism about how much time I have. That over-optimism feels like it's just hardwired into my normal enthusiastic approach to life.

But prior to doing the list, I would actually try to force myself to change. I don't struggle with that anymore. So long as I keep doing this very simple daily thing, jotting down each action that I accomplish, I am so much better at assessing my time and my priorities than I normally would be. I become more focused, more

empowered. I accomplish more of my goals, and I'm also perceived as adding more and more value in my work. So that's a pretty good return on a very, very small investment of time.

So there you go. If you are one of those people who are plagued by feelings of falling behind, even when others praise you for how productive you are, I hope this episode has been helpful for you. It's important to know why you might be vulnerable to these feelings and how to manage them more easily, because when you're able to change the environment that you've created, and you make it healthier and easier for you, you unleash the energy that was getting wasted in worry and stress.

You start having a more empowered approach to time management, and you can direct that unleashed energy to the things that are of higher priority, including growing your capabilities and your skills in the arena of power.

So in our next episode, I've got some news for you. I hope to be joined by a special guest who literally wrote the book on the art of self-promotion. She's going to be sharing her tips about how learning how to tell your own story can transform your career. Be sure to look for our conversation on that topic next month, and I'm looking forward to having you join us then. Take care.

Hey there, would you like some personal guidance about how to use the power skills of influence, persuasion, or presence in a particular situation in your workplace? Well, if so, we've got your back. Just send us a note explaining your situation to [powerskills@significagroup.com](mailto:powerskills@significagroup.com). We'll drop that email address in the show notes. We'll feature your inquiry in an upcoming episode, keeping your identity anonymous, of course, and make sure you have some tips and strategies to help you navigate your particular situation skillfully.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Mastering The Power Skills*. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more insights and resources from Kathy, check us out at [www.significagroup.com](http://www.significagroup.com).