

Your 20-Minute Overwhelm Elimination Plan

You're listening to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast with Cindy Bidar. This is episode seven, Your 20-Minute Overwhelm Elimination Plan.

Have you ever seen that meme floating around that says something like, "I have so much to do today, I guess I'll just take a nap"?

It's funny in a "that's so me" kind of way. It turns out that a lot of people respond to stress by getting sleepy, and if there's anything I know about feeling completely overwhelmed, it's that it's pretty stressful.

Of course, taking a nap doesn't get anything crossed off your to-do list, so I'm not sure how useful that is as a long-term solution.

Which is why I have a different idea for you today. Stick around...

Hello hello hello, and happy Thursday to you--or you know, whatever day you're listening to this, my future friend.

Let me ask you something.

How many things are on your to-do list right now?

You could probably fill an entire notebook with all the things on your mind.

You've got new products to create, content marketing to think about whether it's a blog or a podcast or social or your email list. Speaking of your email list, you've got to think about how you're going to grow that, and then there's bookkeeping and client proposals and that website redesign you keep putting off, and your email inbox is out of control, and we haven't even touched on family stuff yet.

And if your business is a side-hustle you're growing while you still have a day job, well, that's a whole 'nother to-do list to deal with, isn't it?

A couple of weeks ago on our Six-Figure Systems Q & A call, one member came to me with a similar long list of things she needed to get done, and asked me to help her sort it out so she wouldn't feel so overwhelmed.

I thought it was a great lesson that every small business owner--or heck, every HUMAN--can use, so that's what I want to give to you today. I even made you a worksheet to help so you

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don't have to take notes. You'll find that in the show notes at TinyCourseEmpire.com. Look for episode 7, and enter your name and email and I'll send you the worksheet.

Ok, let's first look at the steps, then we'll break them down.

This is a pretty simple plan, which is why it's only going to take you 20 minutes.

You're going to first get everything out of your head, then you're going to organize and prioritize your list, then you're going to decide ahead of time what done looks like, and finally you'll take your new list and plan your week.

I know that sounds too simple--or maybe it sounds not simple enough--but let's take a look at each step one at a time, because I think then it will make a lot of sense.

Get it out of your head

Step number one is to sit down with a pen and a some note cards or a stack of sticky notes and your favorite beverage and just write it all down.

You can use a notebook here, but I like to use 3 x 5 notecards because then I can move them around and group them together without scribbling all over a piece of paper. You'll see why that's important in a minute.

And you want to make sure that you write everything down. Set a timer for five minutes and just write down everything that comes to mind. The dog has to go to the vet, write it down. You need to email your assistant about changing an appointment, write it down. Have to watch that training video, write it down.

When you're done, you'll probably have 30 to 50 cards, and my guess is you'll already be starting to feel less overwhelmed. I find that this kind of brain dump exercise is beneficial even if this is all you do with it. Just having the list is often enough to take some of the pressure off, because at least now your brain isn't trying to hold all of those things. It's freeing up space to actually do the things instead.

So that's step one. Spend five minutes and write it all down. And if you want to pause this podcast and go do that right now, feel free.

Look for the deadlines

Next we're going to go through your big list and get it organized and prioritized, and you're going to do that in three passes.

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The first is to find the deadlines. There are very likely some things on your list that have real live deadlines, and you want to make sure you aren't missing any of those.

Now, I'm not talking about things where you've made up a deadline in order to try to motivate yourself to get it done. Fake deadlines have never worked for me, because I know they're made up and it's safe to ignore them. Priorities--which we'll get to in a minute--are much more meaningful than made up due dates.

But some things have actual deadlines with real consequences, and those are the tasks we need to identify in this first pass through the list.

Paying your taxes has a real deadline, or you'll risk getting fined.

Turning in a client project has a real deadline if you don't want to get fired.

Filling out that permission slip for your daughter's field trip has a real deadline or she's not going to be able to go.

Go through all of your cards or through your list and find the things that have actual deadlines, and write the due date on the card. Put those aside. We'll come back to them in a minute, but first, we have two more passes to take to get your list better organized.

Identify dependencies and eliminate what you can't do right now

The next thing you want to do with what's left of your list is look for dependencies. What I mean by that is that you want to find those things that you can't do because they depend on doing something else first.

For example, on my list right now I have a task to put together the access page for an upcoming Trello board product. But I can't do that yet, because building that page is dependent on having the links and descriptions for all the boards, so first I have to THAT task.

So I'm going to take that card and tuck it behind the one that says "find the links for all the Trello boards" and I'll clip it there with a paperclip so it doesn't get lost.

That's your second pass - find the things you can't do yet, and group them with the task you have to do first. You want to get those things you can't do off your radar, because they're just taking up space in your head for no real purpose.

Find the priorities

On the final pass through your now much smaller list, you're going to organize them by priority. Remember, you're only working with the things that don't have a deadline, because you set those aside in the first pass. And you've grouped things that have dependencies, so now you're going to prioritize them, and here's what I mean by that.

Some projects - even if they aren't dependent on something else - just don't make sense to do right now. This is where a lot of that entrepreneurial overwhelm comes from, honestly.

You've got this person telling you that you have to start a YouTube channel, and that person telling you that social media is critical to your success, and I'm over here saying email is where it's at, and you end up thinking you have to be doing all the things.

But you don't. And it doesn't even make sense to try, because some of those things on your list won't be nearly as beneficial as they could be if you're not doing other things first.

For example, don't worry about setting up your affiliate program when you don't have any products to sell yet. Yes, you need to set up your affiliate program, but not right now. Prioritize getting your product or your course created first.

Likewise, don't spend time learning Facebook ads if you haven't optimized your sales funnel yet. There will be time to learn them later--they're not going anywhere--but keeping it on your to-do list is just adding to your overwhelm.

So take one more pass through your list--and this is where I really appreciate the note card or sticky note approach, because I can spread them out on my desk and literally move them around. But anyway, take one more pass through your list and put them in order of priority.

What's the most logical order for your projects and to-dos to be in? That's what you're looking for her.

Decide what done looks like

Ok, we're almost there, so stick with me. Just a couple more steps. I told you this wouldn't take long.

This next step is important, and it's one that almost no one does, and that's to decide ahead of time what done looks like--especially for business projects and tasks.

There is always one more thing you can do. There is always a way to make any project or

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task better.

That's true whether you go to an office everyday or you work in a grocery store or a daycare or a factory that makes car parts.

It's worse when you work for yourself though.

There is always one more lesson or chapter to add, or one more point to make in a blog post, or one more email to write in an autoresponder. And because you want to produce the best possible content or courses or printables or whatever it is you make, it's easy to get caught up in the "just one more" thinking pattern.

And that, my friend, is why projects don't get done. Because we don't know where the finish line is.

But if you decide ahead of time where that line is, it's easier to know when you're done.

So for everything on your list, decide what done looks like.

Maybe it's a word limit on a blog post, meaning you might say "This blog post is done when I've written 1,500 words."

Or maybe it's time spent, as in, "This sales page design is finished when I've spent three hours on it."

Will it be perfect? No. But I bet it's good enough.

In other words, you're not aiming for perfection, you're just shooting for done.

Plan your week--and don't be a jerk to your future self

Ok, here's the last step, and that's to plan your time. You can do this by the week or by the day. I like to start off with a week plan, and then I adjust on a day-to-day basis.

You're going to take your deadline items first, and decide when you'll do them.

Once you have your deadline items scheduled, do the same with the rest of your list, starting with the top priorities.

You can make your list just based on what day you're going to do something, like you might have a Monday list and a Tuesday list and a Wednesday list.

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Or you can do what I do and actually block the time in your calendar.

I'm actually writing this episode because I have the time blocked on my calendar from 11 AM to 1 PM on Monday September 13, and I'll be recording it--according to my calendar--on the morning of Wednesday, September 15.

Now those times aren't written in stone. I plan my week, and my goal is always to get everything on my calendar done, but it doesn't always happen. So at the end of every day I look at my calendar and I rearrange anything that needs moving. If I don't get this episode written, I'll shift some things around tomorrow and slot in another writing block.

One thing to remember though, is not to be a jerk to your future self.

Be honest about what you can get done in a week or a month or a day. When I'm in planning mode, I can be a real tyrant to future Cindy. I schedule her for 10 hour shifts, and set deadlines she can't possibly meet.

Don't do that to yourself.

You know what you can get done in an hour or a day, so don't set some crazy schedule you're not going to be able to meet.

20 minutes to overwhelm elimination

So that's it, four steps, about 20 minutes, and you'll hopefully be feeling a lot less overwhelmed at all there is to do to keep a business running--or to launch one.

Listen, the biggest reason you're feeling overwhelmed is because you're trying to keep everything in your head.

Get it out of your head and organized onto a list that makes sense and that you can actually do, and you're going to feel a whole lot better, and when you feel better, you'll get more done.

I guarantee it!

You'll find show notes for this episode and that worksheet I promised you at TinyCourseEmpire.com. Leave me a comment there and let me know what your best tips are for getting out of overwhelm, and don't forget to leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts because that helps other people find the show.

Have a fantastic day, and I'll talk to you again next week.