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You're listening to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast with Cindy Bidar. This is episode number 37. And today we're talking about Time Blocking. I'm going to take you behind the scenes and tell you exactly how I use my calendar to get everything on my to-do list done.

Welcome to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, a weekly show dedicated to helping you launch and grow your digital course business. Even if you don't have a big team or a six-figure ads budget, we'll help you design smart systems, take consistent action and achieve massive success on your own terms. Now, here's your host, Cindy Bidar.

Hey, welcome back. I am your host, Cindy Bidar, you will find show notes and recommended resources for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/37. If you are new here, welcome. I am thrilled to have you join me. Go ahead and tap that subscribe button so you don't miss any future episodes. You're especially going to want to catch next week's show, because we're going to be talking about content platforms, what they are, why you need one, and how to find yours. So you're not going to want to miss that. But that is next week.

This week we're talking about getting things done and no, not the book, although I do highly recommend it, but that's not what we're talking about today. We are talking about using your calendar to plan your week effectively, so you get all of your to-do list done. So why would you want to do that? Why would you even want to put your to-do items on a calendar to start with. I've got to tell you, when I first started doing this, it went against everything I had ever learned about productivity. Speaking of getting things done, that book by David Allen, he recommends that your calendar is for appointments, for things that have to happen at a specific time, and that was the mindset that I came to time blocking with, that my calendar was only for appointments and it was not meant to hold my to-do list. So I resisted this process for a long time, but once I finally embraced this time blocking strategy, I found that it's really, really useful. So that's why I want to share it with you today.

So why time blocking? Why does this even work? Well, the first thing it did for me was it made sure that I had time to get everything done. Back when I was a freelancer, I used to accept projects from my clients, I would say, Yes, I can do that for you. By Friday, yes, I can do that for you. By Friday, yes, I can do that for you next week, and I had no real idea how much time I had already committed, I had no real clue if I had time to do that project by Friday or not. But time blocking lets me

see that I've already got my calendar filled in, I don't have room for another three-hour project. Or maybe I do have room for a three-hour project, I can know that by looking at my calendar. So it makes sure that I have room for everything that I need to get done and not just client work now, now it's my own work, right. It helps me ensure that I have room to get all of my projects done, it also makes decision-making much easier if I'm looking at taking on a new project, if I'm looking at working with a JV partner or making a big new marketing change, I can look at my calendar and I can now see do I have time for it. Or do I not? It's easy, it's in color right there on my screen, I can tell I don't have a big chunk of time that I can commit to this. Or I do have a big chunk of time I can commit to this, so it makes decision-making much easier for me.

It also lets me take advantage of downtime. I have quite a bit of downtime as a business owner, surprisingly, I have a lot of spare time in my schedule, and I can take advantage of it. I can take a new course or I can take a pickleball class or whatever it is that I want to do, I can see in my calendar whether or not I have time for it and where it's going to fit into my schedule. So that's a big advantage for time blocking for me.

And finally, it ensures that I prioritize the money-making tasks. We've talked about this before. I have an entire course called Daily Money Makers Toolkit that's all about prioritizing those money-making tasks, and I can glance at my calendar once I've got it filled out for the week, and I can know if I'm doing a good job on that front, or if I have some extra work to do there, just by looking at the color of my calendar. Is it mostly green or is it not, and that instantly tells me that I have or have not prioritized those money-making tasks.

So if you want to get started with time blocking, here's what you need, super, super simple. You need three things, you need a calendar, you need a to-do list, and you might, and this one is optional, but you might also need some kind of a project manager. So let's talk about the calendar first.

I use Google Calendar for this, and I use multiple calendars within one Google calendar account. And we'll talk more about why I do that in just a minute, but you could also use Outlook, if you are an Outlook user. You could use a paper planner, if you prefer that, you could print out a calendar from your computer, there's all kinds of websites that allow you to print different configurations of calendars, you could use one of those. You could buy one at the store, it doesn't really matter, you just need some kind of a calendar that you can have with you all the time and that you will use on a daily basis. Those are really the only requirements. Like I said, I use Google Calendar, I find it most convenient to use, and I like that I can have multiple calendars in one place.

You also need a to-do list. I like to use To-Do It, but I've also played around with just using plain text lists or another to-do app like maybe Microsoft to-do or things. Three is another one that's really popular, if you're in the Mac ecosystem, it might be omni-focus. There's just dozens of different to-do list apps you can use, you probably have one that you use already. And that one is perfectly fine. And again, it doesn't even have to be an app, it can be just a piece of paper where you keep a list of all of the things that you're responsible for and all of the things that are on your mind.

And then the third piece is a project manager. If you're using some kind of a project manager like Asana or Trello, you're going to use that to keep track of those projects and the to-do list that go along with those projects.

So those are the only three things you need to make calendar or time blocking work for you, you need a calendar you need a to-do list and maybe a project manager if you're already using one. So we talked about the calendar and how I use multiple calendars on my Google Calendar app.

So let's talk about what those are a minute. I actually have four different calendars within my Google calendar. The first one is called Goose. Now, I wish I could remember where I heard this name from, I heard it on a podcast, somebody referred to their personal calendar as Goose, as in the Golden Goose, I am the golden goose of my business. If I am not healthy and happy and working effectively, then the business is not going to function as well as it could be. You are the golden goose of your business as well. So you don't have to call your calendar golden goose, but you can, if you like a little fun. And if you look at my calendar screenshot, I'll post a screenshot in the show notes, if you look at it, you see the yellow spots, that's the goose calendar, that's my personal time. That's where I schedule things like meals and time away from the office to hang out with my friends and work out and walking the dog. All of those things go under Goose.

The next thing I have or the next calendar I have is for appointments. This is for things like coaching calls, outside appointments at the dentist, or to get my hair done. Mastermind calls, all of those things go under appointments. Then I have money tasks, and this is for things like content creation, course development, email marketing, recording this podcast, those are all money tasks, those are the things that bring in the cash to the business, those are the things that either are marketing or are creating something to sell.

And finally, I have an admin calendar, this is for things like project management or maintenance of the websites or bookkeeping, or start up and shut down routines,

or managing my personal email account. So those are my four calendars, those are where every task goes when I'm doing my time blocking. So you may have more or fewer calendars, it's going to be up to you, but those four calendars is a good place to start. Then when you sit down to do your calendar blocking or your time blocking, or when I sit down to do it, I like to set aside an hour or maybe an hour and a half to take care of this.

I like to do this on Sunday afternoons. I know some people who do it on Monday mornings. Or some people who do it on Friday afternoons. Whatever works for you. I like Sunday afternoon because then when I sit down at my desk on Monday morning, everything is kind of fresh in my mind and it's all, my desk is clean and my calendar is ready to go and my projects are ready to go, and I feel like I can really hit the ground running first thing on Monday morning because I'm all organized and just ready to go. So you'll find the time that works best for you. Just make sure that you are sitting down to do your time blocking once a week, so you can't skip weeks. If you skip weeks, then this just isn't going to work for you. So marking your calendar, I know that sounds really weird. Block time in your calendar to do your time blocking, that's the bottom line, whenever that's going to take place, then when you sit down to actually do your time blocking, you're going to do it in stages.

So the first step is to start by organizing everything. So this is what the guys or the team over at AsianEfficiency.com would call clear to neutral. Okay, so the idea is that you gather everything up that's kind of hanging out and taking up space in your head, or space on your desktop, or space on your computer, desktop or whatever that might be. Gather all of that stuff up and get it organized. So this is going to include things like I'm looking at my desk right now, so it's Friday morning as I'm recording this and all over my desk, I have paper notes, I have sticky notes stuck to my monitor, I have some mail that came in that I need to open and go through, I have receipts, I have a legal pad with some notes that I've jotted, I have my 3 x 5 note cards with notes on those. So I'm going to gather all of that stuff up and put it all in one place so that I can go through it and organize it. I'm also going to look at my email, any messages that I have to respond to, any receipts that are in my email, any Facebook messages that I need to respond to or need to organize somehow. If you use Slack, you might have messages in there, you might have messages in your project management tool that you need to respond to or you need to follow up on in some way. So you're going to get all of this stuff organized, you're going to pull all of this stuff together and put your to-do items on your to-do list. So if I've got a note here on my desk that says, Create a project for some new product that I'm going to create or whatever, I'm going to create that project or I'm going to add that task to my to-do list so that I can organize it in my calendar so that I can add it to my time blocking schedule.

Then you're going to want to look at last week's calendar and identify those things that didn't get done. Right, we all have things that just don't get done in the week, I have things that don't get done in the week, sometimes I have things that don't get done several weeks in a row, but the only way I'm going to capture those items is to be looking at last week's calendar and reviewing that. What are the notes that you need to make about that, do you need to add something to your project plan about that, do you need to re-schedule that appointment, do you need to reschedule that task this week instead? So review last week's calendar, see where you stand.

The next thing I look at is what's coming up on my calendar in the following week, What appointments do I have that I need to prepare something for? Maybe I have an interview coming up and I need to get prepared for that. So I need to put that item on my task list so I don't miss it. Or maybe I have a course launching next week, and I need to make sure that I get all of the course materials uploaded, so I will put that on my task list for the next week. So review that upcoming calendar, just watch for those deadlines and those appointments that you need to be prepared for.

And then finally, I go through all of my open projects. So for example, one of my projects right now is to get my Google Analytics on the website updated, they've changed or they are going to change from Universal Analytics to something else, I can't remember what it's called, but I need to just review that and make sure that mine is set up properly. So that's a project on my open projects list, and I know what I need to do to move that forward, so I'm going to add that to my task list for the week to log into Google Analytics and review that set-up and see what needs to happen next. So review your open projects and add any to-do list items to your to-do list.

So by this point, you've probably got a big long list of things that you want to do. Remember you've gathered up all of those paper notes and stickies and email and all of that stuff, and you've created to-do list items from them, if that's relevant, if there's something that you need to do you've added those things to your to-do list, so you've got a big, long list at this point. So now we move to the calendar, now you're actually going to plot these items out on your calendar. And the way I do that is I start with that Goose calendar. So I open up my Google calendar for the week, I open it up in the Weekly View, and I start blocking time off, starting with my personal calendar or Goose. So I block off time for meals to start with. I want to make sure that I eat lunch and dinner every single day. I'm not a breakfast eater, so I don't include that, but I do include time for lunch and dinner every single day. So those go in first. I block off time for things like cleaning the house, I do this on a

regular schedule, so I block that time off that's included under my Goose calendar because it keeps me happy and it keeps my environment healthy, and I want to prioritize that.

So I include that in my personal calendar. I also block off time for things like exercise or taking that pickleball class that I talked about earlier, or my morning routine where I'm doing a little stretching and just keeping my body healthy. So these are the things that go under that Goose calendar and I fill those in first because if I didn't fill them in first, if I left them until the last thing, you know what happens with then? There's no room left. It's just like with your budget, if you put savings off until the last thing, you will find that there's no money left to put into the savings account, you have to put that in your budget first. It's the same way with that Goose time, with that personal time with that self-care time, you add that into your calendar first so that you can make sure that you have time for it.

Then the next thing that goes into my calendar is un-movable appointments. So appointments are something that happens with other people, so I already mentioned this is things like the dentist or the doctor, it's appointments with your kids' teachers, it's Zoom calls with your team or your mastermind partner, anything that happens with other people is an appointment, and that goes in my calendar next, because those are not movable. Those are not typically things that I can rearrange as needed, I can't just call up the dentist and say, Hey, you know, 12 o'clock doesn't work for me. Can we do 1230 instead? That's not going to work out so well. So I put those appointments in next. Appointments in my calendar are in red, and that just makes it easy for me to spot them when I'm glancing at my calendar, I can immediately see where I have an appointment with someone else.

Then the next thing I do is I block off the money tasks, and this is where I'm using that to-do list that I've created. So I've that big long to-do list where you're gathered up all of my loose papers and all of my emails and all of those project notes that I've written to myself and I've created that big long to-do list. And I'm going to start looking at that list, scan my to-do list to find the things that are actual money-making tasks. So things like content creation, this podcast, course development, big picture planning, those are all money-making tasks. So those go into my money-making task time blocks. This is going to be the biggest chunk of my calendar, this is what I look for when I get to the end of my planning session. I want to be able to glance at this calendar and see that the majority of my time that my prime time working in the business is spent on those money-making tasks, so I fill those in next, I usually aim for two to three hours a day doing this type of task.

And then finally I fill in the administrative block. So this kind of fits in there around

the edges. So these include things like my email. So if I'm in answering emails or I'm responding to comments on the blog or on the podcast, or I'm responding to questions in the member site, that's where this happens, it's in those administrative blocks. This is also where I include my shut down routine, and this is things like clearing my desk. Cleaning my desk off at the end of the day is part of my shut down routine just so I can start the next day on the right note. This is also responding to any urgent emails, it's putting away my notes and my files so that my desk doesn't get all cluttered and my computer desktop doesn't get cluttered and filled up with files so that I can't find anything. I really don't like a cluttered space, so at the end of the day, I take a few minutes and I put all of that stuff away, and I also review tomorrow's calendar, and a lot of times I'm moving things from today's calendar to tomorrow's calendar because they didn't get done. So I'm kind of rearranging my calendar as I go, and we'll talk more about that in a minute.

And then also within that administrative block, I put things like bookkeeping tasks or maintenance tasks, or things I need to follow up on, or bills I need to pay, or appointments I need to make. All of that comes off of my to-do list, and I put those in those administrative blocks. And I should say right now, that when I'm time blocking my calendar, I'm actually making use of Google's description field within an appointment. So if you're in Google calendar and you create an appointment on your calendar, say for an administrative block, I would title that Admin Work, and I would go into the description field in that actual appointment and I would bullet point things that I need to get done during that administrative block. So if I have, for example, something I need to update on the website or some copy, I need to change on a sales page, maybe, I would put those bullet points right in the description field of that appointment, so that when that time rolls around and I look at my calendar and I can see I'm going to spend 30 minutes on administrative stuff, I can open that appointment and see exactly what I intended to do during that time. So that's how I fill out my calendar.

But there's one more piece, and that is to leave some buffer space in your calendar, so you don't want to just have time block after time block after time block. Just back to back to back. I made this mistake when I first started time blocking my calendar, and what I found is it can create a cascade of delays that just grows and grows and grows. So if you imagine, if you've ever been to the doctor's office and you have an appointment at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and you're still sitting in the waiting room at 330 and 345 and 415, and it's because every single appointment in the morning ran over by just a couple of minutes and by the time you get to the end of the day, then the doctor is back logged by 45 minutes or more. That same thing can happen in your calendar, and that was the mistake that I made early on when I was just blocking minute-by-minute almost in my calendar and not leaving any buffer space in there. I would find that

something would run over even by just a few minutes, and by the time I got to the end of the day, I was behind by an hour or more and things kept getting bumped off to the next day and the next day, and the next day. So what I do now is I leave buffer space, I leave room in between time blocks, just in case something runs over or in case something happens that I need to attend to, something unexpected happens, I have space in my calendar to attend to that. And I'm not feeling like I'm just rushing from one task to the next all day long and never getting really caught up.

And that brings up a really good point. A lot of people have questions about this method of time management, and the big one is, how do I know how long to block for a project or a task. If I am saying I'm going to write this podcast episode, I'm going to outline this episode and get it recorded, how long am I going to leave for that to happen, how many hours am I going to block off for that to happen is.

There's two ways to think about this. The first thing you can do is just make your best guess based on past history, so I know that it takes me two to three hours to outline and record this podcast and get it to the editor, so I will block off two to three hours. You might not know, you might not know how long it's going to take you to write that blog post, or how long it's going to take you to write your emails for the week, or how long it's going to take you to update your laptop, right? So all you can do is make your best guess, but if you don't know how long it will take, then what you will do is decide how long it will take. And here's what I mean by that.

We've all heard the expression that work expands to fill the time available. And that is 100% true. If you give yourself all day to write your email, you will spend all day writing your email. If you give yourself all week to record a podcast episode, you will spend all week doing it. So what you can do instead is simply decide that I am going to write my email in the hour between nine and 10, and when 10 o'clock rolls around, my email will be done. And I know this sounds overly simplistic, and you're probably rolling your eyes right now and going, Okay, come on, Cindy, I can't just decide that it's going to take me an hour to write an email and expect it to be done, but I want you to give it a try and want you to just trust me on this because you really can just decide how long something is going to take and block that time off in your calendar and have it done at the end of that time block. It really does work. Just give it a try. Trust me on this one. Just give it a try, decide how long something is going to take, how long you're going to allow it to take, and then be done at the end of that time frame, and don't forget, you're leaving a little bit of buffer time. So if you go a few minutes over, it's fine, but just knowing that you have a deadline that you have that deadline that you have committed to making and that you have other things that you have to get done that are going

to get pushed off again if you don't finish that task in the time allotted is really going to help you kind of get things done and get more motivated to you moving on that project. So that's my recommendation. Just decide how long it's going to take.

Another question that people ask about time blocking is, how do you handle emergencies, what do you do when something comes up and just blows up your whole schedule? Well, there's a couple of different ways that I manage this, and the first thing is to get really clear about what an emergency really is. So, well, the way I like to think about this is if something comes up in my life that I need to handle during my business hours, during the time that I have blocked off to do my business work, I like to ask myself if I was at a job, if I was locked in to somebody else's business, doing work that they were paying me for, would this event allow me to leave the office and go take care of it. Would it be that big of an emergency that I had to leave the office and go take care of it. That's the question you want to ask yourself. And if the answer is no, then it's not a big enough emergency for you to change your time block schedule either.

And I know that there are some of you out there who are listening to this who are thinking But that's why I started my own business so that I have the time freedom to stop and do things for my family and in my life that are not necessarily emergencies. I want the freedom to be able to do that, and I get that. So that's one reason why I like to put the money tasks in the morning time blocks. So if you look at my calendar, you will see that the money tasks are all in the morning, and the reason I do that is because if the world blows up, if something goes wrong, if somebody decides they want to go out for lunch at the last minute, that never happens in the morning, that stuff doesn't happen in the morning, it usually is happening later in the day. So I try to prioritize my Money Making tasks in the morning, and that way, the afternoon, if the world blows up or an emergency does happen or something occurs that I want to be able to attend to, I can do it without worrying that I didn't get those money-making tasks done.

But what if despite all of my best efforts, I still mess up and I don't follow my schedule, believe me, it happens. It happens more often than I want to admit to. I am not perfect in this by any stretch of the imagination, I am continually rearranging my schedule, and that's okay. As long as I get those money-making tasks done and as long as I'm not dropping any balls on deadlines or missing appointments, it's all good. I just rearrange my schedule. That's one of the reasons why I look at my calendar at the end of every day and go What didn't get done? What do I need to move? And that's another reason why it's good to leave a buffer time in your calendar because then I can easily move things into those slots.

Another thing that people sometimes tell me is that time blocking like this makes them feel too restricted, they want to be spontaneous, they started their business so that they didn't have to work on a schedule, and they want to have room to do all of the fun things, and I totally get that. But time blocking is what gives me the room to do all of the fun things like we talked about at the beginning. It lets me know what projects I have time for, which ones I don't have time for, it helps me to figure out when I can schedule the fun things like that pickleball class, or like a new hobby that I want to try out, or a new movie I want to go see. I get to schedule all of that and know that I have time to do it and I don't have to worry that I am dropping the ball someplace else because I've got everything scheduled and everything is time blocked, and it just allows me a lot more flexibility.

Alright, so that was a lot. So let's do a quick recap. So plan time for your time blocking, that is the first step, if you block nothing else off in your calendar, block off 60 to 90 minutes to do your time blocking. I like to do this on Sunday afternoons. You can do it on Friday afternoons, Monday mornings, Wednesday at noon, I don't care. Just marked time in your calendar that you can get in there and block this time off. Then start with your most important tasks, that's you, that's the golden goose. Make sure you are blocking time off for those self-care routines, for eating healthy, for getting some exercise, for getting out with your friends, for spending time with your partner, leave room for that. Otherwise, it's going to get pushed to the bottom of the list and it's not going to happen. Next thing, make sure that most of your tasks, most of your time is spent on those money-making tasks, and when I say most of your time, I mean most of your work time, of course. So most of your work time should be spent on those money-making tasks. If you color code your calendar like I do, it's going to be really easy to tell. And finally leave room for adjustments, leave room to mess up a little bit, leave room for those emergencies that pop up that you are not prepared for all the time, so that you can easily adjust your schedule.

Now, I want to hear from you, visit me at TinyCourseEmpire.com/37, and tell me what your best tips are for scheduling your week. Are you using time blocking, is this a new idea for you, are you using something else that really works? I would love to hear what you have going on in your life and in your business and what is working for you. And while you're there, be sure to hit the Subscribe button. Next week, as I said, we're going to be talking about content marketing and how to choose your content channel. You're not going to want to miss that. And if you are getting some value from this podcast, I would so appreciate it if you would leave me a review at Apple Podcasts or wherever you are listening or share this episode with a friend you know who could use this information, that really helps our podcast grow, and I would really appreciate the support.

And that's it for me. Have a terrific day, everybody, and I will talk to you all again next week.

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