

EPISODE 028 -

THE 3 PRIORITIES EXERCISE

WITH NANCY RAY

Intro

This simple exercise could change your life. I know that sounds extreme, but it's been a game changer for me. The older I get, the more I'm discovering that the most life-changing things are actually quite simple, and that's true for the three priorities exercise. Whether you are a CEO of a large company or a stay-at-home mom, this exercise will give you clarity at the beginning of your day and fulfillment at the end of your day.

You're listening to Work and Play with Nancy Ray, Episode 28.

Much of our daily lives can be divided into two categories: work and play. Simply put, that is where our life and our legacy take place. This is a podcast all about learning to work and play well, which leads to a healthy soul and a fulfilling life.

Let's dive in.

Content

Okay, I feel like there are two ways to start my day. I wake up, and I'm just running so hard. The kids are already awake. I'm getting ready, making breakfast, emptying the dishwasher, cleaning the kitchen, drinking my coffee, gathering up things, taking care of the kids, getting them dressed, starting work, immediately jumping into my inbox, answering Slack and everything my team needs. I just start doing it all in no particular order. I just am accomplishing all the things.

And at the end of my workday, I did so much and I worked really hard. But then when Will asks me, "Hey, what'd you do today?" I look at him like a deer in the headlights. I'm like, "I don't ... " I mean, I did stuff, I worked hard all day, but I don't know what I did." Anybody else have days like that? I do. I know I do.

The second way to start my day would be I wake up, I have my solid morning routine, I feel grounded, I'm connected with the Lord, and then I realize the importance of making a plan, even a simple plan. So I pause. I look at everything on my plate, kids, household, work, ev-

everything. I look at it objectively, not emotionally or like I need to get things done right away. And then I ask myself the question, what are the three most important things that I should do today? If I only accomplished three things today, what would make today a win?

Just by listening to those two examples of days that I've had, and I'm sure you've had too, you can feel the contrast. By jumping in, your day kind of happens to you. But by pausing and setting three priorities, you happened to your day. Peter Drucker said,

"Efficiency is doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right things."

So I'm really good at, I feel like I'm the queen at efficiency. I know how to jump in and tackle my inbox, and handle my team, and do all the things right, but I'm not particularly being effective because that means prioritizing well and doing the right things. So if you've never done this before, you've never done this three priorities exercise before, or maybe you haven't done it in a while and you need a reset, let's start from scratch. Here is how you can implement this three priorities exercise starting today.

First of all, you just need to block off about 15 minutes. That's really it. That's all the stakes. Make a master list of everything you have to do, like a mega brain dump, all of it, home stuff, work stuff, self-care stuff, kid stuff, husband stuff, anything that you can think of, especially the things that are most pressing to you right now.

Then, try to divide them out. Maybe take a new sheet of paper or maybe you can color code it or circle it, whatever it is. Try to organize them a little bit. What are the things that you need to do in the next three months? What are the things you need to do in the next month? What are the things you need to accomplish this week? And what are the things that are most important for today?

Now, on your list of things to do today, it might be 10 or 20 things that you feel like, oh my goodness, I need to do all of these things today, and that overwhelm can start creeping in. But I don't want it to. This is where it's really important to just choose three things. And that's when you ask yourself, "What are the three most important things that I can do today?"

Now, my biggest temptation in this is to choose five things because maybe two of them only are going to take five minutes. But I just encourage you to only choose three. And if you happen to accomplish those three things, cross them out, and then circle three more. You can reset those three priorities and try to work through them. Or maybe just choose one more to do. Bottom line is I think one of the biggest mistakes you can make while doing this exercise is choosing too many because you think you can do it all.

Now, a couple of guidelines when you are setting your three priorities. Don't include things that are your normal work or day-to-day things. Unless you're tackling it in like a non-normal project kind of way, things like emails or your normal day-to-day job responsibilities should not be included. So for stay-at-home parents, you shouldn't include things like unloading

the dishwasher, or doing the laundry, or prepping meals. Three priorities should be the three things that are the most important things for today.

Some work examples might be to spend one hour on product development, or edit and send out one wedding, for all you wedding photographer friends out there, or call a vendor that you've been putting off for a while. Some home examples might include clean out the pantry, clean out the fridge, meal plan for the week, shop for the week, clean out the kids' clothes, clean out your closet. Maybe one of the priorities is to play with your kids one-on-one because that would make today a win, but it would help you to accomplish it by planning it into your day.

Now, every once in a while, I do make normal day-to-day things a priority. So when my inbox is out of control, sometimes I'll put on my priorities list, my top three priorities, get inbox to 30. Or if I'm leading a team meeting and I know it's going to take up half my day, that team meeting goes on the list. Even though it's part of my normal job responsibility, I know it's the most important thing that would make today a win, a solid level 10 team meeting.

Now, here are three more tips I've learned from doing this through the years. Knock out a priority before ever opening your inbox, right? Keep your inbox closed. Quit your email app. Do not let it stay open. Do not allow yourself to hear any bings or dings. Make sure it's closed off on your phone, you're not getting notified, and just knock out a priority before ever opening your emails. I feel like emails, it's the number one killer in my life of actually accomplishing my priorities for the day.

The second tip is time block your day. I hope to do an entire episode on time blocking in the future. But for now, know that one of the things that will make you most successful in actually accomplishing your three priorities is blocking your time in one-, two-, or three-hour chunks during the day. Peter Drucker also said,

"If there's any one secret of effectiveness, it's concentration. Effective executives do first things first, and they do one thing at a time."

So it's prioritization, right? And it's also making sure that you're not getting interrupted. So by keeping your email inbox closed and blocking your day into time blocks of hour chunks, you really do knock out the most important things.

Here's the third and honestly most important tip that I want to give to you. You have to commit to the habit of actually pausing and writing down your three priorities. I do not know why this is so hard for me. I'm telling you, for whatever reason, just stopping when I have so much work to do, stopping and writing down my three priorities easily gets shoved to the side. I'm like, "Oh, nope. I know my priorities. I'm just going to go do them." That is the temptation that will be your downfall, really. I don't know what it is. If you think you can do it and keep them in your head, you will get distracted. You're going to fall off the wagon, and you're going to go back to that first version of the day where you feel like your day happened to you. I promise. It just

happens to me all the time.

I'd like to tell you that I do this every single day. I do not. I try to, but I don't. But on the days that I do it, goodness, it makes me feel like I have a clear track to run on. And at the end of my day, I can truly look my day and say, "Hey, this worked. I did these things." Or maybe I accomplished one of my three priorities, or maybe I accomplished two of them, but I know what I did and it felt really fulfilling. So that's it. The third and most important tip is you have to commit to the habit of actually pausing and writing down your three priorities for this to work.

That's it. That's the simple three priorities exercise that truly can change your life. I would love for you to try it, if you've never done it before. Try it for three days. Try it for one day. Just try it today. I'd love for you to message me somewhere, Instagram, Facebook, wherever, and let me know how it went.

Okay, it's time for the Work and Play Cornerstore where I have a little bit of fun and draw from my personal life and experiences to bring you one book I'm loving and one thing I'm loving. I'll get a tiny commission from anything bought through these links, which will help me continue to bring this podcast to you, so I always greatly appreciate it when you use my links. Plus, it'll just be fun. So this week I am adding the book *The Compound Effect* as well as our *Time Timer* to the Cornerstore.

All right, *The Compound Effect* is probably one of those books that changed my life the most about 5 to 10 years ago. It is a very small book. It's not very long. So if you're listening and you're like, "I'm not a reader," great. This is a great starting point for you. If you're listening, and are like, "I am a reader. I only like to read 500-page novels," listen, this book literally will get you so hyped and so motivated to really change your life.

And basically, in a nutshell, it's all about making a lot of little choices that over time will lead to the greatest results. It's kind of like compound interest. You think, "Oh, these little insignificant percentages," or, "Adding this little bit of money to this bank account, it's not going to make a difference," right? But over time, the compound effect happens and you blossom and grow into this beautiful life and person that you really want to be. So it's very powerful. It's very practical. And it really, I think, it just motivated me beyond measure the first time I read it. It's really, really great book.

All right. The second thing I'm adding to the Cornerstore, thing I'm loving, is one of our most prized little possessions in the Ray household these days. It's called the *Time Timer*. It is this little blue timer. We bought it for Milly and her rest time because she rest for an hour. She doesn't sleep, and goodness she would keep interrupting me like, "Mommy, when am I done? Mommy, when am I done?" And I love her. I was like, "Baby, can't get anything done when you're interrupting me constantly," and I found this resource online called the *Time Timer*.

Basically, it's this little timer. When you turn the face of the timer to 60 minutes, red appears.

And over the course of 60 minutes, or however long you set it, the red slowly disappears. So for rest time, we would set it to 60 minutes, and I would say, “Just look at your timer. If you’re not sure how much time is left, you can actually see it.” It helps kids keep track of time. So we use it for eating breakfast if they’re being really slow at eating. We use it for rest time. We use it for bedtime routine, light’s out in 30 minutes. Like, okay, we can do whatever we want to do. We got to brush teeth. We got to get ready for bed. But if you don’t do these things within 30 minutes, we won’t have time to read a book. So it’s really great to have this visual she can look at.

But let’s be real. For those of you who don’t have kids, this is such a great time blocking tool. You could have the Time Timer and put it on your desk and say, “Okay, 60 minutes is all I’ve got to do as much work in my inbox as possible and then we’re closing up for the day,” or, “60 minutes is what I’ve got to knock out my first priority for the day. Let’s see if I can do it.” It is so helpful just to have the red visual that slowly disappears in front of you. So, I love it. We’re going to link to it in the show notes. It’s fantastic.

Thanks for listening to Episode 28 of Work and Play with Nancy Ray.

Everything I’ve mentioned today can be found in the show notes at nancyray.com/podcast/28. You can find me at nancyray.com or follow me @nancyray on Instagram or Facebook almost daily. Here’s a quote by Stephen Covey.

*“Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent
and not enough time on what is important.”*

Today, choose three important things and go do them.

Thanks for listening, and I’ll see you next time.

