

**EPISODE 745**

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:36.9]

**FT:** Today's guest is going to teach us how to get more done and feel less busy while doing more, starting now. Welcome back to So Money everyone, I'm your host Farnoosh Torabi. I need this in my life right now. I don't know about you, but this episode is hitting me at a time like no other.

It is time to learn how to I guess relearn how to make the most of my time. I find that I tweeted something the other day about time, and it got a lot of likes and I was just tweeting kind of stream of consciousness and it was something like, "The older I get, the more I'm thinking to myself, how can I maximize my time right now, how can I make the most of my time in this hour, in this minute. Now?"

As a joke, I said, you know, "Incidentally, Twitter is not the thing." People after that –because if we're all on Twitter, we're probably also not doing something else that's more productive. But today's guest is going to help us hopefully find ways to add more time to our day or at least try to stack our day in a way that's more efficient. She's Laura Vanderkam, she's been on the show before, she's like friend and she's a recurring guest.

She's one of the world's leading experts on time management and productivity. She's written four books and her most recent is called *Off The Clock: Feel Less Busy While Getting More Done*. It just hit the shelves, she's also a podcast host, an avid reader, get this, she's already finished about 75 books this year. Her goal is I think to hit a hundred.

Before you think that this lifestyle of just you know, reading 75 books if that's what you want to do or just having more time to yourself or to your business or for your family, seems like this impossible task, let me add that Laura is not only all of those great things that I just mentioned but she's also a mother to not just one child but four. Four children, think about that.

Laura talks about how she divides and conquers the most important things that she has to do during the day, sometimes involving her children, what does that mean, plus inexpensive ways to buy more time in your day because sure, if we had more money, we could probably throw some money at the problem, right? What if we don't or what if we do and we don't really want to spend more money to buy more time in the day? We want to like be smart about it. And I'm not a morning person so that can't happen for me. I was really interested in these inexpensive ways to buy more time in my day and she's on the money.

Here we go, here is Laura Vanderkam.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:03:18.4]

**FT:** Laura Vanderkam, welcome back to So Money. Let me tell you, I have been so waiting for this book to come out, *Off The Clock*, your latest book and to learn the latest on how to best manage my time. Welcome to the show.

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**LV:** Thank you so much for having me back.

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**FT:** You're obsessed with time, lady.

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**LV:** I am.

[0:03:38.3]

**FT:** When did it start for you? I mean, you are a mom of four, so clearly time is always on your money mind and how to best use it but this has really become a professional expertise for you and you're one of the world's most renowned time experts now. You know, after you graduated from Princeton, was this what you thought you'd end up doing?

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**LV:** No, it was not. It was a topic that I was interested in and that other people were entrusted in reading about and so you know, I was much like you with money, there's many things that you're interested in life but once you become known for something, you sort of need to keep finding new angles on that and that's what your community is interested in as well.

I really enjoyed learning as much as I can about time and trying to do some new research into the topic myself and share what I can with my community.

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**FT:** This latest book is called *Off The Clock* and your previous books have included *168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think, I Know How She Does It: How Successful Women Make The Most Of Their Time*. There's also a book you wrote called *What The Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast*.

You've given TED talks on this, your latest is called *Off The Clock: Feel Less Busy While Getting More Done*. You examined 900 time journals, or you in reviewed 900 people and found out how some of the busiest people still have time to relax and not feel rushed. I just want to read an excerpt from the first chapter in your book, just to explain to readers what feeling off the clock feels like and you write:

"Feeling off the clock is exhilarating. It is a key component of human happiness and yet a life is lived in hours and living the good life requires being a proper steward of those hours" and you go on to say that this book is about finding that look out spot for understanding time freedom, it's about developing a new mindset.

You're like trying to democratize how people can maximize time. This isn't about you know, throwing money at the problem, these are habits, behaviors, mindset shifts. What was the biggest revelation for you as somebody who focuses on this day in and day out.

One of the biggest "Aha's."

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**LV:** Well, when I asked 900 people to track their time per day, I also ask them questions about how they felt about their time. Then I could compare the schedules of people who felt starved for time and stressed about time with people who thought more relaxed, who felt time was abundant.

These were all sorts of equivalently busy people, it wasn't like someone was retired and someone – I mean, they were all people with full time jobs, families, busy people. One of the most surprising findings to me was that the people with the highest time perception scores were highly likely to have done something very interesting on that March Monday that I had them record. We're talking people who went to salsa dancing lessons on a Monday night.

Or they took the family out for a movie or you know, went to the park after dinner or something like that. It wasn't just commute to work, come home, eat dinner, watch TV, go to bed. There was some reason that they might remember that March Monday. I think that that was kind of a cool finding because one of the reasons that people feel like time kind of slips through their fingers is that they don't remember where their time went, there's nothing memorable about their time.

Whereas when you have these little adventures in your life then time becomes memorable and one of the ways that our brain judges how much time we have is by how memorable our time is, how many memory units we have formed in any given length of time.

These people were doing fun, memorable things and so they got more time.

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**FT:** It's about filling your time with more intentional experiences. I did this thing yesterday where I scheduled a really quick manicure in the middle of the day, which forced me basically to get all my stuff done before that and I remember thinking to myself, "I should do this more often."

I should give myself these little pockets, these moments of me time throughout the day, not every day, doesn't work out every day. But that way I feel like I'll be more productive until that kind of fun thing starts for me.

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**LV:** Yeah, these are little daily vacations.

[0:08:03.7]

**FT:** Okay, daily vacations. Am I sort of like practicing your book without having already read it?

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**LV:** Yeah, well one of the other cool things that these daily vacations can do is it gives you an opportunity to kind of stretch those savoring muscles. One thing that people do that's really cool at time, people who feel like they have more time, is that they can really stretch really good experiences to make them richer and make them feel like they last longer.

You know, if you think about our time like waiting in the line at the DMV seems to take forever but that equivalent amount of time spent like hanging out and having a drink with a friend feels like it flies by. Wouldn't it be awesome if we could make the time with the friend seem to go as slowly as the time in the DMV line? And one of the things we can do is to like actively build these savoring muscles, to really notice the experience, to kind of take in everything, to slow down, to talk about how awesome it is.

Figure out how you'll remember it afterwards. You know, when you build it these daily vacations, you go do your mani, really, think about like, "Look at me, I'm the kind of person who is taking a

break during the day, let me pause and notice how fun this is. How much I'm enjoying myself, let me notice what it feels like to be relaxed."

When you pay attention to things like this, then that little quick vacation will expand in your mental picture of it.

[0:09:18.9]

**FT:** It's interesting as I hear you talk about this and as I'm skimming through your book. I feel like there are so many parallels in how we treat time and how we treat money that yield more of it, or feeling like you have more of it, or feeling more gratified with the how you're spending your money and spending your time.

You used words like "Abundance" and believing that time is abundant and also, people who believe that money is abundant end up being people who have more of it, or feel more financially free.

People who respect money, respect time, use their money for experiences, use their time for experiences. It's not I think a coincidence that when you have these sorts of belief systems around money and time that you feel more satisfied in life.

In your research, what were some of the time money relationships that you found, any of them? I mean, you can kind of go at it in a lot of directions.

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**LV:** Yeah, well there's definitely an overarching relationship between time and money and that both are scarce resources in the sense of for most people, they're not infinite. Time is a little bit more limited I think, than money, because obviously you can make more money, but you cannot make more time.

I mean, I think you know, one of the strategies that people who spend time well use is thinking about how money can be a tool to help them enjoy more of their hours. Because if you think

about time being a limited resource, we don't want to spend all our time kind of wishing minutes away and if you think about how you spend day to day life, there are many times that people spend wishing time away.

We're wishing our commute to go faster, we're wishing a meeting to go faster. We're wishing, sometimes time before bedtime to go faster if our kids are misbehaving, that sort of thing. The question is, you know, could money be used in any way to make some of these minutes be more tolerable, to be less draining or something like that?

In my life, one of the things we've done – I have four children, so you know, I'm not getting a whole lot of time off from them on the weekends, but we will sometimes have a sitter come to stay with the little ones while we're doing activities with the big one. You know, my husband can take one kid to one thing, I'll take a kid to one thing.

We're both getting one on one time with one of the kids, then the little children are not miserable being dragged to a sideline, we're not trying to keep them off of a court or out of a swimming pool or you know, whatever else we're at.

It's this like investment and life satisfaction that I've taken a couple of hours on a Saturday from being just absolutely miserable chasing a toddler around and trying to keep them out of things, to actually like enjoying my other kid's activity.

That is for instance a way that you know, you can use money to make time better.

[0:12:11.6]

**FT:** In the years that I've had this podcast, I've had on a handful of time management experts or experts who talk about how to live your best life and effectively all of them wake up early in the morning. And say that that is a huge aspect to getting more done, feeling more productive and having really a quality life because if you get up early, that means you probably have to go to bed early and that you're getting more sleep, hopefully.

I am not a morning person, I never have been, never will be. I will get up early if I have to but it's not my preference and I understand the value in having that early quiet time in between, you

know, five AM and seven AM. What is your advice for me and others who feel like the morning is just not their happiest time of the day?

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**LV:** Yeah, well it's probably not my happiest time necessarily either because for the past several years, I mean, I've had a small child waking me up earlier than I want to. If your kids are not doing that to you, good for you. My youngest child wants to do great things before breakfast and unfortunately can't seem to do that by himself.

It's been waking somebody up in the morning for many years. But you know, that's a phase of life. I think for many people, mornings are good because it is time you can have to do your own personal projects before everybody else wants a piece of you both at work and at home.

You know, for most people they tend to have more focus in discipline, like after that first cup of coffee, they can take on the world. You know, if there's something you want to do, you can tell yourself that you can do it at the end of the day with whatever time you have left over. But often, you don't have time left over, your energy level is such that you're not going to do anything particularly important with that time. Whereas in the morning, you can get through it, you know. The same advice that people use with finances, that you want to pay yourself first.

Because if you wait until the end of the month to save what's left over, you probably won't have a lot of money left over but if you save at the beginning, somehow, you'll get through and you'll also continue to build wealth at the same time.

That's why people use mornings, but you don't have to use mornings. I mean, it's a question of like, are you doing the things in life that you wish to be doing? If you are making space for your personal projects, then there's no point in waking up at five AM just to wake up at five AM.

You know, it's more that if people don't have space in their life for these things, that's probably the best place to look.

[0:14:46.5]

**FT:** We're in conversation with Laura Vanderkam and Laura was actually on the podcast back on episode 149, so if you're curious about her money story, check out that episode. But I'm so obsessed with this time topic as you are Laura. I wanted to dedicate this particular visit of yours to the podcast to talking about time.

The other question I had was obviously talked about time for a while now but in 2018, now the book is out in 2018. You probably started writing it in 2016 or earlier even. We are in this sort of height of social media and so many distractions from Instagram to, you can now watch TV on any screen, there's a lot of pressure to fill up our time with things that are not necessarily productive.

Okay, here's the question. How do I get off Instagram?

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**LV:** Instagram is fun, I don't know, I mean, I don't think you have to get off of it. I think the question is, how can we make sure that the time we're spending on it is time that is chosen and that feels good as supposed to feels like, "I just wasted two hours of my life," which is a worse feeling.

I think there's two things you can do. I mean, think about this as like playing offense and playing defense. So in terms of offense, you want to make sure that the important cool meaningful stuff is happening in your life because when you are deeply absorbed in a project that you are working on, like a work project that you find really intensely interesting it is like using all your skills, you're naturally less tempted to go do these little things with your time because you want to spend your time doing this.

So as much of your time as possible, you want to fill with the cool stuff. You want to do the cool project at work, you want to have a dinner party with your friends. You want to go for a long bike ride with a friend or your spouse or something. These are things that naturally keep us off these time wasters. So, it's throwing away the bad stuff and then in terms of defense, I think a lot of the online surfing is just mindless.

And so, one thing you could do is of course put your phone in airplane mode because that way you can still look at the time. You can still see the time, you may even record your steps, I am not sure. But you have to take one more step to get on all your apps that require internet access and sometimes that one extra step is enough to have you decide, “Well do I really want to? Is that what I want to be doing with my time right now?” And if it is, great.

Put it on airplane mode and go enjoy your time on Instagram but if that is not what you want to do then that can nudge you to do something else.

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**FT:** It’s like spending your money. If you have taken care of all the boring stuff first, like you’ve saved for retirement, or you have saved for a rainy day and you paid your bills and not all the exciting stuff but the stuff that has to happen, your needs, then go and have a blast and not feel guilty about it I think is what I am hearing from you the same way to manage your time on the stuff that may feel a little frivolous.

But honestly, if you’ve got everything else covered then enjoy your time if that is actually what brings you some pleasure. I also read in your book something that you do is really look at your day in 30-minute increments. Or maybe that is not exactly how you do it but there is something to be said about checking in on the clock every so often, and actually giving yourself deadlines, many deadlines to do things.

I do this sometimes with writing when I have writing deadlines, I’ll say “Okay, I am going to basically put on the phone alarm to go off in 45 minutes and I am just going to make the most of the next 45 minutes or 25 minutes,” and you can actually get a lot done – more than you think.

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**LV:** Oh you definitely can. I mean often people don’t start stuff because they’re like, “Well I need a whole day to do this,” my guess is you probably don’t need the whole day. You’d be amazed how much you could get through in 45 minutes and then if you need more time, stop and take a

break and do another 45 minutes or whatever unit of time sort of works for you. So yeah, that's a great way to think about this and to make sure that you are making time for the important stuff.

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**FT:** Because what is it about that? I feel like it is very relieving to say, "Okay 30 minutes. I could do that. That is manageable." It takes away the overwhelm for me thinking like, "I have this huge project, it's going to take two days," like to just start. Give yourself 30 minutes, you're going to get more done than you think.

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**LV:** Yeah and almost universally that is the case and often these things sort of buildup in our minds as being horrible and terrible. I feel this way about my taxes all the time. Actually, this doesn't take nearly as much time as I think it's going to. You know I do wind up blocking out two days and then I am done in three hours and I'm like, "What am I going to do for the next day and a half. Let's find something fun I guess."

So yeah, just get started. Lower your expectations. I mean one of the things I talk about in the book is this.

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**FT:** Lower your expectations!

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**LV:** Because we have this idea that things have to be perfect and so that keeps us from even starting but often, we find people who are incredibly productive or prolific. They have just decided to make small steps and do them repeatedly. So, one woman I talk to for instance is this incredibly prolific novelist but basically, all she's doing is she's saying, "Well I'm going to write 2,000 words a day. I will do this in three spurts like I'll write an 800-word scene."

“I will take a break and then I will write another 800-word scene and take a break, go write another scene or half a scene,” whatever, three scenes in a day and that’s really not that much. You know 2,000 words you will probably spend that much words on email in the course of the day but then she just keeps doing it. She will do that a couple of days a week, so she has written 10,000 words a week.

And then she does it the next week and does it the next week and shockingly, you’ve outlined it and know roughly what you need to write. You’ve got a 70,000 word novel in seven weeks at that pace and then you build in two weeks to edit it and at this pace, she can crank out four novels a year and it was sort of like, yeah. I mean she’s not working that hard on any given day but because she just keeps going. It is that persistence is what add up to this prolificacy, if that is a word.

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**FT:** And it speaks to your point that while the perception is that time is limited and certainly it is a limited resource but that when you plan out your projects and you stay consistent and you are disciplined, it turns out there’s a lot of time. That time adds up and then in seven weeks, you’ve got a book or whatever you have. So what is something else that you do with your money that gives you back time?

I loved the anecdote you just shared earlier about getting a sitter on the weekends for your small ones, for your small children, and then doing one on one time with your older children, you and your husband. That’s a great way that maybe parents may not have thought about using their money. Another example among my friends is they’ll get a sitter from four until eight O’clock on a Saturday night so that they can go and get dinner and it’s an early dinner.

But they just like it because they don’t have to worry about reservations and then they can come home, and the kids are asleep, and they can feel like their date is continuing but they’re not getting a sitter from eight to midnight.

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**LV:** Yeah, that would be a good use of cash too.

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**FT:** What are some other ways that you are using your cash to give yourselves more freedom with the way that you use your time?

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**LV:** Well I think one thing to think about is planning in little treats because often life can feel like it's bit of a chore. You know you're working hard, you're dealing with small people at home or whatever your chores are at home and you can feel like, "I have nothing I am actually enjoying." But what if you constantly used a little bit of money as a way to put in a treat? Like it doesn't have to be huge but maybe it's like, "Oh here's a book I really want to read."

"I could put myself on the list for the library and I could see that 18 people want the book before me, so I am never going to get to it. Or I could just buy the e-book." I could just put that – that is my treat fund and then you really enjoy that time and maybe make it up somewhere else, like you bring your lunch instead of buying it one day. Then you can come out and watch there, that 13 bucks. So you know, little treats into your life can really help with using money well.

You know there might be big things too. If you look at your time and analyze like, "Well what is my most unhappy time and then what is my happy time? And could I move any of this stuff in the not happy into the happy?" You know big questions will be like, where I live. Like if commuting is the low point for many people's days, maybe it's worth spending a little bit extra money on a house that is closer to where you work.

Or maybe it is that you get a subscription to something that you can listen to in your car that paying for that, that way you make that time a lot more pleasant. Or if you hate cooking for instance, maybe you could hire somebody to make some meals on weekends and then you heat them up during the week. But think about what it is that you find miserable like you really hate doing and then ask yourself:

“Could I use money in any way to put this into a happier category of time?” And if you could then it might be a good use of funds, certainly more than a lot of these mindless spending that I am sure you see all the time.

[0:24:21.7]

**FT:** Well you bring up commuting which is really in New York City a huge pain point for workers and my husband was commuting what should have been a 20-minute commute in the subway most days, was an hour just because of the breakdowns and the over population that we have here. You know, he was considering leaving his job. He actually got poached to work somewhere else that now he can walk to work.

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**LV:** Oh nice.

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**FT:** A 15-minute walk to work. I know it's like really, it's *The Secret*. You think about wanting to do something and then you tell the universe and then it happens but –

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**LV:** It finds you a job right by your house.

[0:24:57.2]

**FT:** Yeah and we were joking about it. We're like, “Is it enough of a reason to switch a job because the commute is just killing your soul?” And I said, “No I think especially in New York, a lot of people can relate to that.” I feel like it should be a metro section story like front cover like, “Man leaves job for better commute,” because some people will move, some people will just quit their jobs because it's just not a productive use of their time.

I mean it's one thing if you could sit on a train and read and do work but usually, you're just holding onto a strap hold end.

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**LV:** Yeah, I know. It is just miserable.

[0:25:35.0]

**FT:** It's just miserable for 45 minutes and then that is cutting into his time with family and just getting some work done. He has to leave super early to get to work on time. So I think that another bit of advice for people who have that kind of miserable commute to work is like see if you can work from home some days, right?

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**LV:** Oh yeah, definitely. Well especially if you are thinking like you might quit because of this. If that is on the line, you may as well just go and ask for anything you want. Think about, "Could I get out of commuting a certain number of days per week or what amount of money would it take to make me whole in this situation of hating my commute so much?" And go in with that because you know again, if you're going to leave you may as well ask for what you want before you do and see if it's possible.

[0:26:25.2]

**FT:** I've recently recommended to somebody, she was spending an hour and a half every direction to commute to work in Los Angeles which is not a shock because traffic there is a mess. She was spending a lot of childcare and I said, "Well what if you work from home a few days a week or at least once a week and that would allow you to at least not have to rush your kids off to daycare so early and save maybe half an hour each morning."

Or, "Each morning and evening getting ready for work and getting them ready for daycare and that could save money on childcare so it's a win-win-win." Also, for your employer it's a win

because you mentioned like they're going to want to retain you. You're not going to want to start looking for other jobs. What is something that you practiced years ago that you thought was a good saving, a good way of saving time and now you're realizing there are better ways, or it is not working for you anymore?

[0:27:19.1]

**LV:** You know, I think obviously life evolves and things that might have been a good use of time at a certain point and are less so later. I still enjoy writing articles. I write a lot less of them than I used to. I've sort of focused my time on writing books and doing speeches. It just seems a more efficient means of getting the message out there, that if I am going to write articles, I like them to be sort of meatier and longer stuff versus the shorter just quick take on something.

So, you know, I am spending time on that also making sure that if I am writing stuff it is going on my own webpage so that it is building up my brand as much as advancing the cause of other publications. That's something.

I think I'm trying to be a little bit better about just going to bed at night instead of trying to get that extra bit of work in. I know that for many people, it is necessary to do that second split shift at night after the kids go to bed.

What happens is, you need to leave work at a good time to get to daycare pickup for instance but that's before all your work is done. Then you wind up doing all the email at night after your kids go to bed.

That certainly works for some people. I've decided I'd rather just keep working when I could, like I have a little bit of extra childcare into the evenings and try and get a lot of it done and then sort of not be back on every night, if at all possible. Different things I'm doing.

[0:28:49.4]

**FT:** Good, yeah. I think that when you become a mom and you've been a mom four times now over, you just get better and better with managing your time. I think, well, you not everyone does but I think that it's inherent sometimes because you have now none negotiables in your life.

Your kids have to go to school, they have to get fed, they have to bet their homework done. You have to work, and you have to make the money so that the cycle can continue. There are certain things that must now – your time must be dedicated to that are none negotiables and they're kind of this tent poles throughout your day.

Everything else, either you were doing before seems just not important, not as urgent and you get better at doing the things that you have to do, for me at least in a shorter period of time so that you can then do the things that you actually love doing.

[0:29:39.7]

**LV:** Yeah.

[0:29:40.8]

**FT:** Bring the joy back into your life. Not that kids don't bring the joy but you know what I mean. Getting manicured –

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**LV:** I've been amazed how quickly I can write an 800-word piece if I need to.

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**FT:** If you need to, exactly. Because you have to make your kids soccer game, or you know, dance recital or just go on a date night or just stare at the paint dry.

[0:29:59.7]

**LV:** Yeah. Five minutes hanging out.

[0:30:02.1]

**FT:** Exactly. Laura Vanderkam, thank you so much. Congratulations, *Off The Clock* is out everywhere where books are available. It is your latest and greatest on how to make the most of your time, feel less busy while getting more done. Thank you so much for the work that you do.

[0:30:17.4]

**LV:** Thank you for having me.

[END]