

EPISODE 565

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:34.4]

FT: Who doesn't want to work less and accomplish more? You're listening to So Money everyone. Does that sound like you? It sounds like me. Our guest today is Chris Winfield, and he's a productivity expert on a mission to help everyone get their work done in less than half the time. In fact, he says he can teach us all to get 40 hours of work accomplished in just 16.7 hours. Plus, if you're not a morning person like me, Chris gives advice on how you can wake up excited and motivated as early as 5 a.m.

A little bit more about Chris, he helps successful entrepreneurs and executives decrease the time they spent working but increasing their productivity. He has experienced working with big name brands including Disney and Macy's and Viacom. He's work has been featured everywhere including the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and CNN. Plus, he's got his own podcast; it's called The Deconstructing Success Podcast. Take a listen, subscribe.

In our conversation, Chris offers me some personal advice. I've got a big commencement speech coming up and I am nowhere to be done, so he gives me small actions for writing that big overwhelming speech ahead of time. He also shares how to capture your dreams on paper. Literally, I am a very vivid dreamer. The problem is I wake up and I remember none of it. Although I remember while dreaming that I actually need to remember this, because this could help me in work and in life, in parenting.

Chris talks about how to literally capture those ideas quickly and efficiently. Plus, that faithful piece of pizza that changed Chris' views on work, life, and family.

Here is Chris Winfield.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:12.2]

FT: Chris Winfield, welcome to So Money. How are you doing?

[0:02:17.2]

CW: I'm doing great, Farnoosh. It's great to finally talk to you.

[0:02:20.2]

FT: Likewise. Heard so much about you, we have mutual friends, and I've been doing a little Chris Winfield downloading in the last few days just as a preparation for our interview. I kind of feel like — And tell me if anyone's ever told you this, is Tim Ferriss of *The 4-Hour Workweek* and Hal Elrod of *Miracle Morning's* had a baby, had a lovechild, it would be you, Chris Winfield.

[0:02:44.4]

CW: No one has ever told me that, but I will take that as a big compliment.

[0:02:50.4]

FT: Run with it. Run with it, yeah. It's unbelievable what you teach people to do, and I'm hoping in the next 30 minutes you'll give us some takeaways for how we can effectively get more done in less than half the time that we're used to getting it done, 16.7 hours as supposed to 40. Also, I'm not a morning person. I am a morning person now out of necessity because I have a newborn in addition to a 2-1/2 year-old. That's my life right now. I'm naturally a morning person.

[0:03:26.0]

CW: You're a morning and middle of the night person.

[0:03:29.0]

FT: I'm a morning and a middle of — I'm a 24 hour a day person. A lot of us don't like getting up in the morning. We procrastinate. We feel like doing the work is just too overwhelming sometimes. I have to write a commencement speech and I'm delaying this, like it's my job. I know it's going to catch up to me.

[0:03:48.9]

CW: Let's break it down. Let's start right there. This is perfect.

[0:03:51.2]

FT: Can help me? I got to get this done. It's a problem.

[0:03:54.2]

CW: Yeah — No. This is perfect. Basically, let's think about the big commencement speech. In your mind —

[0:04:03.8]

FT: It's 9 minutes. I have to write a 9-minute speech. I have an audience of 20 something, 20-year-olds, 20 to 22. Attention span; not that great. They can't wait to get out of their cap and gowns and start partying. Whatever I say has to be somewhat interesting and engaging.

[0:04:21.3]

CW: You're an interesting and an engaging person, so let's get that part out of the way. Basically, what our mind does is breaks everything, makes it into something really big and scary. Then, anything big and scary, we don't want to do. There's a part of our brain, the amygdala, the lizard brain, which wants to keep us in our apartments watching Netflix not doing anything outside of our comfort zone. What do we do? We just break everything down and make it really, really small so that our mind — It just looks at it and goes, "Oh! Okay, you can do that."

Anytime, whatever it is, whatever the big overwhelming project task whatever, what I'm always looking to do is, "How do I break it down to today? Then, even more importantly, how do I break it down on to what I need to do right now?" Because that's what we really care about, because the future it's not here and the thing that I always say is, "Don't live in the wreckage of the future." Where everything has gone wrong. In your mind, the 20 somethings hate you and they're just waiting to go to their —

[0:05:33.7]

FT: It's like, "Who invited this person? Gosh!"

[0:05:35.3]

CW: Yeah. Exactly. Then, the reality is that they're going to be excited to hear you. You have a good message. You know how to inspire people. You know how to talk to people, but our mind doesn't want us. At least my mind doesn't want me to think that it wants me to be like, "Oh my God! They're all going to be miserable, and waiting, and all those —"

[0:05:55.5]

FT: Boo me out of the auditorium.

[0:05:57.2]

CW: Yeah.

[0:05:57.9]

FT: I thought about everything.

[0:05:58.5]

CW: Even though it's never happened to you. Even if it did, it's not that bad. I've had the worst possible things happen to me in my life that were my worst nightmares in terms of business, or anything, and none of them were that bad. They all went being actually great, because it's forced me to become a stronger person. I always just like to think of that.

Let's just break it down from — All right. When is this? It's May, I'm guessing.

[0:06:25.4]

FT: Yeah. It will have already happened by the time our interview airs, but we are about a month out till the deadline.

[0:06:33.3]

CW: Okay. Perfect. You can come back and then do an update to this and say, "They booed me out of the place, or it was amazing."

[0:06:42.6]

FT: Either way, we're making news.

[0:06:44.0]

CW: Exactly. Either one. I'm going to bet on you. You can bet on the booing, I'm going to bet on you. Basically, what I would look at is you break it down. The speech, it's 9 minutes. However many words that that has to be, or whatever it is. That's one of the milestone is actually writing the speech itself, but you don't really need to — Then, you also have to come up with the overall theme and the idea, which you probably already have, and then a title. You just keep breaking it down into all these different parts to it. It's not something really, really big. Then, you just keep backing into what do I need to do today? What would be the next action that you should take for this?

[0:07:33.8]

FT: My husband tells me just do 30 minutes a day and that way we all have that.

[0:07:41.5]

CW: Even that, that's kind of nebulous.

[0:07:42.9]

FT: Is that too much?

[0:07:44.1]

CW: Yeah. It's like, "What do you need to do right now? What would be the next logical step?"

[0:07:49.0]

FT: Just start writing. I think I have probably a ton of ideas, but I keep dismissing them in my head, like, "That's not good enough. That's not good enough. That's not good enough." Maybe I just need to get all those that's not good enough ideas on paper and at least feel like I'm moving forward as supposed to all just leaving in my head.

[0:08:06.1]

CW: Okay. I'm going to give you something to do that helps me with a lot with any of that, and you might have heard of it, but it's something called the morning pages. Now, since you're kind of up in the morning anyway. The morning pages came from this lady, Julia Cameron, who wrote something called *The Artist's Way*, and the morning pages is — It was something I'd heard about for a longtime and I was like, "That's the stupidest thing I ever heard of in my life," because you sit and write three pages longhand in the morning, first thing that you do.

With a pen and paper, you sit down and just write three pages. The first sentences could be, "That guy curses really out of his mind. Why am I doing this? It's the stupidest thing I ever heard

of.” That’s completely fine. That’s actually great. You can ease up on Chris or the soup that’s after a while, hopefully.

What happens is it gets all — We have this built-in inner critique, and it starts to break that down. The reason that we write it by hand like that is that we’re so used to doing everything on the computer, on a screen, and the screen has an extra layer of criticism built-in, because we can correct and we think it needs to be perfect and all of these.

You start writing, and what I would ask you to do is just put down all of those ideas that you have, everything that you think is in your head and just get it on paper. Just write it as if it doesn’t even matter, because it doesn’t, and you’re just getting it out.

From there, you’re going to start to see what are the parts that are good, what are the parts that are bad, but it’s going to just get it so that it’s not such a big deal anymore, and I do this every single morning, and I’ve done it for a long time. A lot of people started to do it more in the entrepreneur space. It was originally around things based around people wanting artists trying to re-spark their creativity, or whatever it is.

I would suggest that you do that tomorrow morning, even if it’s just one page. Any of the productivity stuff, like, “I never get hung up on the exact —”

[0:10:23.5]

FT: Why does it have to be in the morning? Can I do it at 2 o’clock in the afternoon? What’s the point of doing it in the morning?

[0:10:30.2]

CW: You can do it anytime. The reason that it’s suggested in the morning is that I don’t know about you, but I wake up and my mind is crazy. I’m thinking about the way that my mind is at normally is that I’m thinking about all the things I have to do, all the people I have to get back to. All of the things that are — I’m in New York City, so I apologize for the siren behind me.

[0:10:57.2]

FT: I'm with you. I hear it too.

[0:10:59.4]

CW: Okay. You're probably close to where I am. Basically, you do it to get all that stuff out of your mind. For example; sometimes my morning pages will just be me writing out all the things that I have to do, or the people that I need to get back to, or anything like that. It's basically a way for you to clear your brain, clear the path at the beginning of the day so that it's just the rest of the day you're starting kind of fresh.

You could sit down right now and do it, but it's like whatever — Any type of productivity stop. This is, I think, an important thing for people to know. Do what works best for you. Don't do what works best for me. Don't do what works best for some guy who wrote a book or anything and says that this is the only way to do it, because I don't believe — I never believe that, because whenever you start to put constraints like that or you try to adapt to your life based around some system or around some expert or something, it's never going to work. It should always be the opposite. It should always be that hits conforming to your life and you're doing what works best for you.

You might find that what works best for you is sitting down at 1:30 in the afternoon and writing all that out, and that's perfect. These are just tools, and then you figure out what works within your life, within your — How your life is set up now.

[0:12:33.2]

FT: Here's the other thing. I have my best ideas while I'm dreaming. I have very, very vivid dreams, so I usually will wake up and I'll tell my husband everything. I'll be like, "Then, he was wearing a red shirt and we had this for lunch," very to the detail and then an hour later I remember nothing. I guess I just need to get up as soon as I wake up, write down what I dreamt about, because I've had now two really great ideas in my dreams that I couldn't tell you what they were.

[0:13:03.1]

CW: Or make it even easier for yourself. Everything in my life, I try to make as easy as possible. Things are stacked up against us for the most part already. Why not make it as simple as possible? When you get up and start telling all that to your husband, just hit record on your phone so that you have it right there. Then, just — Another friend of mine, AJ Mirhzad, he runs Online Supercoach, all these stuff, but he, instead of writing out the morning pages, he just records it and uploads it to rev.com, or one of these who transcribe everything back for him.

He said — He's like, "Listen. Whoever is writing all my stuff thinks I'm completely out of my mind, and that's fine, because it works for me." It's the same thing. Again, if you're doing that and you know that that's where your best ideas come from and you're comfortable saying it to your husband, just hit record and then have somebody transcribe all that stuff. Spend 5 or 10 bucks a day to do that, but that could be priceless for you.

That's what I'm always looking for, is like; what works for you that you're already doing, and then just — What's that next step to just make it so that you maximize that whatever it is. Because what works perfectly — Right now, we are just talking about you have a young child. Your life right now is going to be completely different than somebody who doesn't have a newborn or somebody who has no kids and maybe is a millennial in New York City? You know what I mean? You got to just do what works best for you.

[0:14:54.7]

FT: Chris, you mentioned earlier, you kind of teased that you've gone through your own experiences, failures, all your worst dreams, nightmares coming true, not ending up being as bad as you thought. I want to get to that in just a moment. First, because I promised listeners a big promise. One of your big promises, one of your big goals for your clients and for your readers is to teach them how to basically get more done in less time, and we obviously went through that with the exercise with my speech. What are some of the other ways for folks who maybe don't have a commencement speech on the horizon, but they just really want to be able to be more productive? You've practiced something called the Pomodoro Technique.

[0:15:39.9]

CW: Yeah. The Pomodoro Technique is something that it really revolutionized how I work. It's basically the overall promise of it and what grab me is the first words in the paper that I found out it, the study that the guy, Francesco Cirillo had wrote about in, it was like; the first words in it are for many people, time is an enemy. When I read that, I was like, "Oh my God! Yes! Time is my biggest enemy," because I was always saying, "I don't have enough time. Time is running out. There's not enough hours in a day." All of these stuff.

What that did or what it does is it sets you up so that you're working with time rather than against it. The simplest way that I can describe this is, for most people, the most productive day of their year or their quarter is the day before they go on vacation. You get everything done because you're working so fast and so efficiently because you have all these loose ends to tie up and you only have a certain set number of hours that you can have to get everything done, or the day before you're traveling, or whatever it is.

What the Pomodoro Technique, it basically does that. I'm going to use one other study. There's something called Parkinson's Law, and Parkinson's Law essentially states that however much you allot for something, you're going to fill that time up.

Let's go back to the commencement speech. You know it's not until May and you have a lot of time. Now, typically, what's going to happen is that you're going to wait until — Not you, but I'm just going to make some generalizations. For most people that have something like that, they're going to wait until the night before or the week before and all that time is going to be spent worrying about it and stressing about it and all of these. Then, all the actual work gets done the day before, or the week before, or whatever. That's how our brains work.

What the Pomodoro Technique and why I like to try to do, because that's how I am. I'm set up to do that. What we try to do with this is just break it down. Instead of it being where you're waiting to the last minute, you're taking small steps and small actions to route the days and weeks leading up to the main thing.

The Pomodoro is really simple. You pick a task. Ideally, your most important task, as you mentioned before, and you're going to then work on that task and only that task for 25 minutes. You're just going to get that done. What that means is you're not looking at your phone and checking texts, or taking calls, or talking to somebody, or doing anything other than just working on that one thing. It's setting us up so that we'll just be able to focus for just one thing.

One of the big problems now is it's really hard to focus. There are so many distractions constantly coming at us, and there is this belief that we can multitask and multitasking doesn't really exist. I know for moms, especially, it's something you have to do, but it's not where your best work is, because if you think about it, if you're just going in a straight line you're going to get somewhere much quicker. Now, if you're going in a straight line and then also going looking at something else and doing a bunch of other things, you're not going to be able to do something, because you don't have your full force, your full focus, your full attention on it.

The Pomodoro is really simple. You're just spending 25 minutes working on one thing, getting done, and then that's it. That's like a big part. When I found that out, that changed how I worked completely, because all of a sudden was in — I didn't have to just spend eight hours working and you can't see me, but I'm putting working in air quotes. I could just focus on the things that are most important in these small chunks in small bursts of time and not burning out or anything like that.

[0:19:59.2]

FT: I think what's a really interesting that I learned that what you do is you continue to work on weekends sometimes and on vacations. Because you're doing it in these small chunks of time, it doesn't really feel like you're giving up your fun time.

[0:20:16.3]

CW: Yeah. Exactly. It depends on what's needed. What I realized was when I discovered the Pomodoro technique originally, I was like, "Oh! It's 25 minutes. I can do so many of those. I can do 20 of those in a day," and not thinking, and then I would burnout on it, because that's how I did everything. The analogy that I give —

[0:20:36.6]

FT: It's just 10 calories. You need a thousand of them. Yes.

[0:20:39.6]

CW: Exactly. For me, it was that the way I tried to make any change in my life was pretty much all or nothing. Let's say I hadn't been working out for two years and then I went to some conference or heard some — Like a commencement speech and I was completely motivated. Let's say the person was talking about running a marathon. I'm like, "Oh my God! I'm so excited. I'm going today," and I'm going to go out and run eight miles.

Mind you, I hadn't done anything for the two years prior. I'd been on the couch. All of a sudden, now I'm saying that I am going to run and go out and I'd run eight miles, or whatever, and I'd feel great. It would be amazing. I'd come back and I'd tell every person how great I am and how great exercising is, and why aren't you? They'd be looking at me like, "What are you talking about? You were just on the couch for the last two years not doing anything."

The next day would be the same thing. I'd go out and I'd run, be amazing. Then, I'd come the third day and I'd be like, "Hmm. I'm really sore. This is really stupid. I've missed all these work because I'm exercising, I'm eating well, and all these." I would then be like, "You know what? I'm going to skip today." Then, the next day would come and I'd be like, "You know what? What's two days in a row skipping? How much can that hurt?"

Then, the third day would come and I'd be like, "You know what? This is dumb completely," and I'd be back on that couch. That was how all change in my life pretty much happened; New Year's resolutions, whatever it was. This is kind of working the other way where it's all these small little changes. There're something called the Kaizen, which is just about continues improvement and continuous movement, and that's what I really believe. What's the smallest way that I can make change?

[0:22:32.7]

FT: You came to all of these realization through a terrible time in your professional life. Tell us about what actually happened. Take us to that moment. Sorry if I'm making you relive it, but I think —

[0:22:48.1]

CW: Oh no!

[0:22:48.5]

FT: You've probably told this story a million times.

[0:22:51.3]

CW: It's really important for me too, because up until — Basically, my background is on digital marketing, or marketing PR. That's where I'm really, really good at. All these productivity stuff came kind of as a result of having to discover it, having to have it.

Almost exactly four years go this time, an agency, a company that cofounded which had grown close to a hundred people and we had a bunch of offices around the world and stuff like that. On the outside, everything looked really good, and I'd hated what I'd been doing for a long, long time, but I didn't want to change, because I was — Uncomfortable is very dangerous. Because ego gets put into all these different things. That company, due to a lot of reasons that we done, if we spoke for three to four days in a row, we wouldn't be able to get through them all, all the mistakes that were made and things.

That company completely just imploded. Pretty much any bad thing I can imagine happening all pretty much happened, and my white light moment came from a piece of pizza, really, which sounds pretty unsexy.

I was in my kitchen, it was a Saturday afternoon, and my daughter came in. She was about three years old, beautiful girl. The person that was most important to me in my life, even though

she didn't know that. Anytime that she had been around me, it was mostly like when it was convenient for me and lots of nannies and things like that. She walked into the kitchen, she sees me, and she was hungry, and I gave her a look of like, "All right. One minute." She was very familiar with that look of whatever I'm doing is more important.

She walks over to the refrigerator and opens it up, takes out a piece of a pizza and looks at me again like, "Come on. Are you serious? You're going to not do anything?" I'm just watching in the side of my eye and she goes gets a chair, pushes it up to the microwave and puts the pizza in there and hit some buttons and was watching me again and she gets the pizza out, sits down, starts to eat it.

I don't tell this story to — She's like a cooking genius or prodigy or anything like that. It was just this — For whatever reason, right at that moment, it just hit me that she felt that my work was more important than she was. My work and what I've been doing beside work like 60, 80, 100 hours a week and it was always just about — When I was working, I felt guilty about not spending time with her about having a life. When I was doing that stuff, I felt guilty about not working. It was always like that.

At that moment, it just hit me, and I realized that I couldn't live my life like that anymore. I had no idea how to really change or what parts to change, so I changed pretty much everything. As a result, I just started to discover different stuff. I've always been curious and everything that I thought I knew about living productivity, anything, was pretty much wrong. That's a pretty big thing for me to have to say, been realized. Now, the thing is I love being wrong about things. I love finding a better way to do something.

I'm going to give you one quick thing. Since this is — You're known for money and everything, one of the things that changed me in terms of making small changes in life to build good habits was this little thing, and I do this every time I speak, or anything, any way to explain the power of small change.

Somebody came up, and you might have heard this — If somebody came up to you and said, "Listen," or I said to you, "Farnoosh, I'll give you a million dollars in cash right now, or one penny

that doubles in value every day for 30 days.” Now, since you’re super smart, you would probably know which one to pick.

I would have always picked the million dollars in cash. It’s a million dollars in cash. What’s one penny going to do? For the first 10 days or so, if you picked the one penny, you’re at \$5.12. or something like that. That’s like at the beginning of any change, or any new habit, or anything. It’s messy. You don’t really have much results. You’re kind of miserable. You wish you’d took the instant gratification.

Then, by day 20, it’s not even that much better. You’re in the thousands. All the people took the million dollars were kind of laughing at you. By day — I think it’s day 27, you’re over a million dollars. By day 30, after day 30, you’re over \$10 million.

Now, that really help me to understand how important and how powerful small changes can be, and that’s what I always look back to. Whenever I’m starting something, or in the middle of something messy, or something I don’t want to do in terms of a new habit or a new project or something and I got to do the hard stuff that’s really important, I think about that one penny.

[0:28:15.0]

FT: Going back to the story about your daughter. Really, and I relate to this as a parent, it’s like, “I work so hard. I’ve been so successful. I can’t even enjoy a slice of pizza with my kid?”

[0:28:26.0]

CW: Yup.

[0:28:26.3]

FT: In that moment, it’s really about spending your time doing what you value. I don’t think you probably cared about that phone call, but you were obviously affected by watching your daughter. By the way, dangerously use a microwave at three years old.

[0:28:41.4]

CW: Yeah, I'm not looking for any parent of the year award.

[0:28:43.7]

FT: No. I was actually thinking it was going to go a lot worse. I was like, "Oh my God! The microwave explodes. The pizza — She gets hit in the face with the microwave door. You're in the E.R." Glad to know it didn't end that way.

[0:28:56.7]

CW: You know what the crazy thing? That probably — For whatever reason, it was just like right time, right place, or wrong time, wrong place, whatever, in this case. Yeah, it's definitely those small moments that are — It can be so big and just so life changing.

The funny thing is I have no idea who I was talking to on that call. I have no — Whatever that issue was — All that stuff that happened with that company was the biggest blessing. It didn't feel like at the time or for a longtime, but that's one of the biggest things of being able to have that perspective.

[0:29:38.7]

FT: If I may add one thing to this whole concept of making the most of your time being productive, no regrets, if you're choosing between two things, like, "Should I spend my time doing A, or my time doing B?" You can only do one. Is it worth kind of reflecting, thinking ahead of the future and saying, "Looking back, I won't have regretted not doing A, but I will have regretted not doing B." That sometimes how I decide what to do.

[0:30:03.0]

CW: There's all types of things like that in terms of mindset shifts. Just even with getting work done, one of the biggest — Or doing something like that I know I need to do, like working out, or

something. Sometimes, choosing not necessarily what feels great in the moment, or the easy side, and the simpler way which is doing the thing that you know you need to do, it is often — You feel so much better. That's one of the reasons why I try to do a lot of stuff in the morning, and especially stuff I don't want to do, like work-wise, or that's really important, like the most important task in the morning, eat that frog, because it then makes the rest of the day so much easier.

[0:30:47.7]

FT: Absolutely. MIT, the most important task. We'll end there. Give everybody something to work towards. It doesn't have to always be work-related, it could be personal, it could be for you, it could be for your kids, but just identify the most important task and the sooner you do it the better your day will be.

Chris Winfield, thanks so much for coming and sharing this wisdom with us. I hope your daughter is — Maybe she's a future chef. I don't know.

[0:31:12.0]

CW: Oh my God! She's a future world changer. Yeah, I don't know about the chef part, maybe. Yeah, thank you so much.

[0:31:20.9]

FT: No more cold pizza for her.

[0:31:21.9]

CW: No. Remove pizza completely. No, I'm just kidding. Yeah, thank you so much. I really enjoyed it and I can't wait to hear how you rocked that speech —

[0:31:31.2]

FT: The speech goes. Yeah.

[0:31:32.5]

CW: Yeah. No, seriously. Also, and I mean this, if you need help breaking things down or an accountability partner, I would be happy to be there for you. Seriously.

[0:31:42.1]

FT: Oh, thank you. I'm adding you to my favorites on my phone.

[0:31:45.5]

CW: All right. I'm serious.

[0:31:46.5]

FT: You might be getting a call at 4 a.m.

[0:31:48.9]

CW: That's fine. I'll call you back 5 when I wake up.

[0:31:51.4]

FT: 5. Okay, noted. All right. Thank you so much, and wishing you all the best, Chris.

[0:31:56.9]

CW: Thank you. Thanks, Farnoosh.

[END]