

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:04] DC: It takes the right skills and the right innovation to design and manage meaningful print marketing solutions. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse, where we explore all facets of print and marketing that create stellar communications and sales opportunities for business success. I'm your host Deborah Corn, the intergalactic ambassador to the printerverse. Thanks for tuning in. Listen long and prosper.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:33] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your intergalactic ambassador. More specifically, Time Tips in 20 with Sarah Ohanesian, my time frugal friend from SO Productive. Hello, Sarah.

[0:00:49] SO: Hello. I love that you're calling me the time-frugal friend now. Love that.

[0:00:52] DC: Well, I always like to give you a little hashtag, #timesherpa, #timefrugalfriends. Okay, speaking of time frugality, I need your help. And I bet you, everybody out there does as well. We are approaching what I call back-to-school season. In my world, what that means, because I do not have children, is that I know that my schedule and my needs will more than likely be taking a back seat to the needs of parents, whatever those are. Also, we are also approaching event season on top of that. Those two things tend to merge together. You and I have spoken about what you call time seasons, so I think this is a great time to have this conversation.

[0:01:45] SO: Well – and I want to point out that we talk about seasons because it's just realistic, to be honest about – sometimes, stuff is harder than other times. So you just mentioned, back to school, it's a big shift. When we go from that August summer beach vacation, people are not working maybe quite as hard. It's a more relaxing time into this hard pivot shift in schedule. Again, I don't have children either. But that back to school, it can affect all of us because parents are greatly affected, everybody's schedule has to shift. The other major season I see coming right feels kind of close after, that is the holidays. That changes things.

That's another very natural season that we go through. People are relying on you for a little bit more vacation time.

Then the other season I see is almost that summer slump, which is kind of interesting. So it feels like going into spring, there's this push. We got to get this out before graduations, and all these events that happened in May. But then there's a slump in the summer. So as you can see, even in talking through this, there's a sort of a rhythm and a cadence that we typically see in a year, these different seasons.

[0:02:52] DC: Yes, especially now with remote working, it gets rather interesting. Now, obviously, not everyone has children as Sarah and I don't. But we still look at what's going on in offices. Those people might have regular days if they have children, and they are functioning as they normally do with help, or the children can take care of themselves, or whatever it is. But I'm finding with the people who are remote working, that they are fully immersed in what is going on with their children, and getting back to school. I've come across many who I think they spend more time taking their kids to activities, and things of that nature, and some weird ones, which I'll just keep to the side. But that all affects when you can get in touch with them, when you could get answers, and it starts to affect your schedule. So everybody's in the same season, I agree. But we're affected differently by it. So how do you manage all that? Maybe you can give us a tip for each season.

[0:03:58] SO: Absolutely. One of the things that is always important for any season is open communication on that. So, being honest about this is a good time to communicate with me. This is, I'm picking up my kids at three o'clock every day, we've got soccer practice then, but then I'll hop back on at night. Again, we're using kids as the example, but this can go for so many areas of life/ I'm going to be traveling, but I'm still going to be working because I'm just going to be sitting in my parents' Lake House versus I'm going away and I'm not going to be accessible. Whatever that is, is just making sure that that communication is upfront, transparent, and clear, so that you, everybody on the team know customers as well. When, how can we get a hold of you. So that's my first tip, is just really alignment and open communication on expectations in these different seasons.

[0:04:43] DC: If I may just add something to that. That is something fantastic to communicate with everybody on your team who might be setting meetings. Just to know, Deborah is never available from three to four, but she is available all these other times. Nobody needs to know why that is. But if all of a sudden, you're making meetings to make meetings, and rescheduling them, because someone didn't communicate a very simple thing that three o'clock is out for me, Monday to Friday. It seems like an obstacle that can easily be overcome.

[0:05:20] SO: Absolutely. Part of this is being in control. One of my other big tips is that you, pause, take a moment, take the reset button when things start to feel a little out of control in your season. This is a good example of, you might not be able to control everything at work or everything in your personal life, but gaining back some control over one decision a day. And that could be, "I'm going to take this one hour to pick my kids up. I'm going to take one hour to actually eat some lunch because I've been starving myself for the last month because it's been crazy."

So just reclaiming, like one little block of time during the day. Hopefully, it's a block of time that you can use to work on something that's important, work on something for a big client, something that you're really excited about. But it could also be, it's just something I need in my personal life in this season we are in. So reclaiming one block of time not blowing up the whole day in relation to the season that we're in, it's just very honest. Sometimes you have to make those small pivots.

[0:06:20] DC: And just in the – everybody get along thing. If you are that person on your team that has restraints, for whatever reason, try to be more flexible with other people's time. That might mean, "Sorry, you've got to – please jump on a Zoom at seven o'clock at night, if this is – if you can't do it at three, then we have to do it at five, or something," and just try to be as accommodating as possible. Now, the sort of related – if we talk about holiday rush, we have our own pressures of everything we need to get done. We have the pressures of helping our teammates get what they need to get done, if they need anything from us, which you know, is a big pet peeve of mine.

Then, of course, we have to make sure that we are helping everybody that we're supposed to be helping get what they're done in the printing industry. Obviously, we're printing or creating

marketing. I mean – and this is all starting, as it collides with back-to-school season, and starts to mingle into this. And holidays that you – people personally prepare for two. Something tells me this is probably the most stressful time season. I know it's the most stressful for people in general.

[0:07:36] SO: Well, and I'm familiar with your industry because my husband is in the direct mail business. I know the political season is also a huge one in your space, specifically.

[0:07:44] DC: Great point.

[0:07:45] SO: So we got to be prepping also for this stuff long before October, November arrives. I think that's another thing, is to know those priorities, and start to anticipate what's coming. A lot of these seasons, especially in your industry, nonprofit work, when are we doing an annual campaign. If you can anticipate when those things are coming, you can be so much further out ahead of it. Instead of being reactionary. "Oh my gosh. We're late. There's a deadline coming up soon. We got to get this thing done now." It's, we're planning and preparing for that.

One of my tips, and this is a more tangible tip for you here is, to know those priorities. And I would even do this exercise as a team is just sit down together, and think about, in general, we know that our top clients typically come in with these projects at this time of year. What could we do to maybe get it in a little earlier anticipate, stuff up, plan the work, plan it out a little more ahead of time even than you think you need to because that's going to help you kind of when everything hits the fan in that season. So get ahead of it as much as you can.

[BREAK]

[0:08:52] SO: I'm Sarah Ohanesian, founder of SO Productive, a productivity training and consulting company. Teams I work with get more done. They experience improved processes, greater productivity, and increased efficiency, all without stress and burnout. If you want to improve your performance, or the performance of your team, visit so-productive.com and get started today. I offer conference keynotes, one-on-one coaching, and hands-on corporate workshops, all focused on increasing productivity and time management. Let's discuss how SO Productive can supercharge your organization. Links are in the show notes.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

[0:09:36] DC: I think that's a fantastic idea. I do suggest to printers that they look back at, you know, what went on last year, and try to have conversations up front with customers if they can. Now, not everybody is receptive or has time to get on the conversation, or knows what they're doing. So, what I say is, "Okay, no problem. Then base it off of what happened last year, or look at the last five years because we did have COVID in the middle of it, or go back to 2019."

Somehow, between 2021 and 2019 come up with some average, and understand that more than likely sometime around these three weeks, this client is going to kick into action, and start even if it's just to put a status meeting for that client on the calendar, whether you use it or not, I know you love giving people their time back. But I'm more of the, no, account for it, and then upfront. I think that that is great advice to anticipate, but don't just anticipate, use your Asana. This would be something perfect for that.

[0:10:45] SO: Absolutely. What I love is when we can in – and I'm quoting here. I know this is a podcast, you can't see me. But in real life, when what's going to happen, and what we can anticipate in real life is in alignment with what's in our productivity tool. Deborah mentioned Asana, Asana is my go-to choice for my productivity tool. Deborah uses Todoist, but there is monday.com, ClickUp. There are so many tools that you can use for this. But we got to be realistic about the work that's coming in, anticipating that work, and then aligning our tool. Our tool is there to support us. I always think of the tool should really be serving as if it's another team member. That is like your electronic project manager. And hopefully, that tool is well built out for you. It's used in a very strategic fashion so that it's there to support you through this busy season.

Again, that's making sure that we've – when we're in maybe a summer slump, we use some of that time to make sure that our workspace, our productivity tools are really optimized and working for us. So that when we get into that busy season, we're ready to go. We're not figuring out how do we use a tool. We know how we're optimized for success there.

[0:11:54] DC: I know I'm not the time management tip person here, but I would also like to say that, a tip coming from advertising agencies, sometimes you just have to hold time because you

don't know what's going to happen. I would suggest that the team agrees that there is like maybe three hours during the week that everybody blocks off. So everybody knows that everyone's available, and one person can just schedule a call, knowing that everyone's available.

You don't have to go through the make the meeting to make a meeting thing. As long as people don't collide in that space, it's fine, and to be the gift giver of time. If it's not needed, go on with your day. But if it is needed, you can avoid all the meetings to make meetings by just saying, "I know" every day. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 12 to 1, my entire team has this blocked off.

[0:12:46] SO: You're an honorary time management Sherpa because that is a fantastic tip I love, and it's one that I've implemented with many of my clients, where we have blocks of time for meetings. Tuesday morning is a known meeting time. Thursday, known meeting time. But then we also on the flip side of that want to make sure that we have non-meeting times so we can actually hunker down and get some of the work done. I have seen this work so well across enterprise-level clients. Because, again, it's about that communication and expectations for – we're not trying to be difficult and not be available for meetings. But we have to have this balance of, this is a time where we're all available to meet. And alternatively, this is a time when I can get my work done, so it's a fantastic tip from you. Because, again, I've just seen it work so, so well with clients, getting in alignment on the schedule.

I might also add that there is some inevitable fires that are going to happen, and what I call a fire is something that comes in hot, it kind of throws us off, and it de-rattles our day. We don't necessarily know what the fire is going to be, but we know something's going to happen. As we enter the political season, I would say, you know something's going to go on. We have to make sure that we've got time on our calendar accounted for flextime, time for fires. Again, people tend to not want to schedule it, because they don't know exactly what it is or what it's going to be. I encourage you to schedule this time on your calendar and you can be marked as free and open so that other people could utilize due if that time is still available. But just in case there's a fire, you've got time for it, which means you can get it done during the day instead of staying late, working on the weekend, freaking out, and facing burnout because of it. That's another really helpful tip.

[0:14:35] DC: Right. You know I'm a fan of blocking the calendar because it also helps to know that I know that Wednesday from 12 to 1, I already have blocked off whether I need it or not. So I can move the thing I have at 10 o'clock to 12 to 1 because I know I'm free already. And then I can take that client call and not mess up my schedule or get the information I need from somebody else or do whatever else I have to do so. I love it. It's you're pre-planning, you're setting space for anything that could possibly happen. If you don't need it, bonus. If you don't need other people involved, I know you love giving time back. Okay.

The complete opposite of that is having too much time on your hand. What am I supposed to be doing all day, the summer slump? I don't know if I've necessarily seen a summer slump this year. But what I have seen is that a lot of people went away, or just were like, "Okay. I'm actually going to take a vacation this year," whether they stayed in their backyard, or they actually went somewhere. A different story, but not the, "I'm just at the house and get in touch with me, vacation. Like, do not under any circumstances. I need my mental break here." Then, everyone else who was not doing that was still kind of running around being a little frantic about things. So it was a little different this year, but still not the same as the holiday rush political season or back to school.

[0:16:08] SO: I totally agree. I really feel as if I saw the same thing. Again, I work across a lot of different industries, so I certainly saw it in the print direct mail industry, but also with my other clients as well. Because you're right, we all thought COVID might finally be a thing of the past that we don't have to worry quite as much about. Because of that, we are able to take these trips that we've been putting off. However, business didn't slow down as much this summer as well. So it was this perfect storm, if you will. We've still got a lot of work to do, but we also need these vacations.

I've also seen an increase in burnout. Burnout is on the rise, it's officially recognized and conditioned by the World Health Organization now.

[0:16:45] DC: Thank God.

[0:16:47] SO: This is the new pandemic that we're faced with now, and it's kind of colliding. So you've got people, one, recognizing burnout more, talking about it more. Saying, I actually do need to take that mental break, and business necessarily didn't slow down. So totally agree that I saw this happening as well. Here's a tip for what to do during this time. If you are one of the lucky ones to have a little bit of a slower period of time, or because your boss is out, there's a little bit less for you to do, or your main client isn't sending you something this month. One of the things that you can do is that's a really good time to re-optimize your systems. Do you have a good system for organizing your files? Is your Asana, Todoist, and Monday.com in working order? Do you want to optimize a process? Do you want to create an SOP, a standard operating procedure that's listing out everything that you need to take care of? So don't just sit back, relax, because that's not a really effective use of our time. Do that when you're on your vacation.

But if you're someone who is behind in the office during that slumping season, being that summer or another time, great, great time to optimize the process. Do one of the things that you've been saving for a rainy day, like, "I'll do it when — " when the slump happens, that's the time to go back and work on those things.

[BREAK]

[0:18:05] DC: Like what you hear? Leave us a comment, click a few stars, share this episode, and please subscribe to the show. Are you interested in being the guest and sharing your information with our active and growing global audience? Podcasts are trending as a potent direct marketing and educational channel for brands and businesses who want to provide portable content for customers and consumers. Visit printmediacentr.com, click on podcasts, and request a partner package today. Share long and prosper.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

[0:18:40] DC: Excellent. I mean, I think that those are some great tips. We went through these seasons. I think we've covered a lot. Why don't you just wrap it up and we'll give people some time back?

[0:18:49] SO: I love that. So, I want to wrap up with one of my favorite phenomenons, and I coined this term, which is called compounding productivity. Because what I noticed is when we work on the right thing, like that thing that feels like, "Oh, that was a really good use of our time," our mood shifts, and our energy shifts. We can actually get more done, our mental capacity, like our load kind of opens up. We can get more done. So it's this concept of one right thing leads to the next, new doors open, and opportunities increase.

So, I would just like to share this concept with the audience here because I really believe that when you work on some of the right stuff, more good stuff happens. I hope you can experience that. That's when teams say like, "We're on a roll. We've got some momentum." That's it. That's compounding productivity. That's obviously my goal for you with all of these tips, is that you can be in that more fluid zone, and really be in an experience of optimized productivity.

[0:19:53] DC: Amazing. If you find yourself with some extra time on your hands, click over to the past episodes of the Time Management Tips in 20 podcasts. We have spoken about golden hours, which is the best time to do some of this work, how to get control of your to-do list, and how to prioritize things. All would help with everything you said about getting your house in order before the craziness starts if it hasn't started for you yet. Thank you so much for your time, Sarah.

Everybody, check out Sarah's website at SO Productive and her Command the Chaos Course. Until next time, everybody, time management long and prosper.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:20:34] DC: Thanks for listening to Podcasts From the Printerverse. Please subscribe, click some stars and leave us a review. Connect with us through printmediacentr.com. We'd love to hear your feedback on our shows and topics that are of interest for future broadcasts. Until next time, thanks for joining us. Print long and prosper.

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Mentioned in This Episode:

Sarah Ohanesian on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarahohanesian/>

SO Productive: <https://www.so-productive.com/>

Asana: <https://asana.grsm.io/sarahohanesian308>

Todoist: <https://todoist.com/>

monday.com: <https://monday.com/>

ClickUp: <https://clickup.com/>

Command the Chaos Course: <https://www.so-productive.com/productivity-course/>

Deborah Corn on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/deborahcorn/>

Print Media Centr: <https://printmediacentr.com>

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