

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:04] DC: It takes the right skills and the right innovation to design and manage meaningful print marketing solutions. Welcome to Podcast 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]

[0:00:35] DC: Hey everybody, welcome to Podcast from the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your intergalactic ambassador. More specifically, we are here with the Time Management Tips in 20 Podcast, which means I am here with the time Sherpa, Sarah Ohanesian from SO Productive. Hello, Sarah.

[0:00:54] SO: Hello, and Happy New Year.

[0:00:56] DC: Happy New Year. This is the first podcast I'm recording in 2024, and it's specific because, just as in 2023, I think time is going to be the most precious commodity. We all have to offer or keep for ourselves this year. We're going to start off this series with a bang because we're going to talk about time tips for email.

My God, Sarah. If there was ever a topic that was perfect for me, and we've discussed it before, but you know what, it doesn't actually get any better. There are certain things you can do to make it better, and you're certainly going to offer that. But what I mean by that is, I don't receive less email than I did last year.

It continues to grow and the email box continues to be a time suck for so many people. So, why don't you set up the conversation, and we'll take it from there?

[0:02:02] SO: Yes. We've talked a little bit about – I have a speech that was new last year, it's called, 'Dominate Your Day'. In this speech, I talk about some of the things that keep us busy, and some of those things that prevent us from being productive. At the end of the day, we want to be productive. But there's these things that keep us in this zone of busyness and this

busyness trap. One of the things that is really a busy burden, as I like to call it, is email. I joke that there's a dark alley of unsavory characters inside of our email inboxes.

I'm sure, Deborah, you're familiar with them. But we've got forwarded emails. People just hit the forward button, send those emails off to us. We've got emails with no subject line. We've got emails with the entire content of the email in the subject line. And we've got emails in there that we have to open multiple times just to figure out like, what the heck's actually going on here? Those are the emails you're going, "I'm definitely going to save that one for later."

So, we have all these things that go on with our emails. Then, I often joke that like, if you really want to get high, if you're really want to go for it, you can experience that fleeting moment of inbox zero, which is no unread emails. I call that the crystal meth of email. You might want it. But it only feels good until the next email comes in. So, all of this to set it up to say, like, email is this suck. It sucks us back in, we get that ping, we get that ding, we get back into email, and I just find it this busyness trap that is so hard for people to get out of.

[0:03:42] DC: So, I do read all my emails, or I delete them, or put them somewhere. I currently have two unread emails, one just came in a moment ago, and one I just haven't deleted yet. However, there are 10,022 messages in my inbox, and that is after I cleaned out pretty much everything from last year. I usually only save like a couple of months prior, and I also search who it's from, because there are some things, and I don't know why I'm saving them in there. It's not a place where I'm supposed to save things. But that is a time suck too. So okay, I've gotten high, I've taken the crack. I am on the crack. But yet, there are still 10,022 messages in my email box. Discuss, is that a problem? Is that a personal problem or there are other people doing this?

[0:04:46] SO: Well, I think the first step is recognizing you have a problem. The second step is you're not alone in this and I think that that's really important to remember. An email is actually such a personal place that it's got to work for you at the end of the day. So, I had a friend and she said, she got to a point with like 60,000 emails, and she just said, "Forget it. I'm not going to be able to manage this ever. I'm not going to deal with it anymore." She just said goodbye to it.

Now, for a lot of us, that's not an option, right? We work at a company, we're part of a team, we don't have the luxury of saying goodbye to email forever. So, what can we do about it? I'm going

to leave this right into our first tip for today, Deborah, and that is that this really is a mindset shift here. Because oftentimes, we think of email as our to-do list. We think about that thing that pops in, that's the next thing that we're going to work on. So, my big mindset shift for people today is it is a communication tool. That's what email is for. It is not to replace your to-do list. Listeners can't see us, Deborah, but you're having quite a reaction to this. So, I want to hear what you're feeling.

[0:05:52] DC: Well, I'm just like you. You're shaming me. I mean, it's everything about this discussion today is just going to hit me over the head like a frying pan. I feel a little bad because you've told me this a million times, and I know that I'm your live student that everybody on the planet is following my progress. This is not something I've mastered yet, although, I still use to-do lists and I don't email myself information anymore. But however, I am a Pavlovian dog. That damn thing dings and I am trained from my advertising days to look at that email. There could be a change in direction. There could be something that I need to know right now that will affect other people.

Every once in a while, though, to go back to the tools and things, I'm on a Mac. So, I have the ability to turn off my notifications. And every once in a while, I just do that. So, I have some peace and quiet time to think about things. But you are absolutely right in everything you're saying. It's not a to-do list. And that's another reason why I think I save the emails. I will go back to them. Now, I don't save them unread, which was what I used to do. Now, I flag them, which is much better, but at least I can organize them, and as long as I remember what color flag I've assigned for things.

[0:07:21] SO: Yes, absolutely. I think that you bring up a really key point is that if you work for someone, especially in the printing, advertising, that one email could be the difference between a job going out incorrectly or not. So, it's not appropriate that we just say, "Forget email, I'm not going to check it."

[0:07:37] DC: Or spending a ton of money on a photo shoot for a job that's canceled.

[0:07:42] SO: Exactly. Exactly. So, I think this is a really key point and this is a great discussion to have with your team on what is our policy for email? What's an appropriate response time? What makes sense for our team? I know some businesses in your industry, they have a central

email inbox, that is for clients to utilize for project work. So, things are getting flagged quite quickly, still allowing people for time to do their work without feeling stuck in email all day.

There's a lot of cool solutions that companies can talk through. But again, I think the key is that there's a policy related to email, and that we remember that email is a communication tool. It's not meant to be for us to decide, how are we going to spend the next few hours of our day just responding to what happens? Because I see a lot of people missing their goals, because they're stuck in email all the time, just doing what pops up next. My caution is don't get stuck in there thinking it's your to-do list but also use this as an opportunity for your company to come up with a solid email policy.

[0:08:44] DC: Now, I don't want to beat a dead horse on this. But can you elaborate a little more on your definition of policy and who that might apply to? Because policy to me applies to a larger organization, versus let's say, a mom-and-pop print shop who, I can almost guarantee you, are operating like I do. That thing dings and they've got to see if it's an order. They've got to see if it's an approval. They've got to see what's in that email.

[0:09:12] SO: Absolutely. So, if policy is a word that's not your favorite, and that you, Deborah, I know policies can feel kind of restrictive. The other word I would use in replacement of that is expectations. What are the expectations that your company and your team has around email? What's the expectation and how quickly you're going to get back to people? And you can even, we've talked about the email signature before, but I think that's a real powerful place too, to say, I'm out of the office this afternoon. I'll reply to you tomorrow morning. Or we typically respond within six hours or four hours, whatever it is. But having that policy/expectation is key around how are we going to communicate using email as our organization.

[0:09:54] DC: Okay. We'll see how that works out. If anybody out there has an email policy or a company policy regarding anything Sarah just said, leave us a comment. When you see this podcast being shared and let us know and we could share it with other people.

[MESSAGE]

[0:10:09] DC: Print Media Centr provides printspiration and resources to our vast network of print and marketing professionals. Whether you are an industry supplier, print service provider,

print customer or consultant, we have you covered, by providing resources and strategies that enable business marketing and creative success, reporting from global events, these podcasts, Project Peacock TV, and an array of community-lifting initiatives. We also work with OEMs, suppliers, industry organizations, and event producers, helping you connect and engage with our vast audience, and achieve success with your sales, marketing, and conference endeavors. Visit printmediacentr.com and connect with the Printerverse. Links in the show notes. Print long and prosper.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:11:03] DC: Okay, what's your next step?

[0:11:05] SO: Okay, that's awesome, because we can all learn from what other people are doing industry-specific especially. So, tip number one is just remember, it is a communication tool. It is not meant to be your to-do list. Your to do list is still, go back, we've got tons of episodes on this, that is still where you're getting your top priorities done.

So, tip number two is that it's not a race. I often find people feeling like they need to respond to email as quickly as possible. Instead, I would encourage people to not necessarily respond quickly, but respond with the most complete answer instead. Pushing that email towards a resolution. If I get back to you quickly, and I say thanks, "Deborah." Okay, it's better if I get back to you and say, "Thanks so much. Here is the next action that I need from you." This reason, I think, is why that forward button. I wish the forward button would have never been created. Because I think it's really easy for us to hit the forward button, and pass these emails off to somebody else on our team.

But what we need to be doing is when we hit a forward button, when we hit reply, we need to make sure we're being crystal clear on why are we sending it to that person? What next steps do we need them to take? And what do we need coming out of that email? One kind of pro tip here on this to help people is use bold, use color, use highlights. Making sure that those action steps are really clear. So, don't feel like you have to respond immediately, but do reply in a reasonable timeframe. But the key is that you've got it complete, you've got it ready to push towards the next action.

[0:12:44] DC: Okay. I want to throw a little wrench in that. Because I mentioned I do have a Mac. Outlook from PCs and Macs don't get along all the time. So, when I receive emails that are ridiculously formatted in like 20-point outlines with bullets and Roman numerals, I just see a mess in my email, or I get some – error thing. So, you have to be careful with the formatting, especially if you're trying to use a company font that's not like a web font. I'm just saying that, that might not always work out for everybody. The other thing I want to ask you is your opinion on the thanks email, or the, received, I'll get back to you email. I mean, I have my thoughts on it. What are your thoughts on those like one-word kind of messages?

[0:13:35] SO: I think this is where it can come back to that company policy/expectation. Are we wanting our customers to know within 20 minutes that we got it? An auto-responder can do that for you, to save a little bit of time. Just to say we received this message because you do want to give customers especially that peace of mind. But I do think you can be wasting time as a team by sending those quick responses, when in reality, we really need to take the time to figure out what's the next action that needs to happen. So again, kind of back to company policy and expectations. But I think there's a reasonable crossroads here of getting back to people in a timely fashion, but making sure that we're not wasting our time or theirs, without sending a next action as well.

[0:14:19] DC: Okay. I mean, we could get into a very spirited debate about validation, letting people know you're heard, but I don't have what you need right now, or I need to get back to you, or thank you so much for sending that. I get it. Okay, let's not have the debate now. We have two points of view on that, it seems. Okay.

[0:14:38] SO: I think it really, just to wrap it up, it goes back to like you know your customers. You might have some customers –

[0:14:44] DC: It's not just customers though. I'm just saying it could be internal messaging.

[0:14:48] SO: Totally. Yes. I think see where you feel like you might be wasting time because again, the time sherpa here, we're always looking for little, little things that are eating away at your time and saying, "Thanks," and saying, "Got this," that could actually be taking more time out of your day than you realize. So, bring some awareness to that in the next week, just see how much time it's taking and make a decision from there.

[0:15:10] DC: Okay. I mean, the pushback I've gotten is actually from people who receive it. They're like, "You know what, you don't need to just respond thanks, or anything like that." And this because they don't want to stop everything they're doing to look in their email and see that I'm just thanking them for sending me something.

[0:15:28] SO: Exactly. Yes. That's my point.

[0:15:29] DC: What is your next tip?

[0:15:31] SO: So, tip number three is that if you do something more than three times, create a rule, a filter, a template. That is a sign of I've done this before. There's probably something I can do with it. So, let's start with using a filter, using a rule. This is a great feature that a lot of email providers have. Gmail is awesome with this, if you're on the Gmail platform. There's many wonderful filters and tools that you can preset up.

So, for example, you might have a filter set up for your top clients. You want those emails flagged. You want to make sure that you're not missing those. They're top radar. So, for example, I have a filter preset up. So, when you email me, it shows up and it says, "Time Management Tips in 20 podcasts." And that's flagged for me. I can easily click on that filter and see all the related emails, we can go back and look at future episodes and things that we've talked about really simple, but it's also, you are a certain color in my inbox. So, I'm seeing that separately from some of the other categories of work that I do.

It's just a really quick visual. It's a great way to sort, and also the ability to see things at a very top priority.

[0:16:41] DC: I have actually received emails last year, that did exactly what you just said. It was an auto-response that said, some people have taken this a little to the extreme. Again, if you listen to this podcast, you understand where I come from, which is like, why aren't you communicating and answering and furthering the team before you deal with yourself, right? But I get emails that said, "Thank you for your email. I typically respond within whatever," and they're giving me their parameters.

Now, how I feel about that is another story. Sometimes I'm like, "Who the hell do you think you are deciding that you're going to take all this time for yourself?" But again, that's my Gen X craziness. I will admit that. I received another email, a response to an email that I sent, where somebody was telling me that they only check their email and respond two times a day. So, if they're going to respond to you, you'll hear from them between these hours or these hours.

Again, I was like, "Isn't that nice?" Very successful people. These are not people who are not running their own businesses. I mean, I assume they're not off-putting customers or partnerships, because they're still doing it. But I honestly don't have the cojones to ever put a message like that in my responder. But maybe I'm going to try. Oh, my God, I can't even believe I'm saying that. I know. You're going to have to teach me.

[0:18:17] SO: I can't believe you're saying that either.

[0:18:19] DC: You're going to have to teach me how to do it on Mac mail, it's a little complicated.

[0:18:22] SO: But this really comes back to, it is a business decision. I mean, if you feel like I'm going to lose clients if I do that, that's not a good decision. If you feel like doing that is going to allow you to accomplish some of those bigger goals that you haven't been able to because you finding yourself trapped in the email trap, and that's sucking the life out of your day, it could be worth it. Again, this doesn't have to be all or nothing. This could be on Fridays, I'm going to do this. The rest of the day, the week, I'm going to respond as I happen. So, test it out, and see what works for you. This is a business decision at the end of the day.

[0:18:55] DC: It definitely is. I mean, I have, upon your advice, blocked off certain hours during the week. So, I have time to either – I know immediately I'm free. If I need to set a meeting with somebody, I don't even have to look. I could just offer that time. Or I use that time to do the things I need to get done during the day, and not let people grab the time on my calendar, which I also have set up so that there's no back and forth in meetings. Okay. I would love to learn more about how you're creating rules for customers and things like that. I don't even know. Is that something you offer through your company to help people do things like that?

[0:19:36] SO: Yes, absolutely. We do a lot of consulting on this, and then actual physical implementation with things as well.

[0:19:42] DC: Really?

[0:19:42] SO: Yes. Because part of it is you need permission to do it, if it's something you want to do, because the same way you are kind of resisting it and we're having a colorful conversation about it right now. That's real. So, some of it is you need a coach or someone to say to you, "It's okay. We can do this." Then someone else who has the time or technical ability to help you set it up. While we're going down that road, the other thing I would offer to set up is templates, and templates can be a funny thing for people. Because again, oh, a template that feels really impersonal. My emails, personal. I'm a personable person.

Email templates can be a starting point for you. So, think about those words or phrases that you say all the time. Here's the byline of my company. Here's the standard services we offer. Here's our payment, how we take payments for things. Whatever those things are, that you're repeating all the time, all of those phrases, paragraphs, links, those can all be templates. Again, you can make it as personal as you want it to be from there. But let the template be the guide to get your email started. That's going to save you a ton of time.

[0:20:50] DC: I love that. Currently, again, based on your advice from last year and repeating tasks, I have a document that I created and when I need to give people instructions about editing podcasts, or how to share them, or how to embed them on their website, and stuff like that. I just have a document, I go. Now, I have to open it. I have to cut and paste. I have to do it. But I don't have to write the email over and over again. So, you're saying this would be a step even before that. Because in this case, if I was giving people instructions on how to edit their podcast, all I would have to do is put in the link to where they proof it from, and the rest would pretty much be set.

[0:21:32] SO: Yes. You can use keyboard shortcuts for this. You can have them pre-populated as templates, like real templates inside of your email provider. So again, this is something I can help people with, but a ton of little shortcuts that you think, "Well, it only saved me three minutes. It only saved me five minutes." Over the course of the day, that could save you an hour. So, these are these little things that I help clients look for.

[0:21:56] DC: Okay. I want in on that. So, we'll discuss that after the podcast. It's fascinating. Okay. Let me tell you about my biggest pet peeve when it comes to emails and what I believe is the biggest time suck of my day. Now, I will admit, it is because I have the email to-do list syndrome. I will first start off by saying I'm guilty of that in some ways. But I can't tell you how much I cannot stand when people send me emails with an unrelated subject line. Or they reply with all of these deliverables and instructions to my email that's like, "Hey, do you have time to meet this week?" Or something. And finding that information again can sometimes be impossible.

Now, I do admit that the searches are getting better in emails and stuff. They're definitely incorporating more AI, probably, into those queries, or inquiries, whatever they call them. But still, now I have five emails I have to plow through to go into it. Or sometimes I look to see, which is the one that had the attachment in it. But I have been known when I reply, I change the subject of the email and then I beg people to not do that.

Now, I will just give you an example that over the holidays, I updated the Print Media Center website, and I was in an email chain that had some subject that was completely unrelated to anything that we were talking about. Finally, I was like, "Nope. Here's one about the fonts. Here's one about the banner ads. Here's one about" – like, I need to go back and see our conversations on this. I don't want any more emails that have nine things in it and half of them we've done already, but you're still talking about it, and the whole chain is coming through again.

Maybe a little out of control. I seem a little heated about it. But I have to say that that, by far, for me is the biggest time suck and the most annoying thing. There is no way to find that information or it's just very time-consuming to find.

[0:24:16] SO: So, you read my mind, because my bonus tip that I wanted to give people today is make the subject lines meaningful. Think about how you have your naming conventions for files on your computer. You have a standard way you save things, hopefully, as an organization, you have a standard way that you name files and jobs and things. Same thing with email, because inevitably, we're going to have to go back, we're going to have to find something, and

again, this is the Time Management Tips in 20 Podcast. We want to make sure we are saving you time. Good email subject lines are a great way to save time for search.

The other thing that they do where they do waste a lot of time, have you ever had that email that's like, "Can we have a chat?" And maybe it comes from your boss or somebody higher up at your organization, and you're like, "Oh, God, what does that mean? Am I getting fired? Am I not getting my vacation days? What's going on?" So, there can be actually a lot of stress that comes with some of these vague emails, totally innocent, nothing's going on. But when you get that email at nine o'clock at night, like, "Can we have a chat in the morning?" You're not getting any sleep that night.

So, make sure your emails and the vague subject lines are not actually causing extra stress for the people that you're sending them to. On the other side of that, that they can easily find what they're looking for in a week or two, when that email has progressed through the pipeline. Email subject lines are a huge time waster, for sure.

[MESSAGE]

[0:25:42] SO: I'm Sarah Ohanesian, founder of SO Productive, a productivity training and consulting company. The 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.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:26:28] DC: I get a lot of emails that say, "Hey, can I have your address? We want to send you something." That's all I hear. But I have to say, I always give my address because I liked the surprise at my door. Although I did, I have to say, if anybody out there sent me a blue magnetic box. Thank you very much. It's a very nice box. But I don't know who it came from and I don't know why I have it. So, if that was you, please an email with the correct subject line that says, "I sent you the blue box", because it's a very nice box. But I'm not sure why it's in my house at the

moment. But I haven't discarded it, because I want to identify why I have it first, and maybe there's something I'm supposed to do with it. I'm not really sure.

Okay, Sarah, how can people get in touch with you? Let everybody know right now how they can work with you. And most important, how they can get you to speak at their events. I don't care if these are internal events or customer events. Everybody needs time management help. Your print customers, if you're a printer, they will come to a time management conversation, because it's super important. So, please let everybody know how to work with you.

By the way, I met Sarah at an event three years ago. She spoke at this event, at the DirectMail2.0 event. I was like, the whole time, completely engaged. I grabbed her after it was over and I said, "I'm barnacled myself to you. I'm never letting you go. Help me. Help me. Help me," which I was able to parlay into this podcast. So, yay, me. Go ahead.

[0:28:14] SO: That's great. Thank you so much for that. So, sarahohanesian.com is my speaker website, and I know Deborah will have it in the show notes, sarahohanesian.com. That's where you can learn about my keynotes and how I can help come speak at your upcoming conference, or event, or corporate training.

If some of the things that we talked about on the podcast today you're going, "Huh, interesting. Could use some help implementing that personally," that's where you can go to so-productive.com and hire me or someone on my team for coaching services. Because again, some of these things are a little challenging to implement yourself. You need permission, you're not sure how to, or you just want that accountability, so we do a lot of one-on-one coaching as well. So, that's it, so-productive.com.

[0:28:54] DC: Thank you so much for sharing that information and for sharing your precious time with everybody who listens to this podcast. Thanks, everybody for joining us again for another year of Time Management Tips in 20. Until next time, print long, time management long, and prosper.

[OUTRO]

[0:29:16] 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.

[END]

Mentioned in This Episode:

'Dominate Your Day' Keynote: <https://youtu.be/9GjAZTau45Q>

Sarah Ohanesian: <https://sarahohanesian.com/>

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

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

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

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Print Across America: <https://printacrossamerica.com>

Girls Who Print: <https://girlswhoprint.net>