The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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00:50 Jacob: Alright, we are live. So hello, hello! And hello everyone who is joining live. A very, very special guest today. And it is Laura Vanderkam. She's the author of several books including, Off The Clock, and 168 Hours. Thank you so much for joining me today.

01:09 Laura: Thank you for having me.

01:11 Jacob: So today we're gonna be talking about a favorite topic for a lot of people, which is all about time and time management, and some of the secrets and findings that you learned from your book. So very first question I have for you is, why did you even write this book to begin with?

01:28 Laura: Well, I have been fascinated by time for a long time. It's one of those universally experienced things, that we all have the exact same amount of time. I find this idea just utterly fascinating, that we all have the same amount of time. So when you meet people who are doing amazing things professionally and personally, they may have other advantages, but they don't have any more time than the rest of us. And so I thought, "Well, we can learn so much from people who are doing interesting things with their time."

02:04 Laura: And so, I've spent many years studying people's schedules, and wanted to write books like 168 Hours, which is about the number of hours in a week, and Off The Clock, which talks about how to feel less busy while getting more done, to explore these ideas and see how people could have a different and more productive relationship with the time that they have.

02:27 Jacob: Well, I suppose the first most obvious question is, how do you spend your time? So what does a typical day look like for you? And when you think about how you're planning your day, or whether it's personal or work-related, how do you plan and structure?

02:41 Laura: Well, the interesting thing is I do know where my time goes because I track it. I started tracking my time continuously about five years ago, which I know sounds a little crazy. I know how I've spent every half hour of the past five years. I'm not saying anyone else needs to try that.

02:58 Jacob: Wow.

03:00 Laura: Yeah.

03:00 Jacob: Like going down every half hour?

03:01 Laura: Yeah. But I didn't check in every half hour over the past five years. I have time logs

and I check in about three times a day, and it just takes about a minute each time, write down roughly what I've been doing since the last time. So yeah, know where the time goes, so I can tell you that. But broadly, I honestly think that being mindful about time is the best thing people can do to get a grip on where it's going, where they'd like it to go. The crazy thing about time is that it keeps passing whether you think about how you are spending it or not. Whereas, people like to track food, people like to track spending, but both of those involve more conscious decisions. You don't accidentally eat a pizza. It doesn't magically...

03:50 Jacob: I've actually [03:50] ____ pizza. [chuckle]

03:50 Laura: Okay, but there's at least somewhat more of a decision. Regardless of what you do, it's gonna be 2:00 PM tomorrow at some point, like 2:00 PM tomorrow. So it keeps passing. It's very easy to spend time mindlessly. So taking a few minutes to think about where you'd like your time to go just makes a huge difference. So that's what I try to do, ask myself, "Well, what would I like to do this week? What would I like to do today? Where can that fit? What needs to happen for that to happen?"

04:14 Jacob: So do you start off each day thinking about that, like, "Where do I want my time to go? How do I wanna plan my day?" So you ask yourself a series of questions?

04:23 Laura: I do. Sort of the bread and butter of my planning tends to happen on a weekly basis. So every Friday, I check in with myself, look at my calendar, think about what I have going on in my life, what I'd like to have going on in my life, and make myself a priority list for the next week. And I tend to make it in three categories: Career, relationships and self. And think about, "Okay, looking over the next week, what are the big things that I wanna have happen in these three categories?"

04:52 Laura: And sometimes, it's stuff that's already set up. Like if I know that I've got a big assignment that's due, that's probably top of the career category. And sometimes, there are planned family activities that I know would be top in the relationship category. But sometimes, you gotta think it up and say, "Well, what are my long-term goals? How can I do things in the next week to go towards that?"

05:12 Jacob: So most of the people who listen to this show, they're employed full-time at various organizations, medium, large-sized companies around world. So for those types of employees, would you recommend that they approach this the same way? "What are the big things that I need to get done for my career this week or for my organization, for personal life, for relationships?" So in other words, whether you're an entrepreneur or working for an organization, you would structure it as those same buckets.

05:39 Laura: Yeah, because we all have those buckets in our lives. And the unfortunate part is we often think about the career to-do list, the things that are in our job bucket, but relationships and self, maybe not so much. But the good thing about making a three-category priority list is that it is very difficult to make a three-category list and then leave one of the categories blank. We just don't do that. Our brains are like, "Well, we gotta put something in all three." And just by doing that, you can have a more balanced life.

06:06 Jacob: Interesting, okay. And I know a lot of people always say that... Well, I suppose you could put people into buckets. Some people are like, "Yeah, you know, I'm working 190 hours this

week," and they go on non-stop. And then you get other people who are like, "I just don't have the time. How are you working so much? How are you doing so much?" So maybe we can look at those two groups of people. Especially, you keep hearing about the hustle culture nowadays and people say, "Just work, work, work. If you wanna be successful, you gotta just non-stop work." So first question, do you believe that mentality that you just gotta work as much as humanly possible?

06:44 Laura: Well, I'm laughing that you said the 190 hours a week. I've actually had people tell me that they were working 180 hours a week, which is impossible because there are only 168 hours in a week. And in fact, the work hours that people sometimes report in this "hustle culture", as you put it, are wildly inflated. Most people have never tracked the amount of hours they are actually working.

07:09 Laura: And so because of that, it's easy to make our stated work hours more be a statement of how hard we think we're working or how stressed we feel, or things... Or how dedicated we are to our work, as opposed to an actual statement of factual reality. I've had thousands of people track time for me. I have seen almost no time logs that are north of 70 hours. That is about where it caps out. Now, 70 hours is very, very long. That is a long work log.

07:42 Jacob: Yeah, it's long.

07:43 Laura: Yeah.

07:43 Jacob: For sure.

07:44 Laura: But it's not on a 140 [chuckle], or something like that. So I think it's important to think about that, 'cause when you know exactly how many hours you are working, then you can make good choices with it, knowing what the parameters actually are as opposed to thinking there are dozens of hours that don't actually exist. But as for that question of, "Do you need to just work work work in order to succeed?" Well, I definitely think you need to work hard in order to succeed. However, on the other hand, I think that it's not just about sheer volume of hours.

08:20 Laura: A lot of people's success is predicated on certain breakthroughs, on certain creative ideas, on having the network that enables you to execute on those ideas, and all of those things come from viewing your time a little bit more holistically. If you are exhausted, you are not gonna come up with great ideas. If you are constantly nose down into your work, you are not meeting the people that are gonna help you execute on these ideas. So I think we need to be, yes, work hard, but consider more broadly what enables you to achieve at your best.

08:57 Jacob: And what about what we're seeing with this whole work-life integration, where it's no longer just about being at the office for a set amount of time and then you go home. There's a lot of this blending going on in working life. Does that have an impact at all on how we think about time, and make it even harder for us to know how much we're working, where the time is going?

09:19 Laura: It does, it does. I'm actually a big fan of work-life integration because I think it allows people to work as they wish to work, it allows people to have a full personal life, which then means that they're performing at their best at work as well. If we're feeling loved and relaxed and all that, time is abundant, we can actually do more with our time. But that said, for some people, it is very difficult to switch back and forth between the two. And so, I suggest that people try to make lists of intentions, both professionally and personally. Keep your to-do lists short. Try to minimize

the back and forth task switching that can sometimes happen when you're trying to do all things all the time.

10:04 Laura: And yeah, you're exactly right, that the switching back and forth is what makes people feel that they are often working more hours than they actually are. People will say, "I'm working 15 hours this weekend 'cause I was on email the whole time." Well, you weren't. You checked email 10 times over the course of the weekend, and that made you feel like you were working 15 hours, but it was five, 10 minutes each time. But it's because it's back and forth that it feels bigger than it actually is.

10:30 Jacob: Yep, yep, totally makes sense. And I suppose now even with this whole coronavirus issue that's going on, I suppose that probably throws a little bit of a wrench into things. And perhaps now is the most important time for us to be aware of where our time is going, just because things are so chaotic that it feels like we don't have to do anything. I know you're at home with your kids. I'm at home, I have my wife downstairs, two dogs, my three-year-old is downstairs. Who knows what's going on down there?

10:55 Laura: Who knows what's going on down there? [chuckle]

10:58 Jacob: And if I can't hear anybody, I'm happy.

11:00 Laura: You're good. [chuckle]

11:02 Jacob: But it's kind of like madness for everybody, right? Schools are closed. I've seen videos online of people who are trying to have conferences calls and their kids are throwing bouncy balls in their face. It's like pure madness these days. So, given that kind of environment, we need to know where the time and energy goes.

11:22 Laura: I think so, because that's what enables us to stay sane. And it can be easy to tell ourselves stories about the chaos and how crazy it is and how you can get nothing done. But once you have a story in your mind, you start looking for evidence to support that. And so if your story is, "Everything's crazy, I can't get anything done, this is horrible, this is terrible," well certainly you can find a couple of stressful moments in any given day, and then now you've got points of evidence supporting your story.

11:50 Laura: But if you start from the story of, "Well, this is challenging, but I am a resilient and productive individual, I will get through it," well you can also find evidence of that. You can celebrate little moments like, "Wow, I just pitched a huge project over Zoom and it worked, they said yes." [chuckle] That's wow, great. Or, "I managed to have lunch with my family." When does that happen on a weekday? So you can celebrate things like that.

12:17 Jacob: So internal dialog and how you talk to yourself matters, and you can either choose to focus on the negative, "I don't have any time, I'm panicking, I'm freaking out," or you choose to look at the positive of, "I can get through this, I'm resilient to the way that you said I'm... " I love that kind of self-talk. My default for my self-talk sometimes tends to be negative, not just even with time. If I make a mistake on something, even if I'm doing chess puzzles and I make a mistake, I default to negative, which is not a good habit. So I like the positive emphasis.

12:52 Jacob: Your book, you really talk about six strategies, which I was hopeful that we can

maybe spend the rest of our time talking about, which are: Tend your garden, make life memorable. Don't feel time linger, invest in your happiness, let it go, and people are a good use of time. Actually, seven strategies, not six. Maybe we can start with these. Starting off that, tend your garden. You have really cool stories and analogies for each one of these. So what is tending your garden?

13:16 Laura: Well, just that we need to cultivate how we spend our time, in the same way that you would with a garden. And I really like this metaphor because any of your viewers, listeners who are gardeners, know that gardens take work. And it's also never done.

13:34 Jacob: Oh yeah.

13:36 Laura: I mean, you can reach a point where you're doing more maintenance and things like that, but even so, you'll start tending your garden after a winter and some plants haven't made it through or there's some problem that's happened, you gotta plant new stuff, you try new things out, you got weed, you've gotta prune, it's never done. But that said, the work is what makes something very beautiful, and it's rewarding to create that beautiful thing. And so, I challenge people to think about, "Well, what do you want your garden to look like? What do you want this space of your schedule to look like? How can you nurture the good stuff within it, how can you prune out the stuff that is not working for you?"

14:14 Laura: You can recognize that this work is never done, there's not one moment where your schedule is gonna be great and you never have to visit it again, because life will change, things will happen. But if you commit to doing that work, you can be the master gardener in charge of what it looks like. And I think that that is a very liberating thought, that we don't have to be victims of time, that it keeps happening to us. We actually have quite a bit of control over it.

14:40 Laura: And I know, especially in a time like this, that may seem a little crazy to say, because certainly a lot of us have had things happen in the last few weeks that we don't have a whole lot of control over. But, within the parameters of what is happening with outside world, we still do have more control than we might think.

15:01 Jacob: So do you have any advice for how to regain more control or how to practice this concept of tending your garden, like where to begin?

15:09 Laura: Well, we mentioned time tracking earlier and I talked about how I keep track of where my time goes, and I think this knowledge is actually one of the most important things for making wise decisions then, with where the time goes, 'cause if you don't know where your time is going, how do you know if you're trying to change stuff, if you're making good decisions, maybe something you thought was a problem isn't, or maybe something you've never even considered, it's taking far more time than you want. A gardener isn't just sort of viewing the garden blindly there you can't even see what's in there, you wanna know what's in there, and when you do, then you can make good choices. So keep track of your time.

15:46 Laura: Yes, this week is not typical, but you can learn a lot by how you spend time that is not typical. So keep track of your time, ideally for at least a week, add up the major categories. See where does potential leisure time occur, what are you spending more time on that you'd like to spend time on, what are you not spending enough time on? Can you do anything about that? And by asking these questions, you could slowly get yourself closer to a life you'd like.

16:16 Jacob: What about people who say, "Oh, I can't control my time. My manager, my leader at work they just keep giving me more stuff, they expect me to work longer hours. It's a culture of the company." Is there any advice that you have for people in that type of situation? Like can they say no, can they still control their own time?

16:36 Laura: You can always say no. Life is a choice of whether you're willing to accept the consequences. It can still be a choice even if the consequences are bad. I'm not saying that they won't be bad, but that is still a choice. That said, I think people often inflate what the consequences might be. Most people are just wrapped up in their own little worlds.

17:04 Laura: A boss is generally not counting the exact number of minutes you are out of your desk, walking around to get a little fresh air or something like that. If somebody who is a generally good employee, nobody is saying, "Oh my gosh. You were gone from your desk for 35 minutes instead of 30. It's all over now." So it's just, I think people overestimate how much other people care about certain things.

17:33 Laura: So, try something small, try pushing back a little bit on something small, or saying, "Well, that sounds like a great idea. What... If I'm gonna take that on, what would you like me to do less of?" Or keep track of your time and show it, and say, "Well what am I spending my time on that you don't want me to spend my time on?" And ask for advice. Most people are willing to give advice when it's framed that way. So yeah, I just don't like the idea of giving control of our life to anyone else. You do have some control over it, if you're willing to accept the consequences.

18:06 Jacob: Yeah, I mean time is the most valuable asset, so it seems kind of crazy to just give it to other people for nothing. I was actually reminded that I had a friend who told me a story of how in his organization, there's a culture of like wiggle the mouse, where when you wake up in the morning, if you wiggle the mouse and the little green indicator light goes online on your computer saying that you're online, on whatever software the company uses... So this guy was telling me, like "Yeah, when I wake up in the morning before I do anything, I just wiggle the mouse so that people can see I'm online and I'm available."

[chuckle]

18:43 Jacob: I was just like, "What kind of an environment is this, where you have to be online24/7?" Anyway.

18:49 Laura: It's pretty funny.

18:49 Jacob: I just thought that was funny.

18:49 Laura: 'Cause clearly he's not, like it's just about the signal, it's not that he's there or he's in the shower, but he's wiggled the mouse first. [chuckle]

19:00 Jacob: Wiggle-the-mouse culture, that's exactly what it is. So okay, so we talked a little bit about tending your garden. Next, and I love this one, this is probably my favorite one, is make your life memorable. So what strategies and how do we do that?

19:16 Laura: Well, so this chapter is about the intersection between time and memory, and the two

are very interrelated. When people say they want more time, what they tend to mean is they want more good memories of things they have done with their time. Nobody wants more time in a traffic jam, nobody wants more time with a screaming baby who they can't get to sleep. It's about having more good time that, of things that are pleasant memories.

19:47 Laura: And it turns out that the more memories you have of any given unit of time, the bigger you think it is. So if you travel somewhere exotic, the first day of vacation can feel like it took two weeks, 'cause everything is new. Your brain has no idea what it's gonna need to remember, and so it's hanging on to all of it. Whereas daily life, you don't have to remember any of it. Your commute three days ago is gone, your brain just completely got rid of it. Well, nobody's commuting now, but that sort of stuff is gone because your brain sees no reason to remember it, it isn't memorable. When we say, "Where did the time go?", what we're actually saying is, "I don't remember where the time went."

20:29 Laura: So if you would like to feel that time is not slipping away from you, borne ceaselessly into the past, you need to do things to make your life more memorable. And so when I studied people's time logs, I did a big time diary project for this book, Off The Clock, where I had 900 busy people track their time for a day, and I asked them questions about how they felt about their time. And so, I could compare the schedules of people who felt time was abundant with pretty much equivalently busy people who felt like they were starved for time.

21:00 Laura: And I found that the people with the most abundant perspective on time were highly likely to have done things on the March Monday I had them track, that were just kinda out of the ordinary. People go to salsa dancing lessons on a Monday night. Somebody went to a big band concert on a Monday night. These are things that are memorable. And if you do something like this on a Monday night, well, you're gonna remember that Monday night, and then it just doesn't disappear into the past.

21:27 Jacob: So in other words, if you just have the same routine, maybe mundane drudgery kind of day, that's what's it's gonna feel like, but it's important to have some sort of things now that you enjoy doing, I suppose.

21:37 Laura: Well, at least, some little adventure, something that says, "Well, why is this day different from other days?" And if you can answer that question of why this day is different, then you will probably remember it, whereas if you cannot answer that question, then your brain isn't gonna bother.

21:53 Jacob: And is it something that's specifically applicable on the personal side, or is this anything that we can apply inside of our organizations or at work as well? Like maybe getting coffee with a new co-worker or something like that?

22:04 Laura: Yeah, sure, anything that is intense, novel, emotionally adventurous, is going to be memorable. So yeah, saying hello and talking with somebody that you've never talked to before could definitely be novel. It could maybe be a little bit of a risk if you're not sure how the person's gonna react. So both of those things make something more memorable. It could be speaking up in a meeting where you never have spoken up before.

22:29 Laura: It can be giving a presentation to a group, that that is something that's a little outside your comfort zone, and so it's definitely going to be memorable. But it could also be just going for a

walk somewhere new at lunch. There are all sorts of ways that you can make the day stand apart.

22:44 Jacob: Did you collect any research on which types of people, for example, leaders versus non-leaders, who is better at managing their time? Or who says that they're more overworked? Did you look at any roles, or managers versus non-managers?

23:01 Laura: I think everyone thinks that they are busy. [chuckle] That's my takeaway, is that there's no one group of people who feels that they're not busy. And so, people who are in more individual contributor roles may feel like they have less control of their time because they're being told more what to do. On the other hand, people who are managers may have multiple projects running at once, and so they feel pulled in more different directions, and so that can make them feel busy too. So I think it's everyone pretty much feels like they could use more time.

23:37 Jacob: Yeah, exactly. Okay, so the next strategy that you had on here goes, "Don't fill time," which is definitely something that I have been guilty of. So can you talk a little bit about that strategy?

23:49 Laura: Yeah, well, we're certainly finding out these days when we're not running around everywhere, you can't go out, can't do things like activities and all that, that turns out there was a lot of time that was filled with those things. And now that it's not filled, people are discovering that, "Oh. I have to do something else. I don't know what. Giant jigsaw puzzle or baking bread," or something along those lines that people that have claimed that they didn't have time for before. We just have the same exact amount of time. It's just that when there are fewer competing things that are a possibility, you don't think of baking bread.

24:21 Laura: But we're very, very good at filling time. We fill time with all sorts of stuff which may or may not be important, but once it's there, it seems very urgent, and so we do it. Things like email. Email will expand to fill all available space. Housework can expand to fill all available space. So we can never be done with these things, and so time gets away from us. But that's a choice. You can decide, "Well, I'm not gonna check email all that frequently," and see what happens, and if you don't fill time, you can choose to then do other things with it that may be a higher priority.

25:02 Jacob: How do you deal with the anxiety of not finishing something? 'Cause I know a lot of people, and I've felt like this sometimes, and maybe you have as well, especially people who work for themselves, you feel like every free moment you have, you should be doing something, working on your business, you have a project that you can finish and get done early. How do you mentally get into that mindset of, "You know what? I'm not done, and it's okay."?

25:27 Laura: Yeah, because...

25:27 Jacob: "I don't have to finish everything today."

25:28 Laura: You'll never be done. [chuckle] So there's... I've fallen into this trap myself, it's like, "Oh, if I could just get ahead on this work, then I'll have time to relax later." No, you'll fill it with something else. That's just what happens. So there's never a time when you're done with your emails, so if you're like, "Okay, well, I'll get ahead of my email here." Well, guess what? You get more messages, it just fills right back up. Or like, "Okay, I'm gonna deal with this project and then I'll have free time in the future." No, you'll fill it with something else. So...

26:00 Jacob: It doesn't work like that.

26:01 Laura: Yeah. No, you're better off recognizing that at some point, you are just done, and it will still be there tomorrow, and you will be fresher and better able to deal with it. And one of the upsides of having lots of small children is that they force that. At some point, you've gotta deal with them. And so, it gives you a reason to get away from the work.

26:25 Laura: Whereas before I had all them, there was less of a compelling reason to do so. Many years ago, when I was first running my own business from a kitchen table but I didn't have children yet, I wound up singing in a lot of choirs because it would give me a reason to stop work at night, to go to a rehearsal. And that was how I could put a lid on it.

26:46 Jacob: And you have... I know you're talking about your kid. I have one on the way. And how many kids do you have?

26:51 Laura: I have five children, they are 12...

26:53 Jacob: Wow.

26:54 Laura: 12, 10, eight, five and a baby.

26:57 Jacob: Wow. Yeah, so definitely, physically forcing you stop working. [chuckle]

27:01 Laura: Yes, exactly.

27:05 Jacob: [27:05] _____ So, somebody asked a question here, which I thought was a good question from Oscar. He's one of the people watching live. And he says, "How do we make sure we are constructing memorable moments with our family, co-workers and other people? Do you have any advice from a time perspective like doing daily check-ins for example? And I'm assuming he's asking about how do you create some of these memorable things for people?

27:26 Laura: Well having, with family especially, I think it's a good idea to have check-ins maybe every week or two. Ask family members, "What are the things you'd like to do? If we had a free Saturday, what would you wanna do with it? Or what are things we'd like to do this summer in the evening after dinner? What do you like to do?" And I'm not saying that every day you're gonna do some wild, crazy adventure. But I think it's a good goal to think of each week having one bigger adventure and one littler adventure, so a bigger adventure might be something you do with a half day on Saturday, you could go to a park and go for a hike.

28:05 Laura: Or maybe it's a festival, back when people were able to have festivals, and hopefully we will again in the future. Or a concert or something like that. And then a little adventure might be something like a family scavenger hunt in the backyard or make your own Sunday night or something, but just some little out of the ordinary thing. But if you aim for one little adventure a week and one bigger adventure a week, you'll have enough novelty that time will start to feel a little bit more abundant.

28:32 Jacob: Okay. And in the same concept as opposed to your organization, you can do a little adventures and big ones, and maybe a big one is speaking up in a meeting for the first time where

you've never spoken up and you're prepping yourself for that. And maybe I suppose, a little adventure could be kinda talking to a co-worker, grabbing coffee with someone that you don't usually talk to, something along those lines.

28:52 Laura: Yeah, those would be great examples of little adventures and big adventures and things that would make any given work week, feel more memorable.

29:01 Jacob: I suppose part of this is also being like putting yourself, getting out of your comfort zone a little bit, maybe sometimes people fall into that trap like you know, "I'm just comfortable with my routine, my day-to-day, like I'm overly happy, but I'm not sad, I'm just kind of floating around." So is there a little bit of growth in discomfort that's required?

29:20 Laura: Yeah, I mean there's nothing wrong with routines. I love routines. And the good thing about routines is that they can make good choices automatic. If you have a breakfast you always eat, then you're not suddenly like, "How about donuts this morning?" Then you can make these good choices automatic so there's absolutely nothing wrong with routine. I just think that you need to make sure that it's not all routine, 'cause when every day is the same, all the sameness stacks up, and the days become indistinguishable from each other. So certainly routine is good, just don't only do the routine, like much in life is a balance.

29:54 Jacob: Yeah, so we don't want every day to be identical, to be done.

29:58 Laura: Yes, exactly.

30:00 Jacob: Okay. Next thing you talk about in the book, is linger. So what is that all about?

30:05 Laura: Well, to linger is to... It has this nice pleasurable connotation of sitting in time for a little bit longer, slowing it down and noticing. A sort of similar word that some people like is "savor". They can savor time as well. So when something good is happening it, how can you make it feel like it lasts longer? And this is one of the problems of the human brain, is that anything we don't wanna do seems to take forever, whereas things that you do wanna do just zip by. "It's over already. [chuckle] That it's too bad. I wish I could have lingered in that a little bit longer." But it turns out that there are some strategies you can use to make time seem a little bit more slow, that you can pause and notice things.

30:51 Laura: Partly, it's about noticing that good stuff is happening. Humans tend to walk around in this negative mindset. What you were mentioning earlier that the negative self-talk tends to be the more common voice in our heads. So you can consciously counter that and notice when something good is happening. Like if you are comfortable, you're doing something you enjoy, you could be like, "Hey, life is good right now. Let me pause and enjoy this moment."

31:18 Laura: And it becomes therefore a conscious memory as opposed to something that just passes you by, that you don't notice, that you can't linger in. You can also plan in good things. Another reason to create those little adventures in life is that then you can look forward to them, you can notice when they're happening. And then you can recall them after the fact and relive those good memories.

31:31 Laura: And it turns out that having that forward-looking anticipation, being in the moment and then the retrospective view of it, is very important for stretching out the experience of any

given moment, because anything is only gonna take so much time, like the best dinner in the world is still gonna be done in like a few hours, right? So, how do you get more pleasure out of it? Well, hopefully you've booked that wonderful dinner like two months ahead of time, so you could look forward to it for two months, and that stretches out your experience of it.

32:06 Laura: And maybe you take pictures or you keep a copy of the menu, you make notes with the person you're having dinner with so that you can say, "Wow, this is great. Oh, we should really remember this wine." Or "Here, let's look at these candles. Can you see how amazing these are," and as you're taking these notes about it, you are then forming memories which you can talk about later. Hopefully you'll get together with your dinner companion maybe a day or two later and talk about it and cement the memory. So these are all things you can do to stretch out the experience.

32:35 Jacob: I actually wrote about a study that was done by Thomas Gilovich a few years ago, and the study that basically showed that over time, it's the experiences that create better memories and improve satisfaction for us as opposed to physical goods. And part of his research was looking at, like you said, if you're planning something in advance, it's the anticipation leading up to the event that actually has a very strong contributor to how you feel about it.

33:03 Jacob: And so I love that approach. I try to do date nights with my wife. We try to do little things as well, things that we can look forward to. 'Cause even if something's farther out, you still kind of, you get excited for it, which I think matters.

33:18 Laura: Yeah, and I think that's one of the things that's been really challenging for a lot of people with all the cancellations related to coronavirus, is that people had stuff that they were really looking forward to, and then now it's cancelled further out, and so it's like, well, that trip you were looking forward to an early May that would have gotten you through a rough time here, is now something that can't do that.

33:40 Laura: And people feel like they can't necessarily plan at this point 'cause they don't know how long it's gonna go on for. And so that can make it really difficult to have those anchors in the future that pull you forward. But there are still things you can do within this social distancing world. Maybe it's coming up with a really special recipe, or to try with your partner and have a in-house date night or something like that, you can still create smaller things that you can look forward to, even if you had to cancel some really big stuff that would have been more exciting.

34:14 Jacob: Does the lingering work at work?

34:17 Laura: I think it does. We all have some parts, I hope, of our job that we like. If not, that's a bigger question and probably something you need to address. But there's something that if people ask you what you do in your job, like you talk about at cocktail parties, or that drew you to the job in the first place, hopefully there is something you really like about it.

34:37 Laura: And if that's the case, you can consciously try to expand the amount of time you were spending on those things. You can be very aware of the time when you're doing it. Like if you see you've got a meeting coming up with a colleague you really, really like. You can look forward to that. You can have your conversation, really enjoy each other's presence, come up with good ideas. Don't schedule anything immediately after, so the two of you can keep talking and enjoying that. So there are all sorts of ways that you can linger in good stuff at work too.

35:07 Jacob: Okay. Last or the next one that we have is, investing your happiness, which is of course another one that I love. What is that strategy?

35:17 Laura: Well, so you can invest various resources in having more moments that are good and fewer that are bad. So having a good experience of time is partly that a higher proportion of it is stuff that you are glad to be experiencing, and less of it is moments where you are wishing time away. And we all have these moments where we wish time away, and it's such a miserable bargain, we only have so much time on the planet and yet we're wishing time would move faster. So whenever you find yourself thinking that, you can ask yourself, "Well, is there a way that I could use some of my resources to have fewer minutes in that category and more in the happy category?"

35:58 Laura: And as one example, we have lots of kids here and they're all fun to spend time with individually, but sometimes having many of them at one time is a bit of crowd control, it can be a bit of misery if I'm chasing a small toddler on the sidelines of a bigger kid's sports event. I'm not watching the sports event, I'm miserable trying to chase the two-year-old keep them out of the parking lot. The two-year-old is not happy.

36:25 Laura: We realized maybe it would be better off to get a babysitter for a few hours on the weekend. My husband and I could go to big kids events, actually enjoy them, cheer the kids on, and somebody else can play with the two-year-old and keep them entertained, that that would be a good use of resources. There's various things like that. If you hate cooking for instance, maybe it would be worth the money to get delivery a few times a week. Or any sort of chore that you hate, it might be wise to move minutes out of that category if any of your resources could enable that.

37:02 Jacob: So allocate resources to I guess basically take care of the things that you don't enjoy doing, so that you can focus more on things that you do enjoy doing.

37:10 Laura: Yeah, yeah. And obviously that has to do with money, but there are other resources too. How you allocate your time. You can invest your best hours in the things that you enjoy doing. And I tell a story in Off The Clock, of a friend of mine who was trying to write a book proposal. And she kept trying to do it on Friday afternoon at 4 o'clock, that that was the time she had allocated to it. And it turns out that that is not a good time to try to start a new big project, 'cause week after week it just wouldn't happen, something would come up, she'd be trying to get out the door, not working.

37:47 Laura: So finally she decided, "Okay, Monday morning, I'm gonna give it Monday morning." Now this is the time that she normally would have been doing whatever was expected of her, clients or whatever, who had asked her for things that was her good time. That she needed to do the good stuff, the important stuff, the serious stuff first. But she chose to do the speculative project first, and it was just night and day. Within a few weeks she had her proposal, she sold her book.

38:11 Laura: She's the same person. It's not like she's suddenly magically a different person who was disciplined enough to write this proposal, it's just she chose to put her best time into it as opposed to the time that was left over.

38:24 Jacob: So, in a work environment, I'm trying to bring this into like for people that show up to our organization each day. Would this be for example, when you hold your meetings, which types of projects you work on during different times of the day, really kind of designing what that looks like?

38:44 Laura: Yeah. No, I think that the big, long-term stuff, and particularly anything that's sort of speculative, should go on your calendar first. Most people are more disciplined and focused in the morning. So you really don't wanna have that boring status meeting where everyone goes around and says, "Yep, I'm still doing my job," at 9:00 AM on Monday. That is pointless. That is a waste of people's good focused, motivated time.

39:08 Laura: Have that meeting at 2:30 in the afternoon when everyone's tired and can't think of anything. Or just don't have that meeting 'cause honestly, hopefully everyone's a professional and doesn't need to tell you that they're still doing their job. But structure the day so you do the difficult and more meaningful work first, to invest in your professional growth and happiness that way, and save the work that doesn't demand your best self for the times when you're not your best self.

39:36 Jacob: Yeah, I love that approach because a lot of people, they don't actually... They let their days happen to them. And anybody can put anything they want on their calendar, they just say yes to every meeting, they really have no planning of what their day looks like. And when you let other people control your day and your time, you probably feel drained and that you don't have enough time during the day.

39:57 Jacob: But I think the whole point of all this is, you gotta take more control over where your time and your energy goes, and really sit down and design these things. So I think that makes a lot of sense. So that's part of the investing in your happiness at the work side, is just really... You gotta have a little self-awareness there I think too, don't you think?

40:18 Laura: Yeah. Well, knowing when you are at your best is good, and committing to taking charge of your time and not letting it just happen to you, as you said. And it's just sometimes it's a little bit of push back, it's like, "Why do we need to meet? Alright, that sounds great. I would love to accomplish that goal with you. Is there a better time than what you're proposing?" You don't necessarily have to take the first option that is available. And I strongly encourage organizations to have fewer meetings in general, just because what happens is then people wind up with meetings stacked up all day.

40:52 Laura: And then it becomes this thing where you have to schedule a meeting in order to get people to focus on your project 'cause there's so many other meetings that they won't, unless it's there. And then people feel like they can't just talk to someone. Like you have to set an appointment to talk to someone at 2 o'clock, and then you're waiting for 2 o'clock to talk to them instead of just dealing with it at some other point.

41:11 Laura: So, trying to create a culture where there's a lot less of that, where people just pick up the phone if they wanna discuss something instead of waiting until the appointed time at 2 o'clock, it's just much more efficient.

41:23 Jacob: And meetings are exhausting. Everybody who's been in a meeting knows that they are tiring. You get very, very drained on these types of meetings, so booking four of them in a day... And you give talks, I'm sure, for example, if I give a talk, after I'm done giving a 60-minute talk, I'm tired. How many back-to-back meetings can you do in a day? Three, four hours of this stuff?

41:45 Laura: Well, what happens is that people aren't giving their best to each of them, right? You're just sort of tromping from meeting to meeting like a middle-schooler changing classes.

"Here's my 2 o'clock, here's my 3 o'clock, my 4 o'clock. I'll deal with whatever is in front of me." And again, it just winds up being horribly inefficient because then you wind up seeing, say, the same people on Wednesday that you just saw on Tuesday. [chuckle] "Maybe we could have done something about this, we could have done all this on Tuesday instead of... " But when you don't pay attention to it, that's what happens.

42:12 Jacob: Yeah. Okay, last two strategies, "let it go" and then "people are a good use of time". So let's start off with, "let it go."

42:20 Laura: Yeah, so "let it go" is about the mismatch between expectations and reality. Many wise thinkers are pointing out the happiness stems from a match between expectations and reality, and unhappiness comes from a mismatch between expectations and reality. And if you cannot change reality, well, you probably better change your expectations then, 'cause otherwise you'll just be miserable. So, if you have very limited goals for any given day, that's great, because you'll probably accomplish them and you'll feel very good about yourself.

42:55 Laura: Whereas if you have an incredibly long list of things you need to get through, well, you won't get to all of it and then you'll feel bad. So it's really the worst of all possible worlds. There's no upside to putting something on a to-do list and then not doing it. It's just as undone as if you'd never put it on the list in the first place, only now you feel bad too. So we really didn't win in this situation. So better to make very short, limited list for any given day.

43:21 Laura: But the thing is, if you just keep going, you can accomplish amazing things. If you're only doing five things a day, but it's five really important things, you're doing 25 massive, important things a week, which is a ton. [chuckle] So by limiting what you aim to do in the short run, you can actually do amazing things in the long run.

43:47 Jacob: So somebody asked this question, I was actually gonna ask you this in general, that's the impact of technology on social media on time. I'm very curious, for example, is this something that people struggled with even before social media and the web? And has social media technology made our ability to control our time and attention much worse? Even at work, you have things like Slack, you have all these different channels, people are messaging you and buzzing you every five seconds. Do you think that has negatively impacted our ability to control time and attention?

44:19 Laura: Well, time is always filled with something. People were not massive productive people 20 years ago that we're not now. Humans are humans, and you can get distracted by anything. One story I always love to tell of this is, if you've ever read the book, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, which is just a classic in the time-management, productivity genre. I mean he wrote that in 1990. That's when it came out. And he talks about people wasting all kinds of time on things that are urgent but not important. And I keep trying to think of, "Well, what on earth were those things?"

44:53 Laura: Before we had email, before we had Slack, before we had social media, what were people wasting their time on? But they clearly were. [chuckle] And they were yakking on the phone, they were looking through their mail, they were re-reading reports that they didn't need to read. I don't know what they were doing, but they were definitely doing something because people have always managed to waste time. So in that regard, I don't think it's all that different.

45:21 Laura: You know, I think what does happen, sadly, with things like social media, is that it

doesn't feel very relaxing. Like it's the leisure time, but it doesn't actually feel relaxing. So people will tell you they have absolutely no free time whatsoever, and they will literally post this on Facebook. [chuckle] Which right there suggests a problem, maybe a mismatch between where we think our time is going and where it is actually going.

45:45 Laura: But, you know, we have free time and then we chop it up with these little checks, and then it doesn't feel free. And so we feel like we can't tackle bigger and more effortful sorts of fun. And so we wind up cheating ourselves out of this chance to truly relax. So we have leisure time, but we just don't acknowledge it because it doesn't look like good leisure time.

46:08 Jacob: Yeah. So did we actually cover "Let it go" or did I...

46:10 Laura: We sort of pretty much covered that I think.

46:14 Jacob: Okay, okay. I wanna hear if I got us off topic with technology, [46:16] ____.

46:16 Laura: Oh, that's alright.

46:19 Jacob: Okay and the next one is the "People are a good use of time." That's the seventh strategy.

46:24 Laura: Yeah, this is honestly one of my favorite messages from the book, and I've had people write me that they keep repeating this message to themselves and have nothing else to take from the book. Just if you have in your brain like, "People are a good use of time," in general, it just changes how you go through life. Again, back when people are, when people are allowed in coffee shops again, you just actually look at the person giving you your coffee and say, "Thank you." What's that person's name? If you see him every morning, you can take the time to learn them, to say hello. Every morning, you have time to connect.

46:56 Laura: Broadly, for the time diary study I did for Off the Clock, I found that the people with the most abundant perspective on time, spent way more time interacting with friends and family than the people who felt more starved for time. The people who felt starved for time were more likely to spend their leisure time watching TV or on social media, whereas the people who felt like time was abundant, were more likely to spend their leisure time with family and friends. And its...

47:18 Jacob: Interesting...

47:19 Laura: Yeah, well, but when you're doing fun stuff with people you like, time feels good. You feel like you have the time for cool stuff in your life. It's pretty hard to say, "I have no time whatsoever," when you're at your book group with your friends, or you're having a great leisurely family dinner, or you're going on a nice hike with extended relatives or all that.

47:42 Laura: So it's harder to say, "I have no time at all," whereas you can tell yourself that if you're on your phone constantly, but you're actually on Instagram you're not doing anything else. So yeah, anything you can do to have a good quality relationship time be a higher proportion of your hours, is probably wise.

48:05 Jacob: Yeah, that makes sense. What's the downfall of not doing these things? So for example, people who don't practice these seven strategies, there are people who don't take more

control over their time. Do you see any long-term impacts on them, are they more stressed out, are they unhappier in life and in work in general, or what's the downside of this?

48:26 Laura: We're gonna definitely lead to stress, to more feeling like you don't have enough time for the things that are important to you. And as far as I know, we only get one go around. So it would be sad to spend many hours of our lives mindlessly on things that we don't actually wish to be doing.

48:41 Laura: Whereas if you put yourself more in charge of your time, you'll spend a higher proportion on things that do bring you joy, that are meaningful and enjoyable to you and the people you care about. So it's not that you can't live a decent life without doing these things, it's just that you'll live a much better life. If you do follow these, these seven sort of time rules.

49:03 Jacob: Do you have any advice for leaders of organizations who are responsible for employees, for how they can create this kind of a culture where employees can have more control over their time? Should they ease up a little bit, should they just have more open and candid conversations with them? What can or should they be doing?

49:22 Laura: Well, open and candid conversations are always a great idea. But yeah, people who feel a sense of autonomy are generally far more happy and more productive. So as much as possible, if you can give people some control over their work, over when they do it, over how they work. I'm a big fan of, now we're all working remotely, but I'm a big fan of allowing people to do that from time to time, if that would make them feel better about it.

49:49 Laura: Of letting people set their own hours, if that is remotely possible. And even people who do have to be scheduled for shift, maybe there could be a lot of input into when those shifts are, that people can work with each other to come up with shifts that they are all happy with, that it's not just decreed from above, that it's things people have a say in. And that can go a long way toward making people feel like they matter. Right?

50:11 Laura: That their time matters. Because I think that's the thing that makes people feel just worse about all this, is if it comes across from their organization, that their time doesn't really matter, people don't value it. That, why are we in this meeting? There's no reason. Somebody just liked to have eight people sitting around a table. They didn't think about what they were gonna do with those eight people's time. Nobody likes that.

50:40 Laura: Yes, you're getting paid, but time is still precious. So as a leader, as much as possible, if you can treat your employee's time as a valuable resource that needs to be optimized and they need to be happy about it, you'll get incredible performance out of people.

51:00 Jacob: Yeah, I think the autonomy makes sense. It's funny 'cause there are a lot of people, and I'm sure you've seen this a lot, who complain about Inbox Zero, they can't get rid of all their emails. And at least what I found is that these are people who are micromanagers, they need to be cc'd on everything. They need to, employees have to go to them for approval for everything.

51:16 Jacob: But if you give people more autonomy and accountability and decision-making power, everybody becomes a little bit happier at the end of the day. And I think it'll reduce meetings and really just help with the whole, employees feel more valued.

51:20 Laura: Yeah, and then you got less emails so it's a win-win.

51:20 Jacob: Yeah. Think it works out a lot for everybody. What was the last question I had for you? Before I ask you where people can go to connect with you and find the book and all that sort of fun stuff, you have any last parting words of wisdom you would like to bestow on the podcast listeners or those who are watching live?

51:20 Laura: Well, I mean, as people are thinking about their time, a one phrase that has been very meaningful for me and that may help other people too, is that whenever you find yourself saying, "I don't have time to do X, Y, or Z," try substituting the language that it's not a priority, so "I don't have time" really means, "It's not a priority." And this is pretty much more accurate language, whatever you are saying, you don't have time to do, like if somebody offered to pay you a million dollars, you would go do it. Like you would find the time. [chuckle]

51:20 Laura: So it's not about time. It's often that you don't actually wish to do it, or something else is more pressing. And there may be very good reasons for it. I mean right now we've people who have their kids underfoot and they're trying to keep on top of jobs that have just gone crazy in the past few weeks, with a sudden everyone working from remotely trying to make this work.

52:35 Laura: Yeah, there's all kinds of things that may not be a top priority for you right now, but rather than just be like, "I don't have time," just own that. Say, "This is not a priority for me right now. Maybe it will be in the future, and we can revisit that, but right now it isn't." And if we're honest about that, you can just feel so much more in control of your life.

52:53 Jacob: Yeah, and it's interesting because the whole coronavirus thing actually showed that when a lot of leaders in the organizations are forced to make change, they can.

53:01 Laura: Oh yeah, they can.

53:03 Jacob: For the people who've been talking about, "My company doesn't allow flexible work," virus comes along, and all of a sudden everyone magically allows flexible work.

53:09 Laura: Magically. Yeah, no, I mean this is gonna change so much because you know, it's... Nobody will be able to say, "Oh yeah, no, none of our jobs can be done remotely." Yeah, sure they can. People are not gonna go back to sitting in an office 8:00 to 5:00 every day just to email and call people in other places, like that ship has sailed. So we'll see how this all plays out.

53:32 Jacob: Yeah, it'll be very, very interesting. And hopefully, by applying these seven strategies people will be able to take more control over their life and energy as well. So, where can people go to find the book, learn about you? Anything that you wanna mention, please feel free to do so.

53:47 Laura: Well, please come visit my website, which is my name: Lauravanderkam.com. You can find information about all my books, including, Off the Clock, there. You can find information about my various podcasts. And I blog a couple of times a week, 'cause I still love blogging, so you can read my posts about time and life and productivity, careers, family, all those good sorts of things.

54:10 Jacob: Cool. Well thank you very much for taking time out of your day to share your insights and ideas from your book with us.

54:17 Laura: Thank you so much for having me.

54:18 Jacob: Of course. And thanks everyone for tuning in. Again, my guest has been Laura Vanderkam. And that's with a K at the end, K-A-M, and she's the author of a couple of bestselling books. The most recent one is, Off the Clock, and you can also check out 168 Hours. And I will see all of you very soon. Have a good day.