



EPISODE 103: Productivity in Your Season of Hustle with Emily Ley

TRANSCRIPT

- Hey, hey, hello, hello, hello. Welcome back into Casa de Ellis and Casa de Anderson. What's up, Amy?
- Well, you know, a lot Josh. There's a lot going on here at home lately. What's up with you?
- You know, still just trying to adjust, as I've said a couple times so far on the past episodes, to not only working from home but also being a new dad. So our daughter, Eleanor, she just turned a couple months old yesterday. And I'm really trying to learn as I go about managing my work that I need to do and being a dad, being available to my wife, and just how to manage all the time and get as much done, squeeze it all in to every day.
- Yeah, boy, it's something, isn't it? Sometimes it feels like a mountain. Sometimes I think we all just wish we could simplify everything. Which luckily we have someone today I think who's gonna help us with that. I know a lot of us are feeling like we just had a lot more added to our plate. And so the idea of simplifying is really attractive.
- Yeah, our guest is Emily Ley. She is the founder of a company called Simplified. She started it during a recession, which if you're listening to us now and thinking about beginning a side hustle or solopreneurship venture, then maybe you could really listen up. She knows a thing or two about taking a passion project, turning it into a full fledged business.
- She really does. You know, she has her signature product, which is the Simplified Planner, which has sold thousands of copies. And through the years, she's really maintained a family focus, which I really respect and I know Josh that's something important for you, too. She's gonna share with us today many of her best strategies, some of her best tips for keeping focus, keeping moving, keeping that momentum and flow going as you're working. And it's really important for us right now as we're all feeling pulled in so many different directions.
- Yeah, she's also a best-selling author. Now we're really starting to brag about how you can get it all done because this is somebody who is getting it all done. She's a best-selling author of "Grace, Not Perfection" and "A Simplified Life." And her most recent book is "When Less Becomes More." She does it all from home while loving on her three kids and her husband.



- That's really amazing, and we're so excited to have her here and we're so excited to really get inside how can we simplify what's going on in our lives so that we can really get the most important things done. So we're excited to welcome Emily here today, let's get going.
- Emily, it's great to have you here, welcome.
- Hi, thank you so much for having me.
- So great to meet you. We've been really excited about this conversation with you today.
- Oh, thank you, I so appreciate it. It's been an exciting time lately.
- Lots going on for sure.
- Yeah.
- Exciting, new and different. What better timing to talk about time management and productivity at this period in our lives where we're all juggling everything at once.
- Absolutely, if we weren't juggling it before, we're definitely juggling it now, aren't we?
- For sure.
- I'm sorry, Amy, go ahead.
- No, it's OK, go ahead.
- Well, talk to us about where to start thinking about this. It's a whole new paradigm for most of us. How do we even begin to prioritize juggling so many things and all of the things that we have to get done?
- Yeah, well, I own Simplified, a planner company. We create the Simplified Planner and a whole bunch of other products that are geared toward this very thing, managing time well and kind of trying to take the complications out of life so that we can do the things that we care about the most really well. And so it is an interesting time to be in this field. I have found over the years, even outside of this current situation, that it's so important to have one place to keep all your things. Your entire schedule, what you're having for dinner that night, what your personal to-dos are. Having just one place to keep everything is so important. And so that's why we made the Simplified Planner. And really that's why we work so hard to help people look at taking inventory of all the things they're committed to and deciding between the yeses and the nos. And I think that's what it boils down to. If we feel overwhelmed, which hi, many of us feel right now. It's often not because we don't necessarily have the right organizational tools in place or things like that. It's because we have too much on our plate. And so we have to be selective and say this is what I'm gonna say yes to in this particular season and this is what I'm gonna say no to.



- I would absolutely agree. And I think one of the great things I love about your planner and your approach to things is that you really try to help us look at the big picture. And it's the way we look at things sometimes that can be so overwhelming. Yes we do, we have so much on our plates and even more right now with everything going on. But sometimes it is just about how are you looking at things? Are you calling everything important when maybe not everything is important? Can you talk to us a bit about that? About how do you figure out what are your priorities? I mean, maybe is it just how we're looking at things that's making us feel so overwhelmed?
- You know, I wrote a book last year called "When Less Becomes More." And I wrote it because I was in the middle of just an absolute, I don't even know what to call it, completely overwhelmed season. I had very small kids. We have twins who, I thought they were at the door that's why I had to look over there. Oh my goodness, working from home is so fun with kids. My kids are twins that are 5 and I have a 9 year old. And I run a company from home, and so it's a lot. There's a lot of things going on. And I was just in a season of everything was on fire. It felt like everything needed my attention right then. And I decided, I'm just gonna press pause. I'm just gonna press pause on everything that I can so that I can step back and get my bearings. And I found myself doing that again in this situation, saying whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, I need to pause, pump the breaks and re-evaluate where we are and what really matters. If we have a bunch of balls in the air, always there's one, and it may change from time to time, but there's one you can't drop. There's always one. And, for me that changes like multiple times throughout the day. But I find myself always saying, OK, with all the things happening at the minute. I have homeschool over here going on, I have 15 emails, I have a project due. I have all these things going on. What can't fall right now? And in the mornings, that's homeschool, it can't fall. So I have to shut my laptop and walk away and get that done with them. And then turn to work. And I also believe one of the things that we often do so wrong, and I only know this because I've done it wrong so many times, is that we try to multitask. We think that oh, I can teach my kids while I clean the kitchen while I have a conference call on my AirPods. Or, I can write these emails while I entertain kids and let them think I'm paying attention. It just doesn't work, it's impossible. It's like two physical objects trying to occupy the same space. And so, we have to give ourselves so much grace to say, you don't have to do it all at the same time. You can do it all, but you can't do it all well and all at the same time. So I think A, that's really important. And I think B, we just have to decide to unapologetically claim the things that matter most. And I was afraid to do that a lot of times in my career. That if I claimed, I can't do this, I have to say no to this work thing right now because my family has to come first in this moment. I was afraid that I would be viewed as not as committed or not hardworking or that sort of thing. And it was actually the opposite. I started to learn that a lot of people respected that in a lot of great ways. And so, I think we all just learn as we go, but we have to give ourselves permission to draw the line in the sand when we have to.
- You know what, I've seen that sort of evolution happen with you, Amy, over the years of working with you. As your business has developed, you've gotten more and more intentional about how you make yourself available. And like Emily says, I totally respect it. When I deal with Amy, I know that she means business because she's treating me like she is a business, which she is, instead of so many of the freelance writers where the relationship, the expectation that I have when I deal with them is that they're just gonna write me back right away.



- Yeah. That's very true.
- Yeah, I think you really have to figure out those boundaries for yourself. And it does take a little trial and error, right Emily? You kind of have to figure out what works for you and you do have to be willing to take the risk of, well someone may not like your particular boundary. And I think it's especially scary when you're afraid that your clients won't like your particular boundary. Like when you say to your client, OK I'm sorry but I just can't do this right now. I have to be with my son or I have to take care of this other thing with the home. And I have found, just like Josh is saying, and like you're saying, I've found that really people do respect that more. And the right clients for you will stay with you because they align with your values. And that's the thing that people really resonate with. And they see your values through how you're spending your time.
- Absolutely, I couldn't agree more. And I do think that it's something that we kind of evolve into. We dip one toe into setting the boundary and see what happens and then we start to realize that it works. But I think especially in this situation when we all have so many things we wanna do, so many things that we care about, so many responsibilities that we don't wanna not succeed at. We have to just give ourselves so much grace, especially right now. This is so obviously unprecedented, where we are as a world. And so, my husband and I actually had this conversation last night, that it's just so weird and so new. We just have to have even more grace with ourselves and our kids and our co-workers and everybody to kind of get through this weird time.
- I think one of the key words that we're gonna center the discussion here around is intentionality. Now, when you run a planner company, like intentionality is baked into the DNA of the company. You're trying to establish intentionality for all the people that buy Simplified Planner. Has that been something that you personally have got better at over the years?
- Yeah, about being intentional? For sure. I would say in the beginning of my company, I started it in 2008, and I wasn't trained in any of this. I have a masters degree in nonprofit management. So I was on a completely different trajectory. But I found myself just feeling so passionate about beautiful paper goods. And also organization, time management and being more intentional with my own life. I was working 80 hours a week, driving an hour each way. We lived in Tampa at the time and we wanted to start a family. And I said, I can let my life happen to me or I can choose what my life is gonna look like. And it might be a lot of hard work and a lot of hard choices and a lot of sacrifice on the time end. But if I put the work in, it'll be worth it. And there are a lot of late nights and there's a lot of hard choices that were made. But we did it, and when you set that intention, I think it really does make a difference in really just helping you make even the small decisions toward those goals, you know?
- Yeah, I would agree, and I think so many people right now are thinking about starting something and they're worried that they just don't have the time. So, let's talk a bit about what kind of time does it really take? You mentioned that some hard choices were made. And I think you may be aware of that going into something. But what's the difference between maybe creating a side hustle versus a full-time business? What kind of expectations should someone have about that kind of time commitment? What's your experience there?



- Well, I think it goes back to what you were saying earlier about intention. When you have a passion for something, I think it's important to allow yourself to kind of dig into whether it's a passion that you would like to remain a hobby. Something that fills you up and gives your soul some room to breathe outside of everything else that's required to provide an income. Or is something that you would like to become an expert at that you can eventually earn revenue from, earn an income from? I think those are two different things. And a lot of times we kill our passions by requiring them to fund our life. And especially with this, you know, when I got started Etsy was new, Twitter was the thing. And starting our own business was kind of a weird idea. But I knew I wanted this to become my job. I wanted it to provide income for our family, to give me ultimate flexibility as a mother. And that's why I was starting it. So I think starting out with something in your hands and saying, you know, I love gardening. Or I love cooking or I love writing or whatever that is. Decide what you want it to be in your life, what kind of intention you wanna set for that particular passion. And then decide how to move forward. For me, I wanted it to become eventual revenue, income for our family. It ended up growing to eight women on our team now. But at the time, I just wanted it to provide income for myself and give me flexibility. And so I knew it was gonna take investment of time. But I also knew it wasn't gonna take investment of time for the rest of my life. I knew that there was gonna be a season of hustle. And then eventually I should be able to get it to a place where it worked with our lifestyle. So yeah, I stayed up until 3, 4 a.m. for two years without taking a paycheck while I went to my job at the University of South Florida at 7 a.m. every morning. You know, I don't know how, looking back it was like worse than the newborn stage with a baby. It was a lot. And I just ran off adrenaline. I loved it so much and I believed that there was light at the end of the tunnel, there was something I could achieve out of it. So I just went for it. And I also burned myself out multiple times along the way and had to learn that if you're a marathon runner, you have to eventually stop and rest. You have to eventually stop and take care of yourself. So, if you're entering a season of hustle, go all in. Go all in, stay up late, do the things, put in the work. But know that that season has to be followed by a season of rest or you will eventually burn out completely. And so that's why I sometimes feel very itchy about the message these days that I hear from a lot of authors and different bloggers and things about hustle till it hurts and that kind of thing. That's healthy to an extent, but if we burn ourselves out, we burn out the candle that that passion is coming from and it won't amount to anything at that point. So, my biggest piece of advice is just to go all in when you can and when you need to step back and rest, remember that it will serve you in the long run, too.
- I think whenever you are going into that season of hustle, as you said, it's important to understand that there are sacrifices you're gonna have to make. Maybe you're not gonna get as much time with your friends. You can be available to your family and you can be available to your hustle. But the people that you would meet for happy hour, you're just not gonna have that much time for them anymore. And how do you kind of prepare yourself mentally for big life changes like that?



- I think when you're wholeheartedly dedicated to something, it really just realigns your priorities in your brain and in your heart. And it makes it very easy to make those decisions. I have found that not just with work but with being a mother. When our kids are tiny, there are a lot of things I had to say no to that I wanted to say yes to. A lot of happy hours, a lot of speaking engagements or networking things or just different projects. I was asked to do a TED Talk one time and I was so honored to have been asked, but I had infant twins at home. And I knew that it just wasn't, I mean it was a dream to be asked to do that. And I hope to be able to do it again one day. But at the time I just couldn't. And so you say yes to one thing when you have to say no to something else. And when you say no to one thing, you're saying yes to another. And I think just reminding yourself that seasons change. And the seasons when I had three small children at home while I was trying to run a business was wild. And oddly, I feel a lot like that right now. But they eventually got older and eventually went to school full time, all three of them. And so, the season changed and I was able to have more time to put in to those kinds of things. So, it's just, life ebbs and flows, and I always say balance is like riding a bike. You constantly are shifting your weight from left to right to keep from face planting and you just keep doing it, you know.
- That's great, and I know that you've got some simplified systems and strategies that you really recommend and lean on and of course teach to others. So, talk to us a bit maybe about a couple of your favorites that really get great results for people.
- Yeah, a couple of years ago, I was writing a book and I was procrastinating writing this book, was sitting at a Starbucks. And I thought, I get asked all the time how do I start simplifying my life? My life just looks really overwhelming in every way and I just don't know where to begin. And I created, in my procrastination, something called the Simplicity Challenge. And it's something that we do over on Instagram, we also have an ebook on our website that you can download. It's in all of our Simplified Planners, as well. But it's 30 tasks that each take 15 minutes or less and cost zero dollars. So they're very bite-sized pieces of tasks that you can do that by the end of those 30 days or the end of those 30 steps, you feel a significant difference in your life. And it's things like walking around your house with a trash bag and just picking up trash. Just picking it up, just picking up trash. Dumping out your purse or the bag you take to work and just cleaning it out, putting the essentials there. Cleaning off your nightstand, having just a clock and a lamp and one other special thing on it. Just doing these things that are very easy for each of us to do one at a time. It really makes such a big difference. I think if you're overwhelmed about a task or an idea or something you wanna achieve, breaking it down into those little chunks that you can take one at a time just makes it so much more actionable. Also in terms of simplifying, I am a huge believer that physical clutter is mental clutter. And I know for myself when our house is cluttered, when there's stuff everywhere... there is a child at my door now... and there's stuff everywhere, it just kind of plants itself in my head and it makes me confused. It makes me feel overwhelmed. And so, we also offer what's called a Ruthless Declutter Challenge. And it's something that's outlined in "A Simplified Life" that I wrote a couple of years ago. But it's kind of tackling your space with the goal of really decluttering your head, your heart, your schedule, your home. And that just gives us space to breathe, doing that sort of thing. So, I would say A, tackle what you can where you are with the time that you have. And pay special attention to your surroundings, especially now that we're all at home. I can tell, especially with my kids and my husband and I, that it makes a big difference when we've decluttered our space to the way we're all interacting and feeling.



- I totally agree with that. And you know, I've worked home too for a long time. And I found that just that little extra effort, there's something for me about an empty desk. Like just a totally clear surface to work on. And I admit, as a writer and a creative person, I have trouble keeping it empty. So I really have to set the intention of every once in awhile just clear that thing off, even if it's just picking up everything that I think I need there and moving it off for a little while. And then setting the laptop back there and then doing some work on that perfectly clear surface. There's something just really more freeing and you feel more relaxed.

- Totally.

- And I think, too, I love that you mentioned about just doing what you can where you are. And to apply this to those of you who are thinking about a side hustle right now or who maybe are trying to step it up a notch. This really is important about breaking tasks down into bite-sized pieces. So, if you're thinking about adding something else into your life right now to increase your income and it's feeling overwhelming to you. You're like, I already have so much, or you're feeling a lot of emotions right now. You may be feeling fear, you may be feeling sadness or grief. Whatever you're going through emotionally sometimes, it's like that is also a thing on your to-do list. You have to feel your feelings. So whatever it is that's keeping you from doing what you need to do, break it down into bite-sized pieces. Maybe it's just about, today you're just gonna research apps that you could put on your phone that would help you run errands. Or research apps that are for dog walkers, and just see what's out there. One little step at a time sometimes can give you the confidence for the next thing. If you've accomplished that one thing, you feel more confident next time.

- I totally agree, and also just making a list of all the things that you need to do. Just getting it out of your head I think kind of clears some space up where you can really think and see it all and make it manageable. Go ahead and buy that domain, make that your task for today that you look it up and see if it's available and you get it. Google questions, ask a friend for FaceTime help. Goodness knows, I have Googled all the questions, all the questions. I started off designing wedding invitations in Microsoft Publisher because it was all I had at the time. And so, you learn as you go. But I also think to remember that the purpose here isn't perfection. You're not gonna do it all perfectly. You're not gonna start the business perfectly, you're gonna make mistakes. Your house isn't always gonna look perfect. But giving yourself the grace to do the best you can where you are with what you have and just keep going, that is bold, that is bold. Keep growing that way.

- So that word grace is something, it has me thinking a lot about people who are for the first time their own boss. Now, if they were working at a company in a usual situation, they wouldn't assume that their boss expects them to do everything they possibly could the entire job, the entire project, all in one day. And if you were somebody's boss, you wouldn't expect that of them. You would give them grace to take the time and methodically work through the steps to make something happen. So how has the process gone for you in allowing yourself to have that grace and learning maybe what to expect from yourself, like when you've hit your own personal boundaries and when it's time to go from either a season of hustle to a season of rest. Or maybe just a few hours of hustle to a few hours of rest.



- Yes, well, I'm a recovering perfectionist. So, I have held myself to just impossible standards over the years. And I know how unhealthy that is and how it bleeds over into relationships and into your work, and it's just not a good idea. And so redefining that in the terms of grace for me means doing the best you can where you are with what you have. But also I think as a, learning to kind of motivate myself and recognize, it's like you said about feeling your feelings. Feeling when you're feeling burned out instead of pushing through to make it worse. And kind of like, I gotta do one more thing or I gotta stay up five more minutes even though my brain has turned off. Remember that there's where your best work is not done. And your best work is done when you are fueled, when you are rested, and all those things. So, for me it's just about knowing when to draw the line in the sand and getting comfortable with those boundaries and remembering that I'm better when I do that. I'm better for my people, for my team, for my customers, for my family, for everybody. And not being afraid to say, OK, now is the time to make a transition. Like I mentioned with "When Less Becomes More." When I wrote that book, I had hit a wall. And I had had a few months of just work, work, work, on top of work. And I decided it was time for me to write a book. And I had a book deadline that kind of inspired this, but I decided I was gonna unplug. I had built a business on social media, but I was gonna step away for a few weeks and see hopefully it was still there when I came back. Hopefully nothing died when I was gone. But I had a team I could hand some things off to and I was able to say, I'm gonna give myself the gift of a couple of weeks unplugged because I gotta get my bearings back under me. And so I spent those few weeks writing and cooking and resting and just doing things I don't usually have time to do. Kind of like a lot of us are doing right now. I use that time to just refuel myself and I came back not feeling like I was ready to be done with social media or any of that other stuff that was exhausting me. Feeling like I was ready to get back to it. I had more energy, I was ready. I felt refueled, and it was a beautiful, beautiful gift to have given myself the time to refuel. And I think a lot of times we think we're like race cars. We just keep going and going and going, but eventually we run out of gas. So, it's all about grace. You just have to be able to give yourself the permission to say it's OK.

- I love that, and I love the concept of a recovering perfectionist. I'm sure a lot of people listening can relate to that.

- Hey, how do you train with your husband? It's probably simple enough, but how do you train kiddos to understand boundaries of Mommy's working right now, get away. That's a funny question. I don't know, do y'all have any tips for me?

- Well, so I do have to say, if you were watching this on video, you just saw me mute myself and talk to my child who just walked into the room and sat on the bed and started bouncing on the bed. And I had to say, not right now please, and then unmute myself again.



- I didn't even notice. My daughter was at the door like, are you done yet? They're having quiet time right now, which is Mommy's work time. You know, I used to have a lot of mom guilt about being a working mom in general. We have a lot of friends who the moms do not work outside the home. And that is awesome and works great for them, and I had a lot of personal mommy guilt originally thinking maybe I should be doing that and not what I'm doing. Maybe there's something wrong with me for wanting to pursue something else as well as being a mom. And I learned over nine years, my oldest is 9 now, what a beautiful thing it is and how much he learns from, my husband is an entrepreneur as well, and what he learns from seeing us pursue things and work hard and draw boundaries. And having three kids at home right now, home-schooling is exciting. But we've found a loose schedule kind of works. And we get up at the same time, we do breakfast. I work with them to do their home school from wake up until lunchtime, and I don't work at all. Like I may answer an email or two on my phone when they're busy. But for the most part I'm totally on them because they need my full attention at that time. And then after lunch, I send them up for quiet time, mandatory quiet time every day from 1:00 to 2:30. You go to your room, I don't care what you do as long as you don't have screens in there. It's an hour and a half for you to read, color, play Legos, go to sleep, whatever. And they know that that's the time that I'm working. And I think, I can say this nine years into parenthood, I can see the value now in them understanding that OK, there's a boundary. Mom is at her desk and she is working because this is her job and she loves it and all of that. So, it's not perfect. I mean, they still come knock at the door when I'm doing these things. But it works and there's an understanding there. So, I really think we just, my dad always told me you're raising adults, not kids. And so you might as well just explain everything to them and be transparent, and that's kind of what we've done.
- In that hour and a half between 1:00 and 2:30, how do you make sure that you make the most of it? How do you avoid distractions, popups, calls that are gonna get you off task? How do you just focus?
- I have received 131 text messages since we started this, not even kidding, 131. It's all my team, I know it is. We have like a team group text that just goes wild. And it's easy to be distracted by that. Even though it's important, it's easy to be distracted by that or the little red thing that pops up when you have an email. I tend to be that person that wants to work in real time. Like you emailed me, I need to write you back right now. Or you text me, I need to get back to you right this minute. But I found that when I have limited time to work, I have to compartmentalize. So I have to turn off the text messages, I have to turn off my inbox, I have to close it, and I have to go to my to-do list and say OK, this is the work I need to get done. And I'll get to those things when that is over. And that way I know I'm always moving forward. There's been a lot of working at night here lately, too. Which is fine, you turn on some good music and pour a cup of coffee and get to work at night, it works. But I think, someone once told me be fluid, not flexible, because flexible has a breaking point. So, it's just always fluid over here.
- I think that's great, and I know, too, I usually have little blocks of time as well. And as a single parent, one of the biggest aha moments for me in terms of that mommy guilt, right, because it's just me, there's no one else. It's been really like, OK wait, he really does get to see what it's like for someone to run a business, too...



- I mean, I'm raising someone who's very much an individual and how cool is it that these kids get to see what goes into it? That yes there is still time for family, there is still time for fun. But also there's serious time, there's work time and there's time when we need to concentrate. And they get that, too, one of the things too is I try to help him relate in his own life and look at when you're at school, it's really hard to focus when someone next to you is talking. Well, it's the same thing for Mommy when she's working on stuff.

- I had that talk today.

- Yeah, there are times when they come in the room and there are times when they can respect it and a lot of that's age related, too. But once you get that block of focus. And I think, too, I talk to people who are writing books a lot, of course because that's what I teach. And I talk about that designated time each day and what it's like when your brain gets used to having that time. Once you're used to that time being your set time to write or work or focus, it's almost like your brain just switches over like, oh it's 1:00, it's time to focus. And it becomes easier the more that you do it.

- Yeah, that is so true. I told my husband the other day, he takes the kids to school usually, and I stop work around 2:00 and go pick them up. And the other day he was home with them doing home-schooling and I had the whole day to work. And I was in here working, and at 2:00 I was like I don't have any more energy, I'm done. And I told him, it's like my brain knows it's time to stop, it's time to go pick them up. So I had to rewire it a little bit to get back to a routine that works with our current situation.

- Yeah, so I mean definitely if you're listening and you're feeling frustrated, maybe you haven't worked from home before and you're trying to figure out if you're ever gonna be able to actually focus during the time you have. Don't give up, just keep trying. You do have to train your brain a little bit, but it will work. You really can get a lot done in an hour, hour and a half actually, once you're focused.

- Yeah, honestly that is where Simplified came from, was that I was working in a corporate environment. And I just used to think these things don't take this long. Why are we dragging these things out? There's so many meetings and meetings about meetings and reports, and I just always kept saying, couldn't this be done in a simpler way? And so I approach my work the same way. Do we need to have 15 emails back and forth about this, or can we get on Zoom and have a discussion for five minutes and call it a day? So, you find ways, I think, when your time is limited to be more efficient as well as being effective.

- If you identify with what Emily is saying, then you're definitely gonna want to pick up one of those Simplified Planners. Streamline your life, your work-from-home business, and you'll be glad you did. Emily, we're glad we had you on, thanks for joining us.

- Thank you, it was so much fun. I appreciate it.

- It was so helpful, thanks for all your tips.

- Thank you.

- Alright, take care, and all of you out there, we will see you next time on Hustle From Home.