

Hugh Culver

Jaime: Welcome to Eventual Millionaire Builders. I'm Jaime Tardy and I have Hugh Culver back on the show. He's here to help me with a whole bunch of different things. He's an author, speaker, he helps experts make more money in their business. Thanks so much for coming on the show today, Hugh.

Hugh: Thanks, Jaime. This is fun.

Jaime: I wanted you to talk about this because you wrote it down and I need this! So please let's talk about this. I'm going to have a ton of questions for you. So talking about going with the flow and your different rhythms during the day, which I pay no attention to whatsoever, and I'm hoping you can help me out. Can you explain it a little bit better?

Hugh: Sure. What I noticed was that during the day I have down times and I have up times. I have times when I just want to eat a chocolate bar, go for an espresso, and I have times when I have great energy. I started to research why that is and if that's normal and I found that everyone has the same thing and it's called a circadian rhythm. A circadian rhythm repeats itself every 24 hours but as entrepreneurs we tend to ignore a lot of things. One of the things that we ignore is our body.

Jaime: Wait – what? Yeah, I know!

Hugh: We think that the day is one chunk of time and we can just cram as much as we possibly can into that chunk of time. But the reality is that, meanwhile, your body is having these up and down cycles. I started to look at what would happen if I matched my work to my cycle. So if I matched the work to where my energy was. I started to ask people, and I have now probably asked 10,000 in my audiences, and we do a simple X, Y graph, which people listening to this should do – it's an X, Y graph, with energy on the vertical from low energy to high energy – low energy being 'Oh my goodness, I'm just dragging myself, I can't think straight, I'm looking at the same thing on my list five times over and I haven't done anything,' and high energy is enthusiastic and creative, and across the horizontal is the time that I have dedicated to work. So let's say I go to my home office at 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning and I've got until about 4pm that's totally wide open to me. That's seven or eight hours, but meanwhile my energy is going up and down, so what I need to do is draw from the left hand side to the right hand side what my energy does as I go through the day. What I've found from thousands and thousands of people is that most people have an opportunity of about 90 minutes at the very beginning when their energy is really high. Of course there are exceptions – for some people it takes a long time for them to ramp up, but they have this 90 minute window. Let's suppose that takes you to 10:30 in the morning – that's a fantastic window if you are organized to put the hardest work in it. But what a lot of people do is they arrive at work and they fiddle with their e-mail and then they check Facebook and that reminds them of something so they go back to working on a blog and then 10:30 rolls around and then, right when their energy is going into a low point, which

makes sense if you ate breakfast two or three hours before because your blood sugar is getting low. You've also been awake for six or seven hours so you're getting tired. So it makes sense that you start to have a lull around mid-morning and that's why people run off to cafes to buy muffins and that sort of stuff. If you were to dedicate the morning to the hardest work, knowing that there's going to be a lull, then that's perfect because that gives me a window of opportunity to do easy work. So that's a great time to check your e-mail, that's a great time to work on something that's routine, like some editing. If you did the creative writing in the morning, that's the time to do the editing, that's the time to return phone calls, that's the time to do some research or working with a colleague. Then what's going to happen after lunch is you're going to have another shot of energy - it's just natural; it goes down and then it goes up. That usually lasts for around an hour and that's a perfect time to do hard lifting. That's the perfect time for me to finish that negotiation, to have that coaching call. That's a perfect time for me to be coaching other people, that's a perfect time for me to be doing creative writing. Then, again, you're going to go into a low point and then I go back to routine work. One of the easiest things to change is when you check your e-mail. So, rather than checking it all through the day, what you could do is you could say, 'Well, I'll check first thing in the morning for maybe 10 minutes and look at critical e-mails. Then I leave it and check again half an hour later and then dedicate some time, maybe 20 minutes, and really work through it and write some responses.' If you create these hour to hour and a half windows it's going to seem really unnatural because of the temptation - it's very addictive. You check your e-mail and think 'It's a good thing that I checked!' but the person that sent it aren't even around, they're not on their e-mail. So what you want to do is separate that out into distinct chunks of time where you work on only e-mail, but in between you change what you work on based on where you're at with your circadian rhythm.

Jaime: I love this. So, number one, being addicted to e-mail makes it very difficult to listen to only checking your e-mail at certain times of day. Do you have any tips for that?

Hugh: For me, because I'm an early riser and I've got a bunch of things I want to get done in the morning, the simple rule that I created is that I don't check e-mail until I physically get into my office. I work out of a small office and that means I don't check until usually 9 o'clock in the morning. So that was an easy change for me to make. I know that in the morning I need to get creative writing done or work on proposals, then I need to exercise, then I help around the house and then leave. So no e-mail in the morning because I know that's going to take me off. The second thing is that there's actually a study happening at MIT right now and research is finding that if you check e-mail only in chunks of time you actually have no loss of productivity. There's this myth that you must be responding quickly. The third thing is that e-mail is a much bigger distraction than we give it credit for. Because when I check my e-mail I'm now thinking about it - and if I can't respond to e-mails, now they're on my mind, and you might find that you look at the same e-mail five or seven times before you actually do something with it because that e-mail represents a bunch of work or worry. So if I just check in distinct chunks of time I

get away from constantly thinking about e-mail and e-mail doesn't dominate my day.

Jaime: I love this. E-mail is a big thing for me – I have an assistant who does a lot of my e-mail but I still spend at least an hour a day on e-mail and, working 30 hours a week, that's a big chunk of my week, doing e-mails. So I feel that doing only specific times would be really difficult. How many times per day do I schedule and do I do an hour long block at once, do I try to get my inbox to zero? Give me some tips on that.

Hugh: When we go into the world of e-mail it depends if you're on a Mac or a PC, of course, but the first thing to do is use filtering systems so that you can filter out messages you don't want, obviously. The second thing is that I like to work on e-mails in 10 minute chunks, so 10-15 minutes at the most, because I can get a lot done in 10-15 minutes. It doesn't take very long to delete, so I delete as many as possible, and my rule is that I only want to touch them once. So as best as I can I open them, I deal with them and then I'm finished with them. What I don't want to do is dabble in going back and forth between them. So I work in 10 minute chunks but the important thing for me is to not continually check throughout the day. To be fair, if I have something going on and it's a really critical time, like let's say, for example, yesterday I sent out an e-mail to our whole group of experts, so now we're getting all of these responses back about my live event coming up. There's a window of opportunity there for me to respond that's really important, so today I've been checking quite a lot because I want to get back to people as these responses come in and set up a call with them. But, typically, I want to leave big gaps of time in between because it comes down to how I measure my success and, at the end of the week, no one's going to give me an award for most e-mails.

Jaime: I need one of those!

Hugh: What they're going to reward me for is have I got that job, did I get that proposal in on time, did I update my blog, have I moved my book forward, have I got that online course organized? That's where I get my rewards. So the myth is 'I must stay in touch. I must respond quickly.' We need to get over that, because that's not where the rewards are.

Jaime: So for these rhythms, because we were talking about putting things on your calendar, do you put e-mail on your calendar or does that just happen when you have a bit of extra time and you're in a lull?

Hugh: I don't put it on my calendar; I use breaks as a clue. So, mid-morning I usually get up and go for a walk somewhere, so when I come back, that's a great time for me to look at my e-mail. At lunch I'll get up and move again and that's a good time for me to check. What I help people to do is to start creating these gaps of work where you're actually focusing on work. I know you and I are big proponents of hunkering down, working for 15-20 minutes and then taking a break. It's proven that that works, the brain loves that, so what I want to do is get

my e-mail into distinct chunks of time. I don't put it on my calendar but I use other things that happen as a clue that that's a good time to go and check.

Jaime: So you're in a really good routine. For the rhythms that you do, you find that a lot of people have that same rhythm, so what would you suggest for someone brand new to it? They're listening to this, the first step is figure out what your rhythms are, or should we just go with the ones that are pretty general?

Hugh: I would do both but I would say that it's a pretty safe bet that most people listening to this are morning people. More often than not they would say that they are a morning person so what I would encourage them to do is this – if you're a morning person, the first thing you want to do is make sure that you're doing the hardest 50% of your work in those first 90 minutes. That takes some real discipline, because the temptation is to dabble in e-mail, blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, and that's all really great, but most of that does not generate money, not directly. So you want to do the hardest 50% – finish that proposal, post that blog, make that scary call to that person to get a guest blog or an interview, make that scary call to that client and ask if they've looked at your proposal, make that scary call to the publisher – all of that done by whatever time, 10:30am. You'll feel like a hero! What you've done is you've made it easier for you to feel good and be successful. Then the reward is – you take a break! Go for a walk, come back, check your e-mail and now do easy work – you can cruise because you've done the heavy lifting. I think there's nothing worse than having it hanging over your head, this thing that you should have done. You've been there – it's 3pm and you pick up the phone, you make the phone call and they're not even in, or they're in and it's no big deal, you get it done. I want to get rid of that in the morning – especially if you need to get hold of people, call them in the morning, get those voicemail messages planted and then, during the day, they can call you back and you can take care of it.

Jaime: I love this – I think I need to switch my stuff around, too. Right now I have specific days for things, so I have my coaching and my interview days and different days for different things, but everything is so packed to the max that my first 90 minutes are already packed before I can even start for most of the week – and if that's my best time I need to know that that's my best time and use it the best I can. Do you have any examples or stories about anyone who's done really well? Let me just say this really quickly – I had my VA do some work and research and she started listening to your interview that we did before and she said 'I've revolutionized my morning because I did the 90 minute thing that he said and I'm getting so much done!' and I thought 'Man, I still really need to do that!' So I really appreciate you saying this again. Do you have any other examples of anyone doing this and having it work well for them?

Hugh: My work started in the corporate world – my background is being a seminar leader for corporations and that's where I started to see this real 'Aha!' moments, where managers were realizing that all of the things that they were procrastinating about could actually be done in the first 90 minutes. Mostly it was coaching, staff meetings, scheduling and all of this nasty stuff that they've got to get done but they were putting off because there were a lot of other things that were easier to do. So

my success stories come mostly from managers but then I moved over to the entrepreneur world, working with experts, and what I'm constantly seeing is that most experts actually have too much time.

Jaime: What?

Hugh: They complain that they don't have enough time, but what I mean is they waste too much time. Here's a good test – notice what happens the day before a vacation or the day before you're going to a conference and notice how much more you get done on that day than any other day in the month. Notice how you don't hesitate to make a decision, not read the e-mail, not accept that invitation – notice how much more you get done, and it's because you have a huge reward – that's the trick. The reward is 'I'm leaving tomorrow.' I think a lot of entrepreneurs, and I've been guilty of this for decades, think 'I never have enough time, I never have enough time,' but the reality is they have too much time and they're allowing themselves to do what Robert Fritz calls the path of least resistance. So they're spending their time moving things around, checking things, seeing what people posted, doing little updates, and none of that is making them any money.

Jaime: I love this! I remember the Lao Tzu quote that says time is a created thing – to say you don't have time means you don't want to.

Hugh: Good one.

Jaime: I think those things make a huge difference – we're so good at putting these things together and filling our time, but when you really put the pedal to the metal we can get a ton of stuff done, we just don't feel like we can do that. But for the first 90 minute that sounds totally doable – instead of doing it the entire day I'm just putting it into a chunk of time. I can totally work my butt off for 90 minutes and then relax.

Hugh: That's it – go for it. Here's another quote from Tim Ferris – he said 'busy is another form of lazy'. Indiscriminate action and weak goals. Indiscriminate action is when I'm checking Facebook, I'm checking LinkedIn, someone said 'You should check this' and I'm off checking that, and then it's noon and I'm off to get something to eat. The day before you go on vacation or go on a conference or a trip with your family or whatever, you become superwoman – and that's an indication of what's possible. I think the challenge for a lot of people would be to put in a four day week and see what you would have to do differently so that you could enjoy a three day weekend. How would you have to be more effective with your time? Part of it is to not spread stuff out through the day – work in chunks of time based on where your energy is at.

Jaime: I used to get asked by people all the time – how do you get so much done in 20 hours a week? Well I kind of have to, so I totally focus. Now that the kids are back in school and I have 30–35 hours a week I'm like 'What am I doing right now?' I'm not used to having more time, it's really weird. Before I could only do what's important and e-mail and things like that would get lost, but I haven't been doing that lately so I really appreciate that. Thanks so much for all this – it's a really good

reminder for me and I hope it's a good reminder for everybody else. So where can we find out more information about you? I know you help experts and I know a lot of people here either want to be experts or are experts, working on everything every day, so tell us where we can find out more about you?

Hugh: Firstly, I would recommend they go and check out my blog – that's at expertsenterprise.com. Check out the blog, there's a podcast as well, on iTunes. There's a whole bunch in there about time management and being more effective and I think they'll enjoy that.

Jaime: That's a huge thing that keeps coming up over and over – 'I don't have enough time!' I hear it all the time, too. Thank you very much for all of your tips, I really appreciate it. Have a wonderful day, Hugh.

Hugh: Thanks Jaime, this was fun.