

Hello everyone, and welcome to another episode of the, Your Next Best Step Podcast. I am your host, Theresa Cantley, and we have our first podcast guest, the first one ever. Can you believe it?

No, I can't believe that at all.

We actually have the first guest who is my husband, Dennis, and he is joining us today. We also have our two puppies who are sitting by our feet here. I talked him into coming on because Dennis is a project manager for a software company, and deals with mergers and acquisitions, as well as keeping things and people in order. Right?

Yeah. Herding cats, as I like to say.

We wanted to talk about ... I picked this topic because it's something that I know a lot of entrepreneurs and small business owners that I work with struggle with, and I know in conversations that my husband and I have had, you know people that you work with, and probably from time to time, you've struggled with it.

Yeah, it's a great topic for even large corporations or just businesses, anywhere where you have a lot of different departments.

It's this whole topic of, what is urgent versus what is important, because many times people get the two confused, and there is a distinct difference. I think it was Steven Covey did ... I think it was Steven Covey that did the famous urgent versus important framework to describe, okay, what is something, what are tasks, or what happens when you're just putting out fires all day, and what happens when you actually focus on the most important things that you need to get done, right?

Yeah, that's correct.

I know you found yourself, many times over, where you're just putting out fires all day.

Yeah. Basically, that was my job for a long period of time.

I know, but when you do that, how does that make you feel at the end of the day?

Horrible. Basically like you got absolutely nothing done. Yeah, and in my line, urgent versus important is basically you have competing priorities. So, you have somebody else that comes to you from another group, and it's important for them to get it done because they want to go on vacation or they want to finish a project, or something like that. But it's really not urgent for me to do it, and it's really not important for me. And it just gets in the way of the things that I need to do.

I've seen it myself. I've seen it with myself being a business owner, but I've also seen it with people that I work with, where they think they have a plan for the day, and it's in their head, and they get ... they step one foot into the door, or even they wake up in the morning, they check their phone, and the next thing they know, three hours have gone by and they've done nothing that they wanted to do, and they've done everything that everybody else wanted them to do that wasn't necessarily important to their goals, to moving their goals forward and moving the vision that they have for their business forward. So, we wanted to talk about this. I wanted to bring my first guest on to get his perspective and advice and things that he's learned being a project manager and managing people, managing tasks, managing projects, and what has helped to make the projects that he's managed because it's bringing together different groups of people from HR, to infrastructure, to facilities in two different businesses, bringing them together to become one.

Some of the things that he's done that have helped him over the years to make these projects successful, as well as some of the things that I've put together to help small business owners that I've worked with, but also, the stuff that I talk about isn't just theory and fluff. These are actual things that I've been through myself that have helped, or even things that I've worked with, my customers, people

that I work with one-on-one to help them to be supported. I think what it comes down to, or what I've seen is three things that people don't get super clear on and that leads to them having other people dictate to them what their day's going to look like. I think number one is really understanding what their priorities are. I have a goal setting framework that I teach, but the priorities come from getting super clear on your vision, getting clear on what it is that you're doing and why you're doing it.

Then from there, you can figure out what your priorities are like, what are the things that absolutely need to be done, and then the second thing that I think people struggle with, with not understanding their priorities, they also don't set boundaries around time, around their schedule, around meetings, just around everything. Setting up, not a wall or a border, but a boundary to say, "I understand what's important and what I need to get done and what's going to move us forward." And setting boundaries around that to say, "Okay, I will only do meetings during this time," or to understand what their schedule is going to look like so they can put some boundaries around it, and they're not spending tons of time on stuff that's not really moving a project or a business forward. Then the last thing that I think these three things, I mean, actually, I could make it four.

The third thing is having a process, and what goes along with that is setting goals. I think setting goals is one of the things that I've seen a lot of people struggle with. There's no magic to it. It's just having clarity on what it is that you want to do and where you want to go, and then breaking things into pieces so you can get them done. It's not the goal necessarily that becomes the most important part, but it's that process that you go through to get to that goal. Wouldn't you say that those are the things that people struggle with when it comes to understanding urgent versus important?

Yeah. A lot of it's very similar, but one of the things that we do internally is that, it's basically setting expectations. So, it's setting the expectation of the person that's coming to you for something, whatever it is, and they think it's urgent, it's very important to them. But in the scheme of things, it may not be as important to us in our group and the project that we're working on. What we end up doing is setting the expectation of the person that's come to us and said, "Okay, you have to do this, and it needs to be done tomorrow." And says, "Well, it really doesn't fit into our schedule." Really, in the scheme of things, we have other things that are more important for us to work on. So, it's not quite as urgent as what you believe it to be.

Well, wouldn't that be, when you set expectations, those expectations are clear expectations for people. That's a boundary.

Yeah. That's exactly what it is. It's a boundary. It's very similar in large corporate speak, basically, but it's something that you know you need to do, and then things flow much better. The person who's come to you for something, they know that, okay, it's not going to be done in their timeframes and maybe done a little bit longer timeframe, but they know that it is something that's going to be on our agenda, and it will get dealt with at some point down the road.

So, how has that helped, setting those expectations or setting those boundaries, and also getting clear on the priorities, how has that shifted being able to go from projects that didn't work out so good to projects that are, or a new project process, which is something that you worked on that makes things, I don't want to say seamless, but makes things more turnkey or makes things easier to integrate two businesses together.

Yeah. The setting of the expectations is really key, and it's to make sure that it's communicated throughout the entire organization so that everyone knows what it is that you'll be working on, when you'll be working on it and those types of things. As you mentioned, it's setting those boundaries, setting the expectations and knowing that people aren't being ignored. Because a lot of things in our business is, if it doesn't get done on their timeline and it hasn't been communicated to them that it's important

or anything else, then they think that they're being ignored and then they tend to escalate. It's very important for us to set those expectations, have that transparency that people expect, and so that they know that they're not being ignored, it will be dealt with, maybe in a little bit longer timeline than what they would like, but they know it will get done at some point.

You brought up a key point. One of the key things to understanding, to determining what's urgent versus important and setting these expectations, you brought up a key point, is to communicate, is to make sure, because people want to know that you hear them, that they're being heard, that what they're saying that it's important, or you feel it's important, and that they have the chance to say how they feel and express themselves. I think that's one of the key things is having that clear communication.

Absolutely.

And making sure that, when you're setting those expectations, that they do have a chance to come back, ask questions, be heard and continue moving things forward, so they understand what's priority and what's not priority.

Correct. Yeah, and once you start to explain it to them, like one of the recent projects that we were doing is we were doing the server inventory for an acquired company. On the acquired company side, they don't have as many departments as many people to handle all of these individual things, whereas we have an entire department that does nothing but count servers. That's a very exciting job. Not really.

Not really.

Yeah, but anyways, but so, because that's their job and the only thing that they focus on and everything else, they can't understand why you can't turn something around that they asked for within three to five days. But the acquired company's department that is in charge of counting all the servers and everything else is also responsible for operating all of these servers, and all of these servers is what's supporting their product to the customer, the actual customer, the paying customer. When you explain that to them and say, "We won't be able to turn this around in a couple of days, only because there's three people on that side doing all of these different tasks and everything else versus 15 people on our side just counting servers," it becomes clear to them that, okay, these other people do have competing priorities. They have more important things, in the grand scheme of thing, to do.

But there's also an expectation that this will get done, it won't go down in the next five days, it might take the next 45 days in order for them to get around to it, but it's on their agenda, their schedule and everything else. Then it becomes much more acceptable to say, "Okay, it we won't get done in five days, but it'll get done in 45 days."

Well, and it's funny because that also brings up something else that ends up happening with this topic is, when you do that, when you set those expectations and you have that clear communication, and like you said, what might seem easy or normal to one set of people is not easy and normal to another set. I face this a lot with small business owners. Some people think, oh, well, it's just easy. Just do this, just watch a series of videos. You'll be fine. For other people, that's not so easy. What you brought up is something that really is super important is that, when you communicate and when you set those expectations, it takes out the level of anxiety down, it takes the anxiety, the frustration, maybe that fear that people have, of not doing what they're supposed to do, or not doing it in the right timeframe, or being so anxious about getting something done.

It takes that anxiety down. I don't want to say it eliminates it, but it makes people feel better. When people feel better, they can do their job.

Well ...

Somewhat, but ...

That's the theory.

Well, they feel better about what they're doing.

Yes.

Yes. Okay. When I was looking at this topic and having this conversation with my husband, who obviously works for a software company, if you haven't picked up that by now.

Possibly.

But one of the things, or I came up with four things. We talked about the three or four things that people struggle with, which is understanding the priorities, setting those boundaries and those clear expectations, understanding what the goals are, and then having a process. The process becomes super key of getting them from point A to their goal. You also brought up some other good things, which is number one, having that clear communication and having that constant communication, so people understand what the expectations are. Ultimately, what that does is it takes that anxiety down. What I wanted to say, so those are the things that people struggle with and the things that, when you do them, you can understand what really is urgent and what is important.

Because some people get them confused. A lot of times, when people think things are urgent and they're not urgent, that's when we get caught in the putting fires out, fires that don't necessarily need to be put out. They can kind of be put ...

You let them burn a little.

You can let them burn a little. There's four things that I thought that people can work towards that will help them to put these things in place so that they understand the difference between urgent versus important. The first one is having awareness.

Yes.

Okay. When I say awareness, and I am very ... what am I? Left brain, like the emotional side, the energy side?

Yes.

And my husband is very right brain, which is ...

Super right brain.

Super right brain.

I don't even think I have a left side of my brain.

Methodical. When I talk about some of these things, I have to make sure that I come back to ...

Middle brain.

... middle brain. The first one is awareness. Being aware, and when I say awareness is understanding what the big picture is. When you can understand and be aware of, whether it's the vision that you have for your business or the goals that you have for your business. Or, in your case, the vision or the goal for an integration, or even understanding the vision, the bigger picture vision for the bigger company.

For the business itself. Yes.

Right, so having awareness to that, because when you have awareness to what the bigger picture is, you can understand what your priorities are, you can also set those clear expectations, and you can also understand where your distractions and interruptions are.

Absolutely.

One of the biggest distractions that I see is people checking their phone first thing in the morning, checking their email first thing in the morning. Or checking their email, I know when I was in corporate America, the first thing I did was I opened up my email and started checking my email. So, I had an idea, as I was driving in, of what I wanted to do for the day, and as soon as I got in, that idea went out the window.

Yeah. Well, it's more, I would say, not checking your phone and checking your emails, but it's reacting to the things that come into your email box.

And it was funny because I had a conversation with somebody on Friday, and there's a difference between reacting and responding. I thought that was interesting, now that you brought that up, because you're right. Our initial instinct, which I think comes from that fight or flight, which is to react to an email. One of the biggest things that my husband has taught me in the 21 years we've been together is to not react to stuff, but to respond. Sometimes responding means sitting on it and not doing anything. Thinking about it, digesting it so that you can respond to it. Sometimes it might be 24 hours, sometimes it might be a couple hours. I know there's a rule of thumb that I've been following that, instead of reacting to something, giving yourself 90 seconds. After 90 seconds, if you still feel you need to respond immediately to something, then by all means, go for it.

But within those 90 seconds, if you can say, is this going to improve my situation? And most of the time the answer is no, it can wait for a response.

Correct.

It's interesting because that reacting versus responding. When we react, it's typically from a place of fear. When we respond, it's from a place of being aware of a situation and being able to make a good decision about it and have a good response about it. Have you seen that a lot?

Yeah, absolutely. What will happen, especially if it's a hot topic that comes in via email is people will come back with one line responses that basically start to take the entire thread off into a corner, which is going to be bad. What I tend to do, and when I see something like that going back, as you said, I just take the last email that came in and blast it out to everybody and say, "Please stop responding and give me 10 minutes so that I can these questions." Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, because people are just, as you said, they're just reacting. They're just trained to throw it. They just want to throw their two cents out there, and basically try to take things, and what they feel is just trying to help, but it's not. It's just making things worse.

But they also get confused with urgent versus important, and they think, oh, I need to respond to this right away. When in fact, if they take a moment, read it, let you digest and then respond to it, they can understand that it's not necessarily important right now. It can wait.

Yeah. Also, they're very closely tied, urgent versus important versus react and respond, it's basically, everybody just wants to react or throw something out there and do a quick response because they think that, oh, well, people will know that I'm participating in the process, when in fact, the only thing they're doing is confusing the process, because it's a one sentence response for something that probably needs three paragraphs of explanation. Yeah.

Right. The more aware people are of these things, the more they can reduce distractions, or respond in a more positive way. Because what we're not aware of, we can't change. If we're aware of things, then we can make a change to it, whether it's understanding priorities, setting boundaries, learning how to respond and not react, which is key. Super important.

Then also, it helps you work more effectively.

Yes.

Which is really important, especially both in the corporate world, but especially in the entrepreneurial world, because you have a limited amount of time. That amount of time that you spend on your own business and everything else, you want it to be as effective as possible. If it's not, then you're going to end up working 12, 14, 16 hour days.

Which leads to our next point.

Oh, I didn't know that.

Actually, our next two points.

I was not aware of that.

Yes, my husband just made a very good point, which leads to our next thing, which is something else that I know when I work with people, it's one of the biggest issues that they have, which is having a plan for your day, having a strategy for your day, for your week. So many people leave their day to chance. They leave their day to opening up their email and leaving their day to whatever they see in their email or whatever situations come up. When we leave our day to circumstance, we will continue to stay stuck because what we end up doing is, instead of us taking control of our day and being effective with it and understanding what exactly it is that we need to accomplish during the day, we leave our day to everybody else.

So, everybody else ends up scheduling our day for us instead of us scheduling our day. I have seen this time and time again, and this is a big boundary issue with people, is setting that boundary for meetings, for your schedule, and really, really getting super focused on what it is that you actually need to do. When you don't do that, yes, you end up working 14, 16 hour days. I have been there myself, right?

Oh yeah.

Many times over until I learned a better way to do it. What I normally teach people is planning your week out. I normally plan mine out on a Sunday. I know what my three goals are. The three things that I need to accomplish for the week, what my big goals are, and those goals obviously relate to what my monthly goal is, what my quarterly goal is, and then what my annual goals are. The clearer I am on that and the more aware I am, then I can create a plan for the day. Typically, there should only be three things, three super important things that you need to get done that are going to move a project forward, that are going to move your goals forward that are going to move your business forward. Three things, that's it.

Those three things are the things that you need to focus on first. So, if we understand what our distractions are and we understand, like my biggest distraction is my phone. My husband, he actually took all my notifications.

Everyone.

On my computer, on my phone, everything, which ... I think I might have some ADD, and also, I've talked about this on the podcast before, I do struggle with anxiety, and those notifications bring on the anxiety, so my husband shut them all off. But it has also helped me to focus on those three most important things that I need to get done in a day. Anything else that comes in, I get a better idea or a better gauge of, do I need to deal with it now, or can it wait? I don't know if you have any commentary on that.

Well, no. It's very important, because as you said, it's something that, basically, if you don't get these things done, you're not going to move forward. You're not going to have the success that you think you should have in a given day, in a given week, in a given month or something like that. It's basically, you need to set your priorities, if you have your boundaries set up, you have clear communication, you set expectations right and everything else, you can keep things moving forward. Now, that doesn't mean that senior management won't come in and blow it all up for you. But in the entrepreneurial world, you

are your senior management. So, if you don't have these things all set for yourself, then you won't accomplish the things that you want to accomplish in your business or in your life.

Even if, if you're clear on those three most important things you need to get done and you focus on that first, even if senior management comes in and wants you to do something, it is easier because you've already accomplished those things, and then you can allow for, yeah, fires that need to be put out or expectations that need to happen, you have more time to make them happen.

Theoretically.

Theoretically. No, I'm going to say it is the case.

Well, it is.

Sometimes there are, yes, external things that get in the way. However ...

Yeah. Basically, when they take the last 18 months of your work and throw it in the trash, but ...

Right. Well, we won't go there.

Yeah, we won't go there.

But on a regular basis, and I know this is the case for entrepreneurs, making sure that you, and I even tell people, to schedule in time that you're going to check your email. Schedule it in and make sure that it's not first thing in the day. First thing in the day, pick one of those three things, and that's what you need to focus on. Then maybe take a break and check your email for a half an hour. Then when you do that, we're going to touch on the third thing, which is focus. What I mean by focus is, if you're scheduling time to check your email during the day, then when you're doing that, your focus can be, either I'm going to delegate this email to someone else, I'm going to delete the email because it's not important. Maybe it's junk, maybe I don't even need take care of it, maybe it's somebody like just sending me a message that I just don't need to read, or in the entrepreneurial world, or maybe even in your world, it's something that comes through, and you're like, "Ooh, you know what? Maybe we can automate this. Maybe we can create a process for it."

When people do this and they get super hyper focused on, okay, getting through their email, or maybe even, you might have an assistant that goes through your email, and they do this, it allows them to sift out the distractions and stay focused on the important things that really do need to be handled. Because there are things that, in your email, that you definitely need to respond to right away, but there are other things where it can kind of get put on the back burner so that you can focus on the things that you need to do, and you can always come back to it. Focus also is making sure that, again, goes back to ties together with the plan, having a plan for your day so that you're not leaving it to random chance.

Also, you're giving yourself time to, when you have your day planned, when you are able to go through your inbox and put these processes in place, whether you're going to delete it, you're going to delegate it, you're going to respond to it right away, it gives you some breathing space so that you can be creative. You have time to do the creative work. Because you can't do analytical work and task oriented work, and then bounce back to creative, and then bounce back to that, and then bounce back to creative. It gives you some time so that you can have some focus time, focus on maybe something that you need to create.

Yeah. Being right-brained, I don't know what creative is.

Yes, you do. Stop it. He does. He's super creative. Actually, my husband, a little side note, my husband came up with the name of our first business. Remember that?

Oh yeah.

When I had my retail store?

Yeah. That's back when I was a marketing genius.

Yes, marketing genius. But just to wrap everything up here, the last thing that I wanted to just say is, and not a lot of people do this enough, and the times when I've ignored it, it's gotten me in trouble, is listening to your gut. Listening to your gut. If your gut says, again, the 90 second rule, if your gut says, if I respond to this, is it going to improve my life or something that I'm doing? If the answer is no, don't respond, or don't react. Just let it go and respond to it later. But also, if you're doing things and you're focusing on stuff that is A, not bringing you joy, B, not moving you forward, C, not helping anything in your business or anyone that touches your business, maybe it's something that you need to just get off your plate completely.

Are you over committing yourself? That was a problem I had for the longest time, way over committing. Then I couldn't figure out why I was so stressed. So, listen to your gut. Do you have any thoughts on ...

Listening to my gut?

Yeah.

Yeah. Every day I listen to my gut. Basically, a lot of it is how you make decisions going forward. In the entrepreneurial space, you have to have that sense that this is going to move you forward, or it's going to completely distract you. A lot of people that I know that are in this space, they either feel good about doing something where they don't, and if they feel good about it, those are the things that they're going to enjoy doing in the future, and it's also going to bring them the most success. But if there's something that, basically, they don't feel right doing or anything else, it's just going to bring them pain and anxiety. They're going to end up trying to focus because they're going to try to make that work and all of that, and it's really not something that's either core to their business or something that they enjoy doing. Listening to your gut is really important. Really important. You're going to find that you'll be happier doing things when you do that, and you'll also be more successful at them.

Well, and one of the things, because of that, when you do listen to your gut and you're happier doing things, is because your gut never leads you wrong. People who don't listen to, when you get the spidey sense going up, and when you don't listen to it, and you've told me this many times, when I haven't listened to it, things don't go so right. But when I do listen to it and I stick to it, I know I'm on the right path, and I think that's important. Do you have any final thoughts you want to share with our audience?

Oh, she puts me on the spot all the time. No, not really. The whole topic of urgent versus important is key to getting you through the day, because ...

And understanding the difference between the two is the difference between being successful and not being successful.

Yeah. It's one of the keys to being successful or unsuccessful, but it is also helps you get through the day and it puts things into perspective. Also, one of the key things is being able to communicate that. A lot of people try to set you on their own schedule, because they try to get you to do things for them so that they can make their lives easier. If you classify these things urgent versus important, or basically, totally unimportant, it helps you schedule the day so that you can move yourself forward. What's important to someone else may not be important to you, and as long as you communicate those things ...

And that's okay.

... that's okay. Yeah, exactly.

That's okay. I think a lot of times people get confused. This was my big issue back when I was in corporate was, I was a people pleaser. I would just constantly react to my boss, who was the owner of the company, and other people. What I ended up doing is I ended up not being true to myself, and what I really needed to get done that I knew was important to get done to move a lot of things forward, and



then I ended up feeling miserable. I think it's okay to push back and say, either I will get to it, just not right now, and that's something I tell a lot of people that I work with. It's okay to do that. It's okay to push back. Because nobody is going to make your vision happen except you.

Right. It's also okay to tell people that, "That's not important to me and I'm never going to do that."

Yeah. And to say, "That's not really something that I want to do. Thank you for thinking of me, but that's not really something that's going to bring me joy."

Yeah, exactly.

Exactly. Anyway, well, thank you for joining us. My first guest on the podcast.

I am honored to be your first guest.

You did great.

Thanks, honey.

If you want to learn more about how to focus, especially right now with everything that's going on in our world, in our economy, with small businesses, and you want to learn how to focus on what really is important and letting go of the urgent stuff, but what really is important to build momentum, to get stability back in your business, and to really start to move things forward, to create a plan with the right strategy and the right tools so you can really start to turn things around, especially right now, there's been so many new things that have happened in your business. My Business Resilience Blueprint workshop, I'm going to be doing it again next week. You can register for it. It's a 90 minute workshop. You will also get access to a five module, which is the same content that we're going to be doing live in the workshop. You are going to have access to that for a lifetime, or at least, as long as I'm on this planet.

Your lifetime.

My lifetime. So, you will have access to that as well, and there is a potential that there might also be a special guest, not my husband, but a special guest on the workshop with me as well who is going to be talking about ... I'm going to be approaching and teaching you how to build resiliency in your business. He would be teaching resiliency, how to build resiliency in your life, just as an entrepreneur from an emotional standpoint. So, stay tuned for that, but if you want to register to join me live, it's going to be amazing. I'm super, super excited for it. I've done this workshop before. We're doing it again to really help small business owners that have been struggling and can't really figure out how to get their feet underneath them so they can start moving forward, and even think about growing and achieving their goals for the rest of the year.

In the show notes, you can find the link to the Business Resilience Blueprint workshop. It's going to be August 17th and 18th at 3:00 PM Eastern Time. I hope to see you there. But until then, have a great rest of your week, and I will see you next week.

I won't.

But you might ...

But I might be back at some point in the future.

He might be back. All right, take care. Be well, and talk to you soon.