

Transcript of The Space Beyond Scarce Podcast, Episode 38: Prioritize With Purpose

Kate: Hey everyone. Today we are back with a solo podcast. It's been a while since I've done one of these, and today is a very exciting day because we are talking about the meaning of life.

Or at least I have to start there because I really do think that today's subject is an essential part of the meaning of life. But the word that we're gonna be using isn't exactly branded that way. And the word is prioritization. That's right. Prioritization is the meaning of life. Yeah, I know even saying the word makes me feel like I'm about to be lectured or asked to sacrifice myself in some way, but prioritization is way more than a buzzword that looks good on your resume.

In fact, prioritization is something that all of us are doing all of the time.

It is not optional. It's always happening even when we don't give it any regard, just like our breath or our digestion or the firing of our neurons. So the real question to address is not whether or not any of us know how to prioritize. It's whether we know how to do it skillfully and intentionally and in a way that gets us to the results we actually value.

In other words, it's not whether we know how to prioritize. It's whether we know that we are prioritizing.

So because prioritization is this kind of invisible force that is always at play, as soon as I start to crack the subject open, I feel like I'm cracking open pretty much every subject in the history of the universe. So I will just say that I think the question of what makes for good or skillful or effective prioritization is the stuff of pretty much every major debate in world history.

On the macro level, politics is essentially the never ending disagreement over what our collective priorities should be. So is the study of economic. For example, many liberals want to prioritize climate sustainability and economic equity, while many right wingers want to prioritize the continued funneling of wealth and resources to the top 1%, while consolidating political power through the suppression of voting rights.

Of course, those are not the primary talking points of their public campaigns. In order to convince people to go against these very common sense priorities that the majority of the public agrees with, they use false scarcity, urgency, and fear mongering, which is the fastest way to get people's priorities muddled.

We are hardwired to prioritize our immediate safety over our long term. . So it's a pretty easy button to push,

but if it gets pushed over and over again, we end up living in chronic stress and not getting anything meaningful done, which is pretty much what American politics feels like for the last several. Even if we're not buying into the fear mongering of our over culture , when it comes to

our daily lives, on the micro level, we are just as prone to falling for our own irrational approaches to prioritization that are driven in part by the scarcity mindset.

We have internalized, and perhaps also in part by the exhaustion we feel from that chronic stress. I mention.

For example, it is estimated that the average person spends four to six hours per day on their phone. Now, there might be some people who are doing that very much on purpose. Maybe you work from your phone or you use that time to deeply connect with your loved ones or in some other way you're receiving meaningful benefit from the screen time spent.

But my guess is the vast majority of people don't even know how much they prioritize their phone from day to day. I know plenty of people who tell me they don't have time to read books or do yoga or start that creative project they always talk about, but if even one of those four to six hours per day went to reading a book instead of looking at the phone, we would have the most educated generation in decades.

So the truth is most people do have time to read, but they are choosing to prioritize other things. Most people also don't like to admit that and are probably getting a little cranky at me for pointing it out, or perhaps are feeling like this is turning into that lecture I mentioned earlier. So let me reign this in because yes, we all know that we could solve our problems if we prioritize Differently.

But then we don't do it, and then we feel guilty, and then we start resenting the idea of prioritizing. And then we try to escape from its relentless presence by avoiding it. And for many of us, prioritization hangs out in the shadow, unexamined, tucked away, and quietly ruling our lives. So let's bring it out of the shadow today and see if we can do it just a little bit more on purpose, since we're going to be doing it either way, we may as well.

Do it our way.

I suspect that how we prioritize is a really key factor in whether we will feel limited by scarcity or whether we will start to open up the portal to the space beyond scarce to the possibility that we can actually live the way we want. Even build the world that we dream is possible.

So I'd like to present a case study. The case study is my 16 year old self. Now, like a lot of us, I don't think I was ever really taught skillful prioritization in school. I think instead, we were made to understand the hierarchies and the ranking systems that we were a part of, and then thrown into things with kind of a sink or swim approach to see how we handle it.

You get an assignment on one end and on the other end you will be graded. And what you do in the in between part is really up to you. Perhaps your stressed about the grade will be enough to help you prioritize your schoolwork, even when you're tempted to watch your favorite TV show or go out with a friend or take a.

In high school, my strategy was the classic, write the paper at 2:00 AM the night before it's due approach, which I'm fairly certain is not considered the best way to do it.

But before you jump to dismissing US procrastinators as having less skill with prioritization, let me point out that we are all prioritizing based on our unique needs, and the problem is that we don't often examine why we're prioritizing the way we are. If we did, we might be able to find ways to meet those needs that created less stress and more of the results we actually want.

When I think of my 16 year old self, I see that I had a need for love and connection and community and belonging that was stronger than my need to excel at. I knew I could get grades that were sufficient for my goals without exerting any extra effort.

I could sometimes produce an A+ paper out of a last minute, all nighter. Perhaps I was the pioneer of quiet, quitting decades before it became a trending hashtag. I just didn't wanna put in any extra effort on something that wasn't really a top priority for me. I would never choose to stay home alone working on a paper if a friend invited me out because I was most motivated by the emotional wellbeing that I experienced when in connection.

And at that time in my life, I really needed that more than I needed to be a star.

My assignments would only become a priority for me when the deadline drew near, at which point I was willing to move homework to the front of the line over sleep. And you know what? It basically worked. I maintained a 3.0 or above GPA with this strategy for years, even while living the lifestyle of a borderline high school dropout.

Sure, it probably could've been a 4.0 if I had prioritized differently, but to this day I question whether that would've been better for me.

As an adult, I do have some perspective on how I would do things differently if I could go back. But as a coach, I also have the perspective that any lecture about priorities would've gone in one ear and out the other. When our conscious priorities are in conflict with our unconscious emotional needs, we will default to the unconscious every time and wonder what is wrong with us.

I'm just gonna say that part one last time. When our conscious priorities are in conflict with our unconscious emotional needs, we are going to default to the unconscious every time. So we may as well try to understand.

So there's a few things I wanna highlight about my story that I think speak to a common struggle with prioritization. The first part of this is that we have needs, and it doesn't matter how much our capitalist system tries to condition us to suppress those needs, they will always rise back up. They do not disappear simply because we have deprioritized them.

So it's really best to seek to understand our needs as honestly as possible, and seek ways to prioritize them that also align with our other goals.

Now, let's go back to the example of people who spend four to six hours a day on their phone. I would imagine there's probably multiple needs getting met, but here's just a few of the primary needs that I have observed that people turn to their phone for.

The first one is rest and relaxation. A lot of people use their phone as a way to kind of chill out, zone out, flop on the couch, you know, basically it's their rest period. Some people use their phone for connecting to. Some people use their phone for the feeling of productivity, which I wanna make. A distinction here is different from the actualization of productivity in the sense that it makes us feel productive when we're checking notifications and seeing if we have any messages and responding right away.

But that's not necessarily the same thing as accomplishing something that's actually meaningful to us. But still, we crave the feeling, and so that's a part of why we turn.

I think we also turn to our phone because all of the little dings and hearts and likes make us feel seen and rewarded, and validated and even liked. And those are basic human needs. We need to feel like we're connected to others and they see us. Some of us turn to our phone for entertainment. For that joy of just being able to laugh or take something in that we admire or just, you know, zone out and not have to worry about anything.

And finally, some of us do turn to our phone for education. For most of the people I know who don't read books anymore, a lot of them are reading substantial things on their phones, dense pieces of journalism, Important essays, right? People are still reading things and people are still being educated by their phone. So I'm not here to say that you can't get any needs met, or even all of those needs that I mentioned met on your phone, that could be a legitimate reason why people are on their phone so much.

But I also know people who will not let themselves take 10 minutes to lay down on the floor in a restorative yoga pose, but will easily spend 10 minutes scrolling on their phone because they're too tired to get off the couch. And if the real need here is to be rested or restored in some way, which activity do you think would be more effective?

Now I get it that I'm a little biased. Being a yoga teacher myself, but I will tell you, 10 minutes of a restorative yoga pose is definitely more restorative than 10 minutes. Scrolling on your phone, on the couch, it just is. It's better for your eye strain. It's better for your neck strain.

It's better for your shoulder strain. It's better all around You will feel more rested. I know people who say they don't have time to connect with their friends, but they might spend hours on social media as a way of trying to get that need for connection met. And oftentimes the social media will only increase their anxiety about whether they belong about their role in society.

It will increase our FOMO and our comparison, and that's often not the most fulfilling way to.

So I'm just offering these as some examples. Everyone's situation is different, but I think it's important to understand why are we actually spending our time this way? What is it that we hope to get from it, and are we getting that? Because if we aren't, it might not be the best use of our time. There may be a better way and we can be more intentional there in meeting our needs in the way that actually meets.

Another thing I wanna point out just about my story, from when I was 16, is that it is not our fault if we struggle with skillful prioritization because most likely we were never taught how to. But the good news is you can start anytime.

You can start learning how to do this, you can start identifying what you value. You don't need to judge yourself if you struggle with this issue because everybody does, and it really is complicated. When I said it's the meaning of life, what I mean is that it's this really fundamental thread that runs through everything we do and every resource that we have.

So it's not a simple thing to learn how to do it in a way that will be fulfilling to us, but it's definitely worth trying to. Cultivate some skill here because the payoff can be really big in terms of creating more from less. And the final thing I wanna say here is that

most of us were actually taught, whether implicitly or explicitly, that what is naturally most important to us is not necessarily worth prioritizing. . Oftentimes high performance simply translates to the best at sacrificing your own priorities for the ones you were handed. I'm gonna say that one more time.

Oftentimes, what we interpret as high performance or what gets rewarded as high performance simply translates to being the best at sacrificing your own priorities for the ones you were handed.

So it's no wonder that we get confused about what we should prioritize. It's no wonder that we can make to-do lists until the cows come home and still not feel that we have done by the end of the day. It's no wonder that we feel often that we will never have enough or be enough to live up to all of the priorities that we are swimming in.

At the end of the day, I am not saying that we can or should live without any external priorities. I took my kids to the Great Wolf Lodge over the holidays because it was a priority for them and they are a priority for me Whether you're self-employed or you have an employer, it is most likely the case that you're getting paid to prioritize the needs of other people in some way.

And there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. But in any situation, we have to get clear on the deeper purpose of what we choose to do, why it matters to us, and we have to notice when it veers off track from our intentions, our values, our most deeply held prior. Otherwise, we start to feel that we're living in a hamster wheel or a groundhogs day, or that despite all our rage, we are still just a rat in a cage, regardless of which small mammal we most relate to.

When we lose sight of the meaning of our priorities, we can liberate ourselves when we prioritize on purpose.

The good news is there are a lot of different approaches to getting a bit more skillful and purposeful with your prioritization. I have a few approaches that I've developed myself in working with my clients over the years, and I'm going to share them for free in a public workshop this month on October 28th.

And so if you'd like to join me for this workshop, again totally free, you can sign up at my website, [kate holly.com/links](https://kateholly.com/links). I will put that in the show notes as well. Uh, there are a limited number of spots and it's almost half full already, so I would recommend getting in there and getting your spot. Now, if you can.

I hope to see some of you in there, and I hope that today's short lesson was helpful in some way and As always, I'm going to be sending out an email on Monday with some journal prompts and practices that support this episode. So if you would like to also receive those practices and prompts, please make sure you're on my mailing list.

Again, [kate holly.com/links](https://kateholly.com/links) makes it easy to get your one stop shop for all of the free resources that I'm offering. So hop on in there and I will see you next.