

This is a rough transcription of The Career Contessa podcast. This transcription is for **Season 10 Episode 15**. It originally aired on April 15, 2025. There may be errors in this transcription, but we hope that it provides helpful insight into the conversation. If you have any questions or need clarification, please email editorial@careercontessa.com

welcome to the Career Contessa Podcast, your shortcut to be more fulfilled, healthy, and successful at work. I'm your host, Lauren Mc Goodwin, and we're back today with another episode in our three and 30 series where we bring you three tangible tips in 30 minutes or less that you can implement in your career right now.

My co-host for this series is Marni Lamon, a career coach and a regular on the podcast. Hi everyone. I'm excited to be back today. We are focused. Seeing on some spring cleaning inspiration and chatting all things work routines and work habits, whether you work from home, go into an office or something in between.

We've compiled a list that is relevant to any work schedule. Lauren, are you feeling the fresh spring energy on your side yet? I know right before we hopped on, you mentioned it's a busy season. Uh, I think every season is busy. Uh, for, I don't know. I was gonna say for working parents, but I don't even think it's like just us.

I just think it's everybody. It's um, it always. Feels like the year slows down and then you come back from the new year and like the ball just keeps rolling faster and faster. But I will say I just finished Atlassian's, uh, biggest event of the year. It's called Team. And truly between that and the time change where now it's staying lighter later, I have just really like a new wave of motivation.

I think that it's, you know, the perfect time to reset, reorganize, and rethink the way we approach our work days because literally. My day looks different, but then also like having this huge event that we've been planning for forever kind of behind me makes me feel like, okay, now it's really kind of this new season.

So you know, whether it's decluttering your workspace or kind of refining daily habits or even refreshing your routines, I. I love using this season as a chance to really bring in new energy for me that happens to be like new productivity, energy and I am just really excited. I, I love talking about habits and routines 'cause I live my life by routine, so I'm excited for the conversation.

What about you? I am totally feeling the same. It's funny because March in particular was just so jam packed for everyone. I had a lot of personal travels and I ironically did not get to do any of my personal routines or habits this morning, and I am feeling it. So I think this episode is going to be good inspiration for me because I'm calling April the true start of spring.

Yeah. Yeah, I know, I know that feeling when you're like away from your train, especially if you travel, you're off your routines for a little bit and you have this sort of like itching to get back to it.

Mm-hmm. Um, okay, so before we dive in, let's quickly define what a routine is and what a habit is.

Because they're often used interchangeably, but they are different things. So, uh, a routine is specifically a series of actions perform in a structured and intentional way. So, unlike habits, routines require more conscious effort and planning. So here are some examples of what a routine might look like at work following a structured morning workflow.

You know, you check your emails. Then you review your day's priorities, and then you set your goals and you kind of do it 1, 2, 3. Um, maybe another routine might be holding a daily standup meeting with your team at the same time each morning. Uh, another example is completing a weekly report every Friday afternoon that is part of your Friday afternoon routine versus a habit.

A habit is an automatic behavior that happens with little to no conscious effort. It just really forms through repetition and becomes ingrained over time. Some examples at work might be checking emails first thing in the morning without consciously deciding to do so. I know we're all probably guilty of sort of rolling over and doing that.

Um, grab me a cup of coffee before starting work, writing a to-do list at the end of each day. Maybe that's a habit for you, you don't really even think about. It's just sort of like as you're walking out the door or you know. Your home office door. This is something you do. So I do think it's important for us to understand the difference between routines and habits, because we'll be talking about both of those.

And maybe when you think about it like that, you start to identify, oh, this is a routine versus this is a habit. I hear them use interchangeably so much, and I know we will get to this later on in the episode, but I am the last person on planet Earth to read Atomic Habits. Oh yeah, you are. That is, wait, yes.

You have to wait. Have you not read it yet? No, I'm in the middle of it. Oh, it's so good. But, uh, I think if anyone can relate to being like a self-help, self-development junkie, I think I wrote it off for too long because I just figured, oh, I've probably read it in another book. But it really does live up to the hype and a lot of those two differences are reminding me in the book.

Mm-hmm. Yeah, absolutely. Um, yeah, he, he also is a very, he's very good at storytelling and honestly, once you read the book, you'll. You'll like, think of it often. I, I think back to it often now that I, well I read it a few years ago, but, um, it's definitely one of those books. You could probably read it once a year and be okay.

Yeah, no, that's a great point. I am excited to finish it and get all of the nuggets, but this is a really good prelude for me today. And I wanna start by going a little bit more personal, because I know we sometimes lean more tactical, but for this topic in particular, I feel like there's a way to marry the personal and the tactical 'cause we both had so many different seasons of priorities and just different types of work environments.

So I'll let you kick us off, Lauren. Yeah. So thinking about my own personal journey with both of these concepts, um, you know, I think routines and habits have really played such different roles for me, depending on the season of life that I'm in. There have been times when I've relied heavily on structured routines to stay organized.

I would say I'm. You know, in one of those seasons right now, or like when I'm juggling multiple projects, I am, you know, launching a job search or I was when I was transitioning to a new role. And then there are other times I found that small automatic habits, like always jotting down three priorities for the day have been kind of key to keeping me on track throughout, no matter what season I'm in.

So I think my routines sort of changed based on. When I'm usually, when I'm starting something new and then I kind of get into this automatic thing where maybe some of those routines turn into habits. Um. Another example is like, when I first started working remotely, I had to be really intentional about creating a solid morning routine.

So I didn't just like dive straight into emails without setting a clear focus for the day. 'cause I kind of found when I did that I was sort of always working and never working at the same time. It like, the lines were just too blurred. But over time some parts of that routine, like making a cup of coffee before I sit down to work just became a habit.

So it's interesting to see how the two have worked together. Um, and I agree. I think they. They, they do work well together. My tried and true habits though that. From my, like, how this works in my life that I definitely wanna keep around are time blocking as best as I can control. Especially because now it's like I have career Contessa, I have Atlassian, I have my kids.

I wanna have a personal life or something for myself. So I have all these different kind of categories in my life. So time blocking I find is really helpful. So for sort of making sure I get a little bit of dedicated time for all of those in my life. Um, daily prioritization with my. Coffee in hand.

This is actually something from Atomic Habits. He calls it habit stacking. So daily prioritization with the coffee is a habit stacking, and when you habit stack, it's a little bit more enjoyable to do it and you're more likely to do it. Um, and then the other one I really keep around that's important for me is kind of an end of, of the day reflection or planning, kind of like planning for the next day, what's coming tomorrow.

Um, I think especially when you have kids and you have so many moving parts where um, your schedule isn't always your own and yet it is, um, that for me has become kind of like a calming, a routine thing that I do that helps kind of calm me and help me feel a little less anxious about what's coming tomorrow.

I think it's really interesting to hear the habits that have stuck around through all of the different life stages that you talked about, because we talked about this in the Career Clarity episode too. But the one thing that people tend to forget when it comes to habits and routines and goals, whatever it is, is that life is just simply going to change, and your focus isn't going to be the same.

Year over year. And so I think it's really telling the ones that are tried and true for you. I feel like I am in a season of trying to refine my routines. I actually mentioned that's my word for 2025 is refine. And I've definitely been someone who, because I have started working for myself, I've leaned really heavily on let's have the long morning routine and let's set all the intentions and be as primed as possible for the day.

And I realized that while that worked for me for a specific season, I'm now in a different spot in my career where I just need more hours in the day and I, I wanna work more and I don't wanna hold myself back from getting work done just for the sake of having a two hour morning routine. I. And so that's something I'm trying to unlearn right now is not every routine has to be forever, and not every habit will necessarily serve you for every season of your life.

My one go-to that has been really positive for me, and it's the one that everyone talks about, but that's because it works, is not checking your phone first thing in the morning. If you are in any kind of creative role or you need any type of creative inspiration, I would say. This plus a hundred because you really feel the difference mentally to where you wake up in your own mind versus you take in the outside world.

Yeah, I feel that a hundred percent. It's like waking up and not feeling like a dose of anxiety, just smacking you in the face. And I say anxiety because it's like you wake up and you automatically, automatically put yourself in this place of comparison. Like, oh, what is that person doing? What is that person created?

Oh, like, I don't know how to describe it other than, I guess for me, I'm thinking of like waking up and not just checking your emails, but like checking your social media or something like that. Um, it's really funny. I did not break the habit of waking up and checking my email first thing in the morning until I had kids.

Like I had to have like a physical barrier that was keeping me from doing this. And now it's like, I can't even remember where I put my phone in the morning or like they took my phone or whatever. And so, um, it. So it's interesting you say that because I, I wish, I wish I had done that earlier. Like I love that I don't really check anything work related until I sit down at my desk.

But that is not because I am just disciplined with a routine and a habit that is purely because my mornings are so hectic and that a two and 4-year-old completely dominate them. Uh, but. I don't start work with like dread and anxiety and, and like comparison first thing you know, which is kind of nice.

Yeah. And I don't think it really matters what the cause is as long as you're getting the benefit of and effects of it, you know. Yeah, totally. Um, okay, let's talk more tactical takeaways and really split this up by time of day. We wanna give you ideas for pre-work during work and post-work. We definitely understand not every routine or habit is good for every stage of life.

So take what's helpful and leave the rest and you know, these are ideas. And also one of the things. I love doing, if you are looking for new routines or habits, is like asking other people and it gets the ideals, ideas, and wheels turning for you. So, you know, again, take, take what's helpful and leave the rest.

So, um, Marni, what about, uh, some ideas from morning, during work and after work that you would share? Morning, we already touched on it, but not checking phone first thing in the morning, or if you are used to checking your phone, you could try to replace checking email or social media with something that's a little bit more positive if you feel like that automatic response is still there.

I know a lot of people have meditation apps that they like, or like a gratitude app. So if you feel like going cold Turkey without your phone is just too much, you could think of a way to make it a. Net positive instead of a net negative, which is a really fun option. The other one that I really love from a lot of the productivity advice I've read is having some kind of win in the first hour of your day.

And this could be small or big, depending on your work situation. So people talk about making your bed working out. I personally am not someone who enjoys working out in the morning, but I really like getting a work task done that I've been dreading. Have you heard of that concept where it's like eating the frog first?

Yes. Yes. I actually love that advice. Yeah, it's, uh, I feel like that's very entrepreneurial focused, but I think you could swing it to any type of career where you wanna do the hardest thing first and just get it out of the way. The other thing that you can do in the morning is have a dedicated time to check your email, and depending on the type of role that you have, Lauren, I'm so curious what your inbox routine has been throughout your career.

It can get really easy to just get distracted by email all day and not get anything done. So I have started making a real effort to only check email at certain times of day so that you are in control of your priorities and you're not letting people drag you into theirs every minute. Yeah. What's really funny is I was kind of a, or with career contest, I was definitely more of a slave to email because that's what we used at career contest, at email.

Not just like for us on the team, but like with clients, with everybody. Um, at Atlassian, I don't use any email. It's a slack world, you know? So it's really interesting. I actually feel, I, I, I love it. Some people don't. They're like, oh, you're just replacing emails with slacks. But I absolutely am obsessed with not using email if you don't have to.

Um, we can turn that into whole future episode of how I think that like really changes your mental health at work. Um, okay. And then let's talk about some things. What about, you know, during work? What would you say? Yeah, the best advice that I've heard on just mid work slumps is just something to break up your day, and so I share a few physical ideas for people that are remote working all the time.

Just because if you work from home, if you've had a remote job, you get it. You can blink and the day goes by, it's dark and you haven't been outside, and there's something so mentally taxing about that. So getting outside, going on a walk, even just standing versus sitting is great. I also think this break in your day can work just mentally too.

If you get to see your coworkers in the office and you can go grab a coffee and walk five minutes with someone just mentally pulling your brain off of work allows you to come back to it. With such a fresh perspective, which just allows you to be more efficient. Um, Adam Grant calls this attention residue, so your attention can't, I know it's kind of a gross term for like a smart concept.

Your attention can't jump from thing to thing. It has this like residual residue that goes with it. So you actually need to give yourself like a little. Space a walk or something. The other thing I highly recommend for people who are maybe like, look, I literally have five minutes or something like that.

Get a walking pad. I have a standing desk and a walking pad, and that's changed my life, my routine, and everybody at work knows this. If I am on a call where I'm not talking a lot. I am walking while I listen and it actually helps me like focus better and listen better. 'cause I think the movement helps with that.

Um, but highly recommend adding a walking pad into your routine too. Not to replace walking outside, but just like if you are like any meeting that I'm attending where I'm not talking, that's gonna be my new routine. Also, check your count, your step count. After that you're gonna send me your email. You can thank me, then it's gonna be amazing.

Um, okay. And then what about after work? After work. There's so many different ways that you can cap your day, but I would find one that works for you and use it as a mental trick, assuming you want this to tell your brain that work is done for the day. So this. Naturally happens when you go into an office, or I found this in my own office roles, where you're coming back from a commute like you have time to unwind.

But if you're working from home, you can do this either with a reflection on how the day went, similar to what you talked about Lauren. Or just a really small thing, like I'm gonna go outside and get the mail from the day. Just something that can train you over time to know that work is done and that it's okay to relax.

I think the other really important thing to keep in mind, if you're working from home, you can tell this is just my world, so I have it top of mind, is to go to a different space than the space in which you work right when you're done. So I work in my living room. And I am also in my living room at night, but if I do not leave my living room and I try to just go directly to personal time, it doesn't feel as good and I struggle with it.

So even if it's just going to the kitchen for five minutes to make a snack, I try and have that physical break. Yeah, I, I feel that I, um, I like to create like a faux commute where um, it's my way of sort of, to your point, separating. 'cause I also work from home, separating work from life. And, um, I will go outside, I will get the mail.

Sometimes I will like walk around the block, which is not very long and it's just like. Like, I need some fresh cold air to like smack my face a little bit and then come in. I, um, I've really enjoyed that. I've also heard some people are like, I light a candle at the end of my day to kinda like, you know, signal to myself.

It's different. I mean, everyone depending on your life stage, uh, maybe it's like you actually do leave your office at home and go pick your kids up and that feels very end of the day ritualistic. Um. So, yeah, like the faux commute, whether you work from home or not, like create a commute however you need to, whether you're walking different room, shutting a door, whatever.

I will just say one more note on that too, is if you live with loved ones, I think this is actually a really kind thing to do because if you don't create that space for yourself and allow yourself to wind down, then you could be rolling into your personal time at night with some of the work stress residue, if we wanna call it that.

So it's almost like a kind thing to do so that you're not. Inadvertently taking that out on anyone else. Totally. And then you're the parent, and I know we all do this and we probably all know that, you know, we don't want to do it is where you're checking emails and your kid doesn't know if you're doom scrolling or you're checking emails.

You know, like they don't know the difference even though you know the difference. And so I always, I do try to do that so then I can at least be like, I'm putting my phone away. Or sometimes I, I use this tool called Clockwise with Slack, and it will basically let people know, also obsessed with this, where it lets people know like it's after hours for me.

So I like. Set these hours and then clockwise, we'll let people know. So if they slack me, they know why I'm not responding right away and I'll get to it the next day. So I also really like that too, like maybe having set office hours. So anyone who sends you an email after hours, they get like an automatic response from you or something so that you know you don't have this urgency to respond.

Mm-hmm. Clockwise. We will set you free. Yeah. I use that in my corporate job too. It is really nice, especially if you're a people pleaser. Yes. And you feel this urgency to respond to everything. Yep. Yep, yep. Mm-hmm. Well, I would love to go back to our roots and talk a little bit about rapid fire. A few of these we've already touched on.

But I do think because routines and habits are just such a hot topic, there are some love and hate opportunities. I wanna try just weighing in on if we love or hate them and having to pick an extreme to make it a little spicier. Are you down for that, Lauren? Yes, always. Okay, let's start with one hour morning routine and you gotta kick it off.

Since I spoke to this a little bit, um, I. I hate this, I hate this, I hate this Mostly because I am a mom and having two minutes to myself in the morning is, is like a luxury. So when people are like, my morning routine is a three hour routine, I'm like, I have to laugh. I'm like, that is so unrealistic. So not to be a Debbie Downer, but I need a five minute routine or less, two minutes is better.

I need simple things like. Put this thing in your, like, I need multitasking things. Like, there was a point this morning where all I wanted to do was clean the dishes and I could not create the time just to clean the dishes because someone always needed me. So it's, it's a, no, there's no way I'm getting an hour.

Hate, hate. I will say, I think the expectation of a one hour morning routine, I also hate the concept of a one hour morning routine happening on the right day. Great love. I think the thing that is so funny about the concept of morning routines and just how intense they've gotten is the whole point is to.

Lower your stress and somehow you're stressing yourself out more. It's like you're starting the day being like, okay, I didn't do my gratitude drawing. I did my meditation. You have so many Ls before the day has begun. So I love the concept of like five minutes or two minutes, something that you know you can do as an easy win and you're not placing unnecessary anxiety on yourself.

First thing. Yep. Yeah, no, totally. I agree. It's like they're meant to help, but somehow us humans have naturally turned this into like a competitive sport, you know? Yeah. Oh, we have a way of doing it. I know. The next one, uh. I know what your answer will be, but I'm excited to hear how you explain it, which is task batching, or we could almost call it like time blocking for specific tasks so that you can actually go deep and have hours of flow.

Yeah, and I will say, I. I, I didn't really start to put this into extreme practice until I joined Atlassian because Atlassian is really into this, and so it's sort of like, I think there has to be some buy-in at your company with this a little bit too, because otherwise I. I don't know. I think, I think maybe the people pleaser in me before would've felt weird having like a two hour batch of focus time on my calendar where I'm blocking it off.

Right. But essentially, um, reclaiming your calendar. It, and I can link to this in the show notes, is like a whole research backed, um, experiment that, so Atlassian has a group of behavioral scientists who literally study these things. They're called the Teamwork Lab, and they studied. What it is to time, basically time block your calendar and how to do it correctly.

And the results were incredible. So it is something that people buy in at Atlassian. So I wanna preface that I can do this and I don't ever feel guilty about it because so do my colleagues. Um, so I will time block time for emails, time to respond to messages. I will time block, focus time. I will time, block time for calls.

I will time block, um, time for. Uh, deep work, you know, or something like that. Like, uh, sometimes I need to have it for creative and like brainstorming work. Sometimes I am blocking off time to just like review feedback on something. Um, I've gotten a lot better. I used to be very much like I would react to anything that came into my inbox and any message.

And what I found is it was almost like, um. I don't even know how to describe it other than like my, it was like playing whack-a-mole for my brain. Like I, I just couldn't focus on anything long enough to get it done and it was kind of like making me antsy and crazy a little bit. And so I have found that time blocking for me.

It allows me to sort of be like, okay, this thing just came in. It's, it's, you don't have to have this fight or flight response to it because you have time blocked off. Also, it allows me, because I have time blocked off for focus work. If something does pop up, it's like I've got a buffer in my day. All of those are things that I need in order to do my best work and be productive and efficient without measuring productivity only by like how quickly I respond to something.

So it's like, it, it's like you need to have the mindset shift. You need to have sort of this buy-in for other people on your team doing it 'cause. I think it can kind of feel weird to be a lone wolf doing this at work if you're working with other people. Um, but I'll put a link to the research in the show notes because if you are a manager or if you think you can influence your team to do this, I would like highly recommend this as like a general practice to make sure that you are able to create time to work on the things that actually matter.

'cause too many people spend all day responding to requests and emails and they don't actually get the work done. And that's what this is all about. I think some tough love on this front in particular is totally warranted what you just spoke to, because I have noticed in myself when I am not time blocking and I'm jumping between a lot of different tasks, it's normally because I am inherently avoiding the thing that I should be in deep focus mode for, and the dopamine hit that I get from responding to an email with a.

Answer that I have. You know, it's almost like a productive procrastination. Yeah, totally. So if you're hesitant to this, and again, you have the space to be able to do it with your work culture or whatever, I would start to examine, is there something deeper that you're putting off? Because we have gotten so creative just as a working species at.

Tricking ourselves into thinking that we're being productive. And I see this in myself all the time. It's so funny. Yep, yep. It's like you can be the person where you're like, I'm, I work nonstop, but you didn't work on the things that were impactful or the things that move the needle. And entrepreneurship, I think is especially very loud when it comes to that because the things that move the needle are usually the things that, you know, help you get paid.

And so you'll know, you know, like you'll know right away if those things you're doing. Those things are not. Yeah, they call it income generating activities in like the real world, but I think you could still totally use that in a corporate job as well. The concept of task batching, I have started to get a little bit more into.

And I've started to build out some example calendars. If you are someone who is an individual contributor versus a people manager, what this could look like in your week that's inspired by a creator I love named Layla her. So if you want those example calendars, you can follow me on Instagram, we'll put it on the show notes and just DM me calendar, because I know sometimes these ideas are good in theory, but it's hard to actually visualize them.

So I can share some example calendars as well. Yeah, I, I mean, finding a calendar system that works for you is also like key to key to any routine or habit. Like, for me, if it's not written down, it's not happening either. So for me, like a habit in my life is like I write everything down it, I put everything in my calendar.

Everything is a calendar invite, you know? So. Um, okay. I know you have one more. What is it? I can sense the dread in your voice. I'm curious about this one, which is self-help content. Oh. Hmm. This really depends on like, the person, the day. Like I go in waves where I'm all about the self. I'm kind of really into the self-help, uh, content from Mel Robbins.

Right now, I'm, I'm becoming, I don't know. Yeah, she is everywhere. Um, I don't really know what, uh, like what it is about that, that wor is working for me. But like, then I'll, then I'll kind of like od on self-help and I'll be like, okay, no more self-help. I, I've, I've had enough of that. Um. So I like self-help content if my mindset and everything is in the right place.

And I don't think you're full of shit when you say it. If you are just regurgitating and saying something without any actionable tip or thing that I can actually do. Like I don't like abstract advice, so this isn't even like self-help. This could be for anything. I don't want abstract advice. I want really tangible, strategic.

Advice that I can, you know, actionable thing that I can do today. So, um, yeah, that's like a long way of saying like, yes and no. Depends on the person. I get that. I would say I overall love, but I definitely have had seasons where I feel like I've ODED on it as well. And it is funny 'cause once you consume enough self-help content, I remember one time my mom said, don't you feel like you've helped yourself enough?

Like how much do you need to improve? And that's why it took me so long to read Atomic Habits because I thought, oh well, you know, I've read all these other productivity books, how great can it be? So I do feel like you almost have to take a break to come to it with a fresh mind because I do think your perspective is extremely important for self-help in particular.

'cause you have to be in the space to take the actual action, have enough motivation to do so, and not just get the dopamine hit of someone saying this to me. So I think I'm actually doing the habit, which is something Andrew Huberman talks about a lot, is like thinking and talking about a goal gives you a similar.

Brain reaction of actually achieving the goal. And so you don't wanna get yourself in that trap where, again, back to the productivity point, you're not actually doing anything. Yeah. Um, my book Power Moves opens up with this, it talks about self-improvement junkies, and you can't, like, there's a sense of like, if you just DIY yourself enough, like you'll do this thing.

And that's exactly it. You can't. You, you can't just talk about it. You have to actually do it. And it, for me, this is the difference between being reactive and proactive. Reactive is like I'm talking about it and planning about it. So therefore I feel like I'm doing it proactive is like I'm actually doing the thing and that's why I'm moving the needle.

So, um, which is why I love habits and routines. That, and this is why everyone should read Atomic Habits. They are the building blocks to take that step and take that action to whatever the changes that you're going, you're trying to make. And change is very hard. Like behavior change is one of the hardest things to do.

So I really like it. Um, and I agree you can, there's a fine line between kind of getting, you know, off the path of actually making this into something that is useful for you. Yeah, definitely. Well, I would say only one true hate out of a list of three is pretty positive. Yeah. Okay. We'll have to do this again.

Um, because I, I, even though I love to hate your rapid fires, they're always really fun to do. Good. I'm so happy to hear that. Well, thank you as always for listening to another episode of Three and 30. We'll be back in May and we're going to make that episode all about lessons from top performers, which is something we haven't done yet.

So if you have questions about how to be a top performer, how to motivate your top performers, if you're a manager. Shoot me a DM on Instagram and we will see you over there. Yes. And as always, don't hesitate to reach out with any feedback directly to Marni on Instagram or to myself on LinkedIn. Um, we have all of that information in the show notes.

And as always, thank you for listening to this episode of the Career Contested Podcast. Don't forget to take your time to rate, review and subscribe. We're really grateful to all of you. Um, 'cause there's been a bunch of new reviews on there, um, who have done that. Um, one review equals over a thousand new downloads for us, so it's.

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