

WATCM 02, Lesson 1, Time is a Feminist Issue

Welcome Culture-Makers to your *We Are The Culture Makers* lesson on time.

This month we are going to reconsider our relationship with time, both by toggling out and considering the politics of time, and zooming way into the details of our time so that we can reclaim our time (in the words of Maxine Waters).

So here's what happened to me in 2015 when I had a brand new baby: I had a C-section and my partner was out of town for most of the summer. He had a few weeks off with us after the baby was born, but then he was out of town for most of the summer. This meant that I was home with my newborn, recovering from a C-section and tending my four other children who ranged in ages from four to 17. And we had a house guest that summer; a teenager who's dear to us. They're a dear family friend who was going through some really heavy stuff. And we had arranged the year before -- before I knew I was pregnant -- a travel visa to bring her from Trinidad to spend the entire summer with us, so that she could get some time away from some of that heavy stuff.

So now I had a total of six (!!!) children in my care, including a colicky newborn. And yet, in my head, somehow I didn't register the reality of how large an undertaking it was to solo-parent and nurture six children, including a newborn, while recovering from a C-section. Instead, what I was thinking was this:

I have paid time off. I am on maternity leave for a year. My salary is paid for a year. This is my time to write a book. And this is probably the only summer I will have off in the rest of my children's childhood. So let me make memories. Let me make it a summer to remember.

So I had three massive undertakings on my plate, but I wasn't thinking of how huge each of each one was – or how, in fact, each one was *really* a full-time undertaking.

Every day I was taking the kids on excursions. We were going on massive, seven kilometer walks through parks. We were going to the zoo. We were going to all the the children's activities in the Lower Mainland...

...and also I had a colicky newborn.
...and also I was recovering from a C-section.
... and also I was trying to write a book.
...and also I had no other adults near me.
...and also I was talking so much shit to myself.

I was so down on myself. Every day I was like, *"I'm supposed to write a minimum of one page a day. If I write one page a day, by the end of the year,*

my book will be finished.” And every single day I couldn't even get a sentence written and I did not know what was wrong with me.

Clearly I just wasn't using my time wisely.

So what I started doing was downloading every e-book and book and blog post and podcast about time management and productivity. I would be up at four o'clock in the morning, breastfeeding, and reading by the blue light of my phone, trying desperately to figure out how to manage my time better.

And something snapped in me one morning in the wee hours -- like 4:00 AM, 4:30 AM. I'm breastfeeding. The house is silent. It's me and the baby and the blue light of the phone. I'm reading some productivity advice by a really famous time management productivity expert. This person wrote that one of the habits of successful people is that they are early risers. If you want to get more done, and you want to be successful and accomplish your dreams, perhaps you should consider getting up earlier -- like at 4:30 AM.

Something inside of me snapped in that moment. I was like, “Motherfucker, I AM up at 4:30 a.m. *Breastfeeding*. What advice do you have for me now?!”

I'm so glad that moment happened, because what I realized in that moment was: “Oh, my goodness. All of the time management and productivity advice was not written for me.”

It is not written for people who are doing reproductive labor. It is not written for people who have caregiving responsibilities to other people. It is written for people – men -- who can get up earlier, conduct their day, and do all their productivity/optimizations things *because somebody else in the home is taking care of the domestic, reproductive labor*.

Somebody else is getting breakfast on the table. Somebody else is getting the kids to school. Somebody else is doing the laundry. Somebody else is taking care of all of the life-giving activities that make his life possible. So now he can get up a little earlier and go to the gym and he can be more successful in his agenda because someone else is doing the foundational work that makes his agenda possible. The classic time management advice is written for that actor. He's the ‘mythical norm’, as Audre Lord calls it. That entire canon of advice is not written for me and it was not written for a woman who hadn't even gone to bed yet at 4:30am -- because she was breastfeeding -- or who'd only gotten four hours of sleep the entire day; or who was already getting up earlier than the rest of her family so that she can get some things done by herself (like have put a shower unaccompanied by little hands under the door). That stuff? Is just not written for me. Realizing that meant I started looking for time management advice that was written by women for women. I read a couple of books that really were just regurgitated conventional advice. It was by women, but they were simply regurgitating that male advice.

And then I read a magazine article written by Brigid Schulte for an Australian magazine called ***“Time is a feminist issue”***.

And that essay changed everything.

In that article, which I've included in the resources, Brigid Schulte writes that we have to consider the politics of time. She'd actually had a parallel experience to mine, where she had the epiphany that the time advice canon wasn't written for women. That led her to research time for her book *Overwhelmed*.

She studied the politics of time and leisure and the history of leisure time. And when she interviewed one of the time management experts, he very helpfully (ahem) told her that she was doing leisure time all wrong.

And then he offered to spend a day with her so that he could teach her how to do leisure time correctly. The next day, he took her to an exceptionally fancy restaurant in Paris, where they spent two hours having a really long lunch and then walked around the neighborhood. And again, she had that same epiphany that I did. She realized that this man has no responsibilities to anyone except himself in his career.

He's single. He has no children at home has no caregiving or relational responsibilities to anyone else. And that's why he can go take a two hour lunch and he can do all the things that he wants to do. Meanwhile, Brigid Schulte has young children; is a journalist working full-time for the Washington Post; and she's writing a book. So she is frantically, constantly, pressed for time. She never has enough time to do all of the things that are important to her.

After that meeting in France, she met with another time expert who asked her to track her time. After that, he was going to analyze for time and tell her where she was wasting it or where she had more time than she thought.

So she tracked her time on an app and gave him the records – and, as he predicted, he found that she had more leisure time than she thought.

He concluded that she had seven to nine hours more leisure time per week than she thought she did. But when she dug into how he came to that conclusion, she found that he had categorized the two and a half hours that she spent waiting for a tow truck on the side of the road because her car had broken down, *as leisure time*.

Basically, any time that wasn't paid work, he classified as leisure time, even though *of course that's not leisure time*.

This is important because when Brigid Schulte analyzed the history of time, she found that the great works of art; the huge discoveries in the western science canon; and the great works of literature were all created by “the great men” who had wives, sisters, and mothers who materially supported them. These men had people who delivered them breakfast and lunch in their study and who kept the kids quiet. These women facilitated the leisure time of men – and in that leisure time, the men could think deeply about things and make intellectual connections between concepts. Leisure time is what enables creativity and innovation.

Their success wasn't a function of only the time they spent at their desk working. It was a function the leisure time that they had to take a meandering walk in the park and think about things until ideas coalesced. Their creativity and output depended on them having unstructured leisure time where there's no specific activity on the agenda. My friend Lianne Raymond calls it “wild idling”. That wild idling time is the time when we make those intellectual connections. It's when the connective tissue grows between our ideas...so that when we show up to write, for example, *we actually have something to write*.



We need leisure time to noodle and wild-idle in order to make the work that then goes on to be significant in our culture -- and men had that time because women and marginalized people labored for them on domestic duties and life-giving tasks that made that leisure time possible.

But the women and marginalized people who were conscripted into those men's agendas And supported their leisure time with their labor have *never* had leisure time. Historically in Western capitalism and colonialism, women and marginalized peoples have never had time that belong to them, first. Our time has always been considered to belong to other people.

It belongs to our families. It belongs to our employers. It belongs to our children. It belongs to our partner before it belongs to us. And that's why we feel so guilty about saying no when people ask us for things, because we don't have a history in which our time actually belongs to us. So we don't really feel like we have the right to say no to other people's claims on our time.

That's our historical reality. That's informed our conditioning and how we feel about our time. We don't think our time belongs to us , first, because our labor has always been materially necessary to produce the leisure of other people.

So when I saw that , I saw that yes, as Brigid Schulte wrote, “*time is a feminist issue*”.

When Brigid Schulte turned on that bigger-picture light bulb me, it was after I'd had my own personal epiphany that time advice is not written for me. In that moment, everything changed. This is still a bit challenging, and it's something I'm still working on, but when I toggled out and realized that an issue in my life is connected to a bigger issue and that changing it for myself is also good for the cause, I got really motivated.

I get a little more motivated by doing things for other people and for “the cause” than I am for myself. I hope in my development to change that. But right now. I'm trying to leverage that pre-existing lever in myself. So when I realized the time was a feminist issue, and that the entire history of the Western world has created reality in which women and marginalized people don't actually own their own time, a rebellious fire inside me kicked up. I was like, again, *Oh, hell no. Nooooooooo. I'm NOT going to let my life be used like that.*

And this conviction intersected with a really important book that I read and forgotten about, but reading Brigid Schulte brought it to the fore. she references it in her book. It's called *The Second Shift* by Arlie Hochschild. It's a really famous book. One of the things that Hochschild says in this book is that heterosexual couples often hold explicitly liberal, progressive egalitarian ideas about domestic labor. They think that they're going to divide it up equally and even often think they are dividing it up equally.

But what happens is our social conditioning kicks in and we don't divide it up equally.

And in heterosexual relationships, and even the workplace, women carry a disproportionate burden of that life-giving domestic labor. Even when we explicitly don't think that's the case in our relationships, if we actually track our time, we will often find that is the case that we have very disproportionate responsibilities that are organized around conventional gender expectations.

The point of all of this is I held explicitly feminist ideas, but wasn't living those in practice with my time. And when I realized that I thought: *I have to change everything.* And I did have to change everything in order to reclaim my time for the things that are deeply important to me.

And then I did that.

Having the tool of toggling out and realizing, *“Oh my goodness. So many of my choices that I thought were personal choices around time have been framed up for me without my consent, by our historical realities and by conditioning around time”*, helped me decide to retract my time from that system. I revoked my consent. I decided to take back my time and my life.

But then I had to get wildly practical about what that meant.

That meant asking myself some questions and **quantifying my time** so I could get a handle on what I was doing with it and what I wanted to do with it.

Quantifying your time is critical to taking it back.

So I have five questions that I'm going to ask right now, and then again at the end of our video.

1) How are you spending your time?

(And I don't mean, theoretically. I mean practically. Where is your time going? Track your time and find out how you're using it on a daily basis. What percentage of time goes where?)

2) Is this how you want to spend your time?

When I looked at how I was actually spending my time, when I tracked my time on a time app, and then I looked at how I wanted to spend my time, There was a massive gap between them.

My sister did this workshop for the airline she works with and they asked her to write down what her biggest priorities were what she loved most, what she got the most pleasure out of, and what she wanted to spend her time doing.

She wrote that she loved her husband. She loved her children. She wanted to spend more time with her children. She wanted to spend more time reading gave her a lot of pleasure. And then when she looked at how she was actually spending her time, she was spending very little time reading. She wasn't spending a whole lot of time with her husband. So she had to look her top heartfelt priorities and and ask herself: was it lining up with how she actually spent? her time.

Often, when we actually track our time, and look at it, and measure it against our priorities, what we think is happening and the reality of what we're doing can be vastly different. (We can explicitly think one thing even as we're automatically practicing its opposite; that's the lesson Arlie Hochschild teaches us in her book).

3) How much time ***are you giving away, for free?***

We are conditioned to give our time to other people, first and then squeeze our lives around the edges.



4) What is the cash value of the time you're giving away?

Put a wage amount on the time you give away. If this was actual cash, would you be offering these amounts to these organizations and people, voluntarily?

A lot of the time, my answer was no. Translating my time into cash helped me see the value of it and helped me retract my time and use it for me first.

5) What's the actual number of hours you want to give away?

So I found that when I set a number to the time that I wanted to give away, it helped me stay on track and not give away more than that. So then I could actually get my own things done, but that I was still materially contributing to causes I cared about.

When I started tracking my time, to get a baseline of what I was actually doing with my time, I completely surprised myself. A couple of things happened. Once again, as a reminder, I had been talking a lot of shit to myself about how unproductive I was and how I wasn't using my time properly. But then, when I measured my time and tracked it, it was astonishing to me how much I was actually getting done.

Remember: I was the only adult at home with six kids, including a newborn. I was taking them on excursions every day. I was trying to write a book. When I started actually tracking my time, it was a miracle to me how I got so much done. So I went from thinking “I'm unproductive, I'm a procrastinator, I don't get anything done” to actually looking at how I was spending my time and going, “*I am a miracle. I am a superhero. Look at all of the things I get done, who my goodness, this is unbelievable. I am MAGNIFICENT.*”

Time-tracking completely shifted how I thought about myself and how I thought about my relationship with time.

So that's why I advise -- at least for a short period of time (like a week) -- tracking your time. You might have one story about time and how you use it that, and then, once you examine your actual time usage, that story might shift.

Tracking my time changed my time story... and so my self-conception changed. I stopped talking shit to myself and started realizing that in fact I am a time magician...which means anything is possible.

Here's something that surprised me (and it messed with me a little bit, so watch out for it)—

What I discovered parallels the Brigid Schulte lesson of “Oh, you have seven to nine hours of leisure time a week...which includes waiting for a tow truck”. In other words: don't simply accept the highlights of the report. Dig into it. The details composing those numbers might reveal something surprising.

My time-tracking results revealed that I had 43 - 48 unaccounted for minutes of time, every single day. This was better than Christmas! I had a goal of writing one page a day, which meant that across the

year, one page a day would add up to a finished book. So when I saw that I had 43-48 minutes a day, I thought :*Oh my goodness, I can write one page in 43 to 48 minutes! This book is possible.*”

And then after about a week of trying to get one page a day written, and not even producing two sentences (I think I actually produced one sentence), I had to dig into where exactly that total of 43 to 48 minutes was coming from. What I realized, when I dug into it, was those 43 to 48 minutes per day were actually only composed of four-minute blocks. And those tiny units of “leisure time” were usually interstitials; they were found in the transitions between other activities.

What that meant, in practicality was that I had time to open up my word doc, reread my sentence, start to write something -- and then boom! My four minutes were finished. Time to go do something else.

No substantial, deep work can happen in four minute blocks of time.

So that total of 43 to 48 minutes was a cloud cover. The total disguised the real issue and made me think that I had more time than I did. But digging into where that 43 to 48 minutes came from, and the impossibility of leveraging them, revealed a huge truth to me. It was this: *Unless I change something substantial in the way that my daily life is organized and how my time is used, I will never write this book.*

The stakes were urgent. That meant I had to get radical and revise *everything* in my life. I needed to get really ruthless and decide that first, my time going towards writing my book and then, secondly, towards other things. That revelation and decisions triggered off a whole shift in the organization of my life.

The practice of using an app to quantify my time was going, and then seeing if that use of time aligned with my dreams and principles, was a revelation.

And we can get even more granular with our time – which we’re about to do ☺. Let’s talk about two of my practices: time-pricing and time-tithing.

So it's really important to me that we contribute to our communities. When we are contributing, of course not everything we contribute needs to be paid for. Even so, I wanted to put a number on what I contributed to my community so that I know that I'd done my part. I wanted to know that I made my contribution and that it was a significant contribution. Having a metric for the value of my contribution let me off the (overwork) hook internally and said to me, *okay, you've done your part. It's not all on you. There's lots of other people in this community. You don't have to do all the things. You did a certain number of things for a certain number of hours, **and it has value** (literally!).*

In addition, most of us have places and people from which you've got to retract your time so that you can do other things for your family and for yourself. So actually setting a time-target with number on it *that you will not exceed* is a very practical boundary to set *with yourself*. I call that time-tithing.

Time tithing was super valuable to me as a practice. I set what I thought was a significant target for a time-tithe to my community. I said, okay, you know what? I have X numbers of childcare every month. I need to work X number of hours. I need to do this, that, and the other thing; and so every single month, from my available child-care hours, I will contribute 20 hours of my time to my community. For me, “20 hours to my community” meant that was time that I volunteered at the school; time that I volunteered my time by mentoring individuals for free; time when I was donating my marketing

consulting time to organizations; or time I was helping people in my community, like my elderly neighbor next door.

I determined that my time-tithe was 20 hours a month. I was going to give away my time for free. That might manifest as 20 hours of consulting for a nonprofit organization; that could manifest as five hours of volunteering at my kids' school; that could manifest as three hours of helping my elderly neighbor; or as 12 hours mentoring feminist entrepreneurs for free. Whatever I was doing, 20 hours was the maximum time-tithe each month.

CRITICAL: If I hit that 20 hours, then I had to tap out and say, *okay, I have given enough*. If I hit that 20 hours in the first week, then I was done for the rest of the month.

So here's what happened when I started tracking (using the app!) how much time I was tithing to my community: I hit that number like 10 days in. 16 days in, I was 15 hours over. That means that 16 days into the month, I had contributed 35 hours of uncompensated time to my community -- and my goal for tithing was 20 hours, *which is a significant amount of time*. That's half a workweek. So I was way over, only two weeks in. That meant I had to be more deliberate about what I said yes and no to, and try to volunteer my time in the highest impact and highest heart ways.

It also meant I needed to retract my time from some people and organizations. It was not okay for me to give away 35-40 hours a month, uncompensated, because that displaced my labor from other things that *do* compensate me. Which means then I have to work more in order to make up for that lost income. Which then displaces my family and relational time.

We have to think about what your uncompensated volunteer labor displaces and what that costs you – financially, emotionally, and spiritually.

Does it displace paid employment?
Does it displace family time?

Because time doesn't come from like an ever-renewing pot. Once that time is used, it's gone forever.

Time-tithing helped me make sure that I was contributing to things I care about without extinguishing myself.

And you have to repeat this time-tithing goal-setting review at least once a quarter – otherwise things change without you noticing.

For example, in 2017, I was seeing a ton of clients – like, 25 clients a week. I was also doing a ton of pro-bono work in addition to my paid work, which meant that to accommodate all of those appointments, I was working seven days a week. *My pro bono scholarship mentoring time was actually displacing my paid clientele*. Then I had to work extra hours to make up the difference. And then my family wasn't seeing me, and that was not okay. I really had to get that in order and say to myself, *this is how much I mentor for free every month. It is essential that I do not exceed this number so that I don't have to work Saturdays to make up some more billable hours. It is essential that I do not exceed this number, so that I can see my family*. Time-tithing helps you contribute to your community without extinguishing yourself and without displacing things that are deeply important to you.

Now let's zoom out to the politics of time.

It's the uncompensated time women and marginalized people that makes everything in our culture work.

An example that perfectly illustrates this is the hours that I used to spend volunteering at my kids' school.

(I actually don't do that anymore, for specific reasons -- which is not to say that they are going to be the same reasons for you.)

Here's what happens in our school boards. In my local area, they will retract funding from schools. They'll reduce certain line items. Then, what happens is the women come together in fundraising groups and make up the difference; or the women come together and make up the difference with volunteer hours.

The thing needed still get purchased and the activities still get done because the women and mothers care about the kids and they make sure everything happens. The money still pops up. The computer still get purchased. The playground equipment gets ordered because women go and contribute their uncompensated labor towards raising money for it.

Essentially, the school board is leveraging the volunteer, uncompensated labor of mothers to fill in the gap created by the austerity policies the board imposes on schools.

And I thought, you know what? I'm not going to play that game. Ultimately the politicians who don't value our children are getting off the hook because I'm filling in the gaps with my uncompensated labor.

Zooming out to who gets off the hook and who benefits from my labour helped me decide where I wanted to invest that uncompensated labor. (Spoiler alert: the fund-cutting school board was not my choice.)

I decided my time-tithe is better used investing in feminist entrepreneurs who want my mentoring, but can't afford to pay for it; or offered to my elderly neighbor. So that's how I use my 20 hour time-tithe each month.

Time-Pricing

The other thing that I do is time pricing. Time-pricing means I put price on my labor, including the stuff I'm giving away, so that I can see the size of the huge dent I'm actually making in my community, and the value of my time that I'm investing.

One of the challenges with time is that it's invisible. It's like this slippery resource that just comes and goes, right? It's the fabric of our lives and we can't even see it. Putting a number on it, putting a price on it, makes it real and visible. It helps me understand just how precious my time is, and how real it is, and how much value my time creates for other people and in our greater economy.



Time-pricing also helps me prioritize whether I want to give my time to that particular person or organization. So if I put a \$100 an hour value on my time (I'm just making up a number for the sake of this lesson) and I'm going to give away a time-tithe of 20 hours of time a month, that means I'm giving away \$2,000 a month. For me, that's a big chunk of money.

And that's a useful metric. If someone I don't particularly like asks me for something that's going to take 10 hours of my time (half my monthly tithe!), I can look at that and think, “wow, that's a thousand dollars. And I don't even like that person. I would *never* give them a thousand dollars.” That reframe helps me anchor in my no and decline. helps me retract my time from stupid, low-value things that are stealing time from important things.

For example, a few years ago I was spending a lot of time arguing with and defending myself against a specific person. When I put a cash value on my and counted up how much time I was spending engaging with this high-conflict person, I realized that I'd spent 11 hours defending myself across the month. That was \$1,100 I just donated to them! And yet I gave them 11 hours of my time this month. And that is ridiculous. And that has to stop. Time-pricing and applying a cash value to my time helped shock me out of that dynamic and disengage entirely. I would *never* have given that person \$1,100; so why should I give them my time (which is actually way more valuable than cash, because it is irreplaceable)?!!

Putting a price value on my time, even just theoretically, helps me figure out who I most want to invest my time in AND define who doesn't deserve it and who I would never give that amount of money to. Yes, I would give that amount of money to an organization that supports trans entrepreneurs -- so of course I'm happy to volunteer-teach a workshop there. Time-pricing helps me get really clear on my yeses or nos and use my time more effectively.

Ultimately, I'm talking about today is a reminder use the TRUEX self-coaching tool and toggle out. Toggling helps us understand *the stakes of time* and understand *the politics of time*. It helps us see that our time makes the world tick. If we're not happy with the way the world is, we can use our time strategically to grow the kinds of things we want to grow and retract our time from things that don't help create the culture we want.

So to understand where you're spending your time, I recommend getting a time app. I've recommended two in the Resource Slide. One is *toggl*. The other one is *Time Rescue*. I use toggl and track what I'm doing with my time. That's the first step towards you quantifying you time. Then you can see what needs to change -- if anything -- or you can see how brilliant you already are with time...and you can start shifting your time story and stop talking sh*t to yourself.

So first you quantify your time, and second, you price your time. Then you decide where and with whome you want to invest your time. For me, I want to invest my time in my family, in feminist entrepreneurs, in people I love, and in my neighbors. I don't want to invest at propping up school boards who use my labor to justify their austerity. I also don't want to use my time arguing with people on the internet. I don't want to use my time engaging with people whom I don't actually like. Tracking my time, time-tithing and time-pricing helped me understand, just how much I was already contributing and it's value. When I looked at how much time I'm actually investing in my community, I realized, *wow, I am doing a lot.*

That, in turn, helped me *not* overextend myself. It also helped me be more strategic about where I used my time.

Again, time-tithing is where I actually set a target for my contribution. Just someone might say, *I'm going to donate 10% of my income to charity*, we can do the same thing with our time. I looked at my working hours and I set my target contribution at 20 hours per month -- which was a lot!! -- but I actually had enough childcare, so I could make that work. Contributing your time to the community doesn't have to be mediated by formal organizations to "count". It can include mentoring or visiting with the neighbor next door. No matter what I'm doing as my contribution, I always put a number on it inside my own head, so that I can see that yes, I am investing an amount that's significant and that's consistent with my principles and my culture-making goals.

And it means that I stop overextending myself to the point that I was displacing my paid work or challenging my family bonds.

So quantifying your time in those three ways, and getting super detailed and granular about how we use our time and how we invest our time, how we retain time for ourselves helped me change my story about time. I realized that I was actually a time magician. I was already doing so much with my time. It was already brilliant with my time. My time was already having a significant impact in the world around me. And, even so, I could be strategic about how I use my time. That's what these three practices tell me and help me do.

That's my advice for you, too -- but it's not an assignment. You don't have to do it. But if you do, it actually doesn't take a lot of time. Just download an app on your phone and track how you're using your time for a week and then see 1) see how you actually use your time, and 2) how brilliant you really are with your time.

Time tracking (every once in a while), time-tithing and time-pricing have had a revolutionary impact on me. It completely changed my self conception, and it did change the way I organized my life.

So that's what I wanted to talk about this week: about how time is a feminist issue, about quantifying our time so we can really understand how deeply valuable our time is; *and how deeply valuable your time is*. Then you can be strategic with how you use it.

Thanks you for your attention today. I'll talk to you soon in our next group call!