

“Goals are about the results you want to achieve. Systems are about the processes that lead to those results.” James Clear

Could you use a little more productivity in your life? Do you wear multiple hats and can't seem to find the time to be effective at EVERYTHING? Do you have side projects and dreams that you want to achieve but they keep rolling over to the next week, next month, next year? If you answered yes to any of those questions, I encourage you to join me on a Calendar Blocking journey!

Like all of us, I am a very busy girl. :) I've always considered myself an organized individual and for the better part of the last decade, I've juggled four or more “jobs” at any given time. The last two years, however, my workload significantly increased (in the best way possible), which quickly made me realize that if I was going to stay on top of it all, continue to be a reliable employee AND pursue all my other dreams, I had to get more structured with my time management.

Before I continue, I want to share that I am writing this article based on my lifestyle and my dreams. Your calendar, priorities and goals will look very different to mine, and that's perfectly okay. A quick google search of Calendar blocking for mums, students or single dads will yield a plethora of relatable content to build upon the tips shared here. Now let's dig in!

... if it's not on the calendar, it doesn't get done.

Even though I was adamant I would never switch to a digital calendar, earlier this year I was introduced to “Calendar Blocking” and it's been game changing. I LOVE a good To Do list! I love how it feels to cross something off my list as I've accomplished something great! Too often, however, I write my To Dos in my planner and get so busy with my day that I forget to even check it. At the end of the day I realize I didn't call the bank, I didn't book that appointment and I forgot to do the laundry (again!).

Calendar blocking means putting everything (literally everything!) on your calendar which gives you an overall view of your day. When your day is laid out so clearly, it's easy to identify the moments where you can slot in different activities. If you end up with extra time, a quick glance at your week can help identify additional tasks to tackle and make the most out of your day. (Ashley, go fold your laundry!)

The best part, however, is when we can see how we are actually spending our time. This allows us to make adjustments to improve our time management (maybe we're spending too many hours watching Netflix or scrolling social media) and populate some of those precious moments with the goals and dreams we wish we had time for.

I know this sounds intense, but being habitual by nature, its mind blowing how much more effective we can be once we put our life in the calendar.

...Decide how you “To Do” and stick to it...

Whenever you have a thought, an idea or an action item - log it in a safe space straight away. I use an app called “Wunderlist” which I can access on my lap top (when I'm traveling), my

desktop (when I'm in my office), my iPhone (when I'm out and about) and my iPad (when I'm reading at night).

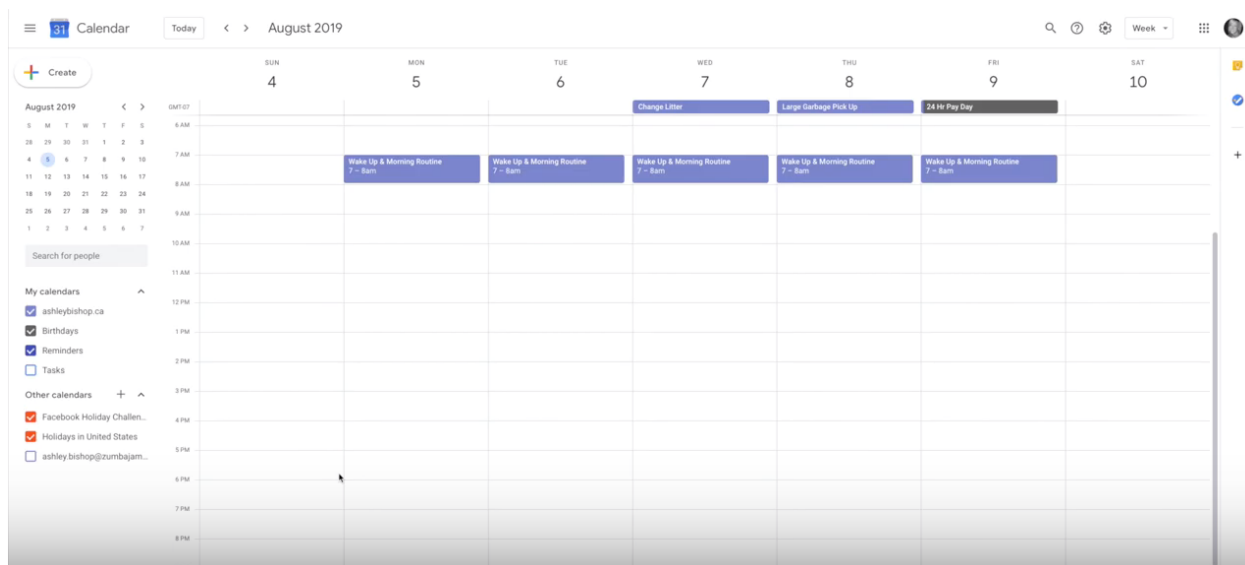
When we create an idea or remember a “To Do” and we don't put it in a safe space, our brain maintains that thought as an “open loop”. When we have many open loops, it can “fog” up our brain power and prevent us from being focused and effective. Similar to when we have too many apps open on our phones. If we can take those “open loops” and put them somewhere safe (or close the loops!), we can then free up our brain power for new ideas and improved performance!

If you're not already a To Do list type person, take a few minutes and write a list of everything you need (or want) to get done. Many people call this a “brain dump” or “download”. Things like hair, car or doctor's appointments, books you want to read, online courses you want to take, errands you have to run, projects you have to start. Everything. Once that list is done, go through it and select the top three most important tasks for that week. Highlight those three for later.

...now let's get blocking...

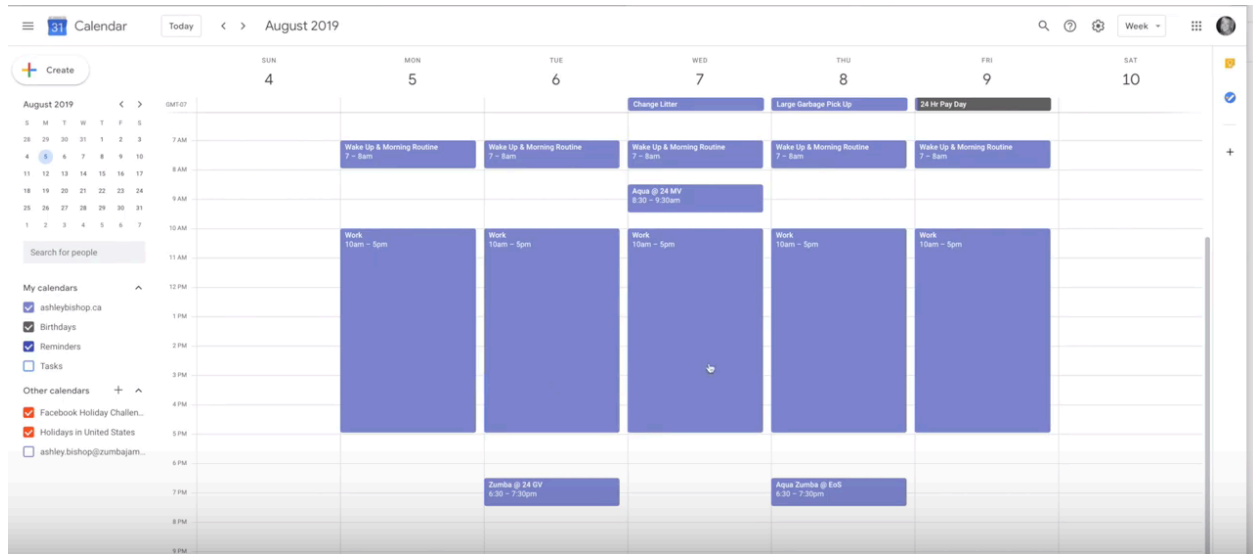
Step 1 - Identify which type of calendar you will use. Since the task of writing out my entire day, every day by hand is a little daunting (and also not easily altered) I selected my google calendar. Other options include your standard calendar on your computer or a traditional paper planner.

Step 2 - Start with what time you wake up and what time you go to be bed. Add these to your calendar and make them repeat as applicable. Eg: Wake Up @ 7am Monday - Friday



Step 3 - Add your activities that happen every week. If you have regularly scheduled weekly fitness classes, add those. If you physically leave your house for a set number of hours to go to work each day for work, add those. If you work from home, block out those hours. If you have to take your kids to school, pick up kids from school, take them to and from an extra-curricular activity, add that as well. You can also take the work portion a step further by

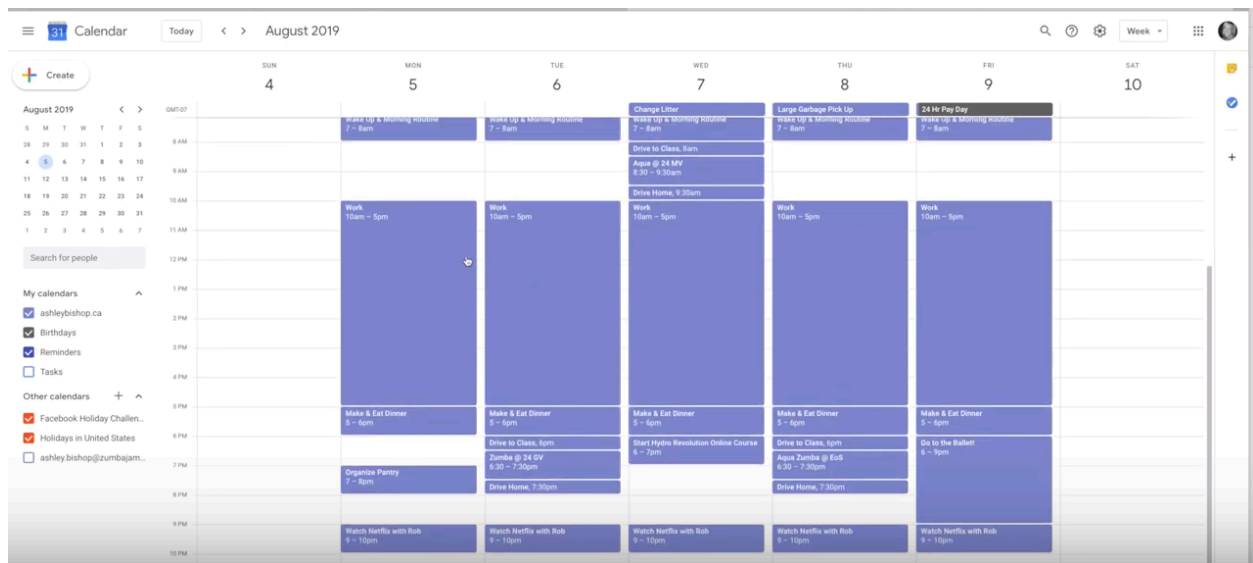
adding in your tasks at work and your major work priorities - but that is a whole other article on its own! :)



Step 4 - Block out your travel time to and from these destinations. (The 10 minutes google reminder is not enough time for me to get out of the house on time - travel time is essential!)

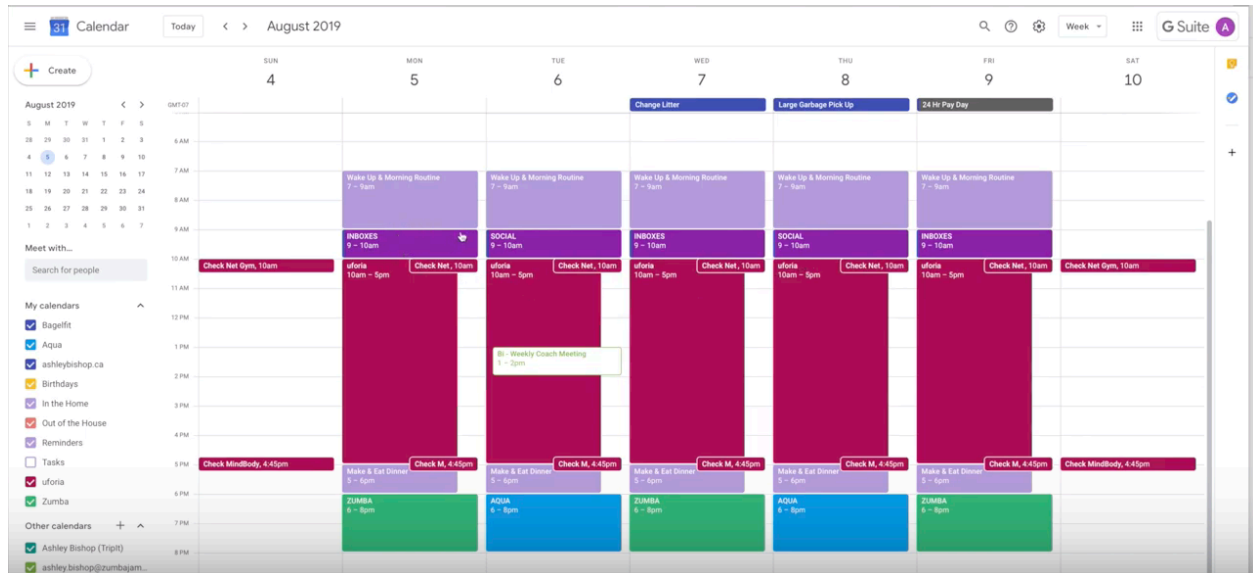
Step 5 - Block out your meals. This is one I had to force myself to do. I would fill my day from dusk until dawn with action items and forget to give myself adequate meal breaks. Try to adhere to your state laws! Give yourself breaks and eat!

Step 6 - Take a step back and marvel at your weekly life! Hopefully you will be able to see pockets of time that can be used to your benefit. Remember that list we wrote? Take those top three priority items and plug them in!



When you first implement calendar blocking, give yourself a good hour to set up your baseline.

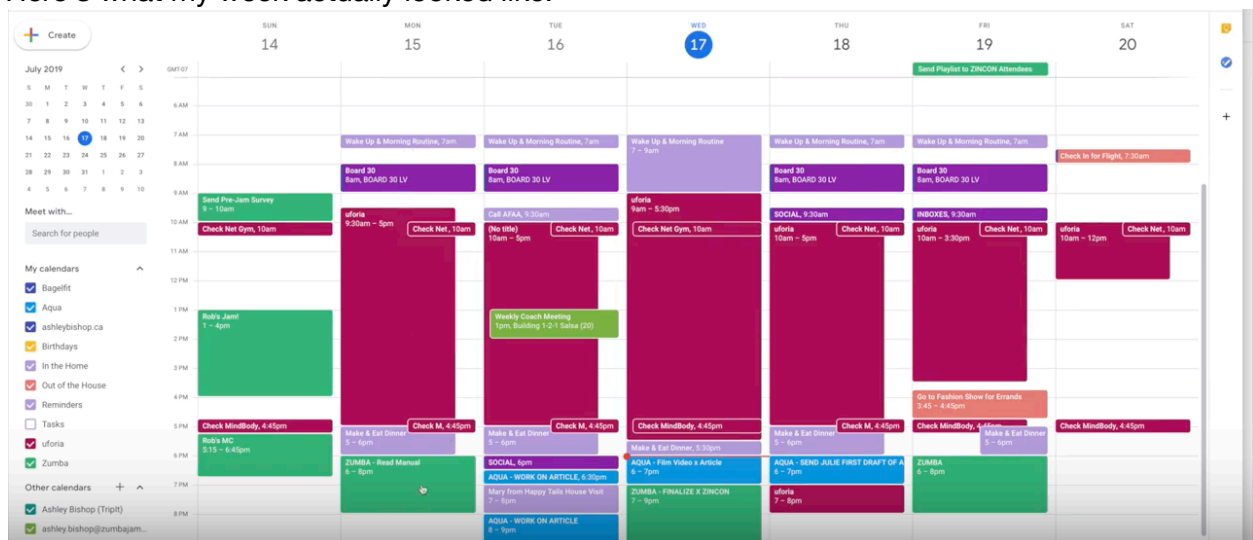
Here’s what my baseline looks like:



From there, pick a day each week (I usually do Sunday evenings) for your “Weekly Reset”. This means looking at what worked the week prior, what didn’t, create a new To Do list and calendar block the next week. Day to day, you will have changes and that’s okay. The unique thing about working off a calendar blocking system is nothing is really set in stone. If something came up, you can adjust and move on. If you can trust that your “To Do’s get added to your calendar every week, your eyes will be on it and it’s likely going to get done.

...when things don’t get done

Here’s what my week actually looked like:



If you get invited to a movie on Monday night but had intended on cleaning out the pantry, a quick glance at your calendar will show when the next slot is available, and you simply drag and drop that block to that time. No problem.

That being said, if you notice you keep moving the same action item day after day, you might want to look a little closer and figure out why. Are you putting it off? Is it actually not important? Can it be delegated?

Here are my top five favorite things about Calendar Blocking. (Note: I leverage technology to aid with my productivity. You do not need to own an apple watch or have all your calendars synced to your devices for this to be helpful. Find out what works for you and run with it.)

1 - By using an online calendar, you can sync up multiple email accounts and calendar invites into one master calendar.

2 - If you wear a smart watch, you can see the same calendar on your wrist and know exactly what's next in your day no matter what you're doing.

3 - You can set notifications ten minutes before what's next on the calendar. These can pop up on your desktop, on your phone and on your watch. Very helpful if you constantly get "lost" in projects - like me!

*note: a 10-minute reminder is also PLENTY of time to get yourself "camera ready" if you have a video meeting. ;)

4 - When you have calendar blocked your week with your top priorities, it makes it much easier to say "no" to those invites and tasks that may derail you from your goals.

5 - There is an undeniable sense of peace and clarity when you can see your entire week a glance. You can identify where there's room for improvement, assign priority to your daily tasks and feel confident that you're spending your time not only effectively, but in a way to help you complete your responsibilities and tackle your personal goals.

By combing calendar blocking with my paper planner, I've been able to finally start cracking the code on my personal work life balance. I'd love to hear how calendar blocking works for you and other productivity tips you've found successful! I've also created this short video tutorial to help bring the steps listed above to life. Enjoy and happy planning!

<https://youtu.be/kuFbrsvyPI8>

Resources:

Allen, David. *Getting Things Done*. 6th Edition. Penguin Books, New York, NY, 2015

Clear, James. *Atomic Habits*. 2nd Edition. Penguin Books, New York, NY 2018

Declair, Guillaume., Dinh, Bat and Dumont, Jerome. *The 25th Hour*. 1st Edition. Declair - Dinh, Dumont. 2018

Elrod, Hal. *The Miracle Morning*. 1st Edition. 2017

Landino, A. [Amy Landino]. (2018.05.13). Get More Done With Calendar Blocking.