



# slack

# VARIETY PACK

Episode 25: Booster Pack

Speaker 1: You are listening to the Slack-

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Speaker 3: All kinds of people on all kinds of teams use Slack to do amazing things.

Host: Greetings, and welcome to the Slack Variety Pack. We're calling this episode The Booster Pack. That's because it's packed full of great information that'll boost your work and your life, like a manual full of tips and tricks. We figure out the best way to multitask.

Kelly Garner: We would do better to stop perpetuating the myth that multitasking is always going to lead to greater productivity.

Host: We learn how to hack your business travel for some great results.

Tyler Dikman: We got \$4,000 in vouchers, \$1,000 a person, and on top of that we were able to get them to give us business class.

Host: First up, habits. They're powerful and they play a big role in our lives. Here's how to reign them in to work for you.

Reporter 1: Gretchen Rubin is a speaker, podcaster, and author of several bestselling books, including "The Happiness Project" and "Happier at Home". When she was researching the subject of happiness, she noticed a common pattern with the people she was talking to. The people who were facing a happiness challenge most often pointed to a habit as the obstacle.

Gretchen Rubin: It turns out that habits are like the invisible architecture of everyday life. Research suggests that up to 40% of our daily lives are shaped by our habits. If our habits work for us, we're much more likely to be happier, healthier, more productive, more creative. If our habits don't work for us, it's just going to be a much bigger challenge.

Habits are energizing and freeing, because they put behavior on autopilot so we don't have to use control, we don't have to use our willpower, it just happens. They're a really powerful tool for us, because they do play such a big role in our everyday lives. If we change our habits, we can change our lives. We can change our present, and also our future.

Reporter 1: Gretchen wrote a book all about habits called "Better Than Before". It explains how to build and keep the good habits, and how to break the bad ones. We've all tried to break bad habits, and it's tough to do. Think of all those broken New Year's resolutions. According to Gretchen, changing your habits successfully might be all in your approach.

Gretchen Rubin: What I find is that the person has tried to change the habit by doing something in the way they're told they should be able to do it. "You should be able to get up early and go for a run before work. You should be able to give up sugar altogether. You should be able to work on your PhD thesis for three hours a day every single day." What I found is that people are very different from each other, and if you begin by saying, "What's true for me? When do I do my best work? When have I succeeded in the past?" Then you can set up the habit in a way that's going to work for you, because the fact is if you're a hardcore night person who's at your most productive, creative, and energetic later in the day, the idea that you're going to get up early and work on a novel or go for a run before work is not likely to work for you. Not because it's not a good idea for somebody, but it's not a good idea for you.

If you keep trying and failing with a habit, I'd say try it a different way. There's a lot of ways to form good habits, and maybe if you set it up a different way you'd have more success.

Reporter 1: When it comes to your work habits, Gretchen says it's important to understand how different people do their best work.

Gretchen Rubin: There's marathoners and sprinters. This is something that comes up a lot in the workplace, because it has to do with your habits of work pace. Marathoners are people who, if they have a deadline they start early, they do a little bit of work each day over a long period. They're like running a marathon. They cushion up against the deadline. They feel like that's how they do their most creative and productive work.

Sprinters like to sprint. They like to be right up against the deadline, they like the adrenaline of the timeline coming down on them. They like to work long and intensely. They feel like that's how they do their best work. My sister had this as a television writer. She worked for a boss who was a sprinter, and he believed everybody did their best work sprinting, but she's a natural marathoner, so it made her crazy to have to work at the last minute like this. He thought that was how people did their best work. When you're working with other people, it's helpful to know that different people have different work styles.

Reporter 1: Yet despite our best efforts to change our habits and keep the good ones, we're human. We like to make compromises with ourselves and convince ourselves it's not a big deal if we cheat a little. Gretchen calls these little cheats "loopholes".

Gretchen Rubin: Loopholes are so funny. There are ten categories of loopholes, and these are all the loopholes that we invoke to let ourselves off the hook. We say, "Oh yeah, I'm totally committed to my good habit, except that ... Oh, it's my birthday. I'm on vacation. It's going to hurt your feelings if I don't indulge. Life's too short not to do this. You only live once. I've been so good up to now, I deserve a break. I'm going to be so good tomorrow, I don't need to worry about being good today." We're these incredibly ingenious advocates for ourselves. Once you know them, it's much easier to resist them. For instance, if you keep saying to yourself, "Well, I can't make any progress writing my report unless I have three solid hours to work in." Okay, that's a questionable assumption. Is it really true that you cannot make any progress on that report unless you have three solid hours? I don't know. Maybe so, but it sounds like a questionable assumption to me.

There's the false choice loophole, that's my favorite loophole. "I'm so busy writing I have no time to go to the dentist." Really? Are you really that busy? I don't think so. These come up all the time at work, at home, but once you're aware of them, and most of us have our favorites. Once you're aware of your favorite that you keep going to, your go-to loophole, then you can remind yourself, "Okay, do I really want to invoke this loophole or do I want to stick to my good habit? What over all is going to make me happier?" Usually you're happier if you stick to your good habit.

Reporter 1: Gretchen created a framework that categorizes people by the way they form habits. She calls them "tendencies".

Gretchen Rubin: It matters a lot what your tendency is when you're trying to figure out how to help yourself or help somebody else do a better job of sticking to a habit. It has to do with how you respond to an expectation, whether that's an outer expectation like a work deadline or an inner expectation like trying to keep a New Year's resolution.

Upholders readily meet outer and inner expectations alike. They meet a work deadline, they keep a New Year's resolution without much fuss. Next are questioners. Questioners question all expectations. They'll do something if they think it makes sense. Their first question is, "Why would I listen to you anyway?" Once they buy into an expectation, once they accept it as justified, they'll do it, but until that point they won't do it.

Then obligers. Obligers readily meet outer expectations, but they struggle to meet inner expectations. This is somebody who always meets a work deadline, but then can't get back into yoga. I have to say this is the biggest tendency. This is the category that most people fit into. Then there's rebels. They reject outer and inner expectations. They just want to be the boss of themselves. Those four tendencies explain a lot about patterns that you see in habit formation.

Reporter 1: We're sometimes oblivious to the fact that our own habits drive other people crazy at work and at home. Forget nagging, it never works. Gretchen explains that techniques to change other people's habits have a lot to do with being aware of their tendency.

Gretchen Rubin: One of the things is to try to identify the person's tendency. For the most part, people are questioners or obligers. If it's a questioner and you want them to change a habit, you really need to explain the reason. If you're at work, it's not enough to just say, "Hey man, can't you come in on time?" Say, "It matters to me that you don't come in on time, because when you're not in on time then the staff meeting can't start, and if the staff meeting can't start then everybody's schedule gets thrown off, because while you don't have a lot of appointments, many people have very, very tight schedules. If something slips first thing in the morning, that makes it very inconvenient for everyone else." That's a reason.

For an obliger, the answer is to give them outer accountability. One way this comes up at work is that people who aren't obligers often don't need accountability, and so they don't readily give it to obligers even if obligers ask for it. For instance, I know somebody who, she's an obliger who has an upholder boss and she said, "My boss keeps saying things like, "Whenever you get a little bit of down time, would you do XYZ?" She's like, "That doesn't work for me. I need a deadline. I need to know you're looking over my shoulder. If you just lob that out at me, it's not going to get done. You need to give me more accountability."

Reporter 1: You have set yourself an objective to finish a task as a way to build a good habit, but Gretchen doesn't think that's such a smart idea. Surprisingly, working towards an end goal may not be the most effective way to instill a good habit.

Gretchen Rubin: People often think that working towards a finish line is a good way to get themselves to instill a habit. For instance, a person who's trying to get the habit of exercise might run the marathon, or a person who's trying to get in the habit of regular writing might do NaNoWriMo. What I found over and over is that when you hit a finish line, you're finished, and if you keep going you're going to have to start over, and starting over is hard. With habits it's better to think about milestones. It's an exciting milestone to run the marathon. It's an exciting milestone to write a novel in a month, but that's just one of many milestones that you would pass on your way to good habits.

Reporter 1: You've changed your bad habits, you've taken on positive habits, and you're feeling pretty good about yourself, until you fail of course. How do you make sure your good habits last? Gretchen has one more great tip for us from her book, "Better than before."

Gretchen Rubin: One of the strategies that can be very helpful when you're trying to make sure that you hang onto a good habit once you've formed it is the strategy of safeguards. The strategy of safeguards is that we should plan to fail. That sounds fatalistic, but really most of us slip up from time to time, and the question is, how do you fail small instead of failing big? How do you learn from your mistakes? How do you get back in the saddle? One mistake people often make when they're trying to really solidify a good habit is they think if they really beat themselves up if they make a mistake that that's going to energize them to stick to their habits better. In fact, research shows that people who show compassion to themselves are much more likely to try again and to fail small. People who say to themselves things like, "Well, we've all done it," or, "I learned my lesson that time," or, "I'm going to do better tomorrow," and really try to learn from what the challenge was, then they do better.

Speaker 1: Slack: Work, life, balance.

Channel Change Multitasking Channel.

Host: If you've been to a symphony, you may have noticed the flurry of activity the conductor does onstage. It's a bit mesmerizing to watch such masterful multitasking, but as we hear in our next story, maybe what they've really mastered is the art of the quick switch.

Pete Nowlen: When I conduct, this is what goes through my head is, some derivation of, "One and two and three and four and a-one-y and a-two-y and a-three-y and a-four-y and a-one and a-two and a-three and a-four ... "

Reporter 2: That's Pete Nowlen. He's been conducting orchestras, choirs, and operas for thirty years. The voice in his head plays double dutch during performances and rehearsals.

Pete Nowlen: It's a very divided mind. It's comparing the ideal image I have for this given moment of music with what I'm hearing.

Reporter 2: Pete's arms are really busy too, and equipped with a decisive baton.

Pete Nowlen: You would make a change in your baton if, say, you wanted the notes to be more connected, if they were to be playing like [sound 00:12:41] and you wanted [sound 00:12:43], then you'd just move your baton sideways more and less up and down, and there's certain gestures, and everybody knows those. If you want it softer, a downward gesture and smaller conducting. If you want it louder, the opposite.

Reporter 2: While Pete's changing the pace of his baton, he's scanning the sheet music. He's keeping track of the musicians in the different sections. He's feeling out the audience. One could say Pete is a master of multitasking, if that were really a thing.

Kelly Garner: We still don't know whether we can multitask per se. Are we multitasking when we do two things at a time, or are we switching rapidly between two tasks? The jury's still out on that.

Reporter 2: Kelly Garner is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham. She specializes in the cognitive neuroscience of learning.

Kelly Garner: Regardless of whether we're multitasking or task switching, it's highly probable that it's going to impact upon performance.

Reporter 2: Multitasking is tough on the brain for lots of reasons. Our brains have to work double time to separate each unique task, and then make them happen at what appears to be the same time.

Don Hodges: My understanding is that we don't really do two conscious things at the same time. What we're really doing is two disparate actions, for example looking at the musical score and hearing the sounds, those can be fused as a single action.

- Reporter 2: Don Hodges is of the school that multitasking isn't really multitasking. What we're actually doing is quick mono-task switching. Don is the director of the Music Research Institute at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He's found that the best multitaskers can switch from task to task within an eighth of a second. But you don't need to be a musical genius to do that, you just need to commit to Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000 hour rule that practice makes perfect.
- Don Hodges: Just as I could not spend a weekend and become a brain surgeon overnight, you can't stand in front of a symphony orchestra and conduct. Let's take Daniel Barenboim, who conducted the Chicago Symphony for many, many years. He started playing the piano when he was very young, about three or four years old, and really didn't get into conducting until quite a bit later. If you're looking at a fifty year old conductor he's probably spent more than forty years, maybe forty-five years, musically trained in such a way that this is not an overnight success.
- Reporter 2: But practice doesn't always make perfect. Our brains host multiple networks that input and output information, but there are genetic limitations. Some people's brains just aren't as open to multitasking as others.
- Kelly Garner: As you continue through the lifespan, so as you get older, people are less good at multitasking. We also know that people who have various diseases or mental disorders will have difficulties multitasking.
- Reporter 2: Neuroscientist Kelly Garner thinks you can build your multitasking muscles and exercise them like other muscles. Some tasks are easier to multitask, others not so much, maybe not ever.
- Kelly Garner: If you're going to multitask, you want to restrict it to behaviors where you're not going to need flexibility and you're not going to need to adapt your behavior very quickly in the current circumstance, and not anything where you're going to have to give it deep thought. Anything where you want creativity or focus or in-depth analysis, that's just not going to be amenable to most tasking.
- Reporter 2: For those of you who think you're great at multitasking, be warned. The more you do it, the less you'll reap the rewards.



Kelly Garner: We would do better to stop perpetuating the myth that multitasking is always going to lead to greater productivity, because it's only going to lead to greater productivity on some kinds of things. People who multitask more often tend to report more susceptibility to distraction. If you're always engaged in this desire to multitask, then you're not going to filter out other information so much because it could be a potential cue to another task that you can start doing.

Reporter 2: Kelly recommends focusing on one task for every hour you practice multitasking. We've all been hardwired to do solo and multiple tasks. Really, that's how we've been able to survive as a species. Having the brain flexibility to do both is what makes us innovative, creative, and human. As for conductor Pete Nowlen, being a master multitasker means knowing how to filter out the unimportant stuff.

Pete Nowlen: I remember reading an article about quarterbacks and conductors years ago, and the idea that some of the way your brain works for the best in those two fields are very similar in that you have to be able to take in a great deal of information and still find your place in it and find the right direction to go. I thought that was kind of revealing.

Speaker 1: Slack: Your team's collective brain.

Channel Change: Travel Channel.

Reporter 2: You read about them every once in a while, those people who figured out how to work those travel perks and rewards to get the best flight deals. How do they do it? Well, let's pull back that curtain and find out.

Tyler Dikman: I've flown close to two million miles at this point. I'm in my early thirties, so I've certainly experienced almost every aircraft across almost every major airline, with the exception of a few of those African carriers and some of those regional Asian carriers. You might find me in Rio for the weekend or in Hong Kong for a couple of days, or anywhere in between.

Reporter 2: That's Tyler Dikman, CEO of LoungeBuddy, an app that helps travelers access VIP lounges in airports around the world. Tyler lives and breathes travel. He's traveled so much he knows all the tricks in the books to get the best travel experience, and the best deals. Tyler loves hacking business travel. In fact, his love affair with travel deals started at a very young age.

Tyler Dikman: When I was thirteen years old we took our first international trip. That was actually the first time where I was able to negotiate a bump for our entire family. Bumping is one of those really great opportunities where you can score big and almost pay for another trip. There were a family of four of us and we were headed from Miami to Madrid during Easter week. Not a single person was going to give up their seat, so I walked up to the gate agent and asked them what they were offering, and they said \$500 per person, in a voucher of course. They said they'd put us on a flight the next day. I went back to the family and asked them and they said they were okay with it, but I knew that no one else was volunteering. They said, "Okay, look, what do you want?" I said, "\$1,000 sounds nice." We got \$4,000 in vouchers, \$1,000 a person, and on top of that we were able to get them to give us business class.

Reporter 2: Tyler was hooked. Since that first success, he's mastered the art of upgrading, credit card perks, frequent flyer miles, and redeeming points. He knows the best times to book travel and the best flights to take. He's sharing some of his wisdom with us here.

First, getting bumped from a flight. It worked for him and his family, but does it work for everyone?

Tyler Dikman: Say yes to bumps is a really nice thing if you have flexibility, and that's one of the things you've got to be a little bit careful of, because once you have signed away your ticket on a specific flight, that means whatever they put you on you have to accept. It's really important to understand what your alternative options are when you are putting yourself in a bump situation.

Reporter 2: Next up, frequent flyer miles. What are the best ways to take advantage of them?

Tyler Dikman: Airlines literally print money when it comes to frequent flyer miles, and as long as you learn how to "play the game" then you can really benefit from it. For a typical traveler the best way to play that game is by signing up for a mileage-earning credit card that offers a large sign-up bonus. It's really important to remember that if you're not good with managing your financials that you should not play this game, because if you carry a balance, the interest that you'll pay will far exceed the benefits that you'll have.

Reporter 2: Does Tyler really know what he's talking about? Well listen to this.

Tyler Dikman: Oftentimes people only assume that the miles or points that you have can be redeemed for that particular carrier, and in reality you've got to look at the partners. One of my favorite awards is by Alaska Airlines, and they have a great partnership with Emirates. What this partnership allows you to do is redeem your Alaska Airlines miles for flying to Dubai or beyond. Their first-class are those suites, those private rooms on the plane that also have showers on board, that have effectively what you'd call butler service, and of course all of the most amazing food and beverage you would ever imagine on an airplane.

If you sign up for an Alaska Airlines credit card and/or transfer points or miles from some other perk program you might have, it's much closer to within reach than people think. My last trip to Hong Kong via Dubai was something along the lines of 100,000 miles plus a whopping seven US dollars.

Reporter 2: Seriously, seven bucks? That's nuts. Yet this incredible experience leaves him wanting.

Tyler Dikman: The reason it's such a terrible thing is when you realize that you're not going to get this on every single flight. When you're looking around and you're saying to yourself, "I'm actually on an airplane right now, and I'm looking forward to the next sixteen hours of being on this metal tube because I am being bathed in luxury. I know the next time I get on a plane that I'm not sitting up here, I'm going to realize what I don't have and not be too happy about it."

Reporter 2: In the bumping and standby game, LoungeBuddy's Tyler Dikman has dealt with hundreds of gate agents. His advice to get them on your side is simple, but one we tend to forget.

Tyler Dikman: Don't be a jerk. I mean, I think that's one of the big things. These gate agents particularly deal with so much stuff, and 95% of the time it is not their fault. Be that extra-nice person, say, "Hey, I'm just standing right over here on the side, if you need my seat, just let me know." If they can't do it they'll say no, but if you don't ask, you'll never know.

Reporter 2: As for the best time of day for the cheapest flight ...

Tyler Dikman: Sometimes the last flight out on that given day can sometimes be the least expensive flight. If you were thinking about flying back at 5PM and there's a 9PM flight that's \$200 less expensive, book that flight, get to the airport at 4PM or 3PM if you can, and then ask to stand by onto that earlier flight. If they have an extra seat most carriers, not all, but most carriers will allow you to stand by, and if that seat opens up then you can get right onto that flight and not pay any difference in fare.

Reporter 2: Finally, Tyler shares his hack for finding a cheaper flight. Careful though, airlines might cancel your frequent flyer account if you do this too often.

Tyler Dikman: If you are going to, say, from San Francisco to Philadelphia, airlines have certain competitive routes with other carriers. Their hub might be in the city that you actually want to go to, so by actually booking a ticket, a one-way ticket that goes from San Francisco to Buffalo and stops in Philadelphia, then you can end up saving a lot of money. You get off the plane and never board the second leg of the flight. However, you cannot do this as a return ticket because they will cancel all the legs of the rest of your journey if you don't show up for that next flight.

Reporter 2: Tyler's accumulated some great travel stories as much as he's accumulated air miles, but his favorite story stands apart from the rest.

Tyler Dikman: I think the ultimate travel story for me was actually when I crossed a million miles on United. I was flying from Washington DC to San Francisco, and as I boarded the flight I had, in my pocket and in my backpack, because I couldn't fit them all in my pocket, 300 drink vouchers that I had amassed over the years. At the time, there was no expiration date, and so when I gave them to the flight attendant I said, "I'm buying drinks for everybody, as many as people want. This flight's on me."

Host: Slack Variety Pack. Tweet us your travel hack at @SlackHQ.

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Speaker 2: Slack Variety Pack.

Speaker 3: All kinds of teams use Slack to do amazing things.