Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

A tongue-in-cheek guide series ;)

I'll Be There in Five Minutes. Meaning Twenty

How to Stop Being Late, Plan Your Departures Realistically, and Leave Yourself a Time Buffer Without Setting Five Fake Alarms



We've got a problem. But relax.
It can be solved—and we'll even have something to laugh about.

I’ll Be There in Five Minutes. Meaning Twenty

How to Stop Being Late, Plan Your Departures Realistically, and Leave Yourself a Time Buffer Without Setting Five Fake Alarms

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INTRO

It is 7:38. You need to leave at 7:45. On paper, this is excellent news. You are dressed. Your shoes are by the door. Your bag is almost packed. You have seven whole minutes, which in your personal accounting system is practically a sabbatical.

Then you notice your phone is at 12 percent.

Fine. Plug it in for a minute.

While it is charging, you may as well fill your water bottle. On the way to the kitchen, you spot the mug from last night. You carry it to the sink because apparently this is the exact moment your domestic standards have decided to return from vacation. Then you remember you need your headphones. They are not where they should be. You check the desk, the sofa, the bedroom, and one jacket pocket that has not contained anything useful since February.

It is 7:44.

Still fine.

You are basically leaving.

You go to the bathroom because leaving the house without suddenly needing the bathroom would be suspiciously efficient. While washing your hands, you look in the mirror and discover that your hair has developed a small but determined political movement on the left side. You fix it. Then you go back for the phone, unplug it at a triumphant 16 percent, put on your coat, and reach for your keys.

No keys.

At 7:52 you send a message.

"Leaving now."

This sentence belongs in the fantasy section.

"Leaving now" can mean many things. It can mean "my body is moving toward the door." It can also mean "I have emotionally accepted that I will eventually leave this building." Sometimes it means "I am currently standing in one sock while looking for a charger, but I would prefer not to discuss the details."

If you are regularly five, ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes late, you probably know this feeling extremely well. You did not decide to be late. You did not wake up thinking, "Whose afternoon can I make slightly worse today?" In fact, you may care a lot about being on time. You may genuinely intend to arrive early. You may even feel deeply confident about it right up until the moment reality presents you with a receipt.

The problem is rarely that you cannot read a clock.

You know what time the meeting starts.

You know what time the train leaves.

You know dinner is at seven.

What often goes wrong is everything around that time.

We are surprisingly good at estimating the visible part of an activity and ignoring the invisible parts around it. The drive takes twenty minutes, so we allow twenty minutes. The shower takes ten minutes, so we start it ten minutes before we need to be ready. Getting dressed takes five minutes, assuming the clothes are clean, easy to find, appropriate for the weather, fit the mood, and do not suddenly make you look in the mirror and think, "Absolutely not. Who is this regional sales manager from 2009?"

Real life is full of little transition costs that do not feel like time until they pile up.

Walking downstairs.

Waiting for the elevator.

Finding parking.

Going back for the thing you forgot.

Locking the door.

Checking the address.

Standing behind someone who has chosen the exact moment you are late to rediscover every feature of the ticket machine.

None of these things is dramatic. That is why they are dangerous.

A twelve-minute delay rarely arrives wearing a badge that says TWELVE-MINUTE DELAY. It usually arrives disguised as six harmless two-minute tasks.

This is also why setting five fake alarms often fails.

The first alarm says, "Start getting ready."

You ignore it because you deliberately set it early.

The second says, "Seriously, start getting ready."

You know there is another one coming.

The third says, "You should probably move."

The fourth says, "MOVE."

By the fifth, labeled something like LEAVE NOW!!!, you are brushing your teeth while pulling on trousers and developing a personal grudge against time itself.

The alarms worked perfectly.

You trained yourself not to believe them.

The same thing happens when you move your clocks forward. For about two days, 8:10 creates a useful moment of panic. Then your brain calmly responds, "Relax. It is really 8:03." Congratulations. You have created a clock that requires arithmetic.

Or perhaps you try the opposite strategy: giving yourself huge amounts of extra time. You have an hour before you need to leave. Wonderful. So you wash a cup, reply to a message, reorganize a drawer, look up whether avocados can be frozen, and somehow, with nine minutes remaining, you are standing in the bedroom wondering where your other shoe is.

Extra time is not automatically protected time.

If you do not know what it is for, small tasks will move into it immediately and begin paying no rent.

This book is not going to turn you into the kind of person who arrives forty-five minutes early for a haircut and sits outside while the salon is still receiving its morning deliveries. That is not the goal. You do not need to replace chronic lateness with a new hobby called waiting in parking lots.

The goal is simpler: to understand what your departures actually cost in time, to plan using reality instead of your most optimistic personal mythology, and to leave enough room for normal life to happen without every red light becoming a personal attack.

You will learn to separate the official time of an event from the time your own process needs to begin. You will get better at noticing which parts of your routine routinely expand, which tasks should never be started just before

leaving, and why "I only need five minutes" is so often less a measurement and more a creative writing exercise.

More importantly, you will build ways to handle the days when the plan goes wrong.

Because it will.

A system that works only when the elevator arrives immediately, your child cooperates, the traffic is light, the printer has paper, your partner is already dressed, and your keys remain where you left them is not a system.

It is a weather-dependent miracle.

A useful system needs a minimum version for tired days and a Plan B for messy ones. It should still help when work runs late, when you slept badly, when someone calls at the wrong moment, when you suddenly need to scrape ice off the windshield, or when you are already behind and have to decide what gets dropped instead of trying to perform thirty minutes of life in twelve.

The first practical move is deliberately small.

For your next few departures, do not even try to improve anything yet. Just notice one gap: the difference between the time you thought you would leave and the time you physically crossed the door.

Planned departure: 5:30.

Actual departure: 5:43.

That thirteen-minute gap is useful information.

Do not turn it into a character assessment. Do not stand in the hallway whispering, "This is who I am now." You are not gathering evidence for a criminal trial. You are finding out where the clock in your head and the clock on the wall stop agreeing.

Once you can see the gap, you can work with it.

You can discover whether it comes from underestimating preparation, starting one last task, looking for things, refusing to arrive early, squeezing commitments too close together, or repeatedly assuming that your fastest-ever travel time is your normal travel time.

And once you know that, something surprisingly pleasant starts to happen.

You stop racing the clock quite so often.

You stop sending messages that contain the phrase "almost there" while still inside your home.

You stop treating every journey like the final round of a game show called Can This Adult Put On a Coat Before the Taxi Cancels?

Most of all, you stop needing time to behave differently.

You start planning for the time you actually have.

Which is useful, because despite years of negotiations, minutes remain extremely stubborn about having sixty seconds each.

Chapter 1 - The Appointment Time Is Not Your Departure Time

At 2:43 p.m., you have an appointment at 3:00. The office is twelve minutes away. This is, according to the highly respected mathematics department inside your head, excellent news.

Twelve minutes of travel plus seventeen minutes available equals five spare minutes. Possibly even enough to make tea.

You do not make tea, because you are trying to become a serious person. Instead, you decide to put a few dishes into the dishwasher. This takes almost no time. While doing that, you notice the recycling bag is full, so you tie it up because you are already standing there. Then you remember the document you need is still on the printer upstairs.

2:49.

Still fine.

You grab the document, put on your shoes, realize one lace is trying to leave the shoe entirely, fix it, pick up your coat, and step outside.

2:53.

Plenty of time.

The car is at the far end of the parking lot because last night you arrived home during the municipal festival of Everybody Park Wherever Physics Allows. You walk over, get in, connect your phone, wait for the navigation app to wake up, and reverse out.

2:57.