WOODS: I have been wanting to have a productivity person on the show for some time because, for one thing, I could benefit from it myself. For another, I think my listeners could benefit from it, but for a third thing, my listeners, I think, think I am a productivity expert because they look at my output, and they say, he must be super-efficient. He must have some kind of secret, and I have to admit that maybe this one episode. This is episode 376. I might be doing a little bit of clickbait because I am calling this episode "My Productivity Secret," and I have already revealed to you what my productivity secret is. Let me tell them. My productivity secret is work myself to death, don't sleep enough, be a wreck, be miserable all the time, sacrifice everything that's meaningful to you, and then you do get an awful lot done, but I have a feeling that's not the right approach.

You have a system and a book called *Less Doing, More Living.* Give me the basic overview of what I am doing wrong.

MEISEL: (laughs) I love that as an intro. Okay, well, you know, it's funny because—I'll answer your question, but I tend to deal with people who are very high performers. I certainly deal with the people who are like, I am just totally overwhelmed, I have no idea what I am doing, I need help. But I also have the people who are like, I have so much going on, I am getting all this stuff done, but I want to do more, and it's interesting at different ends of the spectrum. So you're the guy who has got a lot of crazy stuff going on, but you're still getting so much done that it's almost hard for me to want to help you because I don't want to mess up a good thing in some ways, do you know what I mean?

WOODS: That's true, but yet, on the other hand, it can't be a good thing.

MEISEL: Right.

WOODS: I have got to figure out, first of all, not every project in the world has to be done by me. Other people can do things. But secondly, even though I do produce a lot, I still feel like I am extremely inefficient with my time. I am not a good time manager. I blow a lot of time on

social media or checking download figures on the podcast. If I looked over my daily expenditure of time, I think I would be embarrassed to look at it.

MEISEL: Yeah, so that's a good point, and an inbox is really interesting window into somebody's soul as far as I am concerned. So first of all, you want to know what less doing is, really. So less doing is a system of productivity that I created in order to deal with the stresses that were actually killing me because I had Crohn's disease, which is a chronic inflammatory condition that affects the digestive tract, and it is very, very highly linked to stress. So basically, I felt I had figured out the nutrition and the supplements and all that stuff, and there was still this big thing of stress that was just killing me, so that was my response was to create a new system of productivity. And the whole idea of less doing is to optimize, automate, and outsource everything in your life, and it's very important to understand that framework in that order because anybody can outsource anything nowadays. It's very easy and very cheap to outsource all sorts of things, whether it's somebody doing financial reports to you or designing websites or somebody who walks your dog. That is also outsourcing. But the problem is that a lot of people go to outsourcing first.

That's the first step they make, and that's a bad approach because, first of all, it doesn't only distance you from the problem, but it can actually make it a more complex problem because you're not really identifying what you should be doing better. So my process tells people to optimize first, and what that means is that you really need to take a hard look at what you're doing and how you're spending your time, and that may sound very basic, but the truth is that we have these two systems of our brain as defined by Daniel Khaneman, who wrote *Thinking Fast, Thinking Slow*. We have the autopilot mode, and then we have the more analytical one, and the thing is the autopilot is great because we don't have to waste a lot of energy, but the problem is that it makes it so that we just do things without ever trying to think about how we can do them better. So a really good example, which will actually take you through the whole thing of *Optimize, Automate, Outsource* is paying a bill. So everybody I assume has had an experience paying a bill at one time or another, and the average number of steps required to pay a bill is 27.

Now, that's my own research, but I've seen that in a number of cases, and that may sound crazy, but if you really think about because if I ask you right now, you know, how do you pay a bill? You probably just tell me, oh, well I just go to the bank website and pay it, and that's it. And you have like three things that you do. But the truth is that it's more than that. You go to the banking website. You log in. You go to the payee website. Is the payee already there? If they are not, then you have to add them, and this is the process. This is the account that you like to use. This is the dates that you like to send these types of payment, so on and so forth. Very quickly it gets to 27 steps, and you can write those all out as a really nice checklist, and the cool thing about that as far as optimization is that you look at that, and you can immediately without any other skill set or any other knowledge say, okay, well, I can see from writing this down now that there is a couple of steps here that are redundant, and there's actually kind of a

hole here between 14 and 15. It doesn't really make sense. So you get it down to 22 steps, and that's great.

So what you've done right there is that you've already optimized the process by about 20%, and you now have a checklist that you can follow to make sure that you do it as efficiently as possible. And if that sounds ridiculous, pilots who have flown thousands and thousands of hours, and doctors who have performed surgeries hundreds of times still use checklists because it makes it so that they don't produce errors. So you have that optimization at 22 steps. Now, you want to look at automation, and when I talk about automation, I really mean get in the mode of what can I put in place so that I can set it and forget it, and is it people? Not usually, but it can be. Is it filters? Is it processes? Is it systems? Is it software? Whatever it might be. Things that you can do to automate steps in your process.

So take those 22 steps, and it's like one of those steps is that every time I pay a bill I also have to scan it and then I put it into my Evernote, and then I also send it to my accountant. Oh, well, there is something called Zappier.com, which can automatically see that you've put a new file in your accounting folder or your invoice folder, and it will automatically convert that to a PDF, send it to your accountant, and put it in Evernote for you. You just took away three steps and so on and so forth, and you get down to 14 steps, and now you're in bliss, and things are going really well, and that's the first time that you should ever look at outsourcing it to a specialist or a generalist.

Once you've optimized everything and automated everything else, if there is anything left over, that's when you look at how you can have somebody else do this for you. So then you send that 14-step process to a virtual assistant, and they write back immediately and say, I am really sorry sir, but I don't understand how you got from step 5 to 6, and you look at that, and you're like, oh, well, of course. That made sense in my mind, but it doesn't make sense to somebody else, and you go back and forth a couple of times, and now you end up with a nine-step process that is so perfect and so straightforward and so error-proof that it can be performed by anybody at any time without any skillset or training in what you do, and they can pay a bill for you, and you don't have to do it again. And if that sounds like I made that all up, that is a real process that I have done for myself. I have done that for many people, and so, I know that's a very long answer, but does that sort of cover it.

WOODS: It does. Now, of course, you spell this all out in your speaking. You spell it out in your book, in your website, LessDoing.com is where I would urge people to go. Of course, I will have all this stuff linked on today's show notes page, tomwoods.com/376. I think one of the reasons that I have been sort of soured on, let's say, productivity books and, I don't want to say self-help, but self-improvement sorts of books, is that they tend to be not very specific at all. It's a lot of maxims. It's a lot of encouragement. It's a lot of affirmation. It's a lot of reminding yourself of what a wonderful person you are, and that's great. I already know I am a wonderful person. I want to know specifically what should I be doing. What I like about what you recommend is how specific it is.

Let's talk specifically about the outsourcing aspect of this because I have something that I right now would love to outsource. It would practically, well, let's say it would increase the amount of time I would have per week to do productive things by 30% to 35%. It would be a huge, huge step forward, and that is if I had somebody to do the audio preparation and editing of this very show. I do five episodes a week, and it's more work than you think it is. It seems like, well, it magically appears on your iPhone. How hard could it be? But there are a number of steps that need to be followed for it to come out well, to sound good, and for something like that, I would need somebody who is an audio specialist, and that's not going to come cheap. Now, I have got some revenue that comes in through the show, but I would want to probably double that in order to feel like I could justify the expenditure of money on this person. So you must get a lot of people who say, I'd love to outsource such and such; it would really make my life better, but the dollars and cents just don't add up for it.

MEISEL: Right. So that's why a lot of times, especially now, and the way the technology is improving and getting out there, you don't have to outsource a lot of things that you used to even three months ago and certainly six months ago. There are things that you can just get done completely automatically. So have you seen my podcast automation process?

WOODS: I haven't, but the problem is my steps, for instance, I have got a problem that I have not—no one has been able to solve it. I've had three audio experts in here. They cannot understand why I am getting this background noise on Skype, but if I record using Pamela on two tracks, I pull apart those tracks, and I do a noise removal just on the guest track, then it can be taken out. Then I record myself using Audacity. I plug them together. I haven't seen any other way that makes it work without a lot of noise. So I am not sure an automated process can work for me.

MEISEL: Aha, well, okay.

WOODS: So I am in a unique situation here. Unless I want to start the whole thing from scratch, but I mean, I really, really don't.

MEISEL: No, and, you know, okay, well first of all, okay, you—I am not pausing because I don't know what I want to say. I am pausing because I want to figure out the right order to put this in for you. So, okay, well first of all, as far as automated sound production stuff. Have you heard of Auphonic?

WOODS: No, but I am writing it down.

MEISEL: Okay, so you need to check out Auphonic, and it's not super, super pro-level, but it's what I use for my podcasts for a long time, and basically, you feed in the raw file, and then it makes it everything sound better, and then it can actually publish for you to all the various sources like YouTube and SoundCloud and whatnot, so that's really cool, and that's free, by the way, but you can actually do this a little better. And I know you talked about being free and

saving a lot of money, but you can go to Fiverr.com, and for $5, which is pretty easy to justify, you can have somebody professionally re-master the track for you.

WOODS: Yeah, I have just—

MEISEL: That's what I do.

WOODS: Yeah, I use Fiverr for some things. Like, if I want to give away a free ebook, I am not going to spend a fortune a fortune on a designer for the cover. I will go to Fiverr for a free ebook. For a real book, I will go to a professional designer if I am going to self-publish, but with Fiverr, I am afraid that they are not being paid quite enough. What I'd love is I would love to have a specialist, and I would say, every week I am going to be sending you five episodes to you on Tuesday, and I need you to get them to me within a few days, and for a professional it would take, well, I would need them to listen in in case there were any glitches, in case I say, oh, wait, let's do that over again. So it would probably be half an hour of listening and half an hour of editing. It would be an hour per episode. I can't imagine anybody doing that for me for less than $100 an episode. Now, if I am able to bring in sponsors for the show, then it's a definite. I would definitely do it. I wouldn't even think about it. But if I am not able to do that, then I have to just hope for more donations to the show to make that possible.

MEISEL: Right, so, and you could go to Elance too for somebody who was going to do that on a regular basis, but I mean, I can tell you that my podcast is edited by someone on Fiverr, and it's done extremely well, and you'd be really surprised.

I've had this dilemma for a long time where I've dealt with people in other countries that charge prices that I think are almost unfair to them, but actually, I will give you a good story about that. I have an architect who works for me, and one of my—my background is in real estate, and I have been working in real estate for 15 years now, and I do—I used to do a lot of green building consulting, and that required doing a lot of paperwork and stuff, and I was using the lead rating system. So I actually found an architect on Elance, and she was based—she is based in Egypt. Now, this is a registered architect who is trained in green energy systems. She's got an actual degree. She is a real architect, and she was charging me $2.50 an hour, and at first I was shocked, and whatever. I worked with her for a few hours, and she had a better work ethic than almost anybody I'd ever worked with in person or remotely, and I said I can't pay you this little. I have to pay you more because you're really valuable, and she was really uncomfortable with it and basically said, okay, well, fine, you can pay $5 an hour, and I didn't bring it up again because I didn't want to insult her, so that's how she's been working for me for four or five years now at that rate.

WOODS: Yes, I really should—I have used Elance a lot. I recommend it quite a bit, and you're right. I had to move—my podcast used to be a page on somebody else's podcast page. Then I moved it to my own site, tomwoods.com, and I had to create a whole new page for every single episode, so I outsourced that—there ain't no way I am doing that kind of drudgery. I outsourced it to Elance, and it was actually a young kid from New Jersey just trying to build up a

portfolio, and I was thinking that this was going to cost me $2,000 or something, and he did it for like $200, and I just refused to accept that. I just sent him a boatload of money because I felt so bad about it. Now, he had no problem accepting it. There was no cultural taboo there about accepting the extra money. But you're right, I really should go back and see what's available.

The trouble is that with Elance or with Fiverr, you're talking about all the different steps you have to take, well, every single week I'd have to once again, open a new job because you're not allowed to communicate outside of the Elance or Fiverr platform. I have to create a new job. There would be a lot of steps. Is that not true?

MEISEL: You can hire somebody for ongoing projects, absolutely, like her.

WOODS: Oh, I could do that?

MEISEL: She's been working for me for four years, and we only communicate through Elance.

WOODS: Oh, I didn't realize because I have only had just short, little, finite projects. I have never even looked into what it would be like to do something on a regular basis.

MEISEL: Oh, yeah, no, that's very common.

WOODS: See, look, you're helping me. You're helping me on the air here. This is incredible. I hope people are following along because I am telling you: Elance and Fiverr, if you get nothing else out of this, are of tremendous help to you. I was preparing an audiobook, and you have to have certain specifications you have to meet for the ACX company. It's an Amazon company that does the audiobooks, and yeah, I could have spent hours and hours figuring that out, but why? I found a guy in Greece who does this professionally. He always prepares audiobooks. Why would I have done that? Plus, you have to think in the Tim Ferriss kind of way—think of the money I could have earned in the time I would have been blowing on this project, and subtract how much I paid him, and that's my implicit profit.

MEISEL: Right, exactly, and you know, the thing is that people have to understand as well is because on the one hand you can say to somebody, look, you know, if you're not using an hour—if you're wasting an hour of your time, then that's an hour where you could be making whatever your hourly rate is. That's what a lot of people say, and the obvious response to that is, just because I have an hour doesn't mean that I can suddenly make $200 just because of that. But what people have to understand is that what I want to get to—what my ultimate goal for a lot of people is that if they get to use their brains for the things that they want. I believe that there's that 5% that you can do better than anybody else, and that's what you need to be able to focus on, because 95% of things that most of us do on a daily basis can be done by other people or other things. So if you get in that mindset, then you realize that it's not just the hour that you could be earning money that you're not in that opportunity cost alone. It's much bigger than that because for every minute that you take away from doing what your core activity is, it takes about 20 minutes to get back into that necessary flow state. So it's a really

big cost for that task switching to do things that you don't need to be doing and shouldn't be doing.

WOODS: And not only that, but I could both cut back on the amount of hours I work per week and be happier and a third thing, and I could be doing other projects and still be working less than I am now. I'd like a start a site relating to public speaking. I do a lot of public speaking, and people want to know what my secrets are. Well, thankfully my public speaking secrets are a lot more pleasant than my productivity secrets, but I'd like to do that. I have another podcast idea I'd like to do on a weekly basis. These things would be a breeze if I weren't bogged down doing things that, as you say, a lot of other people could be doing for me, but in terms of a Tom Woods public speaking site, who could do that except me? I would love to be able to focus in on that, and I am at least aware of that, and you know, I am just thinking in terms of how I can get from here to there.

Let me ask you another thing. Just in terms of time management and monitoring your time or doing things more efficiently, I have been thinking there must be so many apps out there now—just smartphone apps that if I had time to look into what's available, I would be amazed at all the ways that I could be optimizing my use of my time. But unfortunately, my use of my time doesn't allow me to research this sort of thing. Are there a few recommendations you have just from the app world that would be specific instruments that we can use for productivity?

MEISEL: Absolutely. It's not an app per se, but it's a service called followup.cc, and it's—and you actually might find this amusing, but I have very, very few apps on my phone. I am kind of obsessive about having as few apps as possible. I think I have about 12 that are not required like Apple iPhone apps. So I try to run as lean as I possibly can, which sometimes may run counterintuitive to what it seems like I am trying to accomplish, but if you can do more with less, then you're better off. The number-one service app or whatever you want to call it that I can recommend is called followup.cc. It is an absolute life-saver, and I will explain what it is actually in context of how I recommend people clear up their inbox. I can tell you how to clean up your inbox in about 45 seconds, so two things. One, you need to have a filter. Do you use gmail, Tom?

WOODS: I do.

MEISEL: Okay, good. So you need to have a filter that says that any email that has the word "unsubscribe" in it is automatically put into an optional folder. So it's not shown in your inbox. It's put in an optional folder. So anything that's like a mailing list or somebody might have forwarded you an email or something like that. It goes into an optional folder, and this is important because it's not junk. It's not being trashed. It's just going into optional because the inbox is a place of work and Zen, so that means when you switch into your optional folder, you are now in optional mode, and you can scan headlines much quicker.

WOODS: Oh, boy, that is—that helps me.

MEISEL: Right, so that's the first thing. Now, in your inbox, there are only three ways to deal with an email, the three Ds. One is to delete it because it doesn't require a response, which is a big one. A lot of those emails that you respond to—people respond to—do not require responses. So you think about the boyfriend and girlfriend in high school who are trying to hang up and saying, you hang up first. No, you hang up first. That's what half of the emails are that people send. They are like, okay, great, thanks, good. Wonderful! See you soon! Great. It's very annoying. So that's deleted. If you don't need to respond to it or it's not for you, or it's not relevant, or it's spam.

The second one is to deal with it. If you can deal with an email in the next five minutes, deal with it right now because you'll get it done, and it will make you feel accomplished, and you'll want to get more done. Dealing with it could include delegating it. So it's sort of a subset D, but the third one is the most interesting one, and that is to defer it. If now is not the right time to deal with it, defer it to the right time, and to do that, you use a service like followup.cc.

With followup.cc, you can forward that email to 8:00pm@followup.cc or Monday@followup.cc or oneweek@followup.cc or threeweeks@followup.cc. Any time period you want at followup.cc. And when that time period comes around, that email will come back to you in your inbox, and it will now include a snooze bar right in it in the email so that if you were wrong about that time being the right time, you can actually snooze so that you can hopefully get to the right time, and then you can deal with a more effective time. And this is important because it's not procrastinating. You are making an active decision to say, I deal with this type of thing better at this time, and that could be because you have free time. It could be because simply in your own biorhythms, you're better at creative at night and busy work in the morning or vice versa, so you can decide this is the time that I need to deal with this. You get it out of your inbox so you can get to inbox zero, and you can basically tunnel vision yourself into dealing with something that you can only deal with now.

WOODS: Yeah, that's really helpful, and you know what I have—this is probably not an optimal use of my time, but somehow I have gotten onto 800,000 mailing lists, and of course, it's quicker just to delete them when they come in—the emails that I don't want—but I have got to the point where I so resent it now that I am actually going to the trouble of unsubscribing, like, leave me alone. I can't take this anymore. I almost feel bad telling people I have a newsletter. That's why I try to make it as useful as I can. You can keep up with the show, I will give you some special announcements, and I will only bother you once a week, and if you hate it, you don't have to get it, but if you do get it, I send you a free book—that sort of thing. I want to at least be providing value to people so that I am not to them what these other people are to me.

MEISEL: That's exactly right.

WOODS: Now, tell me before I let you go. Tell me exactly, or basically, tell the whole audience what it is that you do more or less for a living in terms of this productivity work. I see you have a big event coming up in New York City from May 1st to the 3rd, and I will just point out because

people—these are evergreen shows. This is 2015. I like the tagline: you're going to take New York City by calm. That's very good. Not by storm. People have enough storms as it is. You have a website, LessDoing.com, which is what I am looking at right now. You have your book on this subject. Do you do private consulting? Do you just have seminars? What do you do with this?

MEISEL: Okay, so, well, and thanks for asking. So first of all, it's LessDoingLive.com if anybody is interested, and I'd love to see anybody there who wants to improve their productivity, and it's going to be an amazing event because we're not just going to have speakers speaking. We're going to actually have small workshops where you can implement the things that we're teaching right then and there. I started coaching a long time ago, but basically, nine months ago, I think, I switched over to a mastermind format. So I stopped coaching individuals, and I just coach a group, and I have a couple of programs. One is a boot camp, and the boot camp is an eight-week sort of mini-mastermind so people get to go.

We do a weekly call, and there's a Facebook group, but basically, they go from being really, really unproductive, or most importantly, really overwhelmed and not really knowing how to deal with that to this new place where they are making more money. They are healthier. They get to do the things that they want to do. They feel good about it. They are starting new projects, switching careers, starting new companies—all these wonderful things come out of fixing somebody's productivity, and then basically the mastermind is sort of the highest-level coaching program that I offer, and that's a smaller group of individuals that are working on stuff on an ongoing basis that either they are new companies or they are just trying to basically maximize their own human potential, and it's something that I just love doing and to work with. The event in May is something that is our first time doing this and so far it's looking like it's going to be an amazing event, and that's what I focus on, and then I have the podcast, which I love, and I don't know that's necessarily how I make money in the podcast, but I love doing it.

WOODS: Sure, and there are, of course, as you know, all kinds of indirect benefits that one gets through doing a podcast. It must be nice doing something that has general applicability to all of mankind. I have a niche market, but you're doing something that hardly anybody in the world would say, nah, I have no use for that. I don't want to free up any extra time. Nah, I prefer to carry on with my drudgery. But you know that at some level people are going to respond to this. So the sites are LessDoing.com. For the event, which is also posted there, I see a big banner for it, but for the event, you can go directly to LessDoingLive.com. I appreciate your time. I am going to link to the different resources that you recommended as well as to your websites and to your book *Less Doing, More Living* at tomwoods.com/376. Thanks so much for your time today, Ari, really appreciate it.

MEISEL: Thank you, Tom.