

# 043-getting-things-done-gtd-engage-do-part-one-productivityc...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

context, gtd, david allen, people, tasks, defining, calls, francis, criteria, engaging, book, long, important, scarce resource, model, productivity, physical location, planning, work, decision

## SPEAKERS

Art Gelwicks, Voiceover Artist, Raymond Sidney-Smith, Francis Wade



Voiceover Artist 00:00

Are you ready to manage your work and personal world better to live a fulfilling, productive life? Then you've come to the right place. Productivity cast, the weekly show about all things productivity here, your host race, Sydney Smith and a goose open out with Francis Wade and our gal wicks



Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:16

Welcome back everybody to productivity cast the weekly show about all things personal productivity. I'm Ray Sidney-Smith



Francis Wade 00:23

I'm Francis Wade.



Art Gelwicks 00:24

And I'm Arthur Gelwicks.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:26

Welcome, gentlemen. And here we are in our fifth episode in our ongoing series about getting things done, or the GTD methodology. And as practicing GTD years, once practicing GTD yours or non practicing GTD years, we are here to talk about the various aspects of how the getting things done, methodology works and how we all view it from our our different areas of expertise and experience with the Getting Things Done world. And what want us to do today is to talk about the fifth stage in the workflow map or the workflow diagram that most people know as doing or engaging now in the first edition of the book it was called doing. And now in the march 25 edition, which is the latest edition of the book, David Allen talks about it as engaging. And this is actually a change as I talked about in the last episode from the march 2010 book, making it all work by David Allen, he had changed some lingo. And that has made its way over to the latest edition of getting things done. And what I'd like us to do is to In this episode, talk about what engaging means to each of us, then we will cover the models that David Allen provides to us for being able to engage in the productive work that we're trying to accomplish. So let's start off with defining engaging, I'll say that, for me engaging is the process of being able to get into action. So I really see it as many different pieces of the puzzle that are the glue that holds the system together, as we've talked about before. And as I frequently quote from David Allen. The reality is, is that getting things done GTD is not about getting things done, it's about actually knowing what you're not getting done. However, once you do start getting things done, knowing how to appropriately engage as he talks about is so important. Because if you don't know how to engage with the work, he doesn't know what work you're doing, by the way, that's the thing is that he doesn't know what what you're doing, whether you're a programmer, or an executive or house cleaner, none of that really matters to him, what what matters to him, because he doesn't know how to do your exact job is to be able to give you the tools to be able to engage with that work that type of work when you get there. So that's what engages for me, it's the it's that glue that holds together, your ability to get into action, when you need to



Art Gelwicks 03:13

engaging to me is one of those things that it's actually partway through the process. Because at that point, you've already figured out what you need to do, it's just a matter of getting started on doing it, and having everything set up so that you can start to make progress on moving through whatever that particular item is, whether it's working on that report, or cleaning up a room, or whatever it's taking its taking that next logical step of I've got it planned out, get off your Duff and get moving on. At least that's the way I see it



Francis Wade 03:48

coming at it from the all the other direction in apart from what David Allen says in his books. If I look at the average person who does what they do on a regular basis, on a daily basis, they're either doing or they're thinking about doing some, I think of just more with the in terms of two steps, you're either engaged, you're either executing, or you're thinking about and planning to execute. And that's about it. That's sort of simpler if I come at it from looking at what people actually do.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 04:21

David Allen gives us the threefold model for identifying work. And tell me if I'm on target with what you're kind of talking about here, Francis. But David Allen gives us a three threefold model for identifying daily work, which he gives us the three bullet points, quoting here, when you're getting things done, or working in the universal sense, there are three different kinds of activities, you can be engaged in doing predefined work, doing work, as it shows up and defining your work. And so he gives us these three, the threefold model as a mechanism for understanding you're really only doing three types of work and in the sense of buckets of work. And those are the three buckets Am I am I on target here, Francis, in terms of what you're talking about, or



Francis Wade 05:11

Yeah, the first I in my world, the first kind of work is the thinking about and the planning. And the latter two, which is doing the work that's already defined. And doing the work as it shows up is what everybody does every day. Anyway, it's the actual doing of work, I don't see them as three. And this is my criticism of the modeling, yes, I don't see them as three. But as just two kinds you're either planning or you're doing and how you do is a different matter. But I think it's just it's kind of binary for most people.



Art Gelwicks 05:46

Yeah, I have to agree with Francis on that one, I look at it two different ways you have, you are either working to work or you are working on work beyond that, you're going to recap and figure out what you did. But at the front end of it, you're either figuring out what you're going to do, or you're doing it, I don't know, unless somebody else can articulate something to me, that would fit as a third category for that, that's about as basic as I get it.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 06:12

Yeah. And I think that David Allen is just basically saying that defining what you're going to do is the type of work



Francis Wade 06:19

there's doing the work. And then there's thinking about or defining the work, he's broken down, doing the work into doing work that's already defined or doing work that shows up as emergency. But the distinction is between planning and doing, you get the difference,



Raymond Sidney-Smith 06:37

right. But either way, you're, you're taking pre defined work, and bundling it into just work. And then you, then the other coin is defining what you're going to do with that, understanding that, at least from David Allen's perspective, there are three working modalities. And then he takes us to, and this is now going kind of going backwards again. But stepping back to his first model, which he calls the fourfold model, let me get this correct. The fourth four criteria model for choosing actions in the moment, there's nothing pithy about that, but but the four criteria model as I tend to call it is, is basically his ability to define the, the factors that help us to filter out what actions we can do in any moment. So this is not the, the modal verb would could should in that sense, but it gives us what we can do right now. And so in that sense, we want to be able to look at context, time available, energy available and ultimately priority. And so let's start to unpack this, let's define for listeners will we all think about in terms of context, time, available, energy available on priority, and then how we approach these different pieces of being able to filter down to what is it we can do. So let's start with context.



Francis Wade 08:16

context for me is, is an increasingly irrelevant he, he defined he defined context as a big deal back in the pre mobile internet era. And nobody's the physical context that we're so predominant at the time for me, I've gone away because, you know, I travel like most people, I travel with my mobile phone, and I have a lot of computing power available to me at any time, I happen to work from home, so I don't have office versus home. So it doesn't really doesn't really have much of a meaning for me anymore. But the way he defined it was mostly around physical, physical, physical availability of equipment, objects, resources, data, and those those lines have blurred to the point where many people will say that there is just one context, nobody's you just have access to almost everything at your fingertips if you're the average working professional. So for me, it's

diminish the importance.

A

Art Gelwicks 09:21

Yeah, I'd be inclined to agree with Francis on this one context for me, has gotten this is where I think GTD gets hung up. And I know he's updated is French and Francis mentioned in the newest versions of the book. But people get hung up on that fact. Well, I don't have to go home to use my computer, my computers in my bag context, I like to think about it as separating by these are things that are for work, these are things that are for me, these are things for my consulting and use that as the contextual framework. Because I apply that as a way of getting into the right mindset for the right type of work I'm doing right then. So if I know I'm going to sit down and work on a bunch of personal stuff, I can pull up my personal context and say, Okay, these are all things that I have to do, I'm not bouncing back and forth between these various silos that I have to do with, I know it's not true to the GTD model. But it's, for me, it's a very useful modification of that.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 10:23

And I'll take the other side of that coin there for for folks who are listening in the sense that I believe that contexts have become more important over the course of time, not less important, they just become more granular. And so for example, in my world, instead of having my you know, so, so in first, let's define context, as David Allen sees it. And I'll just literally quote from the book because it's such a such an easy short definition here, he says, quote, you're always constrained by what you have the capability to do at this time, a few actions can be done anywhere, such as drafting ideas about a project with a pen and paper, but most require a specific location at home at your office, or having some productivity tool at hand, such as a phone or a computer and quote, so from, from my perspective, there is no question in my mind that having access to my phone, laptop, mobile tablet and internet broadband access in some way, shape, or form, whether that's over, you know, the cellular network or Wi Fi or hardline connected doesn't matter. The point is, is that having access to those tools, those pieces of of what are the puzzle of getting things done, are not the end to me being able to actually do the things I need. So if we accept time and energy, which are the next two pieces in the in the four criteria model, the reality is, is that there are still a whole bunch of great granularity there that I need to know about getting things done. So for example, the reality is, is that certain work really can only be done not because I couldn't sit in a, an airport lounge and work on something, but it's not the appropriate place for me to do that. For example, if I'm waiting to board a plane, I should not call my mom because that's going to be a longer conversation. And, and, and so we get to time available. But more so than that, I'm not in the best happy mood when I'm about to board a plane, I'm usually actually pretty cranky

and and we just want to get on the plane and there's a lot of commotion, and it's just not the appropriate time. So having quiet, you know, quiet location with the amount of time available then becomes important in that context. So context being that kind of thing, where it's like, Okay, I'm not in the right place, being at the airport is not the appropriate place for me to have personal private conversations, then there's the other factor of Okay, well, what what am I actually using, right to say that I have my laptop doesn't necessarily mean a thought that I have a computer and the internet doesn't necessarily mean that I have actually the right software to be able to make things happen. And more and more as, as art can probably agree with me as well being, you know, on a Chromebook at work for most of the time, both of us can probably get 95% of our work done in a browser. And that's or through a mobile application today. But there are times when I have work to do in very specific programs where I need that program. And that's not on a specific device, or it is on a specific device, and therefore, I need to, I need to be on that device to do it. So the context then becomes that specific piece of software. So I'll say this thing this country text is premiere, which is Adobe Premiere the video editing software, and I don't travel around with that big honking software application, nor the huge files it creates, because, you know, they're large video files, it's on my travel laptop, I don't want that lost, if it's if it's stolen, or lost, or, you know, gets damaged, or whatever, I'm not going to have the backup resources to be able to recover that kind of thing. So really start to think about context, from the perspective of is it appropriate for you to be working on these things on these devices wherever you are, and if not, then that becomes a de limiter. And then you can go ahead and filter for that, so that you can make the protocol such that when I'm sitting at my office desk, with my full powered computer, I'm going to work on on this. And if you're like me, and you do travel for work, than the things that really are only effective we're free to do on the road are then the context for those as well. So it starts to give you some



#### Art Gelwicks 15:06

some natural workflow pieces, it makes sense to me, but I'm going to kind of push back on a little bit, because it sounds like what you're defining is the requirements for the work just as much as what the classic context would be. So if we think about the context being computer, okay, great. That means that if I'm at the computer, I can sit down and look at all the work that I could potentially do with the computer. But the context you just described to me, I would be defining the requirements of accomplishing that piece of work. So, you know, things like needing Adobe Premiere things like needing a specific machine, they're not going to define when I can do the work, but when I sit down to do the work, they're going to tell me what I'm going to need to be successful about it. I don't know that that's necessarily not what you said, it's just a different way that my brains hearing it and I look that to me, sounds less contextual, and more almost a labeling or a tagging of work. So if I throw this into a tool, for example, if I were to throw it into to do

list, I could go through and apply multiple labels to things identifying that this needs Adobe Premiere, and this needs Adobe Premiere, and this needs Adobe Premiere, which technically, by definition, I guess, is applying context, but I don't know what that I would use that term. And the only reason why I probably wouldn't use that term is I go back to its loaded meaning from the original versions of GTD. So I don't know if I clarified anything or not, but that's kind of what I was hearing.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 16:38

Yeah. And, and I think you were hearing me, Correct, yeah, I would totally, you know, if I'm going to be working in Excel, or Google Sheets, I do a lot of, you know, work in those programs. And, you know, to do data analysis of various things, I try not to do those with other things. Because when I'm in number crunching mode, and trying to create, you know, visualizations, you know, graphically, you know, representations of the data for myself and for clients. That's something that I want to do separate and apart from other things. So, I think that that context based actions list. So David, as David Allen proposes, works for me, and it may not work for everybody, right. But it works for me very clearly not, because I create separate lists, it's because I use that as a tag as you're talking about our to, in essence, create dynamic lists of what needs to happen, I don't find the need for say, at phone as a as a list for or at calls, I tend to work in a project basis. So I tend to work you know, from, these are the things that need to get done. So I don't necessarily need the efficiency of calls list. But I have the ability to do it, because I can filter my task manager to look at all my calls, because I've tagged them as calls. So it just depends on how you look at the flavor of the flavor of your system in order to be able to identify what can happen. And again, this goes back to who, who the original audience of GTD was for, and David Allen was trying to help corporate executives, people who would hire him to do coaching and training. And so these are these tend to be people who are dealing with executive time in the sense that, you know, they're running from meeting to meeting and trying to identify in the moment, what is it that I can accomplish right now. And that tends to fall short for people who have a lot of unstructured time in the same location. So if you're in your office all day long, with all of your resources to get your work done, then that's not really much of a, you know, the binary that is at work in at home, right. But there's not much that can not be done if you have that kind of in space, where you don't do a lot of yours in a lot of meetings. And there aren't a lot of things vying for your attention other than the work at hand.



Art Gelwicks 19:05

Now, I think you just called out probably one of the most important points about this for people who like me struggle with this concept a little bit. And that's the difference

between two of his most commonly reference context computer versus calls. I mean, with anybody who's arguing against GTD goes back or not necessarily against but struggling with it goes back to the app computer context, well, my computer is always with me, why do I need that as a context. But if you look at the flip side, the calls context frames work together. So if you're in a place a quiet place where you can be there for a little while, you can pull up that list of calls you need to make and drill through it, or emails you need to reply to, or articles you need to read. So if we stop thinking about are getting hung up on the physical aspect of the context, which is some cases it's necessary. But for the most part, if we're able to move away from that, and think about how using context around functional requirements be the physical or otherwise and aggregation of the type of work we need to do. To me, it seems almost like it makes more practical sense, I would be much more inclined to use a calls context to knock out phone calls I need to make than to ever worry about, this is the stuff I need to sit down at the computer and do because to be honest with you, everything I do winds up getting done at the computer.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 20:33

And that's exactly how I today utilize contexts. But for me, it's more software available to me or software, I'm going to best work and not necessarily the efficiencies of grouping together emails, calls, text messages, or whatnot, I just don't see myself, you utilizing that function. And I think that's a really good kind of test for yourself, is to create the different types of contacts lists and see if you actually start doing them based on their groupings. And if you don't, then stop using the groupings because they're not useful to you. And not don't get hung up on the idea that, Oh, I'm not making all of my calls at once. Because I you know, they're all my calls list and I'm not making the call, there's probably some other reason or difference for you not doing them than them being grouped together in one list.



Art Gelwicks 21:28

Now, let me ask you two guys a question that I get a lot Do you use contexts to determine what work you should be doing? So if you're at a point where it's I finished what I was working on, I need to get started on something else, do you actually look at the context and say, I'm in this context? What's the next work I should be doing?



Francis Wade 21:49

And the answer that question with a big picture sort of point of view, it may, it may blow things up a little bit. But let me let me go for it. I don't. And the reason I don't is that the purpose of applying any kind of tagging or contacts or whatever, and this has nothing to



do with David Allen, per se, I'm just going to talk about what people do when they create a task, they automatically think of what scarce resource may get in the way of that task being completed, effectively or on time. And when David Allen wrote his book, my point of view is that he focused on the context that he created, because for him, those were the limiting physical location is a limiting was a limiting factor at the time. Like I said, it's not a factor any longer. But I think that when someone applies any kind of tag to a task, according to the reason that I mentioned, which is that they're trying to make the most of some scarce resource, whether it's whether it's space or time, I think that that change that that changes over time, actually, they, they the resource that they're trying to use or trying to, to manage changes. And I think in his case, he wrote the book based mostly on physical context. And he throw in a couple other contexts, because he found he uses he uses those also. But that's really just a reflection of his personal behavior, I think there's a much larger behavior, a much larger, a larger hit user context, but a larger story to tell, which is that we're all doing that. And we're always doing that. And we should be using context to the site or whatever tag we apply to decide what to do next, he offered his and they've been very valuable to lots of people. But it's not the end of the story. You know, he essentially says, use use context is either find them first, then use time. And what I found in my research is that people are time pressed context disappears, or goes to a second or third, or if no longer the highest priority number one priority then becomes time knowing in his book, he doesn't recognize or doesn't acknowledge that switch. He says, people who do that shouldn't do it. Basically, they shouldn't use time as the number one determinant of what to do next. But if you talk to any busy executive, that, of course, is what they care about time is what they care about, far more than any other tag. So back to my sort of summary. The reason we tag is to decide what scarce resource Do I need to optimize other words, how do I decide what to do next, and I look to my scarcest resource in order to make the decision and I think that's a human behavior that covers everyone, it's just that we have different ways of deciding, and the different ways of deciding more or less correlate to the amount of tasks we're trying to manage at any one time. So to answer your question, I don't use context. Because for me, time is the scarce resource, not the equipment, or the software or the whole, I'd want to been late, or any of the other things that David Allen happens to us asking



Raymond Sidney-Smith 25:19

the question should is, is is not in my lexicon, right. And because from a David Allen perspective, is can you do it, right. So it's the immediate, immediate limiting factors of it. So I would, I would probably say, the opposite of Francis in the sense that while it's a human behavior to to defer to time as the first criteria, if, again, I can't drive to the market and buy milk if I'm on an airplane, or if I'm on a train, right? So it's the it's reality for me, like, that's how I see it is like, what's reality right now? Like, do I have the ability to do

these things. And from a great reservoir of experience, I try to look at what's going on. And that comes later in terms of priority, and using what I call intuition to get there. But I think it's like, what's, what's reality right now, right. So maybe your system currently doesn't have a way to distinguish that. So your phone battery dies. So now you're without a device and you're standing grocery store line, what can you do in that moment, that's the essence of context. And maybe that's not what most people think of today. But I think it's certainly a valuable thing to think of, you know, if you if you want to, if you want to be on that level of being productive, because the time you have available is, I think, ultimately secondary, right. And I maybe this is just a semantics issue.

F

Francis Wade 26:55

Just to clarify, something I'm not saying that time is, is the most famous, important one for humans. And it's the most important one for busy people, but not for not necessarily for most people. It's just that there are people who, for whom it becomes the limiting factor. And I think the value in doing what you're saying with what he says what what David Allen said, which is, if you find yourself in a particular place, take advantage of the place and do the things that are convenient to that place. At the beginning of every day, we decide what can't what physical locations to put ourselves in. So in other words, we choose to go from our office, to our home to the car to the airport, and it sure it makes sense to take advantage of doing certain things in certain locations, if you can, but the decision to put yourself in those locations is way bigger than the decision or I'm here at the airport, I might as well buy that new set of headphones, that's way down in terms of priority number one priority was the decision to be at the airport in the first place. And although it's it's convenient, it's, you know, it's helpful to combine tasks around the physical location, the decision to be in that physical location is, that's the big decision, that's a big priority. That's a decision that you've already made. So if I were to give that we're talking about priorities, the number one priority is where the biggest priority is the decision about what to do where, and when that's the big chunk. The smaller chunks, I think, are also important. But you don't, you don't ship your day around deciding to buy the headphones, for example, that's incidental. And that's just basically taking advantage of where you happen to be, at the time my point of view on it?

A

Art Gelwicks 28:49

Well, you never know, they might be really important headphones. But this is taking me down a mental path of what, hey, we're podcasters headphones are a big deal. here's here's what I kind of get hung up on though. And people I know have voiced this to me as well, what about over conceptualizing and I'll use your example Ray, I'm on an airplane flying somewhere, do I really need to contextualize the fact that I cannot go to the

grocery store at that moment? Do I need to plan and detail it to that level for GTD to really work? Or am I short changing the system? If I don't, the point is to know what you can do. So again, this is not this should be an easy limiting factor,



Raymond Sidney-Smith 29:33

which is if you're looking at your list, and all things being equal, right? This is how I always look at it. With all things being equal. The the, what David Allen is saying is that in his experience, you know, and again, he could be wrong. This is not this is not necessarily an apologist statement, I'm just stating what he's he's saying, which is, you know, when all things are equal, the first thing that people are up against, in terms of what can they do is, what's available to them? What can they can what they what can they do in this in this moment, they should look at what they can do, not at what they can't. But that



Francis Wade 30:13

logic made sense when in the 1990s, when he developed the system when we had very limited access now that the access has been opened up. In other words, the constraint has been lifted. The question is, okay, now, how do you decide because you could know where, you know, maybe back in the day, we could do 30% of what we could do today from any location. Now, we can do 90% from any location, given that the constraint has been lifted? How do you know, decide what to do first?



Art Gelwicks 30:45

Now, I'm going to push back on you in a second with this, Francis. Because I don't know that I totally agree that the constraints have been lifted, I think the constraints have changed, yes, access, much more common computer availability, much more common, but let's take a specific use. If I wanted to record something, I could make the argument that I could do it pretty much anywhere. All I need is my machine and the right headset and I can record something, is that the best way to do it? Well, probably not. So going back to what you said, Ray about the whole know what you can know what you can't Well, before, you know, if you can do something you have to know if you can't, what's going to prevent you from doing that. And if we look at that whole taking a piece of work and doing the work to be able to do it. Part of that has to be what are the limiting factors that would prevent you from successfully completing that activity. So that when you are in opportunities to work, you don't have to go through that part of the exercise. It's already done. You know that sitting in your car in a parking lot, waiting for your son to finish soccer, there's certain things you can do. And certain things you can't do. But you've

already thought that through. So you're down to your can list. But I think the the idea of being able to do anything anywhere is almost too grandiose, because it's not entirely true. There are there are lots of limiting factors that still creep in on things that we have to be cautious of.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 32:13

Yeah, I



Francis Wade 32:14

exaggerated somewhat the I got to take that back. But let's say the decision to record your podcast in the car while you're waiting for your your kids. Soccer Game is not doesn't happen. Once you find yourself in the car, that decision could happen at 730 in the morning, when you're planning your day, he accurately says yes, you can take advantage of these things. But my argument is that you don't fall into a context by accident, you choose a context, just do a racing based on the limitations. And at 730 in the morning, you decide, okay, I can I can do the recording. So you bring your equipment with your your phone with you, you make sure that when you get there, you park somewhere at the other end of the parking lot, you you know, you wrote the windows, and then you do recording because the situation is quiet. And it's sort of perfect. And you have set it up that way. The way he describes it in the book. So the old that only focusing on the advantageous taking up taking the opportunity to to bundle tasks, if you happen to find yourself somewhere. While it's true, it's way less important than the decision that most of us have to make, which is how do I get hot, I arrange the day so that I can get the podcast in at some point and then choosing to do it in the car. That's the far bigger decision than than the latter decision.



Art Gelwicks 33:37

Yeah. But I think at that point you're focusing on and it's not a bad thing, this is what we should all be striving to do is focusing on the pre planning of work and activity and schedule rather than the reactionary. How what do you do with a time slot that's opened up, you had a meeting scheduled from 11 to 12, they canceled the meeting, now you have a free hour? Well, you haven't plan for having a free hour, how can you take advantage of it and utilize it. I mean, if we want maximum productivity, we have to focus on that hundred and 68 hours a week that we have to work with, and take advantage of every one that gives us the chance. So doing that pre work as part of a scheduled opportunity. I think that's fantastic. And if you can do it, great. But if you're looking into the system, and

defining your system around things like the context structure, being able to put that structure in place, say up, I am now sitting in the car supposed to have a phone call, I don't have the phone call anymore, I have an hour of idle time, what can I do to take advantage of it? Well, you can waste part of that time to go through and evaluate the work that's available in the context. Or you could have pre contextualize the work that you need to do to say, if it shows up, or if the opportunity presents itself or presents itself, I could do this that. And the other thing, it's just a different way of thinking if you're working an operating in this truly ad hoc manner that so many of us operate in now.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 35:04

And again, I think it's also you know, this is one of those things where if you are working from week to week with a with a healthy weekly review, you are identifying the tasks, you know, that you can accomplish in the coming week. And then beyond that you are in an ad hoc nature, which presents why the four criteria model for choosing actions becomes useful to you. So I think it really comes down to the way in which you manifest your system. If you're not practicing GTD, I don't think this is useful or as useful as it is if you are actually practicing all the fundamental principles of the system. So



Art Gelwicks 35:46

I don't know, I think I could steal it and use it for other things. I mean, it let's, let's let's, let's look at somebody who's not using GTD or coming into it for the first time, how could they apply this, this style of context to other things? Well, it goes back to what Francis was talking about, about tagging and labeling and the things that we've talked about. And people by their very nature, like to put things in silos and boxes and pigeon holes, it's just easier than trying to deal with massive volumes of information. And if you're taking time to go through and categorize the work and the tasks that you need to get done in ways that are useful to you. things you can do when you're out of the house, things you can do when you're in the house, things you can do from your phone. That's the classic context model. But I'm not saying that that those contexts have to be for you define your own, find ones that are relevant to you apply that to your work, so that you can manipulate this mass of tasks and work that you have to do in ways that all of a sudden, you can have going from 300 items on the list down to five that you can tackle right now. And it's just one or two things that you need to do to get to that five, and then you can get some things done and move forward. So I don't this is a requirement of GTD at all. And I don't think you have to be up to your eyeballs in it to be successful with GTD. But it's one of those things that people focus on it so much. And they're like, I'm not doing context, right. So the system doesn't work? No, that's not the case at all.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 37:17

Let's let's move along to the other parts of the other three criteria of the four criteria model for choosing actions in the moment. And the next one, of course, is time available. And Francis, you, you posited earlier that time available, is is the is it should be the first criterion so so so make that argument for me, what, what is time available? And and how do you use it?



Francis Wade 37:45

No, no, no, I didn't. I didn't say that. Actually, what, what I said was, it becomes the, the limiting criteria for very busy people. But there are lots of people, maybe people who use you who follow habits that are similar to David Allen, for whom the primary criteria is not time it's something like space or something like physical location. And then there are other people who don't even use a to do list who, for whom the primary criteria is just memory, you know, that for them, they haven't even gotten to the point where they've started writing things down, they're just trying to remember stuff. And they, they, they use as much memory as they can, they don't use anything else. So the in the sort of the Grand picture, we change the way we manage our tasks, depending on the limited resource that we perceive that we need to manage,



Raymond Sidney-Smith 38:44

so that all of us are on the same page, as well as our listeners, which is to understand that the four criteria model is designed like it's for actions in the moment, which means that we're not planning where we're taking stock of what we are planning, because we have taken stock of the fact that we're not in a planning modality, we're in a space where all things are equal right now, that is, we believe all things are equal. So you're when when you're not engaged, you're disengaged, or preparing to be engaged in something new and you're trying to figure out what to do right now, and that hasn't already been predefined? I I know, I know that it seems to be like splitting hairs here. But it's very infrequent.



Francis Wade 39:31

No, I think it's really important in the case of a of someone like David Allen, my perception after reading his book and reading a little bit about his personal style. And this goes back to a way in which we view or tasks is that as a, as a person who owns his own company, I worked as a solo entrepreneur for a long time, he has a lot of flexibility. If I if you read into what he says around what I decided to do next, because I'm a solo, you know, I don't have

a meeting next, oh, I am someone who has a lot of choice over how I use my space and time. And as I read his book, I thought, okay, it sounds like he's saying, I don't want to be boxed in by a lot of hard commitments, I want to have the freedom to choose whatever I want, whenever I want it. It's a if you know, Myers Briggs, it's a very p kind of style. And I also talked about it in my book, because there's, there's different ways of seeing that particular kind of frame of mind,



Raymond Sidney-Smith 40:27

in the Myers Briggs world that's perceiving,



Francis Wade 40:30

you can look that up. And they can also look up the zoom bar, the Zimbaro time inventory, I think it's called the CTA, I think, which has a similar kind of way of assessing the way we view time. And, but the result is pretty much the same. There's some people who have lots of flexibility, and they don't want to be bogged down by planning every minute of every day. Because for them, they have a lot of flexibility to decide what's next. But when you don't have that flexibility, and you already know that you have committed to so 200 hours of activity, and you only have 168 and the next week, then when there's a like, for example, example art give when the meeting gets cancelled, your first question is, how much time do I have until to do whatever? I think I know I have no, okay, what can I do in a note? So the number one priority for someone who is time pressed is how much time do I have available? And yes, I agree. You know, you can't say, Okay, let me fly to Philadelphia and come back, you can bend time and you can say, Okay, let me mow the lawn. If I'm three hours away, I agree that those are considerations. But the the primary concern that they have in that moment, as they consider all of the tasks that they could do in that physical location is how much time do I have? And they go looking in some system, most of them because they are man there managing their tasks and Task Manager. And they ask, okay, what could fit into this time? What's even feasible? So obviously, I can't write my book, because that takes four hours, I can't. So it eliminates a whole bunch of things that they can't do. And then they say, Okay, what can I What can I do. And that time constraint is the primary one that the goat again, this is not for everyone, this is just a subset of people who are the most busy.



Art Gelwicks 42:28

So you know, I'm going to agree with you on half of that, I think you drew out probably in a really important piece of it. If you look at time availability, it's only useful if you also



know time required, you just mentioned it right there, I'm not going to work on my book, because it's going to take four hours. But you've taken the time to evaluate how long it's going to take to do a particular task. This is me putting my old project manager hat on, if you go through as part of your planning, and know how long work will take, you can more accurately and more effectively react to available time slots. If you haven't gone through that effort, you then have to waste that new time on figuring out how long it's going to take to do the things that you want to fit into it. So you have to do both sides of this equation, or else the time available is just free time that you really don't know what you can get the most out of.



Francis Wade 43:27

Yeah, that's exactly that's exactly my experience, that the people who are on the people who are the most busy have assigned durations to all of their tasks. So you're exactly right. And they use, they use a tool to us to decide what what what will fit into the next dollar.



Art Gelwicks 43:43

Well, and this will, this will roll all the way back work to our contexts. If you were to look at my to do list set up, I actually have labels for five minute 15, one hour for hour. And when I go through, and I look at a task that I have to do make a determination roughly how long I think that's going to take. So if it's respond to an email, yeah, I'll give that one five minutes, not a problem, I can tag it. So what that gives me the opportunity is, if I have idle time, let's say I'm standing in line at the bank, and it's going to be backed up, you know, actually having to go into a physical bank for once, and I've got 15 minutes that I know I'm going to have time to kill, I can pull up my list of things I need to do. And look at that context, the context being time, in this case, for anything that takes five minutes, and I can get two or three or four done that is part of that evaluation process. Part of that work to do work. But it also requires you to be very self aware about the work you've done. So the third part that we didn't really talk about earlier, and it comes up in the system new numerous times, is keeping track of the effort that you put in on things so that you can use that historical data. So if you're going to operate in a premise that you're going to react to available time, you have to have the information to be able to react to that effectively. And that comes from knowing how long it took to do things in the



Raymond Sidney-Smith 45:08

past. And, you know, art, this is something that I find to be such a thing that people resist,



which is time tracking is being able to actually get that information in. And I would, I would recommend people to go back to our two episodes on time tracking both active and passive tracking, because it's really so important, as are said, to be able to know, I know the duration of that is the modal average of duration for what I work on. Because I've spent so much time tracking, and you don't have to spend your entire professional career as I have tracking all of the time you spend on everything you you can you can do this in an statistically accurate way without doing it forever. Sometimes a two week tracking period can be very, very insightful, and you can get the data, you need to be able to then make the decisions that you need to make using this kind of, of GTD four criteria model.

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Art Gelwicks 46:10

Well, let me flip it around a little bit. And I'll explain a trick I use quite a bit. And I've shown some other people on how to use time tracking can be scary, because they think tracking down to the minute all of a sudden, they're thinking that they're acting like a lawyer. And okay, easy way to track all this. Like I said, I use multiple tags within my to do a system. So at its most detailed, I have five minute, 1531 hour, two hours, four hours, eight hours, I don't have to sit there and pre populate all that stuff. If something just comes in over the transom. Let's say I get asked to do a recording, I don't know how long it's going to take, I have some time I'm going to go ahead and do it. When I finished that task. I go back and label it properly with how long it took. That way. I'm building that historical data. I'm not worried that it took 17.4 minutes, I don't have to get that level of granularity, I have to remember that what I'm doing is making my life easier in the future when somebody comes and asks me this. And if you look at Project Management methodologies, they're all focused around gathering the historical data necessary to provide proper estimates and evaluations of future time. Well, that's what I'm going to suggest to people if you're scared of time tracking, and it's okay to be scared of time tracking, because Lord knows, I don't like doing it, then go back and tack it on afterwards. And keep it broad until you feel you're at a point where maybe you want to get more granular. But just by using that little step, you can get this so much closer to being able to react and evaluate. And when you're sitting there doing your weekly prep and you have this task that you're not quite sure how long it's going to take. You can look at all the other ones that are kind of like it in your system that you've already finished, find out how long they took, and you're going to be way closer to being accurate than if you were just making it up on the fly.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 48:08

And with that, we're going to close out this episode of productivity cast. And when we return in the next episode, we will pick up where we left off here in the four criteria model.

And then we will complete that part and talk about the horizons of focus or the six level model for reviewing work and close out this discussion on engaging and doing in the workflow diagram. If you have a question or comment about this episode, something that we discussed about GTD or the engaging phase of the workflow diagram. Go ahead and visit [productivity cast.net](http://productivitycast.net) there on the episode page, you will find a comment section Feel free to leave a comment or you can head over to [productivity cast.net forward slash contact](http://productivitycast.net/contact) and fill out the form record an audio message that will come to us and we will respond if you ask us to or we might even air that here on the panel. Cast. Thanks to Francis and Art for joining me here on this cast. And you can find all the episodes show notes HOW TO SUBSCRIBE there on [productivity cast.net](http://productivitycast.net). If you are listening from iTunes, Apple podcast stitcher or another podcast app that allows you to review as please feel free to go ahead and do that that really helps us know that we're doing good by you. But it also helps us to grow our podcast listening community. And so thank you. That brings us to the close of this episode of productivity cast the weekly show about all things productivity, take care here's your productive life.



#### Voiceover Artist 49:37

And that's it for this productivity. Cast. The weekly show about all things productivity with your hosts Ray Sidney-Smith and Augusto Pinaud with Francis Wade and Art Gelwicks.