058-anatomy-of-a-successful-meeting-productivitycast.mp3

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SPEAKERS

Voiceover Artist, Raymond Sidney-Smith, Francis Wade, Augusto Pinaud

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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 Ray Sydney Smith and a goose open out with Francis Wayne and our gal wicks.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:17

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

Augusto Pinaud 00:24

stepping up.

👤 00:25

I'm Francis Wade.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:26

And today we are going to be talking about the anatomy of a successful meeting. everybody listening likely has an understanding has an emotional response to the worst meeting that they probably attended last week. And we wanted to talk today about how to make meetings more successful, how do you how do you really manufacture successful meetings, even when perhaps you're not the person who is managing or organizing the event. So what I wanted to do for us today is first to walk through what really is, and are the parts of a successful meeting, both in preparation, participation and post Ops, I wanted us as a group to discuss how we manage participation during meetings before, during and after, and ultimately have a discussion about some of the the skills that we have to have in terms of communicating during the meeting, presenting and facilitating meetings, as well as closing out meetings, which can sometimes be difficult. So let's start off with what makes a successful meeting in terms of the individual parts that make up a meeting.

Francis Wade 01:44

I think it has to do with the mindset of the people who are coming into the meeting itself. A meeting is always a collaborative event between people. And the ones that take place in companies occur because the participants or someone is the someone instigates the need for the meeting. But it's not just the fact that they're instigating it, that's a potential problem is that they're doing so inside of a context inside of a culture. And most companies that I've worked with don't have a culture of seeing meetings as what I call a necessary evil, which is that it's something that needs to be as short as possible, as high quality as possible. As succinct and on point as possible, and should be reduced wherever possible, canceled wherever possible, people should be disinvited. People should be chased out the room, Steve Jobs, because meetings are huge, huge cost and time zone in terms of time, dollars and money to companies, but I've not been in a company that treated meetings as if it were an awful waste. And that there should be an ongoing process of reducing the time spent in meetings and the number of meetings, I'm yet to see them apply rigorous continuous improvement techniques to what I think is a an inherently wasteful activity that cannot be avoided.

Augusto Pinaud 03:09

I love the fact that you start by I have never worked in a company who has that. And because he's something that I like you when I don't I don't even know if I will say that my own business, you know, every meeting has that, you know, we tend to, we tend to struggle, you know, I years ago there is I don't remember if it's a GTD fast or one of those

audio programs, or was one of the interviews with David Allen and and he was saying that when he was working with his wife on the same hotel room, and he needed to send something for her to do. Okay, the comment was something along the lines of given it's going to age the comment but what Samson underlies I put it on my system, up to the internet, into the server in California, to the internet, until Dec computer and his wife even that they were sitting on the same room. And he was explaining the effective and efficiency on that instead of interrupting the other person. And doing that one of the problems I see in many organizations is we forget that our urgency is not necessarily the other guy urgency, and we really fail to go, what is an emergency and what is not. Therefore, we add an incredible amount of unnecessary meetings, number one, and number two, we think that for every little thing we need to make a meeting with many of these things could be solved. The br other other things, that's one of the things in which I think things like a slack, where allows people to be there to create groups to create chat to create a hug. second meeting is great. The problem is what we must organization I have seen doing with software and pieces of software like Slack, is now let's keep the same amount of meetings plus, let's add now the slack. So what's happening now is the meetings are even less effective. Because you have the people sitting there having shorter meetings on Slack, while they're trying to not pay attention to the meeting they're sitting on,

Raymond Sidney-Smith 05:22

I'm a little bit draconian, when it comes to meetings, one, I don't like to have them if we don't have to have them. And to I believe that meetings are about making decisions. And so therefore, that's really the only reason for in essence, the traditional format of a I'm calling a meeting, as opposed to say an event where someone is going to present something, or what have you. So I don't particularly call meeting something where someone's going to give a presentation or something to that effect. But I understand that that can be considered a part of a meeting. But ultimately, a meeting is about making a decision. And whether that is brainstorming during the meeting, and people coming to consensus, either through an autocratic decision or a consensus or majority based decision, there is a decision that needs to be made, perhaps about one thing or multiple things. And so for me, meetings are all about what are the decisions that need to be made for actions to be decided. And if everyone can understand that construct in preparation, during and ending and leaving the meeting, then we can all be more productive. That's that's the lens through which I see it, maybe not everybody does. But that's that's the, that's the ultimate outcome of a meeting is that we've made decisions. So for me, I see the pieces of the anatomy of a successful meeting is that we've had great preparation, in furtherance of making there's decision we have a an understanding, when we sit down to the meeting with the format of the meeting is going to be who's leading the meeting, and

how we're going to make decisions, right, whether it's going to be autocratic, I'm the head of the company. And so I'm going to make all the final decisions, or let's take majority vote, or we're going to consent as a group to be moving forward on a particular item on the agenda. And then finally, identification of who the responsible parties are, for what actions we decide, based on the decisions that we make. Those are really the those are really the anatomical parts for me of a successful meeting. Let's continue on in the discussion with how you manage participation, for successful meetings before, during and after. From my perspective, I I typically see meetings as being one person who is managing the entire process, typically the person who calls the meeting, and there isn't a lot of participation from the other members, which is the antithesis for me of a successful meeting, in the sense that if one person is preparing the agenda, and sends out a calendar invite, and then everyone just shows up to the meeting, without preparation, then that is out the gate and unsuccessful meeting, or at least it sets you up for lower possibility of success. So how do we how do we deal with those participatory components of a successful meeting?

A **Augusto Pinaud** 08:37

Well, the first problem comes on what the meeting is. Okay, and how the organization understand a meeting, you know, I, I have been organizations work with organizations and participate with organizations that nobody's done without agendas. Okay, the minority of the places I have work, somebody said the meeting they not even on the subject of the meeting is clear what we're going to talk and then when you go back and say, what are we going to talk about these? You know, basically, why do you want me to be there? Okay, well, we will talk about it at the beginning of the meeting, and that is the most common meeting setup, I encounter, you get a calendar invite. Okay, and what is this meeting about? Other we will discuss in the first five minutes? Well, if we are going to deceive you do that that way. The problem is I get to the meeting to begin with without preparation. Therefore, the meeting now requires 10 more minutes at least. So the half an hour you block, it's already short, 10 minutes. The second problem I see is most people never get on time on the meetings. Okay. Why? Because their book, okay. They I seen more than not calendars that you see, double booking, triple booking, okay. You know, I work I have coach executives that they have been triple book, the day, every day, every day, every day. And when you asked how you go, I don't think attention to that column. What do you mean, you don't pay attention to the calendar, calendar is your lifeline. And I have worked with many people who done same thing was agenda scalar. I go there, and they go, and then what happened? People open the laptop, open the phone, okay, never pay attention to the first 10 minutes. Therefore, in the middle of the minute, and then of the meeting, now we're going back. So what we're trying to accomplish here, if they ask that, and then hopeful that they The meeting is over so we can run to the second meeting. Okay, in the

last 10 months, I have been working with one person who managed meetings in an incredible way. And this person basically is the organizer if she sent me a meeting request I go, no question asked, because he's the only person in long time that I have worked with who has a clear agenda, not only that, she tends to take care of the screen, put the agenda and from the screen and go riding down. The interesting thing was this person is that most people think that is unnecessary. And it's a problem for this person, because people think all your to to detail oriented, we don't need that. But her meetings tend to be the only effective ones I forced to go.

Francis Wade 11:19

I have a slightly different tick. And it's not because I disagree with anything that we've said so far. I don't think anybody would disagree. I think everyone knows if you send someone to an effective meetings program, or tell them to read a book they're going to hear and they're going to see all of the right things, because everyone knows, it's not a mystery as to what causes a good meeting, we've all been in bad meetings, where we've felt stuck and wonder why the basics aren't being executed faithfully. So I think in terms of making a difference, it's not a matter of repeating the basics over and over again, I think there's a bigger context, the kind of things that I've been writing and thinking about are if meetings are really a waste, in sort of strict engineering terms they are on something you should be trying to minimize, then there should be a point system. And everyone should have a certain number of points allocated to them just the way they do budget at the beginning of the year. And they use their meeting points by by calling meetings. When they add more people, it takes more points, when the people have higher, higher status in the Catholic in the organization like the Vice President, that takes more points. Anyway, but your allotted a certain number of points per year to call them meetings. And if you exceed that number, you don't have to have a conversation with your manager. And it sort of goes like why do you Why are you taking up so much points? You know, where where are you taking up so many, so much of people's time in your meetings? And do you are you going over your budget? And are you using it wisely. And some people wouldn't have budget, which means they couldn't call meetings unless they went to their manager, they got a certain amount of points, and then they could spend their points on meetings. And I think that would that would close down the problem of calling meetings in the first place. And having them having them sort of be a match for the importance that the organization places on people getting together and spending time in this wasteful activity. And then on the back end, I would put in something I've only ever seen once and I found it on the internet and tried it and it seemed to work in with with one client. But it's to have an immediate feedback program, an app. And what I found was nothing more than a survey and anonymous survey. And at the end of the meeting, you ask everyone pull out the app, and let rate the meeting. And once again, if you get very low marks on the

feedback from the meeting attendees, you lose points, you lose more points. If you get good feedback, you get more points. And at the end of the year, people who get really good points or high points, just like the person that goes to mention would get you know, whatever reward there is, and it would be recognized in their performance management system or whatever mechanism is set up. But the point I'm I'm sort of focusing on in my comment is that everyone knows what you need to do in the meeting. I think it's the context outside the meeting that ruins meetings because protocols aren't followed, and then there's no penalty for not following them. I think they should be just as you said earlier, I think there should be draconian, draconian mechanisms where you can only call a meeting, if you use if you have points to call one. And you could you lose them, you lose points if you call and conduct a very poor meeting. And that's we complete the feedback loop for the people who are responsible for calling meetings.

A   Augusto Pinaud   15:05

My favorite part about the point system is that there will be people who will never be able to call a meeting again. And that will be great. But the problem with the point system is the people who at least in my experience, the people engage on the meeting is the same people engage in other other meeting, okay, then when you get them out of points, okay, the other people in general are not going to be engaged. That's the reason I have always been against the point system, because I understand that people talk a lot, hey, guilty of church, but that is also a correlation between that and the people who tend to be having more projects or having more engagement or having get more done, okay, and if you then limit those people on point to take the risk to then eliminate participation on the meeting, the people who will hoard behind those points are not participating anymore, and they are not participate in any ways now that they are holding points and they have points because of their what they are doing their home, reach on point, because they are not playing. So how we get into the same point system, this people to engage. So are we should simply eliminate them. That is a fine with me. But we we need to think how we're going to get these people who don't engage who you need to bring to the meeting any ways to participate to make that meeting more efficient. Because the problem with these people is they're sitting in the meeting, they don't say a word, then you walk out and they say, Oh, well, I disagree with this idea. Look at them, like we just spent half an hour in a room, why did you didn't set something? Well, I wasn't sure. Or we do a post meeting of the meeting. So let's after the half an hour meeting, let's have a donut and a coffee. So we discuss the meeting, instead of discuss the meeting during the meeting. So that way, we can get something effective. And by the way, I had a manager years ago that I work with that do exactly that. His meetings weren't 45 minutes on the last 15 minutes, give coffee. And the idea and he said that was the only 15 minutes I were effective. He knew he needed to waste 45 to get the meat that is meeting in the last 15 minutes.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 17:22

So I'm going to take a step back here and and go over some of the fundamentals that I think about when I when I think about a meeting because while I think the point system is is fun and has veracity, it has very little opportunity to actually become a part of meeting culture. wish it would, but I don't see anyone anytime soon and in in either major corporations or even small businesses deciding to manage a point system as it relates to who can and can't call meetings. But the idea is great. I I I champion anyone who wants to try that. But there are some fundamental components here that we should should talk about whether or not you learn about them in a in a corporate training or not. My central thesis is that meetings are for decisions. And so if we are attempting to be able to make decisions, then we need to be able to do coalition building, outside of meetings in order to be able to make meetings effective, which means that a meeting should have an objective, what is the objective of the meeting? Is it to is it to educate people? Well, then there needs to be some decisions about how to educate those people, either in the meeting, or around the meeting. That is before after. But the meeting should have an objective or several objectives to to its purpose. And if not, then no meeting, right. And that's, that's always my clear sort of delineation, we have a meeting because there's an objective or objectives. If there's no objective to the meeting, then the meeting gets canceled. And I'm pretty aggressive about that, because I don't want my time wasted. When once we have that idea, then an agenda is usually drawn up. And the agenda then helps us all understand what coalition building needs to happen before the meeting. So from my perspective, and I would be interested to hear both of your perspectives on this, but my perspective is to get the people who are going to make decisions, I want to know what their decisions are going to be before the meeting, because I'm calling the meeting, and I'm facilitating the meeting. And then we'll get to meeting roles shortly. But the idea here is that you want to be able to know that bill and accounting is going to be for your project. And Susie over and marketing is going to be against your project, so that you can start doing that coalition building, before you get to the meeting, such that you know what the vote is going to be up or down on X or Y, you know, item on the agenda. And this really helps you not only build defense, but build an offense for any particular thing that you want to successfully happen in terms of decision making from a meeting. So I don't see people doing this very often. And I really encourage everyone to start that process of saying, Okay, well, what are the decisions that need to come out of this meeting? Which of those do I support? And which do I not support? And what do I need to do before the meeting, such that when I get to the to the meeting itself, I know what's going to happen. And therefore I can make some inroads toward the end influence the thing that I want to make happen. And so often than not we feel victim or subjected to things happening in a meeting, when in reality, we have a lot more control, and a lot more perspective, when we do that kind of coalition building, before meeting. So then we come to roles. And I tend

and try to break up the roles in meetings, although that traditionally doesn't happen just because I tend to facilitate the meetings that I call. And I tend to be the person who acts as a scribe, sometimes some meetings will have a decision maker, someone who's leading someone who's facilitating separately. So especially if you follow parliamentary procedure, and then you'll you will also have the participants in the meeting. And sometimes you'll have outside guests or speakers or that kind of thing, who come in as basically consultants that help provide some kind of expertise or subject matter expertise to that meeting. So you know, my whole thought is to always make sure that everyone who is a part of the meeting gains access to the agenda. And, and just as a side note, I don't know what you guys do in terms of scheduling. But I like to use scheduling software, for scheduling all of my meetings, so that I'm able to disseminate all of the related documentation in the county event, I actually provide links to the agenda, or I will paste the agenda directly into the notes of the of the actual calendar, event invitation, and any, any supporting materials that I want people to read or be a part of in, in preparation for the meeting. What other pieces are there in that space, kind of on a tactical level, less than strategic level in in terms of how you prepare for meetings, not to

F **Francis Wade** 22:28
the point system?

Raymond Sidney-Smith 22:33
Go for it go for

F **Francis Wade** 22:35
it. The again, it's the problem isn't the logic, right? Because everyone would agree that you need to prepare for meetings, there's nobody who's gonna say, Oh, no, you don't need to part is going to agree the problem is the behavior that, you know, people will show up to the meetings unprepared. And there is no sanction, and there's no feedback. And there's no, there's no nothing. So they'll keep on showing up to every meeting unprepared. So the behavior doesn't change, just because they understand the logic is is sort of, it's sort of where the big challenge people have. And I think to change the behavior, you need to either either allow people in the meeting who are prepared and disallow those who are not. And I've seen versions of this done, where if you haven't read, we're going to we're not going to read the stuff I sent out before. And we're going to spend this first half an hour reading because you people didn't do your job and risk and worry and those who are supposed to be in the meeting, and need to have read them, read the materials with Noah

read them, if you haven't seen sanctions up front. And I've seen the sanctions, the back end, also with the feedback via the app that, you know, if you put people need to come to the meetings unprepared, and you get one of the five, for scoring the meeting, everyone's behavior can change, because now you have a tangible representation that we are unhappy about the meeting how the meeting went, we know what to do about it. And here's the feedback that we collectively give to each other about how poorly The meeting was run. So again, I don't think the problem is is knowing what to do. I think the problem is creating the social sanctions and the social feedback. It's a social problem and other words, not a problem of, of logic. And it's just it's just something about human beings that, especially when the most important person, like a CEO is the worst offender. And this is what I see everywhere. You know, I've worked to CEOs will say, Oh, yeah, we need to improve the way we we run our meetings are wasting a lot of time, people are complaining, there's too many of them and that they're poor. And then he or she is the worst offender. And he or she refuses sort of shuts down the door, when anyone even headset giving them sort of common sense feedback. So if it's if it's if you want to have people come to meetings prepared, I think it's a behavioral challenge.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 25:03

Well, and also if the if the executive in charge is the one who's the worst offender, then the ability to change the culture is that much more diminished, you know, point based system needs to be championed, not just from the ground up, but also from the top down, I don't believe that it's a one sided change habits are two individuals as as culture are two organizations. And if the if the idea here is that, you know, the organization needs to change, anyone who is not the executive who's listening, know that you also need to make the executive become a champion of something like a point based system or whatever meeting changes need to happen. Meeting, meetings become more effective, when the culture of the organization recognizes the need for it to change, and culture, culture change, just like habit changes slow. And so don't think that you can change anything over night. So any of these things that we talked about strategically or, or tactically, today, remember that just one of them changing is a huge success. Because changing culture is difficult. It's like moving, you know, it's like directing an elephant, it's very difficult to direct the charging elephant. And so if you could just nudge them in the right direction, tactically in one component, that's a that's a huge success.

Francis Wade 26:24

Can I add another one one tactic that I see people try to use anyway. So they're very few executives who allow unlimited spending of dollars of budgets. So when it comes to that particular expenditure, you know, they are draconian, just like you said, but when it comes

to the time, the collective time spent on email, and on meetings, answering an email as well, all of a sudden, they don't see the cost. And all of a sudden, they give themselves all sorts of latitude to waste people's time in those two media. And then the company then follows. And everyone sort of buys into a culture that, you know, copying everyone on the email is not a problem, even though I know Yeah, it takes a lot of people's time. So those are two areas in which most CEOs are admin are lacks and some of the worst offenders. And it's almost as if they don't see or feel the connection between the bottom line and wasting people's time that there's the it's so fuzzy that they're not willing to even consider the kind of, of penalties that we're talking about social penalties are not even real penalties or just social penalties, because they might be the one who encouraged the worst ones of all.

A   **Augusto Pinaud** 27:41
Well, you know, I agree on I agree. And a couple of things you guys have said, What is the culture and that is a biggest pet peeve of meetings, you know, the culture of meeting culture of any organization will make an effective meeting almost impossible. And I, I remember years ago working for organization, and I start having a stand up meetings. Okay. And I got a complaint on HR, because I was forcing people to have a standard meeting. And I went and talked to the HR people and say, so can you explain to me, Well, people didn't say, people are 20 minute meeting. And if you cannot stand 20 minutes, any job description in this company, said that you need to be able to stand and lift weight for at least 30 minutes. So I don't understand your complaint. I'm the HR person look at me and say, Well, I haven't thought about that. I say, Great, then can we dismiss this and I can move on with my life. Thank you. Okay. But people were complaining because I change the meetings to stand up meetings, including my boss, by the way, okay, by the person I was reporting to see, can we sit in the conference room? No, I told you, we're going to have meetings here. I don't have time for for that. Okay. So that's a problem, Coulter, when specially tried to change it on obviously, the meeting format never work. Because of that I could not get my he has made it that the meetings were more efficient. But he said I hate the standing of meetings. So they were eventually eliminated. Okay, even though they to their his own admissions, they were better than the traditional media fine. That's one second, I have seen a lot of high executive who call this meeting so common these meetings, not to any other than to be able for them to disconnect for 10 to 15 minutes to think they don't care about the meeting. The only reason they're thinking they're sitting there is so they can think so they can go back to the running. So it's not necessarily that they're not thinking on the bottom line is that they're thinking if I can get into that meeting, and listen, these people think and discuss, I know that I may catch what I need to move the other my part of the thing, and they can figure it out, they part later on. And so it's not that they're not looking at that bottom line is that they're looking at that bottom

line, from a completely different perspective. And they are coming to that meeting as an opportunity to block their calendar. And you know, being able to sit on thing, when you tell these some of these people, well, why you don't make a meeting with yourself, they will look at you as if you propose something illegal in the calendar world. But

F Francis Wade 30:22

can I mean, I'm sure we have horror stories like this, but but I was in a meeting, that in which my CEO had off his laptop watching a sporting event, basically refused to not watch it. And, in the next breath, complained that people weren't focused in the meeting. And there was nothing that that I could figure out to do to intervene to change the behavior. It was, it was, as you could imagine, it was it had all sorts of feelings about it. But what a booster saying is, is so sort of true is that the problem of meetings, everyone knows what they should do. But the the requirements to, and what they would have to sacrifice, like standing up, to make them work consistently to cut out the waste, the the the willpower, or the culture or the motivation, whatever you whatever, you know, whichever way you think of it, it's kind of the same thing is that people don't want to be inconvenienced so much, because what we're really talking about is turning meetings into this hyper efficient kind of sprint, that in which you minimize everything, and you minimize any kind of waste, minimize them or people, minimize the time, maximize the quality, maximize the cut the content, you make the most of the time that you have together by being prepared beforehand, you evaluate how well it went at the end, you know, we're talking about this really high powered sprint that has a lot of feedback involved, then it's a lot of preparation, almost like a running 100 metres final, whenever you have a meeting. And there are few coaches that I've met that are up to that level of commitment, they'll say it. And when it comes down to it, you know, I don't really want to have to stand for 20 minutes ago, sorry.

A Augusto Pinaud 32:17

That's one element. And the other element is the way meetings work today, aka they completely ineffective way. It's great in certain organizations in the sense that give the people something that is more important than feel effective. Hey, I have met many people who wants to be efficient, who wants to be effective, who would believe in being more productive. But I have also met my first share of people who want to be bc No, no. Don't touch my meetings. Because you see how busy I am on my calendar. Don't touch I don't have time for that. And sadly, there is a lot of that on me. Company coulters people who ease who carry the badge of honor of I had so many meetings, who carry the badge of honor of look all

you know how bc I am done, fix them, because then they if you fix them, then we need to work. Right now we cannot work more because we're BC, I'm going to take us down a level again, back to the tactical because while Francis, you may think that everybody knows better, I have a tendency to disagree, because if they knew better, they would be doing these things.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 33:31

So a couple of things that always come to mind. I know earlier actually also talked about scheduling meetings. And so there's actually a tool called Let us meet. And it's spelled lettuce as in the vegetable. And I'll put a link to this in the show notes. But it allows you to schedule a group meeting, I think the most popular one I know of is called doodle. And so doodle or lettuce meet allows you to create a group scheduling portal. And it's a link that you share with the other attendees, they're capable of doing this, obviously, if you're in an enterprise environment, using Outlook, you can use the outlook scheduling functions there to see you know, your colleagues calendars and invite external guests and so forth to the calendar. But I think that some of these efficiencies that we really need in the process of having successful meetings is is necessary. And not everybody knows that they are available to them, for example, the ability to use this group scheduling tool, I recently had a snow event that cancelled a bunch of meetings. And so we had to use a group scheduling tool, well, I decided to use a group scheduling tool to invite all of those people to a rescheduled meeting or set of meetings. And you i was i was remarkably shocked at the number of people who one hadn't used one of these tools before. And two were technologically and capable of using the tool until educated about it. And so I spent the time to educate them, because I think that now that they've used it once, they are now aware that it even exists. And that will make somebody else's life easier, when they're when they're charged with scheduling a meeting with those professionals in the future. So know that sometimes you're gonna have to put in a little bit more effort. Because if you're listening to this podcast, you are probably the most effective person in most rooms, right. So you need to remember that you're going to do a little bit more work than the average person. But ultimately, that will pay dividends to you in the long run. And, you know, a couple of other items that just come to mind as we as we make our way through the discussion. And as we've been making our way through the discussion is about timing, both scheduling the meeting at a time when you believe that most people are going to be most open to the decision making process. So there's actually good a good bit of research. In the book when by Dan pink, which we talked about in the past episode, we discussed the fact that judges have a tendency to be more lenient, on, on on, you know, defendants in a case when they are not hungry. So in essence, right before lunch, more

people get convicted or their appeals get denied and all kinds of things. Because the judges blood sugar level was low. And so for you set meetings when people aren't going to be hungry, or provide food or caffeine during meetings so that people have effective blood sugar levels of glucose in their system, basically available to them, so that they're in decision making mode. So that's one, two is set time limits for meetings, you might decide that meetings should only be 25 minutes long, or meetings should only be 55 minutes long, or whatever the length of time it is that you think a meeting needs, you have 10 agenda items, well, you know, look at each agenda item and estimate how much time that will take calculate it up. And that's the length of the meeting. Plus administrative parts of the meeting introductions, you know, closing up and and all that stuff. So set the appropriate time for the meeting, it's usually helpful to have someone who is keeping track of time. So for one particular meetup that I run the the GTD meetups in DC in New York, I actually keep a timer for part of the meeting. So when we are doing the parts of the meeting, and audible alert goes off for each person's turn. And it is remarkably helpful for me as both facilitator but also as timekeeper because the audible alarm is a third party objective system. And so people don't need to feel like oh raise being unfair to me, it's that the clock is the clock, the time is time, I didn't decide that four minutes is four minutes. That's the time that's on the clock. And so when the alarm goes off, people have an audible objective, you know, device telling them that their time is up. And so using that as a as an effective measure, using time limits during the meeting is also really, really helpful. So I hope that's, that's helpful in terms of Oh, also arrive on time, start on time and end on time. So if you say that we're going to meet for 55 minutes, and we're going to meet at 1pm, eastern time, then start on time and late comers be damned. And I don't I don't mean this viciously. But what happens is, is that the culture of an organization once you start starting five minutes late, and then 10 minutes late, oh, let's just wait for a few more people to arrive, then the culture gets developed that okay, well, it's all right for us to all show up whenever we feel like it. And the meeting will just wait for me before I arrive. And that especially happens with regard to people who will might be higher up on the chain, they The meeting will defer to the time in which they show up. And I say no to that, you need to mix that in, you know, nip that in the bud, and start meetings when they're supposed to start. And then everyone gets the idea that Oh, right. If the meeting supposed to start at 1pm, then I show up at 1pm. And if I don't, then I'm going to miss something, and I don't want to miss something. So I will show up on time, and the people who are going to be late are always going to be late and that's fine. They'll they'll get caught up. And when they disturb everybody as they make their way in, they should feel the social pressure to not do that in the future. And then if they continue to do that, then that's an issue for management to deal with them. Right, you need to you need to work with that person to understand the disrespect and the overall productivity impact that it makes when someone is consistently late. And that can be dealt with in another way. But starting meetings late is really a slippery slope, two unsuccessful meetings, because then time gets

distorted. everybody loses. You know, the momentum assumes countdown clock, kind of what you're talking about ocean of the time, they're making

F Francis Wade 40:13

a scene countdown clock, and

Raymond Sidney-Smith 40:15

all of us that have a muddy up the time

F Francis Wade 40:18

is a little bit difficult to describe. But But there, you said it for five minutes, it has a red portion that gradually shrinks like a pie chart. I've only seen it online. And I've actually seen one but the everyone can see the visual cue. So as you get to the as the meeting as the as you get to the time limit, you can see the time diminishing in front of you. This is for a live meeting, obviously. But it could be done online at just only seen the concept. I think it's the people who have ADHD, often use this particular tool to prevent themselves from going over. And I've met by one but never have. But the the other tool I thought was, this is the problem that we're sort of talking about the different ways, how do you give feedback to people who need to get it. And in some culture, most cultures, around meetings, there's no feedback at all. So bad behavior just basically gets accepted and ignored. But here's a here's one that is passive, that I used to work with a fellow who developed people counting software for Nielsen, that the TV really rating people. And what they used to do is put this device in your living room, sit on top of your TV, it would scan the room and just tell you how many people are watching TV, or when people are in the proximity. Why not put one of those in a meeting. And when you when you book a room for a meeting the meeting, the device scans the room passively. And console number of people who are in the room and count them the beginning and when it's supposed to start comes them after five minutes constant after 10. And at the end of the meeting, you get a report that just tells you what the that tells me it gives everyone the feedback around how we did in terms of starting the meeting on time getting everyone there. So it's a passive counter a passive way of giving feedback. I think this particular problem needs a lots of feedback, because in most cultures there is there's absolutely none, which allows behaviors to continue and and people who know otherwise. And people who who should do better. And people who are really smart people who have a lot of power, just because of there's no feedback of any kind, they just continuing and madly and ruin the meeting for other people.

Augusto Pinaud 42:40

You know, it's funny, you mentioned that we did a test on somewhere that we eliminate the face to face meetings. Okay. And then we did all the meetings using GoToMeeting. And the reason we did that without telling people initially, was to figure it out who on the meeting was present on the meeting for how long? Okay, and what we were trying to test was how we can make those meetings more effectively. Okay. And it worked great. Until the first report, the first time we said to people and say, Hey, this is what we're measuring. This is without say names, okay, we just did the upper monitoring had the names that we did not show them name, we just show them how long they get engaged into their own meetings, in many cases. Okay, what happened as soon as the results went out, is meeting engage in proof, not because really improved, because people are starting now instead of fooling around on their laptops fooling around on their phones, leaving the full screen for the meeting. So that time, the recording shows that they are engaged, and they work on their phone sending emails, were tracking, then the server on the other side as the other test, and then we eliminate the program, because it is again, part of the biggest problem of this discussion, turning to a culture problem, how we're going to improve culture for people who don't believe in meetings. And that's that's what turned to be a massive challenge here.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 44:09

Okay, so we're coming up on time, I want to make sure that we cover any final thoughts that you all have about successful meetings in terms of are there are the things that we have not yet covered in terms of communication skills, presentation skills, and then finally, what to do about closing meetings, and then post ops in terms of the the longevity of the actions from outcome. So for example, I like to give everyone an indicator that a meeting is coming to a close. So say 10 minutes or five minutes before the close of a meeting, I will let everybody know, okay, we have five minutes or 10 minutes left in the meeting, 15 minutes left in the meeting, let's spend this time going through the agenda and identifying what the final outcomes are for actions based on the decisions we've made here today. And then we can quickly scan those items, identify responsible parties, and all the while if I'm the scribe, which I typically am describing my own meetings, I'm taking my own notes anyway. And I will, I will jot down those right at the bottom of my meeting notes and identify who said they were going to do what, and that all is kind of in its own block. And in my in my note taking either Evernote, you know, digitally, but traditionally I am or typically, I'm taking notes on and in my rocket book notebook, which is a which is you know, pen on a special type of paper that I can then there's an app, I take a picture and then it shoots an email off to wherever I want it to go, an email address, Evernote, one drive, Google Drive, Dropbox, or otherwise. And so what what ultimately happens is that

now I have these notes for meeting, I can quickly digitize them, and then send them off to a digital repository that I can share to others very, very quickly and easily. So one of the little icons on my rocket book is identified to a group email address for my staff. So when we have our meeting, then I have been taking notes the entire time. And that, that those notes that are very easily translated into an email directly to them, because all I have to do is check the little box that goes to the group email, I snap a photo of it, and it goes out to them.

A **Augusto Pinaud** 46:34

And now there are a couple of things I would like to mention why

Raymond Sidney-Smith 46:38

understand that need to be taken hold responsible, all your

A **Augusto Pinaud** 46:42

organization, I went the meeting culture of your organization, because that will save you a lot of frustration. And yes, sometimes the sad realization is there is nothing that will improve this minutes for now. Okay. And, and we may need to revisit this one later. But because the chain people think, Oh, I can change the meeting, but if you don't understand what the culture behind all those meetings is, what tend to happen simply is you are trying to swim against the organization. And sadly, as much as it will be ideal, you cannot sell a meteorite to a dinosaur. Okay, the only thing you accomplished during that is make the dinosaur Matt. So it's something you need to be really careful when you do because then if you don't notice that what you accomplish is you really make people frustrated, and nothing move out of it.

F **Francis Wade** 47:44

You know, nothing move forward. So that's something important to to remember. It's interesting, the thought that I got from what you said is that when someone asks, which people do sometimes my company, oh, we need a culture change. I would I think my shorthand answer was no going to be Oh, great. Just put in rigorous email and meeting policies and give feedback. That's all. And they probably would blink a couple times. And say, Well, you know, those are really hard things to change. I said, Well, you start there. They're measurable. And they occur a huge cost. So start with those. Don't worry about all the other other enticing stuff, just do those, they'll take care of really, really long way. I

suspect that wouldn't have many clients in this area. And if I tried to do that, but no, I'm thinking based on what you said that those are embedded sort of bad areas of bad behavior in most companies. And there's a reason that they don't want to tackle them. And it's it's it has to do exactly as you said with the culture.

Raymond Sidney-Smith   48:49

With that we're going to close out this episode, I'm sure we will come back to the topic of of meetings in the future. And so if you have a question or comment about this cast, something that we discussed here on this episode of productivity cast, feel free to head over to the podcast website. If you're not listening to the episode from there at productivity cast.net there at the bottom of the page, you can leave a comment or question, and one of us will be glad to respond there at productivity cast.net you'll also find our show notes, our transcript, links to anything that we discussed. And and so you can find that all there on productivity cast.net you'll also have the subscribe option there. So you'll learn how to follow us from whatever application podcast directory via email however you want to receive productivity cast in the future. And if you have a just a general question about productivity, and you'd like us to cover a topic, feel free to suggest that by going to productivity cast.net forward slash contact, there'll be a contact page, you can either record an audio question and write from your web browser for us or you can type words into the form and send that to us and we'll be happy to receive those and review those and we come up with topics based on some of those recommendations. Thanks to a goose Joe and Francis for joining me here on this cast. And also, if you could please head over to iTunes or Stitcher or wherever else. You listen to the podcasts and feel free to leave a rating or review that helps us grow our podcast listening community. And so thank you for doing that.

Voiceover Artist   50:23

And that's it for this productivity cast. The weekly show about all things productivity with your hosts Ray Sidney Smith and a goose open out with Francis Wade and art gallery.