

Voiceover Artist 0:00

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 Sidney-Smith and a goose open out with Francis Wade and our gal Wix.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 0:17

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

Augusto Pinaud 0:22

I am Augusto Pinaud

Francis Wade 0:23

I am Francis Wade

Art Gelwicks 0:24

I am Art Gelwicks.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 0:25

And welcome to our listeners to this episode of productivity cast, where we actually are doing something a little bit different than we normally do. We have a guest today to talk about a system that I've known actually for quite a bit of time now. And so what I wanted to do was for all of us to have a conversation around learning about a system based in Outlook called control your day. And so to do that, we have the progenitor of that system, Jim McCullen, Jim considers himself a productivity hacker always looking for ways to reduce the effort. It takes to stay organized and get more things done. Jim's an avid GTD er, and has built a system called control your day that allows Microsoft Outlook users to apply GTD practices to manage email task lists, delegated work, all from one virtual search folder in Outlook. So Jim published his book, control your day on Amazon. And it's sold copies across the world. And he recently published a course based on that series titled control your day. And so welcome to productivity cast, Jim.

Jim McCullen 1:31

Hey, Ray, thanks so much for having me today. I am excited and look forward to be able to share some of this information with your audience.

Augusto Pinaud 1:38

Oh, really, really excited to have you here. I think I met Jim at least virtually many, many years ago in a time where I was leaving on a closed outlook environment. But over the years, I have recommend Jim's book to many people who are on those kinds of environments who can't or can't install limited pieces of software. Leaving outlook and require really to unleash the power of Outlook. You know, I been

saying for many years now the problem with outlook is that is a really, really long rope. And if you don't have a good guide, what happened is you tend to hang yourself with it. And Jim provide one of those good guides. Sowelcome, Jim.

Jim McCullen 2:21

Thanks. So, yeah, let me just give you a little bit of an overview of control your day how I got started with it. So everything really started from David Allen's book, Getting Things Done. I was a passionate follower from shortly after it was published. I created all of the manual systems that he originally recommended the paper based systems. And then I started looking for technology solutions to deploy GTD with and at that time, there really weren't very many. And so I as I switched and started using Microsoft Outlook. I tried using these other to do lists and external lists to to match My GTD world and it just wasn't working for me because everything would always come back to Outlook for me. My company is heavily focused on email. We're a global organization, we have people working 24 seven email is just that best channel. And so I needed a way and outlook to apply these GTD practices. And so I started to build out this system control your day, and used it for a number of years before publishing a book or most recently, the training series on it. But the concepts that I deployed were, were really kind of taking a different approach to Outlook. So most of you if you're use Outlook, you probably have dozens or hundreds of folders that you organize your emails into. In control your day. I just use two folders. I have my inbox and my Sent Items. That's it. Everything else is managed in virtual search folders, which are basically just filters that you save in Outlook, and so bye bye Using these virtual search folders, I can organize everything from just my inbox in my Sent Items. The other key thing in control your day is, in most outlook users, you're managing by the received date in your email. So as messages come in that received date, they just keep pushing down other messages and you lose focus on them. What I do as messages come into my control your day system and outlook, I flag every single message with a due date of today. And then I can create a virtual search folder looking for that due date, and organized by that due date. And so that way as I'm processing my email, if new messages come in, and I don't need to deal with them for a couple of weeks, I can just push the due date forward two weeks. Same thing if I send a message to somebody, I can set a follow up flag with a due date on it for say two weeks from now and even put a note in there for what I'm waiting for. And so that that follow up flag in Microsoft Outlook. allows you to add a note. And so that note allows me to define next actions. So David Allen talks a lot about next actions and contexts. And I'm able to incorporate all of that in with the follow up flag notes, and then create these virtual search folders. And let me just come back for one second to the virtual search folders. So I really just have three, I have my due today. So that's everything in my system that's due today, whether it's in my inbox, or my Sent Items, I have my CYD folder, which is everything

that's in my system. So anything that has a due date, and the way I clear that out is if I don't need the message, I just clear out the due date flag I've cleared mark the messages as completed. And it's out of my system. It's out of my folders, but it's still in my inbox in my Sent Items for reference. So the other item, the other one I have is my overdue folder. And so that's anything that I haven't gotten to and that ties in perfectly with David Allen's weekly review, so at the end of the week, I can go back into my system and look at that overdue folder and understand that that's the work that I have to catch up on that I have to clean up. And then from there, I can create as many other virtual search folders as I need. So for example, I can set up folders based on context. So I can go say, hey, let me get all my next actions that have call at call at the front of the action. At that point, I can go in and see all my calls that I have to do. So I can create as many virtual search folders as I want, I can set them up, tear them down. But all my messages just exist in these two folders, my inbox in my Sent Items, and I'm not using any external software, which is critically important today, as companies locked down their environments and only allow you to use their corporate authorized software. All I'm using is Microsoft Outlook.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 6:55

And so Jim, just so the listeners are aware if they aren't aware about virtual search folders. How does one create? First of all, what is a virtual search folder? And how does one create it not in like a specific version of Outlook, but kind of how does someone manifest a virtual search folder

Jim McCullen 7:15

just down on the left hand side, if you scroll down the left of your outlook window, you'll see search folders and you can create a new search folder. And once you select that, you can then go in and select the actual folders you want to look at. So for me, I always select my inbox and my Sent Items. So that's the two sources for this search. And then it allows you to put in any kind of criteria you want. So for example, in most of them, I'll go in and say, I only want to include messages that have a due date. That means they're somewhere in my system, I need to action them still, right. If they don't have a due date, I've finished it, I don't want to see it. I can also go in and say look at categories. So for example, if I categorize that message for a specific particular trip or customer or something like that. Do that, in the follow up flag, it's actually a text field that you can type information into. So that's where I can also set up text based context based search folders. So I can go in and say, Look in my inbox and sent item, look in the follow up flag for anything that has the ad sign and the letters CALL call. So anything that starts with that call, I want to put in a context folder called calls. And now I'll see that anytime I have a new clause in there. Does that make sense?

Art Gelwicks 8:31

when we're looking at outlook and outlook is primarily a desktop based application, how are you seeing your GTD approach translating to the web versions within Office 365?

Jim McCullen 8:46

It's a good question. So the web version does have the ability to see the search folders so you can see that part of it. So I can operate on the web the same way the the only challenges without look on the mobile edition, those search folders don't move over there. So on mobile on my phone, I'm really just looking at new messages. My system of managing from my laptop and the desktop or web version.

Art Gelwicks 9:13

Okay, second question for you, then. Outlook itself is complicated enough. I mean, I've been working with Microsoft products for Lord knows how long is do you see any challenge? Or how do you deal with the challenge of not only getting somebody to really grasp how to use Outlook effectively, but then also integrating a lot of GTD style thinking into that.

Jim McCullen 9:38

Training is critically important. So like, you know, for example, in both the book and the training series that I do, I spent a lot of time first talking about email productivity in general. And, and a lot of those things are concepts from David Allen's book, but just general great concepts to follow. I think you need to have some understanding and thought into That this is a system and you need to understand email as a whole how you manage it, as opposed to the, you know, implementation of Microsoft Outlook itself. So I think if you can understand those things like you know how often you process your email, what you do when you process your email, how you define next action, so you're not looking at the same message over and over and over again, I think those are a lot of the challenges that people face in Outlook is, you know, like, for example, they may just go into Outlook, receive all their mail, they don't have time to look at it. And it just kind of falls into their inbox and they don't process it and it just creates stress and work that they miss and don't get back to. So I think it's critical to you kind of have to think about it from the productivity angle first, and then the application of the technology Second.

Art Gelwicks 10:50

All right, this is my third question, and then I will move on. Now this is always the fun one. What do you think is the most common mistake People make in trying to put your CYD system into place,

Jim McCullen 11:05

trying to live in both worlds for an extended period. So a lot of people that I know, they'll have, you know, hundreds of messages in their inbox. And you know, and I suggested in the books well, like you

have to kind of almost get to a clean start. So you have to take those hundreds of messages, put them somewhere, you know, you have to deal with them. But start fresh with with control your day with a, you know, a clean desk, otherwise, you'll just never get caught up. And then the second part is, is basically, it's a habit. So you have to continue to do it over and over each day until it becomes second nature. The people that I talk to that I get feedback to that have been using it for years and years. They can't live without it. Right? But you do have to spend like anything else that first 30 to 45 days, you know, just working it, working it working it until it becomes second nature to you.

Art Gelwicks 11:59

Yeah, I gotta say I love the fact that you've got a system that's built around an out of the box implementation. Because honestly, that's a soapbox that I stand on a lot is that so many systems out there will try to get you to plug something else in, excuse me add a piece of software, download something from GitHub, who knows. But being able to configure your system using what you have provided, that's a that's a huge step. So I can't encourage people enough to take a look at this.

Augusto Pinaud 12:27

There is a couple of things, you know that and I will go in the opposite order that you mentioned them because I think one of them is relevant, you know, to mention, the clean slate is no different than when the first time you grab that getting things done book. You know, it says Oh, it takes two days to implement this and you know, me at least Okay, when I read that I say two days. It's gonna be three, five minutes to implement this. Let me read this faster. And, well, I'm not going to admit how long it took to implement But, but we were you know, it is important to understand that whatever is in your system, some of those things you are aware many of them you are not your subconscious is but your conscious is not. You know, I, one of the things we're looking into all this time is even the people who had had home offices before are discovering that their home offices are not working as effectively as they used to. And part of that is well Judy signed to home office to do X, okay, whatever x means, hey, it's for me to work over the weekends is for me to work, you know, do deep deep thinking you know, when I'm coming back from the office to be able to decompress and really thought deeply in the projects of the work or for me to handle my side business. I'm now what is happening is okay I'm living in this place 24 seven and the office was never thought for that it is in a way no different what happened on your outlook system before you start implementing controls your day is outlook you know I said any email you know go and create an email account right now and before you can click the Go to see that inbox you already have three emails and nobody has received that name. It is no different with Outlook you get into corporate, you get your finally you get your email, you open that thing and there is a bazillion of emails. There

is a bazillion of configurations that the company is giving you that is not allowing you to in many cases to understand what it is, you know one of the beautiful things of their system is what you call the catch up folder that you were describing before. That is happened, that you need to have that place where you are going to be able to come and go. And focus I think is really important for the listeners to understand any of these things are going to help you to really move at a much better speed also will require that time for you to see the new things you know, when you read even if you don't live in an outlet when you read that email management part and understand how to manage email and how to manage email, you know, on that understanding that really well will also help you get a much stronger setup than this.

Jim McCullen 15:43

It's really great what you said about the home office setup. And I think about that often that you know, so many people just have like a mess of stuff, whether it's in their inbox or you know, on their desk or wherever they keep their things and so I find at least I need to have things broken up into kind of work segments, right? So like my desk at home is very organized. And it's just my work, right? My my email system, I like to have the same way. So I can focus on something at a time. So when I'm processing email, that's what I'm doing right, I'm looking at my due today folder, and I'm processing what's coming today, to figure out, you know, apply the four DS to it, do I do it, delegate it, delete it, or defer it right, I'm going to go through each one of those messages and apply those four DS. And then I've processed my email and I feel good about myself, right, and I'm done with that process. Now, maybe I want to go make some phone calls. So I'll run over to my calls context search folder, and I'll work on that for a while. And then to your point about the catch up folder. I'm going to block out a certain amount of time at the end of the week to do my weekly review. And that's when I'm going to catch up on those overdue items that I just couldn't get to or missed. So they don't necessarily create stress for me every day and I'm sure So many people do that where you look at these messages 5, 6, 7, 8 times, you're like, I don't have time to do it, it stresses you out. For me it doesn't because I've either pushed it off to the future, or I know I'm going to come back to it and address it in that weekly review.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 17:14

So I wanted to switch gears just ever so slightly to just how CYD has translated outside of Outlook. And if you've had any experience since we last talked about this half a decade ago, and and you had talked about some of the ways in which you could potentially use this outside of out of the outlook platform. Have you been able to see people extend CYD outside of the Microsoft ecosystem?

Jim McCullen 17:42

Unfortunately, I really still have not. I've tried a couple of times, like in Gmail, for example. And there's just the one limiting factor

that and if anybody has a solution for this, please send me an email. And it'd be fantastic, but I cannot figure out a way Out of the box in Gmail to be able to add notes to messages, like there's plugins for Gmail that do that. But there's, again, I want to stay away from third party plugins. But there just doesn't seem to be a way to add a note that I can reference. And that's what I use for my next actions and my contexts, which are all critically important to the process. So yeah, that's the part I've struggled with. And you know, honestly, I'm, you know, I'm an outlook guy. And, you know, I just kind of have stayed in that platform for now.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 18:32

Yeah, so I would look at Google tasks. So now that Gmail has integrated very tightly with Google tasks, you have the interface, you have the interface between Gmail and each email message, then tagging to a specific note. In essence, the task is just basically a note referencing back to the email message. So maybe that might work out for you. That's check it out. And then look at Google Keep integrations So Google, keep as a part of Google Drive but it does have some some integration there that may or may work not okay not yeah check this out. But you know, it's always worth looking at. I

Francis Wade 19:10

have a question about moving from Outlook to Gmail because in the last year I actually made the jump and it was really only because outlook was so sluggish on my laptop at the time I was running Windows seven and it was killing me and I thought I gotta find something better because it was taking me minutes to open and just do simple things. Anyways, we're still with a Gmail and, and no reveling in all of the power of the interconnected on different platforms or plugins. I'm really enjoying Gmail and it's it's really exploiting it to its fullness, but I guess better than more than I could do on Outlook. But the question I have is what principles Jim translated from CYD into every any other email client Use for what what are the key principles, the top three, four or five that I need to carry with me as I go into Gmail,

Jim McCullen 20:10

In Gmail. So instead of categories, there's labels, right? So you can label your messages to organize them. Gmail does have the ability to set up filters to pre process mail. So I would definitely recommend doing that so that you can organize messages as they're coming in into different contexts or groupings by those labels. So really, the idea is anything you can do to reduce the processing time, number one, and number two, so that you have your messages that need to be worked in some kind of a grouping that you don't have to just keep rereading the entire message. I think that's the biggest benefit is if you don't have to look at that. Like when you look at an email message and you think to yourself, I don't have time to do this right now. And you

just leave it and then you can come back to it five or six more times, and you look at it and you say the same thing to yourself, if you can find some way to label it or organize it so that you can then come back and work it with other similar messages, then I think you can be really productive that way. And you can do that with just about any email system.

Francis Wade 21:18

That makes me think I need a label or a folder in Gmail for extra say, on unfinished email or something like that. Because there's, I think, way better than what I'm doing No, not well, occasionally, we're leaving in the inbox and just begging for trouble because then the same phenomena you mentioned occurs, which gets pushed to the bottom of a list.

Jim McCullen 21:41

Exactly. And, you know, Gmail does that automatically for you with like, the social messages and all that. But you can extend that yourself, like I'm sure we all get a lot of messages that are referenced type messages. So we need them as a possible point of reference, but we don't actually need to read them and do anything with them. So if you could at least move all of that type of mail into a later into a folder or label somewhere that at least are out of your system and you're just working and looking at the messages that you need to do something with.

Francis Wade 22:10

I wish I'd have an automatic. Also, if it forced me to either move it or delete it at all don't think it really went as real because he knows everything about these things. Rick, can email do that?

Raymond Sidney-Smith 22:26

No. So there are a couple things that there there are a couple of things that you can do. Actually, interestingly, there was there used to be something called the Gmail game. And that was created by the folks at Baden, who produced the boomerang software. And they had this really, really cool game called the email game, and you literally opened up the interface, it opened up your Gmail or G Suite mail, email messages, and you could only do one of a few things with it reply, referred or deleted. And it was and it kept a little happy face right. And so as you answered and dealt with email faster, it kept us alive. face as you did it slower, it gave you a frowny face. And honestly, I used it all the time and it was phenomenal and they've deprecated the software and it's closed down now. But the thing that can help you though Francis is a couple of things. One, the Gmail interface uses an automated prompting system. So if you don't deal with something that is from an important person, they directly messaged you, you're in the two or CC line, and they've messaged you, it will surface to the top and say, Hey, by the way, three days ago, this person emailed you do you want to reply to them, so make sure

that setting is turned on in your settings. Second is you have the ability to snooze email messages. And a lot of people don't realize you do have this functionality. So if you are in Gmail, if you hover over any line item of any message, you will see a little clock icon. If you hover over that clock icon, you can click the snooze button and say later today, tomorrow and you can actually set the time for what later today means you can set later this week this weekend next week. And then you can also pick a specific custom time. And so if you can't deal with an email now, you can punt it into the future and have it come back to your inbox at the date and time you want it to, so that you can deal with it then. So in that sense, you can always really manifest Inbox Zero, if that's a goal of yours, because you're able to go ahead and say, I don't want to deal with this right now. But I don't want to forget it, I want it to come back to me at some point in the future. So those are the functions you do have to be able to, you know, manage email and not lose sight of something that you might want to in the future.

Jim McCullen 24:36

That's a great point because that's exactly what I do with the due date. The due date in Microsoft Outlook is I push things forward, so I just don't have to worry about them until I care about it. Same thing, like if I send an email to someone, I'll set every message I send out if I'm waiting for a response, I'm going to set a follow up flag or a due date for say two weeks from now and then that way it comes back and reminds me that I'm waiting for something from that person. So sounds like you can do exactly the same thing in Gmail, which is great.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 25:03

And I think, again, just to your point, Francis, I think having a label called respond would be useful as well, because then you can label those things as respond, snooze it, and then things that come back are not just coming back to you without context, they're coming back to you with what the action is associated with that particular email, which is I wanted to respond to this person I just didn't know, I just didn't want to respond at this moment. You could have other labels like, you know, review, and respond, just respond. Think about and respond, whatever the various contexts are of the actions you want to take on that email. You can go ahead and create labels, you know, label it, snooze it, and then when it comes back to you, now you have context and the appropriate time for you to be able to manage that item.

Francis Wade 25:53

I think I'll try I'll try that tag tagging and then labeling and then just So we're automatic, being lazy and

Raymond Sidney-Smith 26:03

you can you can automate the labeling. You can you can, you can

certainly do that. You can, you can't. Let's see. So you'd have to use something external like swift or Zapier to be able to manifest the automated labeling, you can filter and label items as they come in if you know exactly who and what it is that you're looking for. So I would look at filters to see what you can you need to do in order to be able to do that. So I stand corrected, you don't need sorry, you don't need after Zapier to be able to filter and add a label, you can easily do that. So you should be able to do that Gmail inside the box. The stuff that's more sophisticated in terms of being able to manage movement of things or returning things at a later time. That's where you may need a little bit more of a sophisticated external tool to integrate with it. But I would start with I was Started with looking at filters and labels, and the snoozing functionality. And the three of those together should be able to manage 85 to 90% of what you're trying to do.

Francis Wade 27:09

Right. But to get back to Jim's book a little bit, because this is a this is a nod in the direction of the power of his, his approach is that he's he's implemented a number of principles, specifically in Outlook, in a way that works in Outlook. And I think that people, people like me who are using other other systems, or people who want to use a variation of his approach in Outlook, but still stick to the same principles. I think the principles and where he's coming from is what gives the book The real points. It's the, the thoughts through ideal, and then the question, okay, how do I get to that ideal state, and then outlook is one way to do it the way his book describes it, but there's probably others and people who want to use their own variation and the thing they need to do is to From what I'm gathering is a stick to understand his principle at a high enough level, that they can say, oh, okay, instead of using this particular flag this way, I'll use it that way just because of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Augusto Pinaud 28:11

And that is one of the one of the interesting things on the book is that even when Jim put up framework, and obviously some specific examples, the way the book is written, and the way the principles are used inside of Outlook allows you to that customization to a certain extent or to a to a really good extent, you know, where, where you can call things and whatever, whatever really rock, rock your world but using and being able to move inside of that. So it's hard to deny how fast things has now evolved in the field of remote work since COVID-19. You know, it's it seems like the last couple three to three months in essence Started, really has accelerated things in years instead of months, and especially in our organization, as you were describing who's 24 seven, because of the size, you know, I'm guessing that the impact is even larger. One of the things that people I'm working with and clients are complaining now is that they there was a lot of things on their system that were two minute things. Okay, that

is, okay, let me walk to Joe's desk at the end of this hallway and talk to Joe, or let me you know, interrupt Joe. That is really what it happened to ask him this question. And now, well, I don't want to send another email because Joe is receiving a bazillion of them. I don't want to and he's ignoring some of them because of the volume. Okay, and like for a better system. So I don't want to make assume because it's just a quick question. I need to know where that talent is. I need to know where a resource is. I don't want to Do a formal soon for that. So, we are recurring to more and more to text instant messenger slack. I know this Have you seen that on your system and and what advice can you give to the people who are into that environment but need to integrate that really into the outlook world and to see why the work so that way you have a one solid system?

Jim McCullen 30:27

Yeah, I guess it's it's a great point. And definitely I've seen the world change dramatically in the last three to four months. As I said earlier, I work for a global company. So you know, we always dealt with a lot of email. But now I'm seeing it be the primary channel of communication, especially for our teams here in each of the offices that are working remote. And a couple of things for from that standpoint. One, I think you need to recognize that we're in the past your persona was defined a lot of times in the office by how you presented yourself how you communicated? Well, that doesn't exist right now for a lot of people and your persona, your what you present is your email. And so if your emails are noisy and not well thought out, and just you know, firefight style managers, peers, other players in the organization are going to start to see that and maybe question, right. So this, I think, is a great opportunity to use a system like this to, again to the points earlier, it's less about outlook, specifically, but more about the principles and concepts of how you manage your day how you manage your email that is extremely visible. Now, if you create a message, and you've clearly defined like, who you're addressing it to what you want from that person. So for example, you know, so many times you get an email, nobody's addressed in the head of the message, right? So are you addressing it to me? I don't know. There's no specific Quick ask at the top of the message. So I don't really know what you want. Are you just sending it for my information? Do you need a response? Do you need something? So if you can take that time to define, okay, who am I sending it to? What do I want great. Tell the person what you want at the top of the message, kind of bullet out what you expect from them or the recap of the message and try to give that person as much information as you can in that email. So often I see an email go back and forth 30 or 40 times with little bits and pieces of information. It's like the two people are sitting at their desk talking to each other. Instead of taking the time and really thinking about what do you want, and what does the person on the other side need to be able to help you. If you can think through that you can create a much better message. And again, you know, with everything being virtual email is a way that you can show

yourself to the organization show you how professional you are.

Augusto Pinaud 32:57

I love that because I That is a great way to, to put it on I think is the first time I hear it in these times how that may bring email back to to a really relevant place when when you look at from that perspective,

Raymond Sidney-Smith 33:16

I also wanted to note that it's, it's probably interesting for our listeners, because our listeners are probably the ones who are doing those things that you're talking about, Jim, it's more encouraging the folks around us to make sure that they're actually applying those principles, I find it to be that that's the biggest challenge is that if all of my clients if all of my colleagues would, would do what I'm already doing, trying to make sure everybody's productive. We would all be more productive. What what what is your, I guess you're actually modeling what I feel like everybody should do, which is you're teaching what you're doing, and you're showing people how to do that as because you're an it. It's it kind of lends to that but You have any advice for folks who might be interested in kind of propagating this email productivity, principled view out there into the world? Like, how do you? How do you? How do you persuade others to embrace email productivity?

Jim McCullen 34:15

One thing that we did in the past with the team that was a global team, is we actually set up a communications agreement with the team. So we were having a lot of struggles, getting everybody to be on the same page in email management. And so some people might not respond to an email for a week because it wasn't important to them, or someone else might, you know, add their boss on copy without really asking the group. And so we defined a list of like 10 things that we agreed to as a team that we were going to do in email. So one of them might be I will respond to your message within 48 hours. Another was, I won't push this message up the organization without everyone else on the messages. okay to do that. Great, I will create a clear action item at the top of the message. And so we put together this list. And, and that list allowed us to be able to go back to that person and say, hey, you're not following what we agreed to in the communication protocol. So it wasn't chasing them to say, hey, you didn't respond to this email in 48 hours or whatever it was, Hey, guys, we agreed to this. And is there something wrong? Did you not feel like that's a good thing to agree to. And it really worked and the team got so much tighter. So training and things like that are super valuable to help people understand the tools that they have and how to best use them. But you really need to get that social agreement with your team. First, otherwise, it just won't work.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 35:44

I couldn't agree more. I couldn't agree more. So in the time we have left with you, I wanted to talk a little bit about the is your job to respond to email messages all day or to produce outputs. I think that there are many of us over over time who have experienced that where we spend so much time in our email that we get lost in email and and start to feel unproductive because of that. And how do you combat that? If you're spending as much time in your email triaging, as I like to call it? And is that really the best plan and how to see Weide combat that notion of of being kind of captured by your email all day?

Jim McCullen 36:30

If you look at your most job descriptions, nowhere in the job description does it say email management? And yet we all do email all day long in our jobs. Yeah, no, it's uh, I think, you know, there's some some key points and it like applying that concept of processing your email and then getting away from it and doing work is critical because it's just like, you know, the squirrel, right like, it's like, oh, well hit send and receive and just see what new things came in that are more exciting than the stuff. I have to Already, so setting defined times of when you're going to receive email, if you can do that, I think critically important so that you can focus your efforts there, applying the four DS, so you know really being strong with that, am I going to delete it, delegate it to it or defer, it just keeps you on focus, so that you can get it done. And then the other thing is, I find it super valuable to wait. Some people are so fast to respond to messages. I find, if this message went out to a bunch of different people, I don't need to be the first one to respond. You know, unless you're a customer service rep, and it's your customer different story, right? But a lot of cases Oh, wait a little bit, and then somebody else will answer the question and that message is done. And I didn't have to do anything. or worst case, you know, you respond to the message quickly, someone else responds with more information that you didn't have. And now your message looks wrong. And now you got to go write another message to clarify your point. So some so processing, defining what you're going to do When you process your email, and waiting, not necessarily being the first one to respond to every message, I think those two things can really help.

Augusto Pinaud 38:07

So you made a great point, you know, the time to respond and the time to receive email, you know, one of the, one of the challenges and I advise this to my clients is, when you're going to go into that going to respond, turn to Wi Fi, that connection, the network of your computer off, respond, and then let them all go out. And the reason of that is exactly what you're describing, you have a much lower chance to play to get into that game of ping pong email, you know, I, I respond, and then the guy responds so fast and I'm not even done.

Jim McCullen 38:46

You could spend the whole day right just on that one message.

Augusto Pinaud 38:50

You know, that was the reason I unless I'm traveling on on travel, I don't look at email on on my phone and the reason For that was exactly that. And now even that, you know, the iPads has data even less. But the reason was what I discover was I was not only playing ping pong game, but because the iPhone was receiving email all day I was spending hours doing exactly all the bad things you were saying I was looking at the same meal six times because I look it on the phone and say, Oh yeah, I need something that is not in the phone. Or that I am purpose don't want to have on the phone. I i particular limit what my phone can do on purpose because when I'm going out and I'm not bringing any technology other than the phone, I don't want the phone for me to be that device that can do everything I actually wanted to do less. You know, my I want my smart phone to be a lot dumb. But it is good to to understand that and get that time.

Jim McCullen 39:53

I guess in your point of closing out you know, like stopping your internet connection to do your processing. is a great idea like back in the days when we used to travel, you know, I do a West Coast trip, and I could get my entire due today inbox cleared out, because

Augusto Pinaud 40:10

It was awesome.

Jim McCullen 40:12

I had five hours where, you know, I wasn't getting any new emails and then you know, I got off the plane, I felt like 1000 bucks. And then of course, I got 200 new emails when I got off the plane but yeah, I think it's super valuable to close that timeout like that.

Augusto Pinaud 40:25

Yeah, that time required the maturity after you finished, you know, mine was la Miami, after you get to Miami to actually connect that computer again, little company was coming. That requires that maturity, but hey. No, but I think that's really, really important. And it's something that on the instant and ubiquitous connectivity that we leave people have forget that that is a possibility. Disconnect yourself for 20 minutes because the other thing that happened when you do that is it You start monitoring your week and you discovered you're spending two or three hours doing email right now, the moment you kill that connection, what you're going to discover is that that time is going to be significantly impacted. And you're going to spend less time on the game of email and more time on the really what is your job? You know, I love that comment, you may well know nowhere on your job description, says deal with email of duty, if I ever read that on a job description, I will run the opposite direction.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 41:33

And I'll point out the fact that there are some people where that that is if they work in customer service or in some kind of highly responsive space. You know, you may have to be living in your email and we fully understand that it's for the rest of us who that's not in our job description, and it really doesn't make much sense. And, you know, one of the other things that come to mind is that, you know, it's not just about disconnecting from email, but going Back to your point, Jim about having a communications policy, a communications agreement with your team, in terms of how you respond, if you are explicit about how you plan to respond to people how you plan to communicate, listen, guys, email me between, you know, nine and 11. And I'm going to respond to you at one o'clock, if you were, you know, email me, between X and Y period of time, I'm gonna respond to you at three or four o'clock. If there are these kinds of rubrics that you can explain to your team, then they have the expectation to get a response and they don't have to worry about getting a response because they know when they're going to and knowing when emails not appropriate. And I think this is so important. So so many times, what would be a two minute phone call, becomes a 50 email thread. And we need to remember that email can sometimes be a limiting factor in progress. If we don't use the right communications platform. for that. I want to just turn to turn the floor over To art for his two track technical questions, and then we're gonna start the Closeout.

Art Gelwicks 43:05

Yeah, these are just two little ones. But I, I know you mentioned in your book, you're talking about using the flagging capability. And I just wanted to be clear that you're using the outlook. Follow up flag, correct?

Jim McCullen 43:15

That is correct.

Art Gelwicks 43:16

Okay. Do you use that in? Or have you started to see people using that in conjunction in office 365 with Outlook tasks, specifically, because it now starts to roll up through the cloud solutions, they've started to tie all these flags and tasks together. Have you started to use that and have you found any strengths or weaknesses from doing that?

Jim McCullen 43:38

I have not yet. I do need to go back and take a look at that now and see if it's better than it was before. In the old world it all it did was create a task and outlook which was then disconnected from the message so I didn't really see the value of that. But I will take another look and see if if they've improved that at all.

Art Gelwicks 43:57

Yeah, it's definitely something if if you're going To be in a 365

environment, it's worth looking at just specifically because they're forcing you to look at how these things interconnect. Long story short, when you create a follow up flag and outlook now in tasks and 365 there's actually a section in tax called flagged emails. And you can actually roll it that way and, and not even ties back to OneNote there are ways to do it through all the different platform pieces. So definitely interesting, but I just want to make sure that was the feature you were using instead, instead of something else.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 44:31

Yeah, especially since Microsoft is bundling Microsoft to do Microsoft planner, which is now becoming What is it now becoming it's becoming tat is it going to be called tasks now?

Art Gelwicks 44:41

Yeah, I think yeah, that's what they're gonna do is they're gonna change the they're gonna muddle the branding yet again. And I think it's now going to be called tasks because planner was causing confusion with project and don't even get me started on this. Oh, man. So many products out there,

Raymond Sidney-Smith 44:58

right. Yes. stickies is going to integrate with OneNote, which is going to the which integrates with Outlook within the, you know, Microsoft tasks environment space, and to do is going to be bundled in. So all of these pieces what I, what I presume Microsoft is trying to do is connecting the database to all of these various task management and project management pieces so that they'll be interconnected in some way, shape or form. And I look forward to when they, as you said, are stopped muddying and muddling the brand. And now we have one consistent cohesive space to be able to place things and for them to synchronize across the various ecos, you know, across the ecosystem. So it's not so confusing.

Art Gelwicks 45:40

Yeah, it'll be great to see unified the problems going to be that for the user, at least I think they're going to wonder what system to do it in then. I mean, if all this information moves back and forth, and back and forth, well, where does your primary platform become? Do you live in Outlook? Do you live in OneNote? Do you live in tasks? Do you live in all three? And do you have members of a team That summer using one tool, some are using the other. It gets, it gets really exceptionally complicated at times, because there's so much power and configurability. So you, the business and the productivity thinking really has to come key. And that's the more I think about it. That's one of the reasons where I'm really liking your strategy here Jim because you can adapt it. I mean, similar to the way GTD works and other things work. It's not locked into one specific implementation of one specific platform. So it's good to see something that somebody can take a hold of and say, Okay, I'm going to tweak this a little bit, or

I'm going to hack on it a little bit, and make it work for me.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 46:41

So Jim, thank you so much for joining us here on ProductivityCast. How can folks learn about you and I know that you have a new course that you've recently launched? Can you tell us a little bit about where folks can find that and where they can find you and learn more about control your day? Sure, absolutely.

Jim McCullen 46:58

So just go to Control Your Day dot net. So not com. I don't know when that one, unfortunately, but control your date dotnet. And I've got links there to the book to the Udemy core training course. And just other information about control your day. There's also a chat feature right on the websites. If you have any questions for me, you can just hit that and I'll, I'll be happy to respond to you on those. So yeah, control your data. net is the best way to get more information.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 47:27

Fantastic. I will make sure to put a link to those items in the show notes. And that way you all can hop over there to Jim's website and to the Udemy course. So with that, thank you, Jim, for joining us here on ProductivityCast.

Jim McCullen 47:40

Yeah, thank you everybody.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 47:41

That was Jim McMullen, the originator of control your day, both the book and the course. And so head out there and check out Jim's work. He's doing some really great stuff with corporate email productivity. While we are at the end of our discussion, the conversation doesn't stop here. If a question or a comment about what we discussed here on this channel. Please visit our episode page on productivity cast dotnet. So there on the podcast website at the bottom of the page, there's a comment section you can leave comments or questions. We're happy to read and respond to your questions there. By the way, to get any productivity cast episode fast, simply add the three digit episode number to the end of ProductivityCast dotnet forward slash right so Episode One would be ProductivityCast dotnet forward slash 001.

Episode Two would be ProductivityCast dotnet, forward slash 002, and so on. If you have a topic about personal productivity you'd like us to discuss on a future cast, please visit productivity cast dotnet forward slash contact you can leave a voice recorded message or type of some message and we'll be happy to feature it on a future episode potentially. I want to express my thanks to a good steppin out Francis Wade and art galax for joining me here on ProductivityCast each week you can learn more about them and their work by visiting productivity cast dotnet as well. I'm writing Sidney-Smith on behalf of all of us at ProductivityCast Here's your productive life. Take care of your

body.

Voiceover Artist 49:06

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