106-dealing-with-distractions-open-offices-productivitycast

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SPEAKERS

Art Gelwicks, Augusto Pinaud, Raymond Sidney-Smith, Francis Wade

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00:00

Are you ready to manage your work and personal world better to live a fulfilling productive life,

00:05

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00:08

the weekly show about all things productivity, here, your host Ray Sidney-Smith and a gousto pinout with Francis Wade and art gal, Wix.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:17

A quick note, before we get started with our episode today, for those of you listening, who are interested in engaging with others, listening to ProductivityCast, please find our digital

community at WWW dot personal productivity dot club, sign up, and we'll approve you into the community, then find the ProductivityCast channel and join that you can come on and episodes, ask questions and engage with the ProductivityCast. Team and community. It's easy to sign up and it's free. Again, that's www dot personal productivity dot club. Thanks so much. And now on with the show ProductivityCast Episode 106 Welcome back, everybody to ProductivityCast, the weekly show about all things personal productivity, I'm Ray Sidney-Smith.

A Augusto Pinaud 00:55

And I'm a bootstrapping.

F Francis Wade 00:56

I'm Francis Wade.

A Art Gelwicks 00:58

And I'm marquel. wicks.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:59

Welcome, gentlemen. And Happy New Year, Happy New Year to listeners. This is our first episode of 2021. And hopefully this year will be a better year than 20, in the sense that after hopefully, you know, people start to get vaccinated in larger swamps and everything else like that, we'll be getting back to our normal lifestyles. And I'm looking forward to, you know, seeing people in real life again, very soon. And what we wanted to do today, is we got a listener question. And we thought, Well, why the heck not answer that listener question as a good kickoff to our new year. And so what we're gonna do is cover kind of the points of the big ticket, hiccup points that this particular listener had, and this is from Brent. And I'm just going to read the pertinent points of his comment. And so he says, that he has been practicing, getting things done for about four or five years, and he firmly believes in the system, he's a manager and works in an open office environment. He says, quote, I don't currently have the ability to schedule my time, which makes it extremely difficult to work on the things without getting interrupted. And so with that in mind, he's looking to hear what we're understanding. And Brent, you can always comment on this episode. And let us know if we got it right. But we're hearing is his strategies for dealing with distractions in open office environments, and really how to get the most important things done with that distracted environment with those interruptions happening. And of

course, we do live in an interrupted in an interruption driven world. And we need to be able to have practices to be able to overcome those. And so with that, let's kick into the conversation and start off with dealing with distractions in an open office environment. And what are the practicalities there? What are the things that we can do to be able to help Brent and others who are in that situation, the

A Augusto Pinaud 02:59

distractions happens, and there is nothing that we can do. And it's something we have learned over the last year is that the distractions evolve and change. And when you think you control a set of distractions, and new ones will come, but this is still a game of breadcrumbs. And you need to understand as as in crais, distractions increase, what you need to do is better breadcrumbs for you. So years past, many years ago, I used to have a notepad, and there was a line and that notepad and basically I leave what was the last thing I was working on before I was distracted before I was interrupted before that phone caller that walk in into my office. And later that changed for an index card. And now it's just a tag into my system where if I get a phone call, if I get I picked the call and said give me a second and then write down I'm working on so that way as soon as that call. It's over regardless how long or how short it was, I can go back to that then and catch up or continue the trade and where he was even if that phone call means I now need to go and do something else or get distracted or get engaged into a different activity whatever that time, usually is that clue that I give to my to my own self is good enough, I can grab and come back to that activity.

F Francis Wade 04:30

So what Augusto suggested handles the I would say the individual side of the problem, but ultimately this is a social problem, right? The management of the organization has set the workplace up in a particular way that hinders the hinders bread's productivity. And ultimately, you know, he can do a bunch of things on his own. I've seen people wear headphones and put up signs and construct Plexiglas petitions, you know, all kinds of put on hats, all kinds of tricks and but these are ultimately social social barriers, there to tell people that I'm not to be interrupted. But that only takes you so far. Because if your management believes that you need to be available to be interrupted, as if you're an emergency doctor, from the minute you start work at 801, to the minute you leave you, you end at five o'clock, their belief is that you are infinitely interruptible, then ultimately, there's nothing that he can do with the headphones, they'll just tell him to get rid of the headphones. So this strikes me as a social problem. Primarily, it's a it's a, it's in the relationship between management and workers and the decisions that have either been made or not made. And ultimately, those will overcome any individual tactic that he

could come up with. It's strikes me.

A Art Gelwicks 05:58

Yeah, see, now I'm going to disagree with you there on that, because I don't think it's entirely a social problem, I think what we're failing to take into consideration is that there are many roles out there, you just talked about one of them with the emergency room doctor, but even something less life valuable than that. Maybe I'm just working in a call center, maybe I'm working at a retail desk, that are designed to be interrupt driven, because they are customer facing, and they're client facing and when that client or customer wants help and needs help and needs contact, boom, it has to be done, then it's not an option to push them off and say, yeah, I'll get back to you in a little while. Those types of environments, it's extremely difficult to deal with what I consider what I consider secondary work, things that are not client or customer facing, but are still mandated to be done. And a common example, because I deal with call centers all the time is training. When when management has mandated that people working in a call center or working in that type of environment need to take training, the first question should be okay, when are you going to give me time to do that, because that's not something that can be done in five minutes segments around customer needs and customer interactions. It is a social challenge, but it's more of a managerial challenge, because they do have to recognize the fact that there is some work that cannot be done in five minute blocks. But even more, so that'll get referred to well, the customer still needs to be handled first. So as the person who's having to handle or deal with those incoming interruptions, I think it's really more important for us to try to help them identify ways to deal with that rapid START STOP of work. It's a it's a constant thing. I mean, the example I give to people of what it's like working in these types of environments, if you've never done it before, it's like driving a manual transmission in city traffic. And if you've never driven a manual transmission, because it's an old reference, it doesn't help you much. But just imagine, you know, you go 15 feet, and you stop and you go 15 feet, and you stop. And that's exactly the type of environment that we're talking about here. So what can we do to help people understand or figure out a way to make progress plan the things that are bigger and longer and need more dedicated time and effort? Knowing that they're not going to get that? You know, they've got an hour's worth of reports that they have to write up. Well, how do you do that in five minute chunks? How do you do that in chunks that you can work, work, work and stop and know that you can pick up again, with as little retransmission time as possible?

F Francis Wade 08:59

Well, there's a quick answer to that, in terms of what people actually do. They sacrifice. They give up their lunches. They come in early, they leave late. And that's the way they

compensate for what ultimately is poor management because I think we could agree that any job that doesn't allow you that secondary time that you described is a job that is either exploiting its workers or birth or just on a on a rampage to burn them out. Because they ultimately burn out because there is no, not even emergency room. Doctors work that way. No one should work that way, from eight to five infinite interruptions because it'll ultimately, ultimately cost the person would either end up hating the job hitting the manager, not developing themselves not growing, just being on a treadmill being treated as if their time is isn't valuable or secondary time is is unimportant or their development is not a priority. All those things accumulate over time, and add up to an awful experience that costs that is ultimately more costly to the company in those, there are lots of companies that do it, like you said, and they suffer the turnover. As a result, people hate the work. And they can't wait. They can't wait to find a different job, and then the cycle people in and out and treat them that way. So it's I agree with you, this is a it's a management's head isn't straight with respect to we're that kind of management takes you. I mean, there is there is no occupation in the world that allows you to thrive without that secondary work that you describe.

A Art Gelwicks 10:45

No, and you're right. It's it is something that management has to recognize. But it's also something that we we all know, they don't do, they will defer to turnover, they'll defer to Hey, you know what, this is just part of the job deal with it. That kind of mindset. And being in those positions. I mean, when I've worked helpdesk before, it's not easy to maintain that balance. Even though a lot of people enjoy the work itself. They enjoy that, that type of interaction. It's the secondary processes that make it difficult, because they don't have any way to fit that into their interval schedule. And when I when I start to think about it, one of the things I normally recommend to people is I say, look at your smallest time segment during a day. And they'll go Okay, like my lunch break, or my you know, my 30 minute break, I'm like, No, no, no smaller. Think about the amount of time you're expected if, if you're, again, on a helpdesk, the amount of time you're expected to be able to complete a call in because most helpdesk type of situations, most customer service type situations will have a service level agreement that targets getting things done within a specific period of time, it should take you no more than seven minutes to complete this call eight minutes to complete this call. Now, if it's a broader type of customer service thing, maybe you don't have those time limits, which does make the process a little easier. But if you look at your lowest common denominator, and then say, Okay, these bigger secondary things that I need to do, can I break them up into things that are that size. And the reason why I recommend that is because if you're doing that type of work, you're used to that rapid startup work and complete on the primary things, you're used to taking the call working through it, finishing it, moving to the next one, so that that rapid acceleration

and deceleration has kind of gotten worked into your system, if you're able to then take your secondary pieces and break them down into the same types of things. your mindset, and your psychology will help you drive that same type of rapid acceleration and deceleration on those smaller segments. If you lay them out, here's the rub, you need time to lay them out that way. And this is really where it has to become a partnership between the people doing the work and management assigning the work to make things fit. And unfortunately, that second part very rarely happens anymore.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 13:27

So my question is for both of you, and and maybe start with Francis here, because you You brought this up, which is that if this is a management problem, how do you What's the practical approach to solving that? In this particular case, Brent says he's a manager. So clearly, he has some higher level management to also interact with and deal with in this case, in in this case. So how do you approach that? How do you deal with the fact that if this is a macro problem, if this is a culture problem, how do we how do we go about starting that process of moving toward an effectiveness approach to managing the distraction problem?

Francis Wade 14:08

It's tough to save in this particular example, because Brent doesn't give us a lot of details. If you were in front of us, I would ask him, he says I don't currently have the ability to schedule my time. And that that doesn't that. I think there's there's there's some edge cases, there has to be some edge cases with respect to what time do you get in what time do you leave? What do you do for lunch? You know, you presumably he schedules those times. So I think He's exaggerating somewhat but but for someone who is in that situation? I think there's a there's enough research and there is enough there are enough facts out there to convince or at least present a case to a management senior management team to say that the way we're working isn't working. There's no you know, if you can enumerate the cost of turnover and Then look at why employees are leaving, when they leave, I think there's a, there's a pretty much a trade off that it's, it's to say there's a cost to the way we're doing it, and there's a benefit to doing it better. And there's lots of research that says that you're better off working in sprints, and then spending time recovering from the sprint that you are in trying to get everyone to put their head to the grindstone from eight to five. So there's research, there's data. So for our brand there is you need to become an expert at what the trade offs are, and start gathering, start gathering data and start to present and build a case, in such change management problem, really a case in the organization that the way we're doing, it isn't working, I can't really see exactly what I would tell him. But this is what I tell my clients, whenever they see that there's

something something ridiculous happening, and everyone is kind of accepting it in the company, is to make a case and pull together people who are of like mind, whatever level they may be, and then present the case. And then you'll either succeed or not, which point you like, we all do we have a choice, you know, it This really is slavery, part two, then, you know, consider something else. But if it's something that's amenable to logic, and something that's amenable to reason, then pursue that pursue that path.

A **Art Gelwicks** 16:24

Yeah, I think if you go through the process for as a manager, looking at this type of an environment, and you have people on your team who are working this way, in this interrupt type of driven environment, one of the things that you need to do is you need to look at, what's the total work expectation of your team, are they expected to have 40 hours a week, 36 hours a week, 32 hours a week, doing that interrupt driven work, I don't, I don't want to tag it as call center. Anything else, let's just say, lack of control of time. If that's the case, and that's the contracted requirement for that, then what you have to do is you say, okay, after that, what's the time I have to give them just for personal sanity, things like breaks and lunches, and then whatever's left is what you have available to work with them to get this secondary work in. And if you look, and you see that, that's only an hour, then you have to be able to say, hey, we've got an hour each week to address this stuff. This is the only things that we can fit, and set reasonable expectations with the people who are dropping work into that secondary queue, to say, you know, that's great, you want us to do it, we'll have it done in six months, because we've got an hour each week to do it. It is a give and take. And it is a negotiation. If you're if you're working, that interrupt driven work, it's very hard to make that push back. And that's the reason why it's so important at the managerial level that you'd be looking out for the people who are doing that, because one of the things you're trying to do is mitigate high turnover. Now, let's take it away from a standpoint of a manager. But let's look at it at somebody who is dealing with something that is very interrupt driven. But it's not necessarily like a call center type of thing. So if I think about you, somebody who's a freelancer, or somebody who is in a consultative role, you can try to block out your time and allocate your time as much as possible. But there are still a lot of interrupts that are going to come into your process. And, again, it's really critical that we look at whether it's two interruptions a day, or 20 interruptions a day. What is our engagement, execution and disengagement process on anything we're working on at any time? And the best context is, anybody who's working from home right now and has kids lives in an interrupt driven environment? I mean, there's just no matter how hard you try those little buggers find a way to to interrupt what you're doing. So, again, we have to look at our processes. And we have to say, Okay, how do I get into something, get working on it. And then if I had to stop right now, what's the easiest way that I'm going to be able to get back into that later on? And I

have to admit, I've struggled that with that myself. A lot of times this same problem comes not so much from interruption, but from the fallacy of trying to multitask, because we're trying to knock out this and that and the other thing, you're basically doing the same thing, you're interrupting your work yourself. You just keep throwing those things on the pile and having to change gears so quickly. So I'd be curious how you guys address this idea of starting on a task and then being able to stop it unplanned Be able to restart it again effectively at some later point in time.

A Augusto Pinaud 20:03

You know, the problem is not if there are a couple of things, and one is, is true, we may be into a management issue. But that doesn't mean that you are in a point in or two or the organization. And we don't know by the, by the question in which we can do anything to change it. And number one, number two, we don't know enough about the current role and responsibilities to know even if it's something that is temporary, or is something that is, you know, the routine and for me, high interruption environment was the rule many years ago. So the question was not if you were going to get interrupted. And yes, all those ideal situations were awesome. But the point for what we understand those interruptions are going to happen period are going to happen with you are going to happen with a guy who is going to replace you. So that may not be the solution other than what can you what tips could tricks, what tools can you put in the middle of those interruptions so you can go back and what tend to happen in some of these environments, again, and I'm making assumptions is you are going to get all these interruptions. And at the end of the day, you need to be able to find if you are in a call center, in a ticket center, find you have the ticket, you know which tickets, you need to come back to and you need to tickets that need to be cleaned by the end of the day, regardless of the amount of interruption. Regardless if that interruption comes in email, Whatsapp business telegram, or the phone or somebody walking into your desk. Question is, and and or the issue for me was distractions and distractibility. Because if you don't know what you were doing, or you don't leave yourself again, going back to the clues I was saying before, where to go back to the problem is every time you need to go back, you need to try to remember. And as we know or say explain it is grab 100 baht, post it on three and post it and then start putting them all on top of the other one and try to remember which one makes sense. And the reality is, sooner or later, all those are going to fall down and you will have no clue. And that's what happened when we tried to remember where. And that is a reason we need to leave ourselves a lot more clues. And not only what we were doing, but what was the next thing and that is a line is nothing It takes seconds to do. But when you get yourself into the habit of leaving yourself those clues when I was doing this when I was interrupted, and you know, and now I'm coming back at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. So nice to be able to say it that way. Hopefully we're coming towards the end of this. One of the

things that happened was kids start coming at home. So the level of interruptions in my world, okay, simply grow exponentially to the 100 time, and there was nothing I could do. There was no management, there was no other than a they were trying to figure it out homeschooling classes and working from home at the same way the world was trying to my clients were trying to, and I was trying to deal with all this amount of interruptions. Is there a manager that I could go? No, there was no manager in my case, at least there was no manager that I could go and say can you help good give me read of the like gets interruption. But what happened? What helped was that index card next to me that every time they came we basically set up a rule you started there three seconds and polite hand right what I need to

A   Augusto Pinaud   24:04

stop doing or what I'm doing actually Can you give me a second I write you know, one line. And then as soon as I fix their emergency, then I can go back and I work with a lot of clients with daddies the problem problem is not that what the thing that is interrupt them is an emergency in their world. It may not even be an emergency at all. But in the work or in the world of their superior in in the food chain. It is an emergency. Okay, you are now sitting in your office really nice. And this person that is senior to you come and say I need this now. And it may have zero relevance to your world or you can care less about it. But it still does your senior and you need to stop whatever you're doing and do it. So the question, again is what tips can you get To get back to yourself, when you come back to your office, don't sit into a desk and say, okay, and I was doing what, because that is where the biggest, in my opinion, waste happen, because most times, you can recall, or it's going to take a long time to get back that train of thought, because you're trying to use the memory instead of giving yourself a good solid clue,

Raymond Sidney-Smith   25:26

I think about this from the perspective that there's a bit of training that needs to be done so that you get comfortable with the notion of remembering where you left things off. If you're not particularly engaged in that way, then that muscle will atrophy. And you will not be able to pick up where you left off, where you have left off. And so for me, especially, I am very much about annotating where I am, and I just keep a simple Notepad. On my side, it's actually what I've been using my smaller rocketbook notebooks for recently is just notating, what and where I leave things off. The other part that I use to be able to help me identify things is using virtual desktops. And in essence, I set up all of the various projects that I'm working on at any given day on different virtual desktops. And now all the operating systems have them, whether that's Windows, Mac OS, and Chrome OS, you can create these virtual desktops. And so you can put all the applications and open

documents and other kinds of materials that you're working on, and then place those in those places. And while I'm using a paper and pen modality for being able to track what I'm working on, you could also do this with stickies, on Mac OS or on Windows, you can just open up the little, you know, sticky notes, and just, you know, type a little date and timestamp and what you're working on. And that way, when you are interrupted, you can just pause people for a moment and say, can wait just moment, one moment there, can I just take down where I left off, go ahead and write that down. And that way, when you get back to whatever you're working on, while there is a refractory period, there's this time where you need to switch gears and get back into the into the mindset, you at least know where you left off. And I think that's helpful in that sense. There are a couple of practical points, and I know that kind of Francis,

Raymond Sidney-Smith   27:23

you know, subrogated, those kind of, you know, lowered those in terms of priority, but I can't, I can't say that I'm against using tactics, you know, tips, tricks, and hacks of any kind in, in combination, to be able to actually get yourself ahead and kind of overcoming some of these distractions that happen in any interruptive or interruption driven environment. So I'll just give a couple of pointers here. And then we can continue on and folks can jump in and give their further thoughts. One is, I really believe in in all of the social cues that are required for people to understand that they can interrupt you. And this can include signage that shows things, I'm a really big fan of the locks of four, I'll put links to these in the show notes. But the locks have four lights that allow you to be able to identify that you were in, say a phone call or in a meeting or just in a focused zone where you do not want to be interrupted. So you can have, say, a green light dedicated to I'm in a meeting. But when it's red, then say I'm in a focused action session. And so I'm doing focused action work, and I do not want to be interrupted. And this sets the bar for people to say, Okay, if the lights off, I can walk up to Ray and talk to him. But if it's green or red, then I know that I can't, because those those lights indicate that he's in some kind of work that does not warrant my interruption. So I should send an email and whatever else, which takes me to my next point, which is that I heavily believe in scheduling all calls. And this is one of those things where I get a lot of pushback from people, how am I going to do that? And who does that? And I always say I do. I don't take live phone calls. And and there are you know, that's not a zero percentage situation. There are times when I take live phone calls, but most of my phone calls are going to be scheduled. That is I'm going to schedule a time with that person to be able to sit down with them and have that conversation, even if it's a 510 15 minute call. Those are all scheduled. And this reduces so much distraction. It allows me to be prepared for everything. Even if it's a five minute phone call. That means I can spend five minutes being prepared for that phone call, which means that the five

minutes together on the line is going to be actually useful, productive and prepared and There is, there's so many times when people call me have called me in the past, and I just didn't have the, the work product in front of me, I didn't have the appropriate preparation wasn't the right mindset, right, something else was happening, that phone call came in, and I just wasn't prepared for them mentally, emotionally. And therefore, it was useless. You know, it was like, Okay, well, I'll call you back when I have a chance to actually address this issue. And so much more time is wasted, than actually scheduling the call being prepared for it and having an effective phone call, or whatever, it's a video chat. Now, today, you know, during the pandemic, or otherwise, the point is, is that scheduling calls is trivial compared to the productive gains of being able to show up to every interaction with people prepared and effective. And so I've just gone straight to that point, which is, don't just interrupt me with a phone call, I have a calendar scheduler, those are now trivial tools, you can, you know, you can use calendly, I use schedule, once the once hub tool, there are many, many tools out there that allow you to be able to automatically give access to your calendar to be able to schedule these these kinds of meetings. And you can schedule short meetings, you know, five minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes and longer. And that gives everybody really greater latitude to say, Okay, you know what, I would otherwise just pick up the phone and call Ray about this. But I know that he doesn't take live phone calls. And so I should schedule a time in his calendar in order to do that. And it's very easy to engage clients in that process as well. And say, Listen, if you ever need to talk to me, feel free to schedule a time in my my calendar. And most people are quite comfortable and happy to do so because they can, they can now determine when they want to talk to me. And when they do call me and they get my voicemail, then they can leave a voicemail message. And I can deal with it when I have to. And what I usually do is I then email them and say, Hey, are you available at x time to be able to talk and then they can know that I'm going to call them at that time, and then we'll both be prepared for the conversation. So it's, that's just one category of it, right? But there are so many other areas where you can create this kind of structure, that then sets the standard for how you want to be interacted with. And when that starts to happen, people start to pay attention, and then you're able to actually focus on the work that you need to because it opens up the space for you to be able to do those things.

F Francis Wade   32:25

I agree, I think I think there's a there's a conversation that's missing in, in most workplaces, that around a managers managers obligation to help his or her employees do their best work. And that's sort of the overall intent is missing. And it's not talked about enough, and it doesn't certainly get operationalized into the tactics we're talking about, like, okay, you you do your best work between nine and 11. So during an 11 an interruption during that time is extremely costly, that that dialogue just doesn't happen. And it's almost as if

interruptions are treated as being equal and an employee's time is being is treated as if it were all the same. And that's just not true. You know that the researcher, this is not true, that if a workplace could be or a manager could be savvy enough to have these conversations with his or her employees so that they could schedule, schedule these scheduled conversations, scheduled meetings, make sure they're not interrupted during certain times that that there are signals that show that they're doing their best work, don't interrupt them, unless it's something really big. That this kind of understanding, I find I've not been in a workplace where that kind of understanding is implicit. And is, is a part of everyone's decision making, especially around how they use each other's time and things like meetings or your own expectations about replying to email or replying to phone calls or picking up the phone. I've not been to a workplace where those things have been actually worked out. And I think they would make they would benefit everyone tremendously. If they were actually they were actually made explicit. Not slept the chance.

A **Art Gelwicks** 34:22

Yeah, it's a tough situation. I don't want to back up or support the idea of, you know, certain types of roles. You just don't really have a choice. But that is true. I mean, there are types of roles out there where it's just the nature of the job, you have to deal with that. That being said, though, I think you're absolutely right, Francis, I think a an enlightened management team needs to be cognizant of the fact that you can't just have eight hours doing this job. If you You're going to expect them to do other things as well, if this is the only job they have to do, okay, that's one thing. But if it's not, then you got to make time for them to be able to do that. And yeah, as as a person doing those jobs, you have to be voicing to the people who control your time, or at least can help you control your time that you that control is not there. I'm not saying it's going to change because again, it does require a certain enlightened level of thinking that is, unfortunately uncommon in most management circles. But it is also at the end of the day, you're the one who suffers from it. And if you're not able to push back, and at least find ways to manage it, it's tough I do, I do things like for example, within my calendar, I have a certain amount of flexibility within my calendar as to how I set up my time. So I have focused time that I've enabled throughout the week, in the calendar moving forward, it's the time period that I know during the day, that nobody's, the likelihood of somebody trying to interrupt me at that point in the day is very low. So I pre block that time, somebody has to consciously violate that virtual wall to engage me during that time period. Now, I'm not saying they won't, it happens more often than I would like. But at least I have made that conscious effort to get some semblance of control over my environment to get things accomplished. Again, also, with that heavy interrupt driven when we talk about Ray, you talk about being able to get clients to do that, I have had had much less success, but I think it may be the types

of clients that I'm dealing with. They are much more a you're working for us. When I call you you'll answer. Okay, fine, I get that. I have to work within that spec. And that's just, that's just part of the system that I have to look at and say, Okay, how am I going to manage that? If you were to look at my desk right now, I literally, I use a lot of loose leaf notebook paper right now. And every topic gets its own page. Because I'm, I'm switching gears so quickly right now that I need to be able to flip back to something and have everything right where it was, and then flip over to the other one. Yeah, it's on paper. And I've discussed before, why I'm dealing with a lot of this on paper rather than digital. But it's still an interrupt driven mindset. And it's a challenge that I have to deal with to stay on top of the work that I'm dealing with. I wish there was a quick solution. I wish I wish there was a hack that solved this problem. But there isn't. And until I'll use the term again, until management gets enlightened about the fact that they get the best work out of their people, when they help their people do their best work. Like Francis said, it's not going to get any better, it's not going to get any different,

F Francis Wade 38:08

especially truphone COVID times and working from home because this, if there were ever a time to apply this conversation, it surely has to be no, because everyone went from the office, which was a pretty uniform environment to a whole slew of challenges wherever they're working from home, which are probably unique to each person. And if this has got to be that time to have that conversation, or when when when is the best time for you to do your best work, given that you're not working from home, and that you have all of these other challenges which are no distractions and interruptions. And, boy, this, this seems to be the time to have that conversation.

A Art Gelwicks 38:52

And you're absolutely right. And part of the challenge of it because you're working remotely is that all those in those interruptions are now invisible to everyone else. If you think about the number, if you're working with everybody else in an office environment, and you're constantly getting pummeled with phone calls and things, people see that you're on the phone, or you're doing something and there is a slightly higher level of awareness, when you're working remotely, they have no idea to them. You're just sitting there waiting for their message to come through. You're just sitting there waiting to work on their thing. And that's not the case. We all know that's not the case. We're usually at the wrong end of the firehose, when it comes to all this stuff coming at us and how to balance it and how to control it. So one of the things that I would suggest to Brent and just in general, is if you're in that environment, if you find yourself in that remote working environment. Visibility is key. using things like for example in Microsoft Teams, You have

the ability to set your status message to say, Hey, this is what I'm doing. You know, I'm either busy or I'm unavailable or whatever. But you can go beyond that. There's a text block that you can attach to it that says what you're doing. So you can put in there that I am unavailable right now, because I'm working on the annual report. And you can put that in the message. Is that going to act as you know, the the velvet rope to keep the interruptions away from the club? No, but at least it's going to help create the awareness that the time is not idle time that they are interrupting, productive time. And it gives you the latitude to be able to push back a little bit and say, Hey, you know what? I'm working on the annual report. I can't deal with this right now. When can I deal with it? The second thing I want to touch on though, you guys brought up an excellent point, the difference between important and urgent, and we've discussed this before. So often, these interruptions are urgent for us. But they're not important for us. They're important for somebody else. or worst case, they're urgent for somebody else, just because maybe they promised something and they realize that, oh, they need to get it done. So they're gonna dump it on somebody else. Being able to immediately quantify an interruption, and say, okay, you need me to address this right away. Define right away, is right away within the next 15 minutes is right away within the next four hours. What's the timeline on this? What's the impact, if I don't get to this right away? You accepting the work should be accepting the work with a reasonable expectation of what the success criteria is for completing that work. And so often we get into situations where things get delegated on us, and it's like, okay, I'll do it. But we haven't done that little bit of personal discovery, to say, Well, what does it really mean for this to be, quote, done? And how do I communicate that? And how do I indicate when it's not happening? And what do I do when the next high priority thing comes in? Can I come back to you and say, Hey, you gave me this thing to finish? You know, within the next two hours now something else has come in? Which one do you want me to do? Or I have to do that other one first years is going to have to wait and know what the ramifications are that it's it's a work management challenge. It's a work in flow challenge. But we have to be able to start to think about our systems in a way that are, the only thing we have to support ourselves is our systems in so many cases, and using those systems to be able to then go back and have that conversation, to sit down during that, you know, one on one meeting and say, okay, guess what? You gave me 43 interrupt based things. And I had five minutes for each one to complete them. This is the reason why X number of things did not get done on time, and be able to show I'm a huge one for the analytics, because it's really hard to argue with the numbers. Keep track of the things, keep track of what's coming in, keep track of successes and failures and be able to use that to bolster your conversations around how do we make this whole thing better?

Raymond Sidney-Smith   43:26

Yeah, I think it's really important for us to, I think just reiterate the caveat that that I've heard us talking about throughout this, which is that not every environment, not every organization, company, firm agency, what have you is the same. And so those cultures demand attention. And that just may be the nature of the business, the nature of the organization. And so your mileage may vary, right. At the same time, I think that we all can set better barriers, boundaries, for our own productivity. And I think that's really important for us all to take to heart. With that. Brent, I hope this was helpful to you. If you have any additional questions, you want to clarify things, feel free to jump onto that podcast episode. And leave us a comment. And we'll be happy to respond. While we are at the end of this conversation. The discussion doesn't have to stop here. If you have a question or a comment about what we've discussed on this cast, you can go ahead and visit our episode page. And just as a reiteration our podcasts website, if you go to productivity cast, dotnet, and then forward slash, and the three digit episode number. So this episode is 106. If you go to ProductivityCast dotnet, forward slash 106. You'll hop over to the specific episode page and you'll be able to get the show notes, get the transcript, all those kinds of things that are there with all the links that we provide an episodes to it, and you can go ahead and comment at the bottom of those pages. To access those pieces. Feel free to subscribe in your favorite podcast app by clicking on the subscribe tab on ProductivityCast dotnet and thank you all for listening to us. I want to express my thanks to Mr. pinout Francis wade in our galaxy for joining me here on ProductivityCast. Each week, you can learn more about them and their work by visiting ProductivityCast dotnet. Also just click on the about page and you'll be able to find all of their links. I'm Ray Sidney-Smith on behalf of all of us here at ProductivityCast history reproductive life.

45:22

That's it for this productivity cast, the weekly show about all things productivity with your host Ray Sidney-Smith and a gousto been out with Francis Wade and art galax