133-time-blocking-time-chunking-productivitycast

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SPEAKERS

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

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V **Voiceover Artist** 00:00

Are you ready to manage your work and personal world better to live a fulfilling productive life, then you've come to the right place. ProductivityCast the weekly show about all things productivity, here are your host, Ray Sidney-Smith and Gousto pinout with Francis Wade and art Gelwicks.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:17

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

A **Augusto Pinaud** 00:22

I'm Augusto Pinaud.

F **Francis Wade** 00:23

I'm Francis Wade.

A **Art Gelwicks** 00:24

And I'm Art Gelwicks.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:25

Welcome, gentlemen, and welcome to our listeners to this episode of ProductivityCast. Today, we're going to be talking about time blocking, sometimes called time chunking. And Francis brought this topic. So I'm gonna hand this over to Francis to kind of open us up in terms of kind of explaining to us what time blocking is. And what we're going to do today is have a little bit of a conversation around the idea of an effective reminder system, how do you set up reminder systems? And why is it important as a time blocker or time chunker, to go ahead and have reminders, remind you at the both appropriate time and a level, so to speak, and maybe Francis can speak to that a little bit. So that you can really do what you need to do when you need to do it where you need to do it. So Francis, for those of you who are maybe have no idea what time blocking is, can you explain for listeners, what time blocking is?

F Francis Wade 01:15

Sure, it's a technique in which you put a task a flexible task in your calendar. So in other words, you're moving it either from your memory or from a to do list and you're putting it on your calendar. In other words, you're assigning a time and the day and the duration to a task that you could do at different times. So you're pinning it, in other words to a specific spot in your calendar. And in general, it's it's not a technique that everyone needs to use, it's a bit of a requirement, if you are managing lots of tasks if you only have one task to do per day. And you can do that anytime, then you don't need time blocking. But if you have lots of tasks, and vertical discretionary time, then pinning tasks to your calendar becomes a requirement just because it's too hard to have to figure out what to do all throughout the day, go through all of your lists and figure out exactly what you need to do. It's easier to do it once in the morning or once at the beginning of the week. And then just execute it as you go along. So that's the general idea, you want to discuss that some more or sort of go on to the remainders.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 02:28

I'm really curious about this, because I think a lot of people who hear what you're talking about, which is scheduling your tasks, and a calendar ultimately becomes more difficult as you place things in the calendar. And you realize that you don't necessarily know how much time something might take or that things might be overlapping each other in terms of the number of things you want to do in the same, say, hour, some calendars don't allow you to put things in smaller increments than say 15 minutes or 30 minutes. And so you have lots of things overlapping and that might feel cluttered. Is there a software solution that you utilize in order to be able to overcome that? Do you just get used to seeing overlapping? Basically calendar events in your calendar? What do you what do you think about all those kinds of challenges that people have with regard to putting things in a calendar view,

F Francis Wade 03:17

we could imagine someone who uses PayPal, it has a really difficult time because they it when things change, and they have to move things around, they're left with using an eraser crossing things off, it gets really difficult, someone like that will probably upgrade to a tool like Google Calendar, which basically allows you to put anything anywhere, anytime, overlapping as often as you want. It's not doing anything smart. It's just replicating what you had on paper in a digital version. So things can be moved around at will at the next level. They're auto schedules,

which make some smart decisions. They don't allow overlaps. They try to optimize your calendar. And they try to make sure that at least you're looking at a feasible representation of your calendar and not just things thrown in there willy nilly. So that's the that's the most complicated level, the most sophisticated level I'm aware of.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 04:09

So if somebody is going from task list and calendar two, than having too many, as you call them time demands that require you to kind of level up then there is software bespoke to the solution of taking all of those things and placing them in your calendar. That's kind of what I was leading the witness so to speak. I wanted to make sure listeners know that there is software out there that is built ready built for this kind of situation, that they're not just basically placing things into Google Calendar in this hodgepodge way. And so thank you for that. I'll position is for everybody. And Francis, you can maybe start us off. Why do people need effective reminders? If they're time blocking, they have everything in their in their calendar, or in their calendaring task based software. Why do they need To be able to be reminded about what they need to do

Francis Wade 05:02

with it. The analogy I like to draw is that of the TV show The West Wing popular in the 2000s.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 05:08

Okay, you're gonna need to explain to me the West Wing and reminders now.

Francis Wade 05:13

The West Wing was a TV show about the president, the United States jab, jab back that I think his name was fictional, of course. And he had a secretary and her name was Mrs. Landingham, or Landingham, one of the two. Anyway, she was the perfect secretary, you know, in the show, in that he had a full schedule, as you may imagine, the President does, or a CEOs or anyone who has lots and lots of commitments to execute each day. And her job, one of her jobs, was to manage his calendar. But also, in addition to doing all of his time blocking, she would come and give him that proverbial tap on the shoulder when it was time to switch to another task or to consider switching to another task. And as you can imagine, she had different ways of doing this, you know, she could, you know, just kind of open the door and Wave at him to remain soft remainder that time to wrap up, or she come and tell them oh, by the way, you're there's a phone call coming in for you. And she would interrupt the meeting, and that will be a switch. Or she would walk into the meeting and say, Mr. President, your plane is leaving in two minutes. Well, he's the president. So he determines when the plane leaves, but let's say he didn't, there's a president, you have to leave No, in order to make your meeting with this dignitary via plane. And here's your bag, and here's your ticket, and Secret Service will escort you out the door. So she'll be very firm sometimes. So sometimes she'd be very soft. And sometimes she'd be very strong, different kinds of remainders. But what it allows the president to do is essentially relax. You know, David Allen says Your mind is is for coming up with tasks, not for

remembering them. This is a bit similar, your mind is for executing, not for trying to remember what you need to execute. Next, at the minute, you need to execute it. Because there's a bunch of research that says that, that effort it takes to remember to do something at just the right time takes a whole lot of cognitive resources. And if you can outsource that to Mrs. Landingham, you're in great shape, because that person will basically just say, Okay, no, tie your shoelaces, I'm exaggerating, but Okay, now it's time for your meeting with this Chief of Staff. Okay, now it's time to get on the plane. They act as the person who directs you throughout the day, that's a moment the perfect remain. And that's the example I keep in my head. Unfortunately, most of us can't afford a Mr. Sandringham, we have to make do. And the way most of us make do is by, you know, committing that sin of trying to commit it to memory. And that works. And sometimes it doesn't work. And usually, you know, we, if you have one task per day, you're fine. If all you need to do is to remember to eat lunch at 12, you're probably good, you'd probably don't need a software solution or a missing Sandringham. But if you have a day, that's completely time blocked. And let's say there are eight to 1015 tasks you need to accomplish during the day, then the the importance or the onus is on you to find a way to not use your memory, to remind yourself to switch to the next task. Because if you go over, or if you forget, or if you can, if you commit any of the sins of time blocking, then it's going to throw your day off, and you're not going to accomplish what you want at the end of the day. So the question is, which software and that's where, from my point of view, there's a huge gap.

A Art Gelwicks 08:52

Well, I'm gonna continue the West Wing metaphor because it is one of my favorite shows ever. But I'm going to use a different character from the show. Mrs. Landingham was great. Mrs. Landingham was also always in the outer office. So being able to inform the President as to what was going on, was always in proximity to a particular place. What I think is probably the better example is the character of Donna in the show and Donna was Josh Lyman's assistant, Josh Lyman was all over the place. He was everywhere. He was running from building to building capital, you run into Congress now. And Donna was almost always with him. Somewhere. She's chasing him down. She's running around. She's calling him. It's frenetic level of activity that I think a lot of people would be very familiar with. And the Donna character is very similar to a lot of our systems where we can't count on being in a fixed location, especially nowadays for extended periods of time. So we have to have systems that when we're in the office, we get a notification when we're out in the car, we get a notification when we're in a restaurant, we get a notification, but it has to have that consistency of information. So physical proximity to where we're capturing these needs can't be a factor anymore, at least not for most people. For some it can, some people are at a desk all day long. They can have stuff pop up there, they can react to it, that's great. But just take that exact situation, you get up from your desk and you go to a meeting in a meeting room? Well, if you're gonna get a notification while you're in there, for the next meeting, you need to go to having a pop up on your desktop, does you no good. None whatsoever, it has to follow you along with proximity. It's one of the reasons why mobile calendars and mobile devices are so popular because it's the data in your pocket. So what I get a little challenged with on this is we start to look at, you know, putting in our notifications into a tool in this without taking the step back and saying is this going to be accessible to me when I need it to be in where I need it to be, the tool may be great. But if the tool doesn't go along with you, you're just wasting time in my book.

A Augusto Pinaud 11:23

So in complete agreement with you, that bring to a point I have brought into the show times before in which I said that their main productivity device it is your phone, in some cases may be your smartwatch, if it is connected to data, if you your smartwatch need to tether to your phone, then that's not your main productivity device, your main productivity device is that phone that you carry in your pocket 24/7, almost you know that it goes to your night sign that it's really reminder, now what you need to do is figure it out how inside of that tool can use it both can use said, you know, using your guys analogy, I'm not familiar with the show, but using Donna and Dolores so that way you can get really that level of direction, or ping or not in the shoulder. So you can go to the appropriate right attention. And one of the things I see that a lot of people tried to do is to find our tool that can do everything, instead of our set of tools. You know, when you look at calendars, there is something magical that happen when you start putting colors to that calendar and given significance to those colors. So that way you can look at that thing at glance and know what kind of event is what is coming. Okay, but that means you are now maintaining two or three calendars. So you can have the different colors. Same thing with the kind of alerts that you need. Some of those alerts need to be on a way some of those alerts need to be on a different way. So you need to be able to have inside of that mobile phone doesn't matter if it's an iPhone does matter if it's an Android, different kind of alert. So that way you get the pings that need to be on a certain way. And the pings that you need are the alerts that you need to get from the other person.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 13:24

I say this slightly differently, because I don't call things reminders, they are just triggers across my entire system. And so triggers are a mechanism for identifying when something needs to be done. And that is irrelevant to the thing that needs to be done in my world. So we can kind of swap out the word notification for trigger in my world. And that would be useful trigger could be a piece of paper, you know, like a post it notes stuck to the front door saying Don't forget your keys to a prompt in a calendar application that says you need to leave right now to get to your appointment on time. And I am a little less dependent on my mobile device, I think than others for those kinds of reminders, although they do extend to my mobile phone, because of the way in which I've patchwork together my system. We'll talk about that a little bit later. So I think that for me, it's important for you to really think through how you have structured your work life and where you do most of your work. And to concentrate on making sure that your notification system, your triggers, basically do so in the context that most allows you to be productive, so that if you do need it to extend by proximity as art talked about, you know, and for it to go mobile, then that's fine. But if you do not need that, then it's also kind of a waste of time to really try to focus on things that are going to do that. So some people have their work and personal lives segmented very heavily. And that means your trigger systems are going to need to be bifurcated between In those two, and that can be sometimes very difficult. I know that a lot of the folks who work for the federal government, you know, they can't take their work away from the office, for example. And if they do, it's on specific devices, dedicated devices. If you have that kind of world where you live in an enterprise world where those things are separated, that can be somewhat difficult when you are trying to set up an effective notification systems, you have to make sure your triggers are both contextually appropriate, but also you knowing your own work and personal world to make sure those kinds of things line up. So let's move on then to the idea of what is available for people today. In terms of notifications, what do people have available to them right now, in terms of the notification world? What software do they have? What apps are on their phones, what features are inside of the current applications that help them basically no, trigger them to do that thing that they need to do right now,

Francis Wade 15:57

I've messed around with different ones. And the as a Windows user, the remainder in Google Calendar is the first one that I tried. And it doesn't, as far as I remember, with up to when the last time I tested tested it, it didn't work when my browser was running. So this is a it's an instant problem, I found software, an app that does go off even though my browser isn't working, it kind of works on the desktop, it's not synchronized to my phone. So on my phone, I use something else called calendar alarm. I haven't figured that one out yet. I'm still trying to understand what that is. Because the instructions are so arcane and options. There are certain things that as you said, I want it to do. So I want a consistent set of reminders on my devices, it'd be great if if when I was on my phone or near to the laptop, the phone wouldn't have to remind me if it knew that it was nearby. That'd be great. But hey, what I don't even need that. I just need a consistent set of reminders, regardless of what programs are open, as Art said, regardless of where I am. So alarm me, alert me and trigger me in a way that I want. setting this up is not only tricky the first time, but it's a moving target, because I've discovered that they update Android, which means that calendar alarm doesn't work the way it did a month ago. So I gotta go in and figure out what changes they made to that then interacts with what they did. And the lock screen doesn't quite and they know this and that. So the overall problem, I think, is that there doesn't seem to be someone committed to solving this problem by itself there. It's a bit of an add on problem to other problems. But it will require a concerted effort to solve it across all platforms, all OSs and to give you just one place to go and create all your manners and set all the options understand what they mean. And not have to fuss with what I keep forcing with.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 18:07

I'll start with a potential solution for what you're dealing with Frances one, I don't understand why you would ever close your browser. I was like, Wait, why would I ever close my browser, I always have my browser open. So but I understand that some people do that if you use the calendar application utilized by Microsoft on your Windows system, you don't ever have to open it after you set up the calendar, you can basically implement your Google Calendar account inside of that Microsoft calendar. It'll synchronize your calendar, and then it will without it being open, present you with reminders for those calendar events. So Windows

Francis Wade 18:44

Windows calendar, correct, you just close it after you're done but use it before well, it exists.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 18:53

This is new. There's a Windows calendar application. And as far as I have experienced, the windows calendar application will present those notifications. It kind of runs in the background. So you don't need to have it open or running or anything like that for it to do. And that will that will overcome the issue because because then you have your calendar notifications triggering you for those things on mobile and desktop in the same database. So you're not having to

extend it outside of that to another application. But it works on mobile as well on Android, your calendar application. Oh, yeah. beautifully. The Windows Oh, no, no, I'm talking about Google Calendar. You're trying to synchronize those those components, Google calendars, the thing that synchronizing the notifications. So you're just basically putting your Google Calendar account into Microsoft calendar, or Windows calendar, I think it's called Windows 10. Then putting your your Google Calendar app to provide the notifications on mobile and that gives you across the board. So

F Francis Wade 19:51

that's it. We're trying for sure. Yeah.

A Augusto Pinaud 19:54

Obviously my main machine is an iPad so everything needs to get there. Done. Doesn't matter if is my company work who live on Google, or is a client work who live may live on Microsoft 365. So everything at the end of the day converge into that device. And because of that, it gets replicated on the iPhone and gets replicated in the Apple Watch. So, additionally, the other thing that I use is the alarms function on the watch. So there is a, I have shared here on the show that for years, I have back pain, and I found somebody who gave me the tool so I could get rid of my back pain. But part of that is I need to stretch my back consistently during the day. So there is an alarm on my watch every 30 minutes, okay, that I go and tried to do one minute to stretch. And can I do it every minute, every 30 minutes? No. But having set up that way, allows me to get many more of those stretches than they're not. So things like that are in setup in my watch things like the time to wake up the kids. Even though this block is time, the time is blocked into my calendar, the alarm of that it's more, it's set up in my watch. Why? Because there's times constraints in that they need to wake up quick, they need to get dressed, they need to have breakfast, not on the summer, but during the school time. So that time needs to happen. So I want to make sure that I get something more than the alert on the watch that oh, there this needs to happen. This need to start happening right now. So that is a distinction that I made with what Francis was referring early. If it's just the nudge, the calendar will do and will give the notifications on the phone or the watch. When something needs to start precisely at that time, I tend to set a second alarm that is just now an alarm that will give in the watch. I don't have noises they vibrate, but the vibration is different and much longer. So it will allow me to break that concentration or the pattern of what I'm doing. So I can go and pay attention to that

Raymond Sidney-Smith 22:17

something that you're bringing up against. So I think is important for folks to think about as well, which is that sometimes an event and a calendar is not the right type of of notification that you need some other additional trigger to either leave to get to somewhere start to make a transition from the work you were doing to the thing that you need to go do next, or go to next, the idea that you might want information presented to you at a particular time, that is not necessarily associated with anything that you're doing. For example, some people might want motivational quotation to present to them at some particular time. And that notification is not related to anything that they might be doing right now. But it's going to help them be excited

about the next thing they need to do or remind them why they're doing the current thing that they're doing. So remember that notifications can be very flexible and adaptive to the environment you're in.

F Francis Wade 23:12

Yes. It goes to say I've noticed that when I have appointments on weekends, that I'm likely to forget them or not have the appropriate remainder in place. And the problem is that my remainders are mostly situated on my desktop on my phone. And on a weekend, it's possible for me to be as art has been seeing not close to either one. So if I'm in the garden, for example, doing something, I wouldn't necessarily have my phone with me, it's a Saturday, I haven't seen the desktop all day. So I'm not really I'm kind of just doing what I'm doing and enjoying it. And I may have a 10 o'clock call that I scheduled. So what I've done is done with the goods to set an asset, the hardest of alarms that I knew how to set, which is a wake up alarm, you know, like wake up in the morning, and it just keeps going and going and going and nothing stops it until you actually go and turn it off. It's not a 10 second reminder, it's a infinite reminder. So even if I don't hear it, the My wife will hear it. She'll say your phone is going off and I say, Oh yeah, let's jump on the call. Hi Ray. Because I need the extra law. The original alarm isn't strong enough. Nevada watch, like Augusto said, so I would I would use that functionality. If it were tied into my head into my kind of I definitely would. And if it had the different levels of alarms like he's using it, I would key key the alarms, the cycle we're seeing, they're soft alarms, they're strong alarms, and then there's your kind of do ignore us. The world is going to break alarms, different levels of alarms, I would definitely use them

A Art Gelwicks 24:58

with just about every application Anything that's out there that deals with this kind of thing to do lists that sort of calendars, they've got some sort of embedded notification. Unfortunately, I've also found just that browser or internet based notifications are the most unreliable of notifications. And it's not a failing of the system, it's a failing of the fact that you have so many points of connection before the notification gets to you. So if it's an online calendar, and you're trusting the browser's going to send you a notification, well, that means that you have to trust your device to receive that notification and pass it through to you. There's a lot of steps that can fall fall by the wayside. That being said, I think it's really important that you choose tools that work with local copies of applications. So calendar, for example, Google calendars are great calendar solutions extremely popular, I use Outlook on my phone as my mail and calendar client. Why? Because the calendar is pulled into the application and replicated. And that way I know, even if I have no connectivity, there is all those notifications are available within that local lab. So I have the device handy. So using those types of things, using solutions that have local copies for your notifications, that don't require connectivity for it, are the ones that I found most useful. There's lots of them out there. And there's other ways you can construct these, if you're okay with the internet based solutions, looking at automation tools like IFTT T, or Zapier, or Microsoft Flow, or I'm sorry, power automate. Now, all of those give you that kind of notification capability. Notifications, though, also have a problem of inconsistency with creation. So we think about things like every morning, I need to be reminded to do the following, you know, 6:30am, get the kids up. Okay, that's a consistent one, that's something that calendars are really good at, it's when you start to look at notifications that have to happen like every other Tuesday, sometime between nine and 11am, I need to be

notified that drive systems nuts because it's not a consistent range. So when you're looking at your tools, like I like to do is for my to do things, specifically because it accepts natural language as part of that request. So when I type in an item, I'll say next Tuesday at 9:30am, as part of the task name, and I know it's going to generate a notification in the system, whether I received that notification, that's a whole different conversation. But at least I know the notifications being generated in the system, and I can leverage it. So there aren't really any specific ones that I would call out as being better than others. But it's usually it's not the fault of the application, it's the fault of the multiple steps that it takes to get to wherever I am at any given time.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 28:04

I think we've all mentioned many of the different applications that are out there. But I'll just reiterate these for folks so that you have them in concentrated space. One is of course, all of the major platforms Microsoft, Apple, Android or Google. They've all given you some form of calendaring tool. And those calendaring tools as well as task management tools. All of them now have a task manager of some kind. Apple has reminders Microsoft has to do. And the Google platform has Google Tasks. And there's actually a reminders feature built into Google Calendar, which is akin to tasks and kind of blends in with it. I would also note that Google Keep is, is frequently forgotten here, Google Keep provides not only time based reminders, but also location based reminders. So that if you do have a thing happening in a particular place, it will trigger you based on proximity to that location. And, and that's really helpful. So you can say, when I show up at this particular location, or near this particular location, present this information to me. Now that can be tricky, because obviously, you know, your location services need to be turned on and as accessible by Google Keep at that moment, and all of those kinds of things. But who will keep has been incredibly useful to me because it will remind me when I go to perhaps client locations where I just need to know a checklist of things to remember, like how to get into the building, because I haven't been there in a while, or things of that nature. When I use Google Keep it will say, you know, when I go to this address, present me with this information. And that's incredibly useful so that I'm prepared for whatever it is that I might be facing when I know what I'm going to be facing, right. Obviously, if I didn't know I wouldn't be able to help myself, know how to deal with it. But many times I am going to client locations or client sites where the searching circumstances just very different than other places. As are I might need to know the door code in order to get in. And this is silly things like that. And it's incredibly helpful to have Google Keep remind me of those things, many other task management apps, I believe OmniFocus has that on mobile, the ability to provide proximity based reminders, and that kind of thing. So other applications do have those features built into them. But noting that, you know, outside of time and location, we have other ways of being reminded as well. There are vibration based reminders, there are visual reminders that are audio reminders. And so those are the primary vehicles for being able to be reminded of things. So don't think of things as just as audio. As Augusto noted, he uses primarily vibration, some of us might use visual reminders that are prompts on the screen, or otherwise to be able to be reminded of these things. So lots of tools on the market that I am aware of, including baked into your operating systems, all of them have some kind of assistant based services that will also provide some level of reminders to Francis's point about Google Calendar, you know, in the browser closing, and it no longer providing you with a reminder system. Microsoft has a complete service system built into the operating system for notifications. So you can actually go in and schedule what are called scheduled tasks, you can actually provide the operating system with instructions to say, you know it on Tuesday morning at 8am, prompt me with a reminder, and you can actually schedule those things, it's very easy to do on Apple, you can do

the same thing. You know, you can do other kinds of reminders, utilizing the operating system itself in the assistance as well. So we talked about this Apple Siri, the Google Assistant, you know, those are now kind of the primary providers of assistance on phones. But we also do have Amazon's Matt Ma, and those all actually have their own their own abilities for you to be able to buy voice trigger a reminder of any kind. And that can also be included in text for some assistance, like you can go into the app and type a reminder into Amazon's tool into Google's tool. So just know you have those as well. Where do

A **Augusto Pinaud** 32:16

you make a good point with the geolocation in the case of, as you said, OmniFocus gave it to you, apple out of the box in reminders gives you the geolocation to do is give you geo locations to at least on the iPhone, I'm assuming also in the Android, but I don't have an Android phone to to go say one way or the other. But But you made a great point that we tend to focus into the device on hand when we have all these things around. It is really easy to say, Hey, mom s remind me of this in 20 minutes, or remind me that I need to leave at 130 or that I need to start transitioning, I want 30. And they will do it. And I again, I like to do it in my in the watch because the watch is in my wrist. Can I do it with mme a here in my office? Yes. And that will ring all over my house as far as I'm in the house. But you need to also understand what is the device that is going to be convenient, you know, I can do geolocation on the iPad. But if that iPad is not with me, it's going to be completely useless. So that's where having the component of the phone, it's really what made the geolocation a winning combination for years. I've been a proponent of geolocation. Why? Because not only will remember, it's I can put that even farther to the trying to remember things, okay, because I know that when I drive close to that place, everything is going to be reminded to me, so even if you asked me, Hey, give me a call tomorrow when you drop the kids to the school so many it's not summer, I will add that reminder to live in the school. So I don't even need to remember the time or anything. As soon as I drove out of the school, the phone will tell me hey, you told you we're going to call Francis. So it's a matter of really not a lack of ways to get reminded. What is important is to spend in my opinion, is to spend time understanding what are the reminders that you have available to you currently? And then what are you really using out of those reminders, because even if you look calendar calendar can give you an alert at the time and alert sooner than the time even two days before the event. So you can program all that. What I found the most common problem is not the lack of ways to be reminded is that people have not stopped for a moment and think, what are the ways that the reminders work best for me and then establish you don't need to invent the reminders every time. Figure it out. Add what are the three to five ways that you need those reminder and then be consistent. That, for me is what makes this really, really powerful.

A **Art Gelwicks** 35:08

I want to raise an issue that's starting to concerning me concern a little bit here. And that's too many notifications. We talked about setting up all of these different things. And having my Microsoft calendar on my desktop connects it to my Google Calendar, and my Samsung calendar on my phone connects, there's my Google Calendar in my watches, now I get a notification, well, I don't get a notification, I get four notifications, every place. They're pinging me, like, it's, it's a fire alarm, this starts to become a problem very quickly. And now I start to go, Okay, which one do I need to react to? Now I gotta go through and cancel out five different

notifications. It's feast or famine with this kind of thing. And this is where I think a lot of people really get frustrated with it, Android has tried to manage it a couple of different ways on their platform itself. Microsoft's never really bothered to try and tackle it. It's one of those challenges that I think makes automatic notifications are just, it almost becomes like spam after a while.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 36:13

Yeah, so notification fatigue is certainly an issue that comes into play when we get overload, overloaded, or over notified by things. And I think that's something that we all have to be conscientious about. The good part is that many systems are getting smarter about presenting reminders where they need to be so for example, you know, it will, sometimes the setting will say something like, you know, notify, notify me only on this device when these two devices are paired. So at least in the Google space, we have device pairing, and so when devices are paired, then knows that it is together, and therefore will not do those things. So for example, I don't have my watch, ever show me any audible or, or vibration reminder, if my phone is present, because I don't need it to, if I am away from my my watch and in an untethered, then that's the thing I have on me, it's attached to me. So that is the thing that will then start to provide those reminders. So there are some ways in which we can kind of get around that. But I think the but arts point is very well taken in the sense that we have to be very mindful that we all of a sudden, don't get everything beeping and buzzing and buzzing, you know, and vibrating around us, because that will ultimately create adaptation. And we will just basically start to tolerate the notifications and be less motivated to do what the notifications are telling us to do. I know that I provide myself with a quite a number of, of notifications throughout the day. And most of them go away over time, because of automaticity. Right, I they become just a part of my world that I no longer need the notification to know that it's time for me to go do whatever I need to do. So remember that also that notifications can be helpful for basically helping you with a routine. Once the routine is in place, then that trigger is no longer necessary, because you know, the natural point in which you need to go do those things. So as much as you can get rid of the superfluous notifications, use notifications for the essential triggers, you need to be able to do those things you need to do. And then over time, build a lot of those things into routine. So the notifications or reminders that are left are the ones that are really going to be most effective for you, the ones that are going to tell you know, if you don't do this, something bad is going to happen. And or if you if you do this, something really good is going to happen kind of a joy based perspective there. So making sure that whatever you're doing, you're you're highly motivated to respond to that notification. And it's not just for nothing. And if you're not in a need to be in a highly responsive state, I suggest turning off your email notifications, just like that's the first thing you should do is turn off those email notifications on your desktop and in your systems. Because the constant binging and dinging of email, I think creates a lot of that notification overload. And ultimately, it's decision fatigue, right? Should I should I respond to this? Or should I not, and it just depletes your glucose levels. And ultimately, you start to have decision fatigue more and more often throughout the day. And that's just not good for for you overall,

Art Gelwicks 39:23

I'll admit a couple of things. I have no email notifications turned on on any of my devices. Not there's no reason if it's an email, there is no urgency attached to it. And that's my rule, and I don't send urgent emails. I don't accept urgent emails, because it's a frequent email, who

knows when it's going to get there. But the second thing that I've gotten into we were talking earlier about the applications and the tools to look at, this may be an excellent way for you to kind of filter out the solutions. The solutions that give you granular control over your notifications are ones to seriously consider ones that have this blanket, okay, I'm going to notify you when something happens in this app. That's not helpful. But when you're able to go in and say, in this instance, I get this notification in this instance, I get this notification. And I'll use an example Google messages which I use on my phone for incoming text messages. I have the ability in there to change the notifications based on the conversation. So I have some standing group conversations that have one notification, I have family members who have a different tone, that's tied to their notifications. Because when when my little pocket Mrs. Landingham, comes up and either waves at me, or knocks on the door or throw something at me, I need that contextual relevance around that trigger, not me going into dig into it every time that trigger actually provides me information. And I think we have the same thing. When we look at various other solutions. If it's the same tone all the time, you get a ping that you've got a notification, well, if it's Facebook, in your calendar that have that same trigger reaction, your brain doesn't know what to do with it, it might be something important. So I'm gonna go look and what is it, it's flotsam. I mean, it's, it's not worth looking at. So we have to be able to control that within the solutions that we pick out. Which means that we should pick out solutions that give us the option to control that. And if I was a developer, putting in notification systems, that would be a high priority piece, in my mind, to be able to say, okay, depending on what's coming through, we need to have notifications go through different ways or give the user the option to define that.

A Augusto Pinaud 41:42

Yeah, in the case of many notifications, that will be awesome. I agree. Like you, I don't have any email notification on having that definition of what the serve I notification? And where are the six place on a checklist that the six kinds of notifications that I do on what are the criterias to get there, has really make a difference in the amount of notifications that I have. So by default notifications for me go off. And I just want to have it's like, it's like the ringtone on my phone, my phone, the default ringtone is no noise. Okay, it's just certain people who have earned that right to make noise on my phone. And other than that, the default is no noise. Because if I am in a meeting, because if I am working, I don't want that to distract me. Sorry, it's you can go to voicemail. And I will get to that and get back to you pretty quick. But I don't want you to be another notification or another distraction.

F Francis Wade 42:50

So I mentioned before using calendar alarm on my phone, I use something called just forgot the name of it. It's a calendar program on Firefox and Chrome. It's better than Google Calendar. I can't remember why. But I replaced Google Calendar notifications with that program. Because it gave me as I said, more fine control. Is this checker plus? checker plus? Yes. So I'm going to try I'm gonna try the the suggestion that you mean for the desktop. But again, you know, what I really wished for is one, one interface that would allow me to set my notifications across all devices, all OSS, all apps, if I could find one place to sort of craft, it will be a real, it'd be a real attention manager. For me, I think most people would benefit from having one place because you're beyond the apps, the apps all come with their assumptions about what you really want and need. But it's like a calf, a cacophony of as Art said, have different kinds of hodgepodge

decisions that developers have made. What I want to come into my attention is something that I would like to manage through one, one app not not have to go through each one and then decide which one is doing what job at what time and where, and then have to decide between them. It's just right now it's a lot of work to craft. The attention grabbing notifications that the system that you need, personally, it's too much work.

A Art Gelwicks 44:29

It's work, but it's probably the most work well spent. If you translate that in English, that's we don't spend enough time tuning our systems. We'd spend a lot of time poking around and other tools looking for the one that will do it for us that we can flip a switch and everything's all of a sudden taken care of and this was the reason why, you know, our voice assistants we said, oh, okay, it'll take care of all No, everybody has different structures. And we have to spend our time refining these. And I'll use a really bizarre analogy that people have listened to this before. No, I do a lot of woodworking. I've been actually learning and focusing on how to cut a piece of wood with a handsaw. Now you think this is probably the most basic thing on the planet. But refining that technique and tuning it to the point where I can actually cut a square piece has taken a huge amount of time. And that's time well spent. Because I know everything I do after that, I can trust that that part of the process is going to work well. And this is where when we look at these notifications, we look at our calendars we look at our task list, this time has to be well spent to trust our systems, rather than just having this false confidence of it promising it's going to work well.

A Augusto Pinaud 45:55

And I love that point that you just bring, how much time? Do we spend really learning the systems and really learning how to get the tools, you know, it doesn't matter which tools you pick, okay, and but the time, every hour that you spend really looking how Google calendar works, and how the notification works and the different kinds of notifications that you can get work. It's really an hour that you're investing into much more productivity in the future. And we tend to look at that as not as productive time as Oh, I don't have time for that. No, no, no, no, it's exactly the opposite. You cannot afford not to learn to use your tools really, really well, if you really care about being productive. And what I found many times is people don't invest that time into learning those tools to see people doesn't matter, their Windows machines, their iPads, their full mobile phones, and they know how to use two or three functions, but they have never spend the time trying to learn how to use the functions of the tools that you use every day. You know, when I tell people, yes, you can open notes on an iPhone, okay, unclick. And instead of trying to type hit the microphone button on the keyboard and dictate using Siri or you can install other keyboards like Google Voice and then use Google Voice for that process. Okay, most people look at me like, No, you can't, yes, you can. Okay, and they don't use their mobile phone as a capture tool. Because the the numbers maybe or their typing may not be something that they can do fast enough. But they could do the dictating perfectly fine. So why they don't do that, because they have never spent the time to research and to try to find those and to really make the tool but the people I have teach to use that. Now their capture has changed from day to night. And now they capture consistently. And now they know what to process. Even if the dictation is not always 100%, perfect. Hey, it's 90%, you will get the idea. And it's much better than trying to say, Oh, gee, I will write that down. When I get to my office.

Raymond Sidney-Smith 48:35

I'll say that for me, as we close out the conversation that I really recommend to everyone that they look at all of the applications they have running on their either desktop, application desktop systems, or their mobile systems and identify the notifications that they're providing. Many times, they are providing you with all kinds of notifications, because applications have the intention of getting you to use them. So they want to push notifications to you on a regular basis to tell you to come and use their app and to become involved and they want to push sales pitches. And they want to be able to push other notifications to have you engage with them. The goal for you is to have as few notifications as possible, and have those notifications effectively trigger you to do the things you need to do. And so if you have any of this over notification problem, then that's the first step. And then go to the tools that you really do need to be reminding you about the things you need to get done or the places you need to be and look at how your notification system works. I know that at least on on Android and iOS, you have very granular notification controls. So you know not just the ability to control where they display, whether that be in the drop down menu, drop down bar, the notification bar, or prompting you we now have chat bubbles on iOS and Android so they can have these little chat bubbles that show up in show little notification icons. So you can have as discreet, or as overt application reminders and notifications present to you throughout your entire ecosystem. And so a little bit to what both art and producer were saying, you know, you really need to know your systems, you need to really get in there and dig in and see what they're capable of. And then taking just a little bit of time, it doesn't take a lot of time, you can do this actually, per application, whenever it next reminds, you just take that two or three minutes and say, Okay, how does this remind me? And is this reminding me the way I needed to, and if it's not, let's change it to the way in which it can remind me better and more effectively. And over time, you're gonna get better and more reminders that really help you be more productive. And so with that, I just want to thank you, gentlemen, for the conversation. This has been a lot of fun. And the conversation of course, for us in the recording is over, we're coming to the end of our conversation, but we don't have to end the discussion necessarily with you all. So if you have a question or a comment, feel free to head over to productivitycast.net. If you go there to the episode page, you will find a comment or comment field where you can go ahead and leave your thoughts and questions. And we are happy to answer those and engage with you. If you are also on that episode page, you will also find links to anything we discussed. If we missed something, let me know. But anything we've discussed should be linked there. So you can easily jump to it. There is also text transcript. So there's a text transcript that's both embedded in the page. If you click the Read More link, it'll expand and you can read along and listen, it's machine generated, but it should be good enough for you to be able to read along and understand what we're saying. And then we also have a download link below that. So you can click on it and it will download a PDF document so that you can take it offline and read that side by side. So you can do all those things if you need to subscribe if this is your first time you want to subscribe or follow the podcast feel free to follow the instructions by clicking on the follow or subscribe link there on ProductivityCast dotnet. You'll find instructions there for that. And thank you all for listening. If you have a topic you'd like to suggest to us feel free to head over to productivitycast.net forward slash contact, you can leave us a voice recorded message. But otherwise, I want to express my thanks to acoustic pinout Francis Wade and art Gelwicks for joining me here on ProductivityCast Each week, you can learn more about them and their work by visiting productivitycast.net and clicking on the about page. I'm Ray Sidney-Smith on behalf of all of us here at ProductivityCast Here's to your productive life.

Voiceover Artist 52:29

That's it for this productivity cast the weekly show about all things productivity with your hosts, Ray Sidney-Smith and Gousto been out with Francis Wade and art Gelwicks