

135-task-sequencing-productivitycast

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SPEAKERS

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



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

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



Augusto Pinaud 00:23

I'm Augusto Pinaud.



Francis Wade 00:24

I'm Francis Wade.



Art Gelwicks 00:25

And I'm Art Gelwicks.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:26

Welcome, gentlemen, and welcome to our listeners to this episode of ProductivityCast. Today, we are going to be talking about something that I find to be fascinating which is the order of

we are going to be talking about something that I find to be fascinating, which is the order of operations, so to speak of tasks. And tasks. sequencing is interesting to me, because I think that when we deal with so many complexities in life, there are ways in which we can really order the tasks that we're doing, not just for making them more effective, but also making them more efficient. And I think that it's important for us to think through how we put things one in front of the other. And so I thought today, we would have a conversation around the idea of why would you condition tasks? Why would you sequence tasks, in essence, and then we could talk about maybe some of the examples and or pitfalls that we experience when we do task sequencing. And then we'll close out with maybe some tips and tricks for you all to utilize when you want to jump start the process of task sequencing. So let's get started with Why do you task sequence? Why would you want to do task sequencing,

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Francis Wade 01:32

if we don't think about task sequencing, we end up making mistakes, small mistakes, big mistakes, we end up arriving at places late because we didn't start early enough, we end up with late deliverables, we end up being stressed, there's a host of problems that we can create if we don't do task sequencing correctly. And they all end up causing us emotional stress, the people around us come to realize that they can't count on us. It's loss of reputation, there's just a whole host of problems that gets created when we don't really pay attention. And we just do what we think we feel like doing in the moment. recipe for disaster.

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Art Gelwicks 02:19

Task sequencing is one of those things that you don't realize it's important until you don't do it. Because you go to plug into working on a particular task. And you realize that three other tasks before that had to be done first, for this one to be able to be executed. So being able to take the time to say okay, what, what's the predecessor what has to occur to prepare this task to be able to be successfully completed? And then what are the next tasks that get triggered from this. And often we, we lose sight of that. And partially because it's not a natural habit to think about the before and the afters. But the other thing is that most task management tools don't support this kind of thinking. They don't have any structure built into them. To have that transitional piece from task to task, you wind up doing it artificially through the organizational structure. So the outlines and nesting and things like that,



Raymond Sidney-Smith 03:17

I think that OmniFocus is really the only one that I know of that has a true conditional task feature built into it. Are there any others that you know of that that really, truly will basically only show a task after you complete one?

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Art Gelwicks 03:31

Not without getting into the project management space that I've seen? I mean, most of that's a much heavier lift, which it shouldn't be that hard of a thing. I mean, to paraphrase, you know, top gears, Jeremy Clarkson, how hard how difficult could it actually be? Because all you need to do is provide a connection to the next task and ID. And maybe that's the charge is that every

task would have to have some sort of unique identifier. But I'm really surprised that most more applications don't give you that option to say when I finished this, what's the next task I want to do? And be able to designate that and say, Okay, here's the next one in the sequence and the next one, because when we talk about flow states, when we talk about time blocking, these are perfect connections to that. And it just seems to be a blind spot in the task management applications that are out I will definitely



Raymond Sidney-Smith 04:28

say that I think that task sequencing is important, if you think about it from the perspective that we design checklists, because we want to know in say, any given known project, that we know the sequence, the order that those things should be done in one before the other. And many times what happens is we have the complexity of many different projects ongoing that has many different things that we need to do throughout any given day or week, and not knowing the order in which they're going to happen. It creates a level of just inefficiency that causes things to break down. And also, you lose momentum in many cases. And so if you think about it, if you have to go to the grocery store, you would group the things you're going to purchase, buy the areas of the grocery store, right, you're not going to go, go get the milk in, and then walk, you know, to the other side of the grocery store, then walk back and get the eggs. And then you know, you're going to when you're in dairy, you're going to get all the dairy items, you know, you get the milk, cheese, eggs, when you're in the bread aisle, you're going to get all of the, you know, grains. These are things that we naturally do in some areas of our lives. But for some reason, when we think about tasks, we don't actually group things, or sequence them in a way that makes them to be more efficient. And that just creates more problems.

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Augusto Pinaud 05:45

Yeah, only focus on that sense, as you were mentioned, was incredible in the sense that not only you could say, do not start this task, or show me these tasks on top. But you could also say, not only you cannot show to me until the prior one is ready, but also need to be after this date. And you could combine those two conditions, I have not seen anything that do conditions as incredible as OmniFocus. That's the sad part was a collaboration. But from the condition perspective, and the fact that you could mix, conditional or non conditional in the same projects, and you could have part of the project who has those conditions, parts of the project, or tasks that did not have them. It was really, really incredible. You brought

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Art Gelwicks 06:31

up the grocery list thing, right? That did does remind me the application any do it's interesting when you go and you plug tasks in there on their shopping list, it will actually organize those by category within the store. So like it'll try to put the dairy items together and the thing, so it creates groupings. But again, that's not a sequencing as per se, because there's nothing within that grouping. It's it's all you're in the dairy aisle, find your stuff, I'm trying to think about how some of the tools will do sequencing, for example to do is the closest you get with sequencing and Todoist as you can change the order of tasks in the list. And that's assuming you're going to work from the top to the bottom, most Kanban tools, you can rearrange the cards in the

board, something like a Trello or something like a notion board, you can change the order that way to create a somewhat of a sequence. But there's nothing that locks it in to say that when this one's done, this is the next one that has to be done. And I'll make the argument that the next one is actually less important than what was the preceding one that needed to lead up to this task. So what had to be done first, because what I've seen consistently is that when you have a task that you're not prepared to execute with everything, it fails. But if you have a task, that's going to dovetail into the next one, that's logically the one that's setting up the success of the next task. So the predecessor is really the one that makes all the difference. And it really doesn't matter how you, you look at it. If you want to look at a task and say when this is done, I can do this next thing, or when I need to do this when I need to do the prior ones. But it does raise an interesting situation. Now in the conversation, we talked about task sequencing, sequence implies 12345. But that's not always the case, you can have four or five tasks that have to happen before another task can start. So if you're if you take something simple, like mowing the lawn, well, you have to get out the lawn mower, put gas in the lawn more clear the debris out of the yard, and then you can start well, those are all tasks sequence. But they're all equal to get to the next level. This is again, this is where we're starting to play in project management space. But it's so simple. It's such a basic level, that I still don't understand why we don't see some sort of capability, but even barged into existing applications.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 09:12

And it's interesting more to me that we see more and more applications that are doing some level of kind of zettelkasten type features where we see linking backward and forward in the database to items. So the ability to link things is actually trivial now in many software, and yet we're not having the capability to track those things. And for me, just so that we're aware for me, I just want to know, I don't need the software to hide things from me as as like you can't do this until that thing is done. I just want to be able to have some signifier that there is a condition that needs to be met before this task gets done and or another task needs to be completed. I think of task sequencing as being in any condition that needs to be met before this task gets done, right, so if I need to do some action, and say, for example, you know, I need to get my next paycheck before that happens, well, I'm not going to, I'm not going to do that thing until I see that thing happen. And so, it may be some external thing that happens, it may also be something that I need to do. But both of those things are important to me, I need to know that I'm gonna get a phone call from Susan, Susan is going to tell me, I've got the green light to do X, then I will do Y. And it's that very kind of context, whereby I'm then capable of identifying, okay, next week, there are some things that I'm not going to be able to do until I get a response back from Susan. Okay, I'm going to set those aside into likely my someday list Allah GGD. And forget about it, because I don't need to deal with it this week, unless Susan calls me and says, Hey, Ray, you've got the green light. So there are all of these different types of conditionality that we need to think about when it comes to what tasks need to be done. What examples kind of come up for you in thinking thinking of concrete examples aren't used the grocery shopping, you know, and that kind of example, are there other examples where you find that sequencing is either necessary, or just so much more useful when you do use it, the thing



Art Gelwicks 11:34

that I run into all the time is when you when you create tasks related to a process, that sequencing built in. And even if it's a fairly simple process, it's a reproducible one. And to

reflect that process in your task management system, you need to then emulate that sequence for it to be done effectively. Otherwise, things fall off the rails, you're constantly going back and checking some sort of a reference document for your process. And it may not be, you know, an exceptionally complicated process. Let's let's take since we're starting to head towards the end of summer, you think about end of the year things or end of the summer things you're going to do, maybe, maybe you have a swimming pool, then you're going to be closing the swimming pool up after you know, sometime in September, that has a whole series of things that have to happen, a lot of things have to happen prior to even getting started, they have to happen that day, they have to happen within a couple of days after. And that sequence is very important. Because if you don't do things in the right steps, you can have a mess and very huge number of problems. A lot of people I know will actually just write down, these are all the things that I need to do, and then assume that that is the way that it will operate. This, the specific to me is that if it's something that you're going to do more than once, and it has multiple steps, you need to be able to demonstrate that sequence within the task tracking, I was thinking about the sub task idea, because a lot of the tools offer the ability to have subtasks. But those are disparate tasks and most tools, I think it would be kind of nice if those were actually linked tasks. So if you had, you know a list of tasks, and you would you would take a task, and then you would have a sub task under it well, that maybe that's another just task from the list. So you can say, okay, when I click on that, it's also going to close out the other one, too. It doesn't sound like it, this should be this hard. I

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Francis Wade 13:37

had this conversation with a developer, a task management developer, and he assured me that it is exceedingly difficult. He said it is It sounds easy. It seems like it should work. It seems like all of them should have it. But he tried to convince me, he was pretty good Vinci that the programming of that requires to create a task dependency. And the inside the software is extremely complicated. And it gets complicated really fast.

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Art Gelwicks 14:09

I think they're overthinking it, then, because they're immediately running into what would be project management. They're thinking about something on the scale of a Microsoft Project or a PERT chart tracking, they're getting too big too fast. If all you're doing is saying that this task is related to that task, not scheduling, not dates, not calendars, none of that, because that's what I will completely agree if you're trying to do something where you have a schedule of dates, and you want to have it automatically adjust those based on task relationships. Yeah, that's a big hairy monster to try and deal with. I've seen people try and build those out in Excel and wind up losing hair because of it. So when we, when we think about something small though, just you know, that logical next step, take a task, what tasks are related to this, what are connected to it, that's all that's all we're looking for. right away, building off of that, yeah, go find another tool. But I just think they overthink it at times.

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Augusto Pinaud 15:06

And I think that's, that's exactly what it is part of the problem is, the need is not another Microsoft Project, okay, the guy or the person who which role requires something as complex as Microsoft Project will not use. this will go directly to those tools. For other reasons. What is

needed is a more basic level of this task. It's not about, it's about really, okay, this other task will not start until this, this one finish or this group of tasks. Finish. And, and again, as we mentioned, OmniFocus has done it for years incredibly well. And it was a strength from the focus, there were things that now I recreate on Todoist, or recreate on nodes that are less effective and pretty, because you cannot really hide these other tasks, you now need to find ways to hide it, instead of just saying, Don't show me these tasks yet, because I don't want to see it. Because I need to finish this other set of tasks before and one example is insurance of the house. Okay, I need to pay the insurance of the house every year and wait for the check to return. Why? Don't ask me, it's how it's set up. And it's really close. But okay, I pay and then three weeks later, the mortgage company pay and I get my check back up every year. But that means I need to be aware that in this next month, okay, they're going to take a chunk of money on that account that I need to make sure it is in there. So the insurance company can do they're automatically withdrawal. Okay, but also I need to create a second task that says waiting for to gain three weeks waiting for the refund for that thing. And in OmniFocus, it was really easy. Okay, he was all set in automatically. Here. Not so much. Even I had a winter list for things to check around the house. Okay, unplug the houses, you know, typical checking checklist for the winter, that in only focus was really easy. The question was, is winter jet. Okay, every day, you finally have not clicked that I suggest, okay, the rest of the list never populate my system. When you go to other platforms to do list in this case, that is not true. So I need to find other more complex ways for the user at least, to hide those things. So I don't see them until I decide that is ready, or we already went through ways to do it.

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Francis Wade 17:55

The two that I'm thinking of are examples. I'm thinking of our webinar today, webinars that I do. And they require a two week cycle, a week of preparation, a week, the day of execution, another week of other promotional activity and setup for replay and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And the other one is, uh, I do two annual online conferences. And they take about three months to prepare. And another two weeks to wrap up after it's been after they're finished. And these are repeatable activities, that in which the tasks are connected to each other. But they don't necessarily occur one after the other, in terms of a must be done. The moment before you do B, the tasks can be separated in time. But one thing I've read about, I've heard suggested it was it was done by an actual academic from forget the university University of Utah she's from but anyway, Desi Desi will the name but she suggested that we should be able to download chunks of activity the way you don't know the instructions for how to you know build a desk or something from Ikea, you get the instructions from them and they tell you follow the sequence. She She argued that you should be able to download a conference or a webinar as a group of activities of dependent activities into your task management system. And following what Augusto is saying you should be able to hide everything until you do the first task. So the first task could be set the date and once you set the date, then it should automatically populate the next activities. You do them it should automatically populate this So this is still satisfaction. But there's a lot of things in our world, like paying mortgages, which have a standard flow. And we should be able to download these flows from other places and just put them right into our calendar.

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Augusto Pinaud 20:17

And to do is, requires more work on the front end, but one of the things you can do is create templates. And those templates. you can put those dates. So when you create them.

everything gets populated that way. So there are ways to do it is just getting the dependents in the sequence, it will be much faster, much simpler than all the work arounds you need to do to create things.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 20:41

Yeah, so what I'm hearing here is there's really two different kinds of sequencing that are involved and potentially a tertiary form as well, which is the kind of conditionality piece that I talked about. But the point here is that if you have something that is structured, that can be put into a checklist, then you can identify that once that condition is met, task A is done. Now Task B can be done. If there is a checklist involved, then that can actually populate with, say a date sequence associated with it. So that these things now need to be done in this order by these dates. And so you can then populate your system you're utilizing that, and or there is the idea of like with OmniFocus, you have a singular task that is conditioned on the prior task being completed. And then it appears or, you know, gets excised from some other list and comes to your your primary task list once that thing is met. So I just wanted to explain very briefly how I do both of those things in my own world. And maybe that will help folks kind of understand this. So when it comes to checklists, I actually have a set of, of templated emails that I've designed to use Remember The Milk, and you can email bulk tasks into the system. And so the great part about that is that anytime I see a condition met for something, I can then just pull up that template and send it to remember the milk. I can even automate that because I can have IFFT or Zapier, go ahead and send those emails into Remember The Milk based on a condition met, and then it will just populate the system. And since in the in the bulk email format, you can include task list, due date, start date, tags, all kinds of things in those lines. When you import, it can put them in all of the places it needs to and it can time, put the due dates and times in them as well. So let's it's very, very helpful for being able to say, Okay, once this thing happens, then all of these other things need to happen right thereafter. Just set it up as a way to like and Todoist, you have a template, and remember the milk, I use the email into function for bulk email tasks. And so that's one way to do it. The other is the more simplified way, which is that I always code conditional tasks, so that I know that there is something that needs to be done before them. And so for me, I just use the chevron at the beginning of a task line that tells me that something else needs to be done before that thing will go into place. And then in the in the task description at the end, I will actually note what that thing is. So it's it's basically what resource do you need or what condition needs to be met in order for that thing to happen. And so the chevron allows me to be able to, in essence, filter out anything that is conditioned, right, I can't do it right now. So in essence, it's a special type of someday, maybe, but it's something that I say, for example, I expect that call from Susan this week. So I will place that task into my current week's list of tasks. Notwithstanding, because I, I'm prepared for her to call me Tuesday or Wednesday. And then I'm going to have to be able to do that on Wednesday and Thursday or Friday. So I'm going to place that into my current tasks. But if I can't do it, then I don't want to see it right now. So that will be filtered out of view. Until such time as Susan makes that call, and I get the phone call, I can make it active. So there's two pieces there, right, there's the for me filtering using that icon just to have a visual for what is a conditional task. And then the other part is identifying what the resource limitation is, so that I can see the sequencing activity. I also put sometimes, you know, activity constraints in parenthesis after the task description, you could use the notes section of your task manager to do that as well. I just happen to like to see all of it right there in the task description. But you know if it's going to be a very long reasoning as to why something is or is not So, I will put that in the notes of the task

then and make a note see notes, I will literally in parenthesis, put see notes, so that I know to look into the notes and check those out. So those are two different ways in which we can we can do that in systems.

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Augusto Pinaud 25:13

It is interesting if I listen to you, because I like my task as clean as possible. So I am the one who put everything on the notes and on the bottom because that description I wanted as precise as possible. So for me, it works exactly the opposite the notes, it's what contain all that array of information and conditions and things to remember, I know that I was smiling as you were describing that



Raymond Sidney-Smith 25:40

yeah, and one thing to remember is that my system is designed so that when I'm tracking time for all of my work, whether it's billable or non billable time, and so I use toggle track against that description. And so I need to make sure that it is highly descriptive, because that's going to show up in my billing system. When I do click on the Start and End Time for toggle track. So I'm doing it for good purpose for that reason. And also, I want to be able to know what I've actually done throughout the day. And if I do a good description, then I will know the context immediately when I see the task, and I will complete it better. I just found that for me. And that's not for everybody. But I find the more descriptive my tasks, the more likely I am to know immediately why I want to do that thing. And then to be able to do it. And so I do put a little bit more detail in my tasks than I think the average person, but it just helps me in that sense. And it just goes to show you know everybody's different, you have to your mileage may vary. You need to know how much detail you need in your tasks to make them both useful. But also, they should generate a sense of momentum. Where can we fall short when it comes to task sequencing? Aqui trip it up.

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Augusto Pinaud 26:57

The first the first one I'm on top of you is I need these exactly one of the pitfalls of OmniFocus is that you can overcomplicated the system. Any of these things as as an incredible potential. It has also an incredible risk to overcomplicated things. And over complication means that you tend to be less effective and do the task less because it's now harder to find them. Because they you may not see the task but because it will be dependent on two things that you have made may have forgot to check. So that's for me is the biggest pitfall that said, for my past experience, the benefits, I outweighed the over complication, you can always come to the wizard review and simplify if needed, that when you don't have it is simply impossible to rebuild it.

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Francis Wade 27:50

I think there's lots of room for better UIs better user interfaces, the list format, or the calendar format. I think they're a bit for a different time. And not the world that we're in right now. We're I think the user just wants to know, what should I work on next. And there's a couple couple of

calendar that auto schedulers anyway that offer you, here's what you should work on next. But by and large, they're most of them follow the calendar or list format. But you don't really need all of that, in order just to answer a simple question. And I think if they were thinking of what you the user need to do to take your next action, they will read as they would, they will be able to rethink. And basically, what we're saying is take away all the complexity from view, you could handle it somewhere else, as long as it's being handled, but then just tell you the part that you absolutely need to know. So and shorten the time that it takes for you to find it. You know, just fast, quick, simple, direct, maybe not even in a calendar or task manager, it could be just a pop up on your screen that smart pop up, not the kind that we have right now. But that's all you need. But I haven't seen anyone start from know that none of the kind of designs or task manager seems to have started with what does the user absolutely need? When do they need it? And how can we minimize the time it takes for them to find it when they need it? And then work back from that? It seems like they're working from the database forward with predictable kind of complicated interfaces as a result.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 29:37

And isn't that really the the challenge of the type of user because I spend a good amount of my weekly review, preparing for what is going to happen so that I have a higher likelihood of that happening. And most people do not do that. But if I were to come into contact with a piece of software that was highly opinionated did in that sense and tried to provide me with some level of logic that was not my own. I don't know how I would feel about that. I think that certainly I want, quote unquote, it to be easier. Right, I would love for you to utilize the Unschedule method in line with my GTD weekly review. And I'm utilizing all of this software to make my world more efficient. But at the same time, I actually like touching every single thing that I'm going to do in the subsequent week, because that task sequencing happens, and I understand it better by virtue of touching each of those items along the way, because I can make the judgment call this is why am I why am I looking at doing this, right? Or this is probably low priority, or this person asked me to do this thing. But really, it's not high priority to me, it may be high priority to them, right? So if if they're on fire, they need to stop, drop and roll. But that's not necessarily my problem. I'm not on fire, right? So you have to kind of take those, like use that those heuristics in a way that help us understand that. And if it's put into the black box, right, I tend to think of like any AI machine learning or algorithm that I can understand as being the black box, if I put it into the black box, then that takes some of the mental muscles away from me, right? If you if you don't use your muscles, they atrophy kind of thing. So if I do that, then I become less attuned to those pieces. What do you say to that argument in terms of, of, of a desire to still have good productivity skills, while at the same time having the software facilitate maybe the mundane components, I was gonna

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Art Gelwicks 31:48

say that was my worry, when we were talking about this is that we're we're looking to, for the software to do too much for us, we lose the ability to investigate those tasks, to think about the tasks to think about the sequencing, to think about the impacts and have that mental awareness. If we count on software to do that decision making process for us, I'm totally up for automation. I think that's great streamline the manual, repetitive or mundane, repetitive tasks. But we need to be able to process and have that time to be engaged in what we're doing. And that engagement needs to happen on the planning point, more than it does on the actual doing

point. I think people get away from that they they want to find a tool that does the hard part for him, which is the planning. It's the thinking through it's the creative visualization of how do I get from this collection of random tasks to a complete completed successful activity? So while I think there is a lot of value to these are the things that I figured out are in the sequence, what's the next thing that I need to be doing and the tool should facilitate that process? I don't think there's going to ever be a tool out there that can decide what that process should be in the beginning. It's going to there's so many variables that come into play with that. And if we look for that, I think we're looking for the wrong target for the biggest return on our effort and, and our investment.

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Francis Wade 33:22

I think I might disagree from the point of view that there is lots of busy people, executives, who have administrative assistant, who does exactly what we're talking about? No, do they do it? Well, some, some are amazing at doing it. And some are terrible. And if you've ever met an executive, an executive who had to change that administrative assistant from someone who was competent to someone who was clueless, you've ever heard their complaints, you know what it's like to go from one extreme to the other, and then start to start all over again, and not even have a real idea of how that person became so competent at figuring out their schedule and telling them what to do about it saying that the person would the administrative assistant would do everything because in the beginning, he or she couldn't do anything, right, because it takes training to get to the point where they could figure out what the executive is doing. So essentially, what happens is that there's a period of training, where an executive would have to train his or her administrative assistant to get to that point of super competency. Well, the same thing is with with software, same thing is with auto schedulers is that they take training, they come with capabilities. And you are essentially the same way we just talked about CRISPR being a program that learns your voice as it goes along is the same way that you need to train an auto scheduler users In administrative assistant, and as you train them in the very basics like, don't schedule may work out for 10pm. In the evening, as you get past the basics, you move on to secondary, tertiary and higher levels of complexity that you can then delegate to the person or system. And then you kind of move up to the next level and up to the next level. But most executives I've spoken to I've not met one who really understands what I just described as a process. It's, it's more like, they call HR and say, Send me somebody good. And that person could be 18 years old, I've seen that happen. The CEO has an 18 year old imaging assistant who's like, you know, she's brand new, she's never been work before. But difficult. She's available. So let's give him to her, her to him.

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Art Gelwicks 35:52

But that's the exact same mindset that they then take with software, they look at it and say, Okay, fine, give me a piece of software that is the equivalent of the administrative assistant that has 30 years of experience, and it can immediately do exactly what I need it to do without any effort on my part. And then they get frustrated with well, why doesn't it know to do that? Why would it know? Honestly, every piece of software is the equivalent of the clueless administrative assistant you just described, it starts off that way. They all have a base set of skills, they just graduated from college, they they know, they've got the BAA, and they're just ready to go and do some work. But they have no idea what the guidelines are, what your requirements are, honestly, what your foibles are, and your, you know, your little weird quirks

that you have to have, you know, I can't have a task that's blocked in on three o'clock on a Wednesday, because that's when I do this and that and the other thing. And Ray, I know you've worked with assistants directly, and you know, that grooming process, for lack of a better term that has to happen to develop that relationship. So many people are not willing to put in the effort to create that relationship with the software that they are trying to entrust their entire productive system with,

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Francis Wade 37:14

is actually a whole, it's the things we're talking about, I've never actually seen written anywhere, that the hype of the software, you go to the sites, it isn't as if they're giving you the 30 year old versa, the person who's sat in the next office next to you for all this time, they're promising that they really can't deliver it. But they don't offer a distinction between the 18 year old and the one who's been there for 30 years, they they the hype is that, don't worry, you're someone who it's as if they've been with you all this time. And it's just not, it's just not true. So then offer you a path that will offer you any training, they don't give you an indication that you're going to spend some time training this thing.

A

Art Gelwicks 38:01

Where they flip it is they can, they don't want it really confused, but they obscure expertise with functionality. So they figure if we have more features, it's smarter, so it will do more things for you. And I'll call that a perfect example of this is notion, notion is a really powerful app, it is also a quagmire. To get things set up in that first learning curve it has it is just because there's so much in it. So you're bringing on board a person, if we use the person analogy, you're hiring a person with a vast amount of book knowledge, but no practical experience in what you're trying to do. And now you are going to take the time to translate your practical experience into their book knowledge. Well, the first thing, you have to have the same book knowledge. If you don't, you're not even talking the same language. But then you start to get into say, Okay, now you have to understand your own structures and processes enough to be able to communicate them to somewhere else. And how many times have we seen somebody say, you know, you ask them, Well, how do you do this? Well, we just do. Well, where's your where's your process outline for this? Well, we don't have one. So how do you know what you're supposed to be doing? Well, we just do the same things we've always done. What piece of software is going to turn that into anything intelligent, very little, unless they're your they are getting you to spend a whole lot of money. And I guarantee I'll get off my soapbox in a minute. I guarantee there's a whole lot of big brain people standing behind that software interpretate the software implementation in doing the interpretation for it. So we have to look at and that that went corporate but even down at our own basic level. If you were to take your significant other and say guess what? I'm going to put you in charge of all of my productivity planning, you're going to, you're going to do all my planning of my schedule, can you imagine the fights you will have for like months, trying to get everything together, because they don't think like you do. And you don't think like they do. And they're not putting up with your nonsense. Software, at least won't yell at you, when you're being a ridiculous person in your planning.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 40:23

I will say that one of the major pitfalls of dialoguing about any of this is the fact that technology

is only as good as your compliance to use the software and your awareness of the features. And I mean that in terms of not only what it can do, but what it can't do, and many times what we perceive software to be doing is more than it is. And it's usually less than it is. And so I think there is that fundamental piece, I also think, kind of arguing out of both sides of these corners here, that the average person probably is very comfortable with something that is a simple user interface that just tells them what to do. Whereas for me, I would like to do all of the work. And then on the flip side, know that when it gave me some simple prompt, you know, just a little pop up display on my screen. Whenever that work needed to be done, hey, this is the work that you need to do. It's reassuring that I'm doing the right thing. And so much knowledge work today, we're not really told that we're doing the right thing at the right time, we have to make that determination. And it would just be nice to have some algorithm that confirmed and affirmed that you were doing that. So I get the it's an appeal, there's a there's this nice tug at that at that component. But yeah, it just takes a long time getting someone, as you said, groomed to know you and how you work and all of those things. So being able to offload that onto a human is tough enough, better yet to technology that is still in its nascent forms, you know, machine learning, a lot of this technology is all very still early, early days, you know, infancy. And it's going to take some time before it really learns how to do a lot of this material, a lot of this work. And it's multiple types of technology being blended together. As we come to the kind of close of our time together, I wanted to talk about maybe some of the tips and tricks to get started. If somebody wanted to start Task sequencing, maybe what are some of the pitfalls they may come into contact with? And how can they make sure that they get started correctly. And I'll just get started here with saying to simplify your work, and I don't mean complex versus simplicity in in that very binary sense. I mean, in the sense that simple solutions are usually elegant solutions. And that means that there's a lot of work that goes underneath the thing that looks simple. And so think of the elegance of walking yourself through a week, what things need to be done for that to be to be able to happen, the most useful thing I can offer to you is that in the many years I've been studying personal productivity, I have come to the determination that routines are primacy in terms of being able to create sequences of tasks that allow for greater effectiveness in life. And so that's a great place to start, which is to think, what are the things you do every day, and just reversing or reordering? The sequence of doing those things can create a greater start to your day, for example, I usually use the example of mother or father who doesn't feel like they have time for the kids. Because they're, you know, frazzled. It's kind of, you know, Tasmanian devil, as they get out the door to get to the office, you know, it's a world when all things are kind of flying around, kids get thrown into to car seats, and you're off to the you know, it's just, it seems like a mess, but it doesn't have to be that way. Right? You can really, truly organize your morning so that things get done in a proper sequence. And it's just going to make your life better and quite honestly, you're teaching your kids organizational skills, and you actually get to to spend time with those children in a way that they actually enjoy mom or dad in a way that they otherwise wouldn't because Would You Rather mom or dad like spend time with you as they make their way through their morning or mom and dad yelling at you to like, Okay, go grab the thing from the from the fridge and you know, grab your bookcase, book bag and it just all of that, you know, nonsense going on around you is chaotic and is probably not healthy for the child. It's not healthy for you because it's more stress than you need. And and you can actually increase your the value of the relationship with your child if you learn how to be organized in that sense and And I really felt that growing up my mother, being a very highly organized person, it was, I never felt that push a rush to get it was things were organized in certain way that you got up and you did those things. And then you're out the door. And you know, like, I would just like, walk out the front door feeling like I just was, was just like cuddling with my mom, you know what I mean? Because it was just like a nice, easy mechanism. It wasn't always easy getting up every day for school, but she knew what I needed to do, she made sure that

they were in an order that made sense for me. And that worked. And so think of your routine in that sense, what can you do, maybe it's just just changing one thing to put it at after the other to make your morning just a little bit more seamless.

A

Art Gelwicks 45:48

For me, it's, it's the working backwards thing. That's the hard part. If you want to start into this, every task when you're planning out the task, ask yourself one question, what has to be done before this, for this to be done successfully? If you can get into that routine, you're setting yourself up to being able to develop the sequencing as you build it into whatever you're tracking this in. But that's the habit. You're not using the term habit, but that's the habit that you want to establish, is asking yourself that logical question, and that should be part of your weekly planning your task planning, all of those steps? What do I need to have done? Before I start this, for this to be able to be successful? Do I need things? Do I have to finish things? Do I need to go get things? You know, it doesn't have to be things but are there people I need to involve? Ask those questions. If you start that, I think you're halfway along the path that you need to pay.

F

Francis Wade 46:49

I agree. The business that Ray is talking about of grouping, grouping recurring activities into repeatable rituals or sort of repeatable mini projects every day. And then thinking about how can I make it better from one day to the next, if not every single day, one month to the next one semester to the next. Because you're going to be executing the same rituals. And you don't want to have to reinvent the wheel each time, you don't want to have to be the Tasmanian devil coming out the door, you do need to do what Ray's mom did, which is to pre think, put things in place, kind of lock them in, and then allow them to run for a while to see how well they were I'm guessing this is what your mom did read aloud to see how they can see how they worked. And then afterwards made some improvements and then rinse and repeat. But to get into that sort of virtuous cycle and not just leave it up to Tasmanian devil every day, or Tasmanian devil every time you need to go and have a conference or whatever the repeatable activity is get as many of those away from the creative, generative kind of ad hoc way in which they all start and move them into sort of production, which is that, yes, I flick a switch, the ritual starts, I flick off the switch, it stops to move them into production. So move them out of creation and into production. And then revisit them as needed. I think that that principle of tasks, task sequencing, I think is combining both of you guys are seeing I think is a is a let's call it the cornerstone, I guess just not at frankly, I don't think there's much is enough. Attention put to what we're talking about. I think it's just left to the example of mentioned before is when I think of also the training of an administrative assistant, is there's all these studies that show that that person's effectiveness is critical to the performance of the executive. But a couple of years ago in preparation for our conference I went looking for, okay, who who knows something about this topic? Crickets. I couldn't find a thing. I found, like one website, I've kind of talked about it, but the person was really selling their services and they kind of spent a little bit time going meta, but they really were pitching themselves as a virtual assistant. But the the recurring activity of training someone in that manner is something that you would think that should be taught in business school, right? Not even talked about, is this

well, given the person's criticality. And I don't think but I imagined the search no wouldn't yield would kneel to many good results either. This is a bit perplexing for me because you can't scale unless you go through this process of what we're talking about.

A

Augusto Pinaud 50:00

I agree 100% was what art says think what are the previous but also pay attention? Not only what are the previews, but what repeats in your life? Because that's one thing that I see is that every time not only Yes, you need to think what is coming before the task, but also, are these tasks recurring because they are recurring while you are inventing them every, every time you want to do the will, you know, I had a client who lived in OmniFocus. And he ended up having his planning for food in OmniFocus. Why? Because he could do sequencing. So you can say, Okay, this week, we're going to eat chicken, meat and pasta, and OmniFocus was intelligent enough to populate his grocery list based on that. Okay, I can you do it that way? There are plenty of sufferers. Okay, I use paprika, paprika will allow you to make those plans. Okay? Doesn't matter what you use. But think on those where are those little point of resistance that are not allowing you to breed your best self, but to default to the to the behavior you don't want? Those are the ones that you need to start looking before what are what is creating not the good sequencing that you want, but the poor sequence in that journey, or that you don't need. So that's it, start there, start little building one next, then the next.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 51:33

Well, thank you, gentlemen, for this conversation. This has been a lot of fun talking about task sequencing. And of course, we are at the end of the episode, but we're not at the end of the conversation. And so if you have a question or comment about what we've discussed during this cast, feel free to visit our episode page on productivitycast.net. There on the podcast website at the bottom of the page, you can leave comments or questions. And of course, we read and respond to those comments and questions if you want a response. So by the way, if you are on the episode page, you'll find our show notes. So those have links to anything we discussed. So I tried to keep track of all the things that we discussed and link to them there. We also have text transcripts. One is a readable transcript, just click on the Read More link, it expands it and you can read that along with the audio as it plays. And then there's also the downloadable link below that. And that is a PDF document you can download all and have offline for you to be able to read along with. If this is your first time with us, feel free to subscribe to the podcast, click on the subscribe or follow button in your podcast app. And go ahead and follow us so that you get the downloaded episodes free whenever they come out. And feel free to also you know, follow rate and review us in any of the podcast apps. Those of course help us to know that we're doing what you want us to be doing in terms of content, but it also helps us grow our personal productivity listening community by letting the podcast gods know that we're putting out quality episodes. And so thank you for doing that. If you have a topic you'd like to suggest, head over to [ProductivityCast dotnet](http://ProductivityCast.net) and go ahead and submit it there you can leave a voice recorded message or you can type a message into the contact form there. And maybe we'll feature that on a future episode. I want to express my thanks to Augusto Pinaud 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 and on behalf of all of us here at ProductivityCast Here's to your productive life.



Voiceover Artist 53:31

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