

# 138-one-size-doesnt-fit-all-live-pcast

Mon, Mar 06, 2023 1:19PM 34:52

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

tools, fits, task, size, pants, corporate environment, world, management, productive, manage, francis, talk, work, point, people, find, productivity, application, inboxes, podcast

## SPEAKERS

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

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Voiceover Artist 00:00

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



Augusto Pinaud 00:22

I'm Augusto Pinaud.



Francis Wade 00:23

I'm Francis Wade.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 00:24

And Art Gelwicks is with us somewhere in spirit. But he'll be back hopefully, and with us shortly. Welcome, gentlemen. And welcome to you all, listening, live, watching live or listening after the fact to the podcast feed. We are here live at the task management and time blocking virtual summit 2023. And the theme for this summit is one size doesn't fit all. And what Francis kind of positioned us to do here on this episode was to talk about really the the ideas behind what does one size fits all mean? Does it really make a difference in our productivity? Can we think about

this in a more, I think fluid and dynamic way. And I'm going to play devil's advocate a little bit in this Episode Episode to talk about really the, the fine line between efficiency and effectiveness, when we think about one size fits all methods, tools, and otherwise. And so what do we want to get started here, let's let's talk about one size fits all being a problem, because we're consistently trying to do more. And as Francis talks about task volume, for instance, do you want to kind of talk to us about the number of projects and commitments that you typically talk about with regard to how one size fit all one size fits all really becomes a problem for folks, when they're attempting to do more and more

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Francis Wade 01:48

Sure, is that we're greedy. It's, we fill our we fill our plates in terms of capacity. So we do as much as we can do, and we grow as much as we can grow. And when we get to a particular level, we still want more. So even if we pick up a new app and learn some new techniques and become more productive, because we can manage more tasks, eventually, or capacity runs out, because we just keep adding more tasks, we're really until eventually, we coupled and start to experience problems all over again, it's just human nature, the more we do can do, the more we want to do. And it's just a matter of wanting, just being aspirational, just being positive. Having a vision for yourself, that is beyond your grasp. wanting more out of life, wanting to grow, wanting to learn wanting to contribute, wanting to serve, you know, there's always all of these commitments, they sound great, because we are just wired that way. But what they all translate to in the world of task management in terms of what goes in your to do less than what goes in your calendar is one word more. So given that we always want more, there is no single set of techniques, and there's no single tool that will ever serve us forever. It serves us up to a point. And then we want more. And we either give up wanting more, which some people do, or we change our approach. So that more becomes possible human nature.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 03:32

And I would probably put a different lens on this, I would filter that response to the fact that we are in various different cultures and societies that really require a lot of us today, you know, there, there is just a different sense of the world than at the turn of the last century, or even the turn of the prior century to that. There's just so much more expected of us. And we are required to be connected to all of our past mistakes in a lot of ways. And that creates a lot of shame and regret for humans just generally. And I think the idea of one size fits all ends up being problematic for folks who do have any sense of their past, coming back to bother them haunt them, so to speak. And I don't mean this in terms of like doing something bad. I mean, in terms of like just capturing your existing task volume, and recognizing that there's a backlog that at its very nature causes a an emotional response that has its own effects on us. And I think that can be very, very troublesome for folks. So we have task volume. I'm going to kind of twist us to the other side to this, which is kind of Devil's advocacy, right out the gate, which is to talk about the fact that we have lots of solutions in the world and In which the one size fits all works. And maybe not perfectly, but maybe enough, I'll use the example of all in one productivity tools like an outlook outlook positions itself as the one tool you need for being able to manage communications. I think to some extent Microsoft Teams is starting to encroach in that space a bit. But But focusing on Outlook, right, we've got email, we've got calendar, we've got task management. At some point, it did a journaling type of tool in there as well, there was

kind of a note taking capacity, you have add ins that extend on that. So it's customizable, and it's extensible, make the argument that that one size fits all strategy does not work for organizations.

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Art Gelwicks 05:49

No, I'll jump in there and say it absolutely doesn't work for organizations. And it's exactly what organizations need. And here's why I say that. Because organizational implementation of those types of one size fits all solutions are not about the users using them. They're about what it takes to maintain them, and what it costs to deploy them. And what it costs to license them. That's the the objective. And that's the purpose, it has nothing to do with whether or not it's the best option for the end users, because they're rarely taken into consideration for that. So when you have a tool like Outlook, where Microsoft will tell you that it will do everything, including slicing bread, it's not, they don't really care that, well, it's not the best option for doing task management. And it's not the best option for handling your calendar. Typically, what you'll see retroactively is they'll try to shoehorn functionality into it, to get it closer to those applications that actually do those very things. So, in a corporate environment, it's extremely rare to actually get an application that's really good at the singular job it's supposed to do, because then you wind up with a huge number of applications to to maintain license and ultimately pay for

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Augusto Pinaud 07:06

to go by little back to what Francis was saying. Us, you know, there are two problems, yes. Our task, you know, we go into task management or learning to manage our mess, because that overwhelm, okay, because we want more and more and more. And what is little say, in the world as you work with somebody is there is a moment in which you need to start looking for better. And what I mean by that is, as Francis was saying, and I will agree, there is a moment that you reach capacity. And when you reach capacity, what are you going to do, okay, as to this day, I have not been able to find the upgrade. Okay. So if somebody knows how to do an upgrade, please let me know. Okay, but since I cannot do an upgrade, this is what it is. So the moment you reach capacity, is when this game gets interesting, because that's where the geeking and the time management and the story comes into place. Because now is how we are going to get better task, okay, on how we are going to maximize that resources, those resources that we have, so we can really be productive. That is where things that I have mentioned before, in other episodes of this podcast, that do not do list, what is the things that you need to stop doing? What is what you need to teach others to do when I work with families for task management? Okay. How do you teach your kids how to use these tools? Because it's very interesting are my kids are 14 and 10. Okay, they can play with Windows, Mac, iPads, and Chromebooks. No problem, okay, switch between one or the other. But somehow, we parents, you know, don't give them the tools that we know they're going to need. Now do I think my kid will use not to be or to do is when they get to their professional life? Maybe not. But this is a great time to teach him, hey, you need to find a way to capture you need to find a way to collect and to think so that you can do so that way. They don't get to where we got Okay, that is more and more and more and more crashed. Okay, but they can gradually learn that the only way they're going to be very successful is as they reach capacity, they start looking for better.



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Francis Wade 09:46

I would add to that and say that it's not it's not. Greed is a big part of it in terms of personal aspirations, greed for more capacity or wanting and needing more capacity. But also there's no standing still, you know, I had one inbox when I was in 1995 96, one inbox that got five email messages per week. Let's see, I now have, I can't even count the number of inboxes, that I have places where I can get messages. And the email is at least the least up to 200 to 300 a day. So I'm in a totally different zone than I was way back when, and trying to manage my whole world with one inbox, one email address, as if I got three or five emails a day is unworkable. So if I look to the future, why should I think that this is going to be the limit of the inboxes? And messages that I have to manage? No, chances are, there's going to be more because that's just the way technology is going. And you know, there'll be everybody has an uncle or a cousin who sends them conspiracy theories, right? You know, back in 1995, that didn't happen. So you're getting a lot more potential time demands, potential tasks coming into these inboxes. And you can't do anything about it, you can't write off the world, you could, but you don't want to write off your uncle, because he's sending you conspiracy theories. So you need a way to cope with the change in technology. So that's not a change in necessarily your practice. It's that you're being given inboxes people are using email, and they're sending you more messages, and you either coach yourself off, or you at least pretend to accept them.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 11:24

What I'm hearing from both you and Gousto kind of brings this thought to mind, which is that when we are thinking about the concept of of the more specific we get, though, not just in terms of of this kind of sense of having to use many different tools for many different things. But the more you focus actually, on one thing, the more likely you are to need a specific tool for that thing, right, because the better you know, the confines of that project or repeatable task, then the more bespoke the tool can be or the set of protocols can be to doing that thing, I use very specific tools for producing this podcast, that are very tailored to just doing this work. They're not tools that I use everyday for anything else. And so they're, they're designed for that. So I would not, I would not try to use an audio editor to do video editing, right, you know, like, those kinds of things don't make sense. But in my system, I'm capable of toggling back and forth between both efficiency and effectiveness. But specifically for these kinds of, I don't know, the more you focus on the the work at hand, the better you're able to identify the the tools that are going to be best for that kind of work. And even to the extent of I keep track of what needs to be done, and a completely different tool for the podcast, that I do everything else in my world. And it's just because it's simpler for me to be able to look not only in that system for that work. So hopefully that gives a little bit of mental fodder for folks to think about in that sense.

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Francis Wade 13:07

I would also add today, because are you going to be using the same audio editor five years from now? No chance.

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Art Gelwicks 13:15

And this is actually a good, good point to address this. If it's customizable, is it really one size fits all? I'd argue that no if it if it may only provide a limited number of sizes, but it's still not a

its an: I'd argue that no matter it may only provide a limited number of sizes, but it's still not a single size. That's I think, where we start to get into this difference between a tool and a platform. And when you start to look at functional tools, functional tools are typically, for lack of a better term, one size fits all for that function. They are designed to do a job audio recording perfect example, I would not use an audio recorder to manage a spreadsheet, why that is not its functional purpose as a tool. However, a platform that is designed to handle multiple types of functionality. We'll never excel in any one of them. It is truly the jack of all trades. But it does give you that capability to configure and match your needs sent more specifically. This is where we have the problem though. It's not a tool or a platform issue. It's what are you asking it to do? Are you asking this thing to define how you should do something? Or do you understand how you should do something well enough to define it for this thing? And I think that's where people get hung up. Because they'll look at something that's a platform, like a notion for example, and they'll expect it to be able to do what a to do is does. Well Todoist has a specific objective task management that's that's its gig. It is not designed to be a database. It is not designed to be a note management system. It's not it's not its purpose in life. So we have to understand what is our need set. Because ultimately you do want to get to a one size fits your needs. But when all four of us would look at a task management system, we're all going to have different needs sets.

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Augusto Pinaud 15:21

But you change the and I think that's where that need to go is the question is not one size fits all. One size fits you, what will fit you. And that is one thing that we go into this show and come over and over and over. You know, what works for Francis or yourself or Ray? Okay, doesn't matter how effective it is, may never work for me. Okay, I'm even we were joking on the pre show. Okay, how my kid got an Android. Okay. And he was complaining about his speed. And I almost told him get a no, but okay, and but why? Well, because I leave on an iPad, that's what is happening, okay. And is that we have established, there is no difference. But what happened is that what it will work for me may not work for anybody. And that's a key into that, what is the trust, it doesn't matter if the size fit or don't fit, what matter is to understand it, that's the challenge, what will work for you. And then when you go into those corporate environments, how you can get those standard tools that you're going to get work for you. But first and foremost, you need to understand what works for you.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 16:43

I don't think one size fits me, I am very comfortable with having multiple tools for multiple different similar veins of my world. And to some great extent it's because of compartmentalization, I want to be able to very clearly have a distinction between my work and my personal world. And so that's just an easy and clear distinction to have different tools for those things aren't go ahead, and we can come back to this topic,

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Art Gelwicks 17:09

I was gonna say there's, I got into a conversation about this with a friend of mine recently. And we got, we got talking about what productive pants are you wearing that day. And I have to explain that if you go into your closet, you don't have 14 pairs of the exact same pair of pants, guaranteed. You have dress pants, you have work pants, you have casual pants, you may have

sweat pants, you have pants for specific purpose, but they're all pants, they fit you, they do that job that needed that is needed to be done at that time period. Now, if you're looking for one pair of pants, that can do everything, you might find it, the odds are pretty good, you won't, you may find something that you can wear all the times like our good old blue jeans, or you may want to be that specialized to have you know, these are my gardening pants. And these are my car working pants. And these are my fancy dance pants, whatever it's finding, as we've as we've talked about what fits you now and I'll stress the now part because for apparently my pants have changed size. So sometimes my pants fit and sometimes my pants don't fit. So you have to adjust accordingly. And and when you look at a tool that is that rigidly locked down, that provides a structure that you just follow these dots, it can't adjust with you. And that's where I think a lot of people get into the mistake of the one size fits all. They look for a tool that provides them a structure without recognizing that they may not fit that tool.

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Francis Wade 18:43

But it's some kind of introspection required to figure out your need. If I can't see myself, I would have a difficult time fitting into a corporate environment at this point. From a pest management point of view, because of the tools I use, you know, I could imagine the IT department saying Oh 90% of these you can't even touch but you're here on the job. And that would mean that my productivity would plummet because I would be forced into not using a tool, for instance using the one they gave me. So if I start from the inside out, I tell the truth about what I'm doing. And I become this rare doc that probably wouldn't fit into a rigid system, I'd have to find some accommodation. But let's at least a bit of introspection about what I do and what I need and even how I find new stuff. Because I like trying new things with the hope of replacing what I'm currently using in task management or anywhere else. So I think there's an introspective action here. Kind of to understand what my needs are.

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Augusto Pinaud 19:48

You see and you bring you bring a very interesting point and art and I discussed this point in the Cross Platform podcast extensively because of what you said Okay, as you said, I will not be able to go into the corporate environment and you have valid reason. But you are making that conscious choice, and you have the ability to make that choice. What happened with the people who don't, okay, who Hey, their life happened on that corporate are great, it's a great opportunity or for whatever reason, they are moving, or they have always been into that. And now they have that IT guy who said you cannot. And that is very critical and very important, and how it comes even to be more critical or more important to understand what you need. So you can adapt it to that, so you can make it work in the confines of the box. Okay, the box may be smaller, the box may be more difficult to fit, but now it gets, okay, how I'm going to keep us productive with this little box, and how can I dis constraints or make work these constraints, so I can really be productive?



Raymond Sidney-Smith 21:05

What are some practical components of all of this, that people can take away? Specifically, you know, many of us are in, you know, one phase of our life for a pretty considerable amount of time, you know, whether that be considered the prime working years or otherwise, some folks

are in the ramp up years, right, where they're where they're maybe new to the workforce, some people may be retired or in a in a secondary career, some are in their fifth career, you know, some entrepreneurs out there, or they're retired, and therefore, it's not really task volume, but really just managing the everyday repeatable items. And then specialized projects. So all of these require some level of, of as Francis noted, introspection, I usually say surfacing to awareness, right? Like, we need things to be surface to awareness for us to be able to know that they need to be managed. So what are some practical things we can think about when it comes to one size, not fitting everything in our own personal worlds.

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Francis Wade 22:07

Underpin the, it tells me not that it tells me but I, I find out what I need to look for. So I'm able to narrow my search. So I remember, like, if I could think of a good example, I would, but I remember needing a particular tool for my task management, and not being able to find it for a couple years. And then having to oh, there is one. So my time tracking, I use an app on my phone that doesn't quite fit with prompts me whenever some time has passed that I've not tracked my time. And I have a practice of tracking sometimes during the day and definitely at night, it's become more accurate. Because I used to track every two weeks, I used to capture screenshots using a program. And then every two weeks I would laborious Lee go through the screenshots and then estimate all the time that I spent in different times. And it was always up to do some guessing. Because if I was away from the computer, or if it didn't capture the screenshot, I'd be like, Oh, my God, I have no idea what I was doing that day. So I wished for something more portable and more ready, ready, readily useful. So I use this program and it works works really well. So if we know we have the need, we can start looking for the solution. And it took me a couple of years to find it. It didn't exist at the beginning of my search, but somewhere along the line it got invented. So this introspection gives us a way of specking out our needs, and then doing a targeted search.

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Art Gelwicks 23:42

It's two things one, know what puts you on the struggle bus. What are the things that that you encountered for me? What are the things that I encounter on a daily basis that caused me struggle, anxiety, difficulty, derail productivity, all those negative things? What are those trigger points, those are the things regardless of the solution that I have, that have to be addressed. The second thing though, is and I jotted it down here, know thyself, and know thy tools. So I'm adding on to that old phrase, because and we talked about this all the time. If you know your tools, if you take your time to learn your tools, whether you have one multiple or dozens doesn't matter, as long as you know your tools. If your tool should have to change, you can change, you can transfer that knowledge set to whatever the new solution is. And if we go back to what Ray was talking about earlier about the audio recording, if you should change audio recording tools, all that knowledge about audio recording doesn't go away. It just has to be transformed into the new syntax and structure of the new tool. And that's what we have to do is we have to define and document Our own syntax and structure. If we do that, then whatever tool we look at whatever path we go down, we can apply that syntax and structure to, if I go back to my pants analogy, it doesn't matter what pants I buy, they're still my legs. So I understand what's going in the pants. And as long as you know, and as long as I adapt for that, it should be workable, and I can then continue to make it function. There is an underlying expectation that the tools and the platforms we use will change. It is exceptionally rare to see



anybody who is able to use something for years and years and years and decades. And because the technology itself changes, and when I say technology, just even paper, we got erasable pens, that's a technology change. It changes how you think about things that changes how you do things.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 25:56

I know that over the past year, plus I have been, we're going through the process of determining what I need. In a task manager, I've been as many know, I've been using Remember The Milk to great effect for many, many years. And I think I'm you're 13 or 14 or something like that now, and it just serves its purpose, I haven't had a need for anything more spectacular, quite honestly, it does a lot. I mean, now they have milk script, which is an entire kind of JavaScript based scripting platform for being able to do that. And that kind of automation. And it's, it's amazing, I love Remember The Milk. But I also have this drive this need this desire, Francis would call it greed. To to, to consolidate into an existing tool that I have. And generally that doesn't bother me. But I have been feeling this need to, to kind of do the one size fits all thing. And so I've been it's been interesting for me though, it's it's allowed me to be able to sit down and say, What are the criteria that I need, or as art was noting for this to be rock solid for me. And I realized that I actually don't need that many things, I really, I really what I want is the ability to be able to have that tool, speak to other tools. And then otherwise, the basics are enough for me. And I think that's something that you should start to think about for yourself. Like if my tool connects to Zapier, or it integrates directly with the other tools that I need, then perhaps the existing tool doesn't need to be detritus now, it's just a functional tool that you can use. And it's and then it's extended by other tools. And I hate to be focused too much on the tool itself. But just thinking for yourself through any given protocol, right, any any, any way that we think about how we work, think about the way in which it integrates into the rest of your work flows. And then you can start to think of them as puzzle pieces. Right? That that extends to skills. If you think about how you, you know, if you're doing carpentry, or any of those other kinds of things, something that art knows more about than I will ever you know, woodworking and so on and so forth. You know, but you learn a skill, a craft like that, those become skills that you then can apply in other areas, right you can you can go into the kitchen and be like, oh, you know what the the the woodblock that holds the knives can be sharpened and cleaned up and done in a particular way using the right whetstones whatever they might be. That's that's a replicable skill outside of the context. And I think a lot of people forget the concept of being able to contextualize generalizable skills. And so we can have very specific skills. But those skills can then be generalized in some some fashion with just very, very minor tweaking,



Augusto Pinaud 28:59

I don't know if I want if I'm worried about the tool that can do everything. Because I prefer it will be ideal to have all the tools communicate and come to one place. But the reality is that it's okay to have the different compartments and it's okay to have the different tools and it's okay, that everything don't necessarily gets to one place. And the only reason I said that is because what the experience has show is that if you put everything in one place that will work amazingly, if you can make distinctions the only tool I have found, and yes, I am an expert in and ask the expert is not me. And the only reason that works so well enough me is because the tools allows you to have the different instances. So when you open the application, you see this



is my personal This is my business. This is the other thing that I have And even though they are all in one application, they are certain distinction. There are certain things that work very well together. And there are certain things that the distance, it's very healthy.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 30:13

Fantastic. All right. So we have one question coming in from a listener Pedro. Hello. As he says, at one time, it seemed that an effective personal information manager or Pim, the aim was the Holy Grail, so to speak for knowledge workers, do we now live in a time when we shouldn't go on this quest, that is, should we should we not try to find that one solely useful tool, who wants to tackle that?



Art Gelwicks 30:39

I think we're constantly looking for that tool. I think that's part of this underlying quest. I mean, when you talk about a PIM, I go all the way back to tools like arriba, back in the old DOS days, where we were junior or sidekick, where we were trying to get an application that would be our basic assistant, handling our external information, internal information organization, doing all the things that we found, we were never particularly good at doing. We are still in that continual quest, if we weren't, we wouldn't be having this conversation, nor of looking at these applications, tools like to do is to nos be a notion have come from that evolution. And I don't think we will ever see that quest end because of the underlying premise of this whole conversation, which is that one size does not fit all, there will always be someone who says, I have a better way of doing it. And you should use my way. And we will eternally see that. So as long as we see things out there, that give us the opportunity to take, adapt, configure and apply. I think we'll still continue to see this evolution, if we ever get to a point where we have one tool that works for every absolutely every one all the time, I'm actually a little concerned, because then I think we're missing something cool. Seeing that sci fi movie,



Francis Wade 32:05

I agree with you that it's not going to happen, we're in a it's a moving target, or needs are moving technology's moving. And that means that the choice of tool has to move as well.



Raymond Sidney-Smith 32:16

Something that we will get to is a point where most tools integrate, most tools can be in some way shape or form automated. And we are getting closer toward a place where whether we call it AI or you know, some kind of, you know, machine learning solution becomes so convincingly fluid in our lives right there embedded in the tools themselves, that the combination of those these three things, integration, automation, and artificial intelligence, makes it more fluid for us to be able to have that kind of personal information management, that kind of like speaking to Jarvis, Allah, Tony Stark and Iron Man, you know, where you just have this seamless experience where that entity that code is doing so much of the work for you that it seems more fluid, and it's ubiquitous, it's on all screens and all surfaces for you to be able to interact. I think there is a point where we get to that kind of pseudo singularity, I don't think that it is very close at hand.

But it can be useful in a lot of ways in its patchworked sense today. And I think that's really important for us all to kind of take hold. I think the consensus here is that one size doesn't fit all. But you can find a size that fits you within context. And I think it's really important for us to all continually surface that to awareness. And so thank you, gentlemen, for this wonderful conversation. While we are at the end of our conversation for the recording. We are not at the end of our discussion. In totality. If you have a question or comment, feel free to go ahead and visit us on our podcast website page, you can go to ProductivityCast dot net and leave a comment there you can also join our community by going to ProductivityCast dot net forward slash community and and going ahead and joining the community and continuing along in the dialogue there as well. If you have a topic to suggest or otherwise, go ahead and post those in the community. I always love new topics, suggestions or questions. And of course I want to express my thanks to Augusto Pinaud, Francis Wade, and Art Gelwicks for joining me here on ProductivityCast this every week, thank you to our live audience for this ProductivityCast live recording. Really fun to be able to interact with you all while we record. And that has been a it's been a lot of fun to be able to do as well. I'm Ray Sidney-Smith and on behalf of all of us here at ProductivityCast Here's your productive life.



#### Voiceover Artist 34:41

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