

Transcript Ep 34 Brad Aeon

===

Francis Wade: [00:00:00] It's the task management and time blocking podcast episode 34. You're someone who is well acquainted with the skill of capturing. In other words, you know that it's important to write everything down that's important. You know better than to keep it all in your head. That's a basic productivity lesson.

But lately you've noticed that the number of things you need to write down or capture has exploded. It seems as if it's just like the other day when a post it note was enough. And now you're writing everything down in something like a notebook, or maybe on your phone, and you feel as if you can't catch up.

What's wrong? What else should you be doing? Tune in to this episode to hear from me and my special guest, Brad Aon, as we solve this wicked task management problem together. [00:01:00] I'm Francis Wade, and welcome to the Task Management and Time Blocking Podcast.

And welcome back. As you can see, we are joined. On our podcast by Dr. Brad Aon. And before I introduce Brad, let me just tell you a little bit about this particular format, because you probably have not been on a podcast like this one before, unless you've heard one of our prior episodes.

So things are a bit different. We're actually here to solve a very difficult problem. So I've invited Brad to join me in my virtual office. I'm in Jamaica and he's in Montreal, Montreal, right, Brad? That's correct. Yes. We're far away from each other, but we're going to act as if we are together, putting our best thinking towards a solution of the problems that I introduced in the introduction.

So this isn't an interview and I'm not going to ask Brad what his favorite book is and what his favorite pet and color is. No, we're putting our heads together to try [00:02:00] to give you some insight. as the listener to a problem that many, if not most, or maybe all of us have to some degree. And what we're going to do is hack away at the problem, spend most of the time diagnosing it.

And then as we diagnose it, you'll start to hear solutions based on the conversation that we're having. Because what we're trying to do is have some unique insights, generate some kind of serendipitous moments. And if we have one of those, I'll put a bell in. You probably hear a bell, you know, as these serendipitous moments take place.

If we get to the end of the podcast and there's no serendipity, I'll put in a buzzer timeout, but you know, this is really inspired by something Einstein said. That he had an hour to solve a problem. He spent 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions. So here we are.

So let me tell you a quick story. Then I'll introduce Brad. Karen has lots of [00:03:00] ideas. Plus people admire her way of always writing everything down. Whenever she has one of her good insights, she's quick to put it in one of her blue notebooks. She has one at home, one for her car and another at work. She writes down great notes for meetings in person and virtual meetings.

And people know, she's the only one who has notes from meetings and get together from over a year ago. She even has seven notebooks. These are prior notebooks that are completely filled up to the last page with notes. They're sitting on her desk at home. So she's been doing this for a while. And there are some good things in them, right?

For sure. That's why she's not throwing them away. Guess what? Lately she's been feeling a bit overwhelmed. More than a few times, she's looked for notes in the wrong notebook. She can't recall which one she last used. So some [00:04:00] critical tasks start slipping through the cracks. It's produced a few embarrassments in meetings when tasks she was assigned were not completed.

They were written down, but they got lost. So even though she's trying harder to keep perfect notes, This approach isn't working.

So Dr. Brad Aeon is a time management researcher who specializes in the dynamics of time, combining sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, and philosophy.

His expertise extends beyond academia, the TED talk and features in major media, like BBC news and the Guardian. Brad actively collaborates with various organizations offering tailored time management and productivity training. Ostrof founded a startup based providing evidence based training to enhance team productivity, well being and work life balance.

Brad, welcome to the show. [00:05:00]

Brad Aeon: Thanks for having me on. Really appreciate it.

Oh, it's

Francis Wade: great to have you. we've had you be at a couple of our conferences and it was awesome having you and that's, I guess, forms a basis for why we're invited to you today, because giving us some decent insights before probably means you'll give us some today.

But no pressure, right? No, it's a little, thank you. it's always a pleasure really. great. So what do you think of Karen? have you met a Karen before? And what do you think of people like that?

Brad Aeon: To be fully honest, I wish I admit more Karen's. The reality is that even though her approach might not be optimal.

The vast majority of people I know, do not even get there. Meaning that they don't even have. One notebook, let alone many notebooks to offload their thoughts, their ideas, their brainstorming notes. And I think that's a shame because you know, we live in an age of cognitive overload and we don't even realize it, you know, [00:06:00] like if you think about the average person around the ninth or the 10th century.

Even the 12th century, imagine you're in Western Europe, somewhere in like France or Germany, and you're not a king, you're not a prince, you're just like a regular Now

imagine your day to day life. You're not going to be exposed to a lot of information. You don't see billboards. You don't see magazines.

You don't get emails, no text messages. You don't have to deal with phone calls. the most information you're going to be exposed to is the village's gossip. You know, like maybe your cousin has a new cow and that's the news of the day. And,

Assuming you knew how to read, maybe, one of the books you're going to be exposed to is the Bible. And that's about it. Now compare that to today. We live in truly unprecedented times, historically. Like, you wake up, for most people I know, they wake up, first thing they do is reach for their smartphone, then look at their emails, maybe look at the [00:07:00] news, and already you've consumed probably more novel information than someone in the 15th century.

by the time, you know, by 8 a. m. or by 9 a. m.

Francis Wade: Karen's of the world, you said you wish there were more of them because most of us are consuming, but we don't do anything with what we consume. Right?

Brad Aeon: That's right. I think in the 21st century the foundation of time management should be information management because you're right.

We consume a lot of information. The way we organize it might not always be smart, if that makes sense.

Francis Wade: Well, it's hard to say, right? Because it's hard to sort of. Point fingers at us, I would say, because we're not trained to operate in the world that we're living in.

We're not expected to, we're more like Karen, you know. Karen probably didn't even have a writing implement. It probably even came later when Pencils and bits of lead were crafted and paper became more of a thing that you had. And then literacy, you know, she [00:08:00] had several obstacles to doing what we do today.

but she learned and most people, I guess, train themselves to write. It had to have been through some intervention because that doesn't come naturally to do that. Yes. Something happened and they decided, okay, I'm going to be someone who writes everything down. And these people, are very rare.

And they're very effective compared to the people who write nothing, down, who try to remember everything because they get themselves in all kinds of trouble, right?

Brad Aeon: Absolutely. You know, some people, you said it doesn't come naturally to us. That's absolutely true. Sometimes we do have like a reflex.

When we're in the kitchen, we want to remember to buy some milk. We just stick a post it note to the fridge saying, remember to buy the milk or remember dentist appointment. But that's about it. I think it certainly doesn't come to us naturally. And it's, I think, like you said, it could be illiteracy.

it could be applied to any skill, really. When you train yourself to do [00:09:00] it becomes a lot easier, but I think that the default for most people is really to try to keep everything in the back of your mind. And our minds are, yeah, exactly.

Francis Wade: But still Karen has a problem. so as we're, you know, probably the audience that we're getting are people who already know about capturing, right?

they've already been through Getting Things Done GT D or they've been exposed to some philosophy in which they are already capturing. This is not brand new, and if it is, this might not be the episode for them, but there's other episodes that could listen to. But the idea is that you capture by writing or typing or voice recording, Or if you have a useful, secretary, admin, aid, or something, you have someone you can give instructions to, and they keep everything in their head or write them down for you.

But the point is that everything important is recorded somehow. And it's not left just to memory [00:10:00] and some recall and random triggers and whatnot. But most people, I think, listening to our podcast, they know this practice and it's been recommended and they probably recommend it to others.

But. Karen, Karen's practice of writing everything known does not match the world that she lives in any longer. And she, by virtue of writing everything down, she gets overwhelmed and she's feeling buried and it used to work, but it's no longer working. And I would say that we all have to go through some kind of a Karen phase, I think in our productivity journeys, at some point we learned and some point we tried and some point we.

Probably decided, but then the Karens didn't adjust the way the rest of us did. The Karens sort of, you know, had the initial success and then just kept writing everything down what happened if she doesn't [00:11:00] make the adjustment at some point. In the, in the future what will her future look like, Brad, do you think?

I

Brad Aeon: think there's two main problems. The first one is the hoarding problem. Maybe you've heard of people that have a hoarding issue like that TV show. Yes. Compulsively, they're going to keep everything regardless of whether it's. Useful, important or even still usable.

So they would keep like old pieces of newspapers old gadgets, old pens that don't even work anymore. They wouldn't keep everything in their house.

Well, you know, as long as it doesn't become an issue where. Your house is so cluttered that you can't even find what you need anymore. Or you can't even, sometimes in extreme cases, you can't even walk within your apartment because literally there's no space anymore because you've been hoarding for 40 years or 50 years.

Francis Wade: You're filled to the brim with pens.

Brad Aeon: Yes.

So

Francis Wade: Karen could be a hoarder [00:12:00] of, I guess, information in this case, right? Not physical objects, but a hoarder of, Data

Brad Aeon: that's right. And I think that's not even the, the most common problem. I think to get to that level, you would have to be very, very systematic in the way you capture data.

I know very few people who do that systematically because to get to a point where you have so much information that's captured that it becomes a hoarding issue. It means that you do it very consistently, very frequently. And I don't think there's very few people in that category.

I think the main problem is that people like Karen capture a lot of information, but they don't make the time to implement it because the very purpose of capturing information is that at some point in your life, if not now, maybe later, it is going to be useful. It is going to be implemented. Maybe you have a thought about a potential, side gig or a business or something to fix the way you currently work.

But if it's just [00:13:00] stored somewhere and you never look into it, then for all intents and purposes, it becomes useless.

Francis Wade: So Karen's overwhelm comes from a feeling of probably underlining the hoarding and the feeling as if I'm going to miss out, a fear of missing out in the future, I guess. Yes. There is an underlying fear.

And I guess, unfortunately, she can never capture enough to have the fear go away.

Brad Aeon: Yes. And in fact, it becomes a vicious cycle because as you capture more things, the average person forgets, sometimes has good ideas and then forgets about them.

But people like Karen good ideas, captures them, and then becomes more and more aware of the many things could be doing, and that creates a sense of anxiety, anxiety, overwhelmed. like you put it, because we become more aware of what we could or should be doing. Rather than just forgetting about them.

Francis Wade: So this is the weird thing, I guess, you're [00:14:00] saying that the capturing doesn't at her level, it stops reducing the anxiety and it actually increases it. Yes. Her capturing doesn't scale in other words.

Brad Aeon: Yes, because there's a growing disconnect between your day to day capacity and what you could be doing.

And this actually happened to a friend of mine two years ago, because he's the CEO of a very successful company in Canada. And he asked me about exactly that. Like, how can I better capture information? And What worked best for him was

And it's an app where you can capture. And two months later, he sent me a link to one of his notion pages where he had a list of movies he wanted to watch and another one, a list of articles that he wanted to read articles from the media research. [00:15:00] And he told me it became an issue because.

It makes him realize more and more that there's so many things that he could be doing, like all the articles to read, all the movies to watch, and so little time. And so it just makes it, I guess for some people, it makes us more aware of What we're missing out on every day.

Francis Wade: Well, I've never had that thought.

I never realized that I'd had that thought before, but I can see it. Maybe it should be our first insight that capturing too much increases anxiety. And it's meant to save you from anxiety and to take things off your mind and give you a peace of mind.

And then you take it to the next level and it gets much, much worse.

Brad Aeon: Yes. So it's interesting you mentioned this because just yesterday a colleague of mine sent me this. Very recent study on the concept of a choice overload. So, you know, you go to the grocery store and you [00:16:00] want to buy a box of cereal.

If there's maybe two or three of them, it's easy for you to pick the one that you like best. But if in Walmart in the United States, there is literally like hundreds. Of potential brands of cereal. Sometimes we have this paralysis. It's called analysis paralysis, where there's so much choice.

The selection is so wide that you can't even start to think about, okay, what do I pick you then walk out with any cereal,

Francis Wade: because you're overwhelmed. I've heard the story of folks who have moved to the U S and walk into a grocery store for the first time and their mind explodes.

Yes. And they have to run or even Americans who have lived abroad and come back to the U S and they walk into the, like you said, the Walmart or super, what's the super Walmart called? Oh yeah. Sam's club. Yes. Yeah. the mega ones, I go into one of those and all of a sudden they're like, because they're used to three boxes of [00:17:00] cereal, not 500.

Brad Aeon: Yes. I think you're right when you compare it across countries. I've spent a few months in South Africa once and after that, going straight to Boston, Massachusetts and I was at a gas station. and in the gas station you have the store, the store alone had more options than everything I'd seen in the previous months.

In any store in South Africa, like you want some Gatorade or some Mountain Dew, there's nine different flavors just for that. and the same applies to information. Like when people gather and gather and gather, like, Oh, I could be working on this project. I could be watching this movie. Then when you go back and you look at your notes, you realize, Oh my God, I only have 24 hours in a day.

And yet all of these things that I could be doing. And it creates a sense of, like you said, overwhelming anxiety. But also a sense of time pressure. Cause you know, when people say I don't have time, or I feel like I don't have time, it's not always objective. It's about the subjective perception of it.

[00:18:00] And what we see consistently around the world is that believe it or not, the people that feel the most pressed for time. Are the people that could afford to work less, like people that are highly educated people that make a lot of money. Those are the ones that are consistently pressed for time. And it's not just about work.

It's also because in their cultural preferences, they want to go to the theater, they want to go to the movies. They want to go to this ballet. They want to go do this piano lessons. So because of all the things that they could do, they could be doing, it creates the sense of urgency. So many things I can do, and yet so little time.

Francis Wade: so it's not analysis paralysis in the traditional sense, cause each of the things that Karen has captured are meaningful to her. It's just that there's too many things that she's captured. So it's almost like self assignment analysis paralysis, because she's kind [00:19:00] of assigned these things to herself.

And said, Oh, these are things I want to do. So she's routinely assigning a hundred hours of stuff to a 40 or a week or 300 years of stuff to a 70 year life. If you want to blow it up And feeling the time pressure and thinking that probably thinking that it's not her fault.

Brad Aeon: it's never for most people, that's the thing that a lot of people. So when I started doing research on time management, I felt a bit like I almost never wanted to bring this up in public because I felt that people would feel attacked that very often, especially in the West, especially if I'm.

Not wealthy, but at least middle class usually when you don't have time, a good part of it is because of your choices. and obviously no one wants to hear that. So whisper that next [00:20:00] time. Yes. As people listening to the podcast, kicking it off, turn it off, pause, swiping it right now, because.

Francis Wade: You know, you just said something that, say it again, really slow, so that those who want to hear can hear.

Brad Aeon: Well, that's the reality. There's research on that self imposed time pressure, self imposed paralysis, analysis, paralysis. And, I don't think it's a bad thing, you know, like being honest with ourselves is to me, the first step towards.

Making better decisions to give you a personal example. When I was doing my PhD, I was not making a lot of money. I was making very, very little money. And so I decided to start using this app that tracks my expenses down to the cent And for a whole year I did that. And then I realized. That over a whole year, I think I'd spent [00:21:00] \$1, 700 on pizza slices.

There's a pizza joint near the university. And I would go there like multiple times a week. And, and just to give you a sense of perspective, that amount of money was more than 10 percent my annual income. Obviously that's not something that's great when you realize that you're like, Oh my God,

What have I done? That is absolutely ill advised. But it was the first step towards better budgeting, towards more, rational, more reasonable use of my money. If you're eating for that matter. Absolutely. You know, there are some harsh truths about ourselves. No one is perfect.

And I think recognizing that and being honest with ourselves makes for better outcomes. Good time management and good decisions in general.

Francis Wade: Yeah. You know, some smart person could say 1700 slices, huh? And then they'll add up all of the cheese on all those slices and show you that you ate 45 cubic feet of cheese, which point you'd never eat pizza again for the rest of your life.

The [00:22:00] point with that is that if Karen had feedback. When she added these bits of information to her books, if there were something that could read up, you just added 25 minutes, or this is going to take you three hours to read. And congratulations, you've

now added 40 more hours of reading to your day at the end of a day, can you imagine what her reaction would be?

She would be like, Oh, I don't need to capture all of this. Actually, maybe I shouldn't, maybe I, I don't, you know, it would give her the immediate feedback would give her some some reality check. Yes. So it would temper her sort of. I didn't want to say anal, but her compulsion to capture everything. Yeah.

You know, I had a feeling that, you know, this, this reminds me of a feeling I had just yesterday. I went into YouTube and I found this history channel, right? yesterday, I was looking through [00:23:00] all of the cool history videos that they have in this channel, each of them is like an hour long.

So I can spend the rest of my life watching these videos. So many of them, right? I started to feel just that what you mentioned, that feeling of overwhelm that I really liked these history videos and I think I should listen to them because I become a better person. I'm on the verge of doing what Karen does, which is assigning myself an overwhelming task that I can never complete because I can never watch all the history videos on YouTube.

I don't have enough life left to do it. And there's people adding them faster than I can view them. Yes. So I guess I've forced myself to rationalize and say no, but it happened really quickly. And I imagine there's many people who are listening right now who have had to do the same. But there's the places where, like, for example, for Karen, where she's not done that yet [00:24:00] and the anxiety is only increasing.

Yes. Because, as you said, it's her choices. In her mind, it's not like she's making conscious

choices

where she gets feedback each time she writes something down.

Brad Aeon: That's right. And I think that's where maybe a concept that would help here is the concept of Signal to noise ratio and essentially means this is actually very relevant because it is about information processing when you're trying to capture information, you want to reduce the noise so irrelevant or not super useful information to prioritize the signal so useful information.

when I was In my teenage years I would compulsively save every article I found interesting. Then you end up with a huge collection of articles that may or may not be interesting. that was when RSS feeds became Oh, I like those[00:25:00]

So many people who are listening . I still use 'em. But the compulsion to save every potentially interesting article, I've increased my signal to noise ratio by only things that are really groundbreaking, interesting that I think would be worth revisiting at some point.

So I used to say maybe 10, 12 articles a day. Now I'm at. Maybe one a week.

Francis Wade: Ah, okay. We're getting a little more into solutions though. And we're really, we're really in the diagnostic part. So hold that thought for when we get to solutions, because we'll, we'll come back with it. I think there's, we'll go deeper with it, but so Karen is an anxiety, unfortunately, putting herself in more anxiety and she thinks she's being productive and everyone in her office thinks she's productive, but in fact, she's giving herself more anxiety and it's a function of the behaviors.

Maybe that's why it's so difficult to solve this problem if you have it because [00:26:00] it appears to be productive. It's more productive than the other guy, but ultimately it's not a winning strategy in today's world because there's too many things. That we have to try to keep track of. That's right.

it needs another intervention in order to make, to keep it productive. Otherwise it will become unproductive.

Brad Aeon: Yeah, absolutely. I think too, for, for something to be productive, it has to lead to outcomes, to desired outcomes. In that sense, just merely doing something is not productive in my definition.

Like for instance, if someone is constantly checking their emails, responding to emails, but not actually focusing on their. Main job. To me, that's not being productive because the ultimate outcome that you want, which is to do a good quality job, that's not being done. What you're doing is just tending to responding to emails that may or may not be important.

And the same thing with Karen noting down every minute aspect that [00:27:00] daily life or things that you may be thinking about that's not ultimately what you want is to act. on important ideas that are potentially going to change your life for the better.

Francis Wade: that almost says that if a Karen is over focused on one kind of productivity, then she'll eventually create a problem, an overall problem.

And I think that's true for all of us because we don't have standard measures of productivity. It's easy for us to focus on the one, like replying to email quickly. And there are some people who specialize in that, you know, in their office, they're the guy who replies to their email within five minutes, every time, no matter what.

Right. And you wonder, how the heck do they get anything done? The answer is they don't. Their job in their mind is to respond to email. So we don't have a sort of a balanced set of metrics to [00:28:00] tell us. How we're being productive. We have insights that people have derived, like Karen, the person who answers email, but we don't have like a dashboard that tells us here's how we are doing overall.

And yeah, we're capturing, but guess what? We just captured 500 hours of tasks and we can know a lot. We can't do them. We don't have anything telling us that we're creating a problem for ourselves. So we don't have any feedback.

So

that's a big, that seems to me a big, a big, big drawback. we don't have a sense of what, A productive person is like in a kind of a, I would say general sense is that how does that, how does that fit with your, that that makes a lot of sense.

Brad Aeon: I think that there's ways maybe to approximate it. So for instance, your goal in life is to start this yoga business. Maybe you can establish a few milestones like . By next month I want to incorporate my business. Then after that, , I want to [00:29:00] start advertising.

So maybe I create. Five marketing campaigns. Then by month six, I want to have at least 20 clients a month. So there's ways you can quantify that. And that's the basis of goal setting theory. The reality is that it works. And the reality is that it's very powerful. Most people, I think focus on the wrong metrics because they're usually a lot easier and are less abstract.

So for instance, You know, that success in your business means signing up more clients. That means you have to reflect on that. That means you have to reflect on what would be. A realistic yet challenging way to measure that. Like number of clients, how many do I want 20 months? Is that realistic? Is that feasible?

That takes a lot more, I guess, reflection and cognitive energy than [00:30:00] say, okay, I'm going to respond to 30 emails today and then feel good about it.

Francis Wade: Yeah, because people were more on in our personal life. So I could see the business example because there's lots of examples of business and you can be taught the business example because there are people who will teach it, but on the personal productivity side, it's all kind of smoke mirrors.

Guessing you don't have the tools, you know, when she captures into her notebook, it doesn't measure anything. Even if she captured into her phone, there's no decent capturing. I've never seen a capturing app that says, Oh, look, you're capturing too much. you need to filter some of this down, like an AI that says, We think there's something wrong with the way you're capturing because, and it explains it to you.

There's nothing like that, right? and to discover that if you don't have a coach to sit down with every week, or if you don't have a structured way of reviewing your performance, you would never discover it.

Brad Aeon: No, for sure. And I think the problem when [00:31:00] people do that is that they're too focused on the input side of things.

So how many bits of information do I capture versus the output side of things, which is. How many important, useful actions or outcomes have resulted from these information capture activities? So input is very easy to measure. Like you said, how many thoughts, how many ideas have I noted down today?

That's easy. And anyone can come up with ideas and note them, note them down. That's the input side of things. That's not productivity. Productivity is the, if you really want to be technical about it, it's the ratio of input to output or output to input rather. And so if your input is very high.

And your output is very low. Then by definition, you're not being very productive. However, if you for the same input, if you increase the amount of output, so like you, based on that information, you've created that you'll get business, you signed up a lot of clients, then your [00:32:00] productivity increases well, because this flies in the face of, I would say some of the conventional wisdom, which is that you capture everything.

You know, we, we, there is a, there is a thought that you leave nothing uncaptured because it would prey on your mind. I don't know how to resolve that other than to say that it's good advice when you're not capturing, but if you're a Karen to say, Oh, you should capture some more. We're not talking further overwhelmed because that's what got her into trouble.

So it's a, it's, it's a different kind of advice for a different kind of person. Okay. That's more suitable for someone who's already skilled at capturing, no w needs, another kind of advice, another, a different kind of analysis, a different diagnosis to continue to be effective. For sure, but I think that for everyone, the root of the problem is not so much how much you capture, how much you don't capture.

I would agree with you. it is usually better to capture as [00:33:00] much as possible because you don't want to have that nagging voice in the back of your mind telling you, Oh, I'm still thinking about this. I think that people like Karen do not really have that problem because by definition, they're offloading everything.

And I think that's good. I think the problem rises when you have a huge chunk of Information that's just waiting to be acted upon and it's not being acted upon. Yes. And that's just a constant reminder of everything that's left undone.

Francis Wade: so, you know,

Karen if we don't solve this problem for her, this is going to be a continual source as long as she stays working and active and, sentient and all the rest of it.

It's not going to get any better. And the anxiety might cause her to dig a deeper hole even. What does someone like a Karen typically do to try to fix the problem?

Do they try [00:34:00] to capture more because they think that's the, let me try to be more disciplined. And then, you know, these kind of people who take notes, minutes in meetings without being asked to take minutes, and you're wondering, why are they taking minutes? And it's more that sort of compulsion. I wonder if that's what they do, or do they, if they catch themselves, what do they then do?

They try not to capture everything? Or do they keep capturing everything? And do they, hopefully they would do what you said, which is kind of like figure out that I'll sort it out when I sort it out. You know, which of those solutions do they apply?

Brad Aeon: That's a very good question. I think it assumes that people like Karen will realize that their way of operating is a part, is a problem.

The reality is that I feel like most people don't see it as a problem, whether in academia or in businesses, I've seen people compulsively note down things where I'm like, you

don't need to note that down. Be there and be present. It doesn't really matter whether [00:35:00] you take that down or not.

So I assume this is some kind of personality trait where everything needs to be somewhere and that's fine, but at some point, I think we need that kind of self awareness when we do realize it's an issue. And it's not specific to information capture. Like we all have. You know, most human beings have issues that they're not even aware of, whether that's maybe drinking a little too much or eating a little too much or being stuck in a rut.

it's all kinds of problems that we don't see because we're like a goldfish in a bowl. and we don't realize that the water around us is not good for us because it's our environment. It's our day to day environment and we take it for granted.

Francis Wade: Being driven by some kind of fear or insecurity or the feeling of being less than or something from the past.

Yep. I knew, someone who was a Karen and she had the three notebooks. And the story that I told is a version of what I saw her [00:36:00] doing. And I think there may have been a time in the past where she didn't write something down and it proved to be very costly. So being driven by some past failure.

Yeah. And that had that effect. The person was extremely accomplished also. This was a person who actually ran a company, a successful company. And then there was this tick, you know, that she demonstrated that was like, okay, that's a different kind of behavior. Never seen anyone do that.

But it was kind of like that, but the sense I had was that it came from not a healthy place and maybe getting to what happened that drives that behavior today and getting to the source of it, maybe in a therapeutic kind of relationship could lead to some freedom as opposed to the compulsion that I noticed.

What do you think?

Brad Aeon: For sure. I would say that 20 percent of people that come to me with time management issues. issues that would be better solved through therapy. Whether it's procrastination, whether it's a lot of things that like you said, are [00:37:00] due to. Much deeper seated problems than just a time management issue.

And you're right in saying that because these are deeper issues, they might escape our conscious attention. And so we don't see them as problem. It's just the way we live, the way we've been living for the past 20, 30 or 40 years. and I think one way to realize that it's just seeking external feedback or when you realize that something is not making you happy.

Maybe take that extremely important first step of trying to look into it further than just dismissing it as, oh, well, that's just the way I am because the way I am is not necessarily a good thing. I see it as something to be constantly improved.

Francis Wade: I mean, that's our second insight, you know, the 20 percent of folks would have a therapeutic issue. The 20 percent have something that's involved in [00:38:00] therapy, as opposed to something involved by a new way of processing information. That's right. If The therapeutic issue isn't addressed, then it would overwhelm any solution of a practical nature because of the origin of the whole thing.

So it's not like they could take a course and then learn a different way of doing it or do some process change and some new technology. But for the 80%, so let's say that there's not a therapeutic issue. Do you think that there's a model of data that they're missing? Most of the Karens are missing about what constitutes most effective information to be captured.

Do you think there's a rule of thumb in there? Cause they tend to, they tend to write anything down that's assigned to them, assigned to the other person, anything, any factoid that's of interest, any nice statistic, any quote, any URL, any, any, anything. You know, they're kind of busy, like [00:39:00] making sure that nothing slips through the cracks.

Maybe it's again, that fear of missing out, but. There doesn't seem to be any filtering happening on the front end. It just seems to be like a dump of everything that they've

heard that seems somewhat, you know, the bar is low in other words, anything that exceeds the bar gets put into the notebook. But is that, is that is there a way to, to apply a filter or to raise the bar?

Do you think that would give them some more accuracy or more efficiency?

Brad Aeon: Have you ever cooked green peas?

I can cook a few things green peas, and you may have me there. I'm not a fan of green peas. So green peas in particular, like Jolly Green Giant. The thing with, yes, the thing with green peas is that I, [00:40:00] I would rather buy the canned or frozen kind than the fresh kind, because when you buy green peas from, from the grocery store, from the farmer's market, and they're fresh is that you have to open the pods and one by one.

You know take out all the little peas. It's a very time consuming endeavor. The way I look at it is information is the same thing. You have to realize that going to the grocery store and getting all the green peas in a fresh, format, that's easy. But when you get home and you actually have to cook and you realize that the time and effort that it takes.

to make those peas more actionable, more ready for cooking. That that's quite the endeavor. And so when people note down things, maybe one way to establish a filter, like you said, is to think about how much time and effort is this [00:41:00] actually going to take me? Versus how much do I really want it?

So in this case, if I was like a green peas addict or fan, like it's my favorite food, presumably I would actually be okay with getting four pounds of fresh green peas and taking the time to open the pods and prep them and cook them. But I'm not, I don't like green peas that much. And so.

I'd rather just not eat them at all. So that saves me a lot of time. Or if, it happens that one recipe does call for green peas, I would just get the frozen or the canned kind because in the grand scheme of things, it's really not that important to me. So there's a ratio between. How much time is this idea going to take you versus how badly do you actually want it?

Francis Wade: Okay. That's really interesting because it goes to what gets captured, right? Yes. So does [00:42:00] she write down green peas or does she write down canned green peas pre cooked green peas, raw green peas, and also does she write down four pounds of green peas or Two cans of green peas. So when she even captures, she's actually committing to A particular block of time in her calendar, for example.

Yes. but she's not necessarily wittingly doing so.

Brad Aeon: So that's a very important thing that you bring up, which is the, believe it or not, research on this has started very recently in 2017, and it's called the opportunity cost of time. So when we talk about opportunity costs, usually we think about money.

So if Money you have and spend it on a car, the opportunity costs that you're not spending money on a house. So you're not going to be owning a house. You're going to be owning a car and you have to [00:43:00] be okay with that. The opportunity cost of time is something that we only started talking about very recently because unlike money, it's not exchangeable one to one.

So for instance, one could say, oh, well, if I'm spending time with my kids, the opportunity costs is that I'm not making a hundred dollars an hour being at work, but then, whereas the opportunity cost of time is. Oh, I'm being, I'm at work right now working on something that I, I'm okay with, but the big, the big opportunity cost for me is that I'm not spending precious time with my kid who's growing up and whose childhood time is going to expire at some point.

And I do want to spend time with him as a father figure. So that's very important to realize and to keep in mind as you're dealing with more and more information. To give you an example, there's a lot of books on time. And the history of [00:44:00] time, lots of articles that come out almost every, every week.

Now, I do not have time to read all of them. I will be very selective. Like there's one on how people thought about time around the first century and Greece and Palestine and the Roman empire, that's super interesting. Now there's another one on something that

I'm already quite familiar with. I like, even though it would inform me a little better, the marginal outcome for me is very small compared to reading the one on.

Hey, I found it fascinating. What did the people in the Roman empire, the way they thought about time, that's a lot more interesting to me because I don't know a lot about it. So the marginal outcome for me is much bigger.

Francis Wade: Wow. That's interesting. Cause I have the same problem. I used to, and I still collect almost every time management PDF I can find academic research wise, and I have a store without my hard drive.

Right. I [00:45:00] had a similar problem also that some of these, they seem kind of marginal and I couldn't find the time. I'm not going to find the time to read them. So do I store them on my hard drive? Well, no. And again, I've started to say maybe not, you know, maybe I don't need to have my hard drive filled with every single time management article that's ever been written since, and they're coming out so quickly now that maybe, so maybe back to the green peas, maybe there's a sort of a wisening up getting smarter about capturing.

That I need to get green peas that over time you start to get more more accurate, more nuanced. Yes. It's not just green peas. It's a particular kind of green peas. And the kind that you're choosing to capture actually is based on some prior commitments that you have. Yes.

Brad Aeon: Yes. It has to be aligned with and by [00:46:00] prior commitment, I assume that you mean some goal, well defined goal that you have.

Like more time with my kids. That's As opposed to cooking green peas. Yes, absolutely. But that makes it, that makes things, I was gonna say, it makes 'em harder, , but it, it's hard.

Francis Wade: But the truth is, you're, you're giving yourself the gift because you're getting back some of that opportunity cost, right?

you're actually giving yourself more quality time by not just capturing everything in its raw form.

Brad Aeon: That's right. I think it's, we live in an era where. we can have less and less of it all because there's more and more stuff out there.

I had a friend, a colleague, a professor who six years ago he told me, Oh, I'm good now. I'm all caught up. I was like, what do you mean? I'm all caught up. he said, well, there's this TV, there's breaking bad. there's that show and they had new seasons like, okay, I'm all caught up.

I made the time to watch them all. he had this sense of [00:47:00] urgency where if there's a new big TV show out there, he had to watch it. just today on my social media, I shared this graph where you see around the year 2000, Very few new TV shows per year Now in 2022 or 2023, you have more than 2000 new TV shows, not even new season.

That's new TV shows, 2000 of them every single year. So in the year 2022, there's 2000 new TV shows, which is all of those. Yeah, absolutely impossible to watch them in a lifetime. Like you said earlier, if, if you wanted to watch all the existing TV shows, a lifetime would not be enough.

Francis Wade: That I don't know where I get, we're getting into solutions now, but so there's, there's some kind of filtering that.

Karen needs to do that. We all need to do because [00:48:00] we, the way you said it, but I don't know if you can quote it. Is that, is that, is that a fresh insight or did you bring that one to the party? The one about we can't do it all. in fact, we're doing less of all because there's more all than there ever was before.

Brad Aeon: that is such a fresh insight that I actually came up with it. A minute ago. I'm not kidding. That's our third insight. I bet on a phone call that that's going to be on an episode, by the way, because that one. Well, because I was thinking, you know, people do say, Oh, You can't have it all.

Like, I want to have it all. That works in Like a 1950s timeline where maybe there's a few new books every year, like maybe the three broadcast channels that are available after some new shows. Maybe you can do that. You can't have it all today. Not because we can't, but because the all, so like everything that's out there has increased exponentially.

Francis Wade: So you must choose to [00:49:00] have less of all there is and not have that equate to failure.

Brad Aeon: That's I think the sense, the concept of sacrifice. has become more important in the sense that you have to realize you have 24 hours in a day, the same 24 hours in a day that we've had since the, I guess, beginning of civilization.

The difference is that now there's so many more things we can do at any point in time. It used to be that, you know, you want to buy something in the store, you have to go to the store and the store it's open from 9am to 5pm. Now it's open 24, 7, 365 days a year online. You don't even have to go to the store.

And when you go online on Amazon, you don't have to choose like between one or the other toothbrush, there's probably hundreds, if not thousands of different models you can choose from. So, yes, you can't buy each one and test it. Can you? Exactly. So I think people have to become more and more at [00:50:00] peace with this idea of sacrifice.

I only have 24 hours in a day. I better spend it on things that on the few things that matter the most.

Francis Wade: So it's, it's a filter is a part of the solution, but there is a sort of an accepting that there will be sacrifice. There is by, by definition that you live in 2023.

Brad Aeon: You must sacrifice that's right. So this is what we're getting at here filter because I assume we're at a point where we can talk about solutions.

Is that correct? Yep. So I think that a good way to think about it is halfway

point. So, you know, when you go from point A to point B and you're on a train, sometimes you're at a halfway point. Or like some point in the middle. I think the same thing can be extremely useful when we talk about information capture. So at point a, you [00:51:00] capture a lot of information.

And then at the end, the goal is to implement that information or at least organize it, put it in your calendar, put it in your one note doesn't matter, but in the meantime, in the middle. Is there something that you can do

to resist, or at least to mitigate the fact that we almost always over capture. And so the technique that I think is very useful here is you can have. A repository where you capture almost everything that you think is important at the time, like in the heat of the moment to make things even more, I guess, concrete.

Here's how I do it. I have this app called Google keep and I use it. it's great because it's instantaneous. I don't have to like open an app and then click on that button or this button. All I do is literally grab my phone and [00:52:00] then. Be like, Hey, Google note to self. And then I dictate my note.

It works on my phone. It works on my home assistance. It works on my earbuds when I'm walking or biking. So it's a very integrated ecosystem where I can take notes from. Pretty much any device that I own, whether I'm cycling, walking taking a bath, doing the dishes doesn't matter. It's always there.

Now, the barriers between me and saving an idea. Or a thought are very, very low. And that's what I want. I don't want anything to stand between me and a potential good idea. Now that's what I do in the heat of the moment as things come up. What I also do is that every day when I finish work, I have a routine where I go through.

My Google notes for the day. And so I look at them and now, you know, a few hours have passed by. I look at them with I guess, a new set of [00:53:00] eyes. And some of them I just delete because I'm like, Oh, that's sounded like a good idea, but it's either

impractical or not that important to me. And then the others are turns out that they're actually quite insightful and very important to me.

And then they have to go somewhere else, right? Google keep Google note is just a halfway point now to put them on a train to where they belong. So for instance, if one of the Google notes was, oh, this is a great idea for a blog post, then that goes straight into my repository where I have a list of ideas.

For my blog, or the other one might be, Oh spend time with my partner. And you know, go to a restaurant. So do just set a time on my calendar with that particular you know, I said time, place, restaurant, and so on that stuff. So there's always an end point. The end point is either my calendar, my could be my my tasks, my [00:54:00] OneNote, it doesn't really matter.

But the end point is where the things start to be implemented, for instance, if it's scheduled on my calendar, that I'm going with my wife to a restaurant that will be done. because if something is on my calendar, it will be done. If it's on my list of blog posts.

at some point, I will be writing a blog post about it. And that's where I create this great filter where in the heat of the moment, you know, I always want to note something down then around the end of the day, I can decide whether, okay, I applied this extra filter. Do I really need this?

Is this really important?

Francis Wade: And then based on what you said before, there's an idea of the input and the output. Yes. So almost like the yield. So the yield of your, are you concerned that the yield of your capturing the transition from A to B, not the halfway point, but the A to the B, should [00:55:00] we be concerned?

Because it sounds as if we should be, that there's too much capture going on. The yield at the other end that, that there's, it's ineffective to capture 5, 000 to do one task that that's somewhere in there, there's some ineffectiveness and that effective capture is

more balanced with the output to some degree, somewhere in there, there's a tipping point.

Brad Aeon: So it's, it's very interesting that you talk about yield because I see this process as separating the wheat. From the chaff, or you know, when you get a lot of wheat, the signal from the noise . Exactly. So you know, and we all have ideas that we want to save or capturing the heat of the moment.

That's great. Mm-Hmm, I think that should be encouraged. But you need to have at some point, like a, a halfway point where you separate the wheat from the And, and very often you're gonna realize that maybe a third or maybe half or maybe more of the ideas were in, in hindsight. Either [00:56:00] not useful, not practical or just not of interest anymore.

Francis Wade: Right, right, right, right. So an effective, an effective halfway point would, would produce a great quality yield so that everything that gets through the, the, the, the filter, so to speak, or it gets through Google, keep into your calendar gets done. You did emphasize everything that gets. Yes. Absolutely. And the halfway point.

That part's faithful. The halfway point is just like a point of triage.

Brad Aeon: Exactly. And it helps you get at least, maybe a few hours of let it cool down. So, I don't know. I don't know about Jamaica. I don't know. I'm not sure about the U. S. But in Canada there's a law that if you want to divorce someone, you have to wait a year between the time you announce it and the time you actually sign the papers.

And the reason for that is that's a long time, Brad. It is a [00:57:00] long time. It's a very long time. I, I've had one of those and a year would. Been painful. That's all I could say here would have been it. Yes, it is painful, but I assume that the logic behind it is that sometimes we make decisions in the heat of the moment that when you take time to cool down, you realize that.

Okay, maybe I don't want to get a divorce or very often what happens that people I know I'm like, Yes, I'm very sure that I'm going to get a divorce even a year after so this halfway

point works the same way Like we have a lot of ideas that in the heat of the moment We like and we think okay, we're going to do this but then a few hours later we're like, oh not too sure about this or If you still are sure about it and you think, still think it's a great idea.

That to me is a great indicator that that should be done.

Francis Wade: So there's that time to consider. But if again, back to Karen, if your time to consider [00:58:00] what you need to work on the processing time, you know, at some point, If you're spending 10 hours processing to determine that you only have one task to do, at some point, you know, the opportunity, again, opportunity cost.

So doing all of that capturing and even considering the 10 hours of activities that you're going through, is it worth it? And I think the answer would be no, right? There's, there's some point at which Karin could reduce the input and get the same output in other words.

Brad Aeon: That's a very good question. And that's why I recommend doing the cleaning, the cleanup daily, because every day Unless you're an absolute genius, you're not going to have a hundred ideas or a hundred things to note down.

Maybe five, maybe six, maybe 10. And that's doable. Like if you take five minutes at the end of the workday, just five minutes to go through 10 ideas and ask yourself, do I keep [00:59:00] this? And if I keep it, where should it go? Should go my calendar, my OneNote, my Notion. that should not take more than five minutes.

And I think that five minutes is time very well spent. However, if you do find yourself having to spend 20 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes doing that every day, to me, that's a clear indicator that, again, either you're extreme genius or maybe you're compulsively noting down a lot of things that are of little value.

Francis Wade: Right. And the probability of them, somewhere you're at the bottom of the distribution, down in the tail, capturing all kinds of stuff just in case. Yeah. Right. But the truth is you want to be near the fat part of the distribution, where the things you're capturing have a high probability of turning into the task, not a low probability, which then takes all this time to process, which then has you be kind of compulsive and maybe even runs up your anxiety.

Yeah. And it gives you a feeling of [01:00:00] missing out. Well, I've never had a conversation like this one before. Wow. Okay. This is a really, this is a good one. So, Brad, we've got to wrap it up. But we could keep going. I just want to be clear. there could be a part two to this. Very easily.

But, in the interest of our listeners, and their opportunity cost as well. Brad, how can folks get a hold of you, and the work that you do, and enjoy more of your thinking?

Brad Aeon: So three times a week, I share new research and what it means for you in terms of tips to better manage your time.

And I'm available on LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. My name is Brad Aeon. That's Brad A E O N. And as much as I can, I try to translate scientific research into actionable tips. And is it on Twitter? Is it at Brad Aeon? That's correct. Yes. Is that the handle? Great,

Francis Wade: So I follow folks, I follow Brad on LinkedIn and there's always something of value each week. I can promise you that. And there's nobody else doing the kind of research that he's doing that I'm even [01:01:00] remotely aware of. Not even 10 percent of the value that he produces in this area. So Brad, thanks so much again for joining us.

It's my pleasure. Thank you. Great. We're not finished folks. There's going to be a little bit more information about our next episode, so keep listening.