

ep 38 BradAeon Recording

[00:00:00] It is the task management and time blocking podcast, episode 38. You're both a fan of AI and task management having achieved gains in both areas over the years. The recent outbreak of LMS has made you hungry for better task management using AI solutions, but nothing seems to be happening.

Francis: So you keep looking for AI companies hoping that one of them will offer insights, but they have not made any progress beyond making some vague recommendations, some really bland stuff you're thinking to yourself, there must be a way, it must make my task management better. There must be a way to make improvements using new technology, but the waiting game is killing you.

Francis: Maybe these companies are missing an understanding of the fundamentals of task management, and if so, what can be [00:01:00] gained from having some very special insights? Tune into this episode to hear from me and my special guest, Dr. Brad Aeon as we tackle and even maybe even try to solve this wicked problem together.

Francis: I'm Francis Wade, and welcome to the task management and Time blocking podcast.

Francis: And welcome back. And as you can see, we're joined on the stage by Dr. Brad Aeon. And just before I introduce Brad, let me welcome and thank you for joining us here at the Task Management Time Block podcast. Uh, few things about this podcast, I wanna let you know in case you're thinking that we do things traditionally around here, we don't, we do special stuff.

Francis: It's different, right? So what we're trying to do is solve a problem, unlike other kinds of interviews, you know, typical podcasts. In this case, I've invited Brad to [00:02:00] join me in my, you know, virtual laboratory. I'm in Jamaica, he's in Canada. And the idea is that we are gonna tackle the problem of improving task management using AI together.

Francis: And the way we're gonna do this is hopefully illuminate the way we do our own thinking and make our own improvements so that you can make your own. So we're trying to come up with insights that would actually give you the ability to make, have your own insights, and have your own understanding of your own task management.

Francis: So in the first part of the program, we'll be talking about, uh, the nature of the problem and why it's so bad and what makes it so, so difficult, and why people struggle with task management in general, and why AI companies have not yet come up with any improvements. Material nature. Second part, [00:03:00] we're gonna be looking at the solutions, kind of what Einstein said.

Francis: Einstein said, if you had know how to solve a problem, he spent 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions. So we're hoping to get some serendipity going here in our conversations. Some surprises, and if we do, we'll ring an insight bell, which will be an indication that we said something that's remarkable in some way, or that I've said something that Brad hasn't heard, or he said something that I've never heard before.

Francis: So let me introduce Brad. Brad, lemme, lemme just say, welcome to you and thanks for joining us. Thanks for having me on. We really appreciate it. Great. So who is Brad? Well, he's a time management expert and researcher. He did his PhD on time, wellbeing and productivity at Concordia University. And today he works with organizations around the world to help them implement the latest research on.

Francis: Time management. His insights and ideas have been featured in top tier [00:04:00] media outlets, including the Howard Visual Review, BBC News, the Guardian, the Atlantic, and many more. His TEDx talk, the philosophy of time management, explore some of the most recent and important ideas in time management. And it's been viewed by hundreds of thousands of people on YouTube.

Francis: And it's a, it's a real pleasure to have Brad here. And, um, let me start off by reading a story and then I'll ask Brad to comment on the story of Julian. So, who is Julian? Okay. Well, Julian is a hard worker who loves making productivity improvements. He's also a fan of chat, GPT, and he loves to play around with it.

Francis: He's made improvements in his job as a researcher that are truly inspiring compared to his peers. However, he also feels as if his personal task management is still where it was before he discovered LLMs a few years ago. [00:05:00] In other words, he's thinking that there should be a way to make fewer errors, feel less stressed, and do the right things at just the right moment, but big.

Francis: But his performance in this area, in task management has not improved at all. So he's better than, you know, the average guy who works in the office, other people he works with, but he's still not satisfied. He keeps asking chat. GPT Perplexity, deep seek all of the players for ideas on how to improve his task management.

Francis: But they of no help. They're just repeating a bunch of conventional wisdom. He's also an impatient guy. He doesn't wanna sit around and wait for a software developer to come up with an answer, because that could take forever. He hates thinking, I don't know where to start, but this thought has woken him out of his sleep.[00:06:00]

Francis: He is really bothering him. So let's go into diagnosing what's happening with, um, with Julia. Uh, Brad. Uh, first impressions, uh, reactions to the story of Julian?

Brad Aeon: It's very hard to do. Uh, task management is, is essentially how you want to, when, when you wanna do certain tasks and what, what, what are the tasks that you wanna do in, in the first place?

Brad Aeon: So it's, uh, there's a component of, you know, there's a million things you you wanna do. There's a million things you can do. So how do you choose? So that's. Uh, step number one. Step number two is once you've selected those tasks, when do you do them and how do you do them? Um, that by definition assumes that you know who you are.

Brad Aeon: You know what you want, you know what your values, you know your goals. Um, [00:07:00] and no one, usually no one's gonna know that better than you. And that's why I think a lot of automated or semi-automated task management apps are, are struggling. Uh, they're suboptimal because by definition they don't know you as well as you do.

Brad Aeon: So they can help you make certain choices, you know, based on a few rules of thumb, like, I don't know, you're more tired in the afternoon, therefore it's maybe better for you to do X, Y, Z in the morning. Those are the things that can be quote unquote recommended. Uh, but other than that, I think the main problem here is that until there's some kind of AI that fully knows you, who you are, what you want, your preferences, your beliefs, um, it's gonna be hard to, to kind of automate that particular aspect of task management.

Francis: Hmm. [00:08:00] Well, it's not to say that there's no hope, right?

Brad Aeon: I'm sorry, what was that?

Francis: It's not to say that there's no hope for us, we're,

Brad Aeon: I mean, there's a lot of hope. Um, there's, um, there's this, uh, a stream of research that I find very, very interesting and it's this, uh, I think it's started, or at least it's, it was popularized by, uh, Paul Mehl, uh, M-E-E-H-L, Paul Mill.

Brad Aeon: And he, uh, it's essentially this idea of statistical versus clinical prediction. So you, you give a bunch of doctors, um. Some data and they have to predict health outcomes. And you do the exact same thing with a statistical formula, a very simple formula that takes a few variables, a few factors, and then tells you this is what, what's probably gonna happen.

Brad Aeon: Um, and this was decades ago, so it's not even like some kind of advanced ai. Uh, and consistently the, the statistical formula would [00:09:00] outperform the, uh, the doctors, the clinical prediction. Yes. The doctors. And so I think this, this is something that's been known for a while. This is something that's, I guess a bit, uh, that people don't want to, some people at least don't want to admit to because they're like, oh, what do you mean a simple, stupid formula will do better than me?

Brad Aeon: Uh, but the reality is that the formula is a formula. It's, it's not. Once you program it to do something, it's not gonna be affected by our, our own biases. Mm-hmm. By, uh, being fatigued by the fact that it's, uh, post lunchtime and you might be more tired because you just had lunch. Um, and because of that, there's a lot less noise if, if that makes sense.

Brad Aeon: The, the decisions are consistent and usually better than human level, uh, human made decisions. And I think this is gonna, this definitely happens more and more, not only with ai, but just, uh, uh, [00:10:00] without ai. Uh, one thing that I've found very interesting, for instance, is that over the past few years I developed a very simple formula that you can use on an Excel spreadsheet where you take a bunch of tasks and you just give them a few, uh.

Brad Aeon: You just pick a few variables, like importance, uh, the deadline, the progress you've made, the complexity of the task, the feasibility, and based on like three, four, maybe five factors, you input the scores for each task. So this task is more important. This task is, you know, the deadline is earlier and the formula is fairly simple, but it computes a priority score.

Brad Aeon: And based on that you can see which tasks have a higher priority score. And what's interesting is that people are often like, huh, I would not have thought of that, but this actually makes a lot of sense. Mm-hmm. And of course, very often I would not have thought of that [00:11:00] because we're human beings. Uh, a lot of people are smart, but in the sense we're limited, we're not thinking of all things at the same time consistently, because again, we're, there's a term for that.

Brad Aeon: It's bounded rational. There's a, a boundary to our rationality. And so because of that, we see that. In many instances, if you use a formula to prioritize your tasks, assuming you're good at assessing importance deadlines and so on, mm-hmm. It will outperform you in most cases. Because when you ask people to use their intuition, sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad.

Brad Aeon: Sometimes people are tired. Sometimes people have cognitive biases. Like they, they prefer urgency over importance. Mm-hmm. Um, and that leads to priority decisions that are not necessarily optimal. Mm-hmm. So, all that to say that, you know, when you say that, is there hope? Absolutely. There's hope. Um, [00:12:00] I, I think more and more AI will be capable.

Brad Aeon: I think it's already capable of asking us detailed question about. Hey, who are you? What's your age? What do you, what are your aspirations? What do you want out of life? Are you a, an early riser? Do you go to bed late? Uh, what kind of work do you do? Uh, if I give you task A, B, C, what would you choose? And based on that, it would be able, in principle, to give you really, really good task management options.

Francis: Mm-hmm. That, that makes sense. That makes sense to me. Um, and matches my experience. So I, I use the, I used a, uh, actually a, a, a narrow AI driven software called Scpi, I think in about, in 2015 or so. And it, it did, it, it did that optimization you're talking about, it went even further actually. It, it, it, it went into your schedule and then changed your schedule and.[00:13:00]

Francis: Shuffle it around, you know, you could designate which part was fixed, which part was variable, and it would work on the variable parts of your schedule and optimize it in some different ways that you're talking about. Which, and, and it, it, it, it worked, um, up until, up until up up to a point. It, it, it's, and it's no fault of the software or it's no fault of your spreadsheet.

Francis: Um, it, it, it seems it's, it, it, now, years later, I still sort of use it in the background. It's become, it's become pretty complex. Mm-hmm. Because this, it

turns out that, that the, the, the, the optimization of a schedule of an individual schedule is a, a weak problem by itself. But I don't find myself using it as often.

Francis: Um, but it's not because it doesn't work. And I could put the time in to figure out the new nuances and [00:14:00] the new things they've put in. It's that the over time I've become more skillful at managing my tasks with a minimum of, uh, of capture.

Mm-hmm.

Francis: So I don't need to go through the discipline of writing everything down.

Francis: I, I, because as you know, you know, as, as our listeners may know that, um, we've, we've had prior, prior episodes where we've talked about the fact that tasks are psychological objects. You know, you create these commitments in your mind and in a, in a simple world, when you're 10 years old, you, they come to mind and you do them.

Francis: And then a little bit later on, somewhere in, in your teams, too many of them come to mind for you to do at the. In the moment, like, you can't do next week's homework, right? Well, I guess you could, Brad, you're probably a guy who did [00:15:00] next week's homework. The rest of us, however, we're like, oh, we're not gonna do the homework now.

Francis: So we put the homework off and what we discovered is that if we didn't somehow capture the homework, then when next week's deadline comes, we wouldn't have done it. So we, we learned that, okay, that there's something to something valuable in capturing all of your tasks and doing it religiously. But what I've found, so this goes against everything I teach in my courses, everything in my book, everything all orthodoxy thrown out the window.

Francis: But what I've found is that I only need to do that in special situations where I'm really overloaded. Or something, something is, something big is at stake. So I like have a conference coming up in June and for the two weeks leading up to that conference, I better write everything down or else I'll be, I'll be, I'll be dysfunctional, I'll, I'll, I'll mess things up.

Francis: So [00:16:00] in, in that one month, two week kind of window, just before this major conference, I have to use that technique. But for the rest of the year, I'm actually okay without it. And so that's made me wonder, you know,

there's something unnatural about, and guys, you know, folks, if you're listening in, you're, you're probably gonna burn my book and say everything against it.

Francis: He's, he said, and you take one of my courses, you'll know that. I'm like, you know, this is like calling forth Lucifer. You know, this is like the opposite of everything. But there is something unnatural about taking a psychological object. Rendering it as a digital object or a physical object. It's not, it's not pure in the sense that you're a human being and it's a psychological object.

Francis: If there were a way to manage a psychological object and leave it in [00:17:00] your psychology and still be effective, we'd all go for it. You know, in that one month of stress, I would definitely go for it. If I could just think, in other words, oh, I need to send out a hundred emails, and if that thought could get instantly translated into something in an ai, I'm talking like the perfect, I don't wanna say that getting into solutions, but the po, the point is, if, if I could somehow bridge the gap between thought and execution and bridge it in a way that I.

Francis: Is, uh, natural doesn't involve any paper, doesn't involve any, um, um, bits and bytes. Doesn't involve anything digital. If I could do it, I would. So if I had, if I had the perfect person sitting beside me, the perfect secretary or admin, and as soon as a [00:18:00] thought came into my mind, I would immediately say it to the admin.

Francis: That would be a step closer because then I wouldn't have to process it. And if, if the admin were supercharged with AI powers, then I wouldn't, I wouldn't care. But there's something, something about, something about the translation from thought into other forms and then interaction that have recently, I guess, found laborious.

Francis: And I. Well, let me, let me, let me, let me see if that resonates with you any at all. And, and if, if I'm not just talking crazy talk from here in Jamaica.

Brad Aeon: No, I think that makes a lot of sense. Um, for, for a person like you who, uh, I think already knows what he wants and, uh, what you wanna do, your goals, you've already reflected on, on exactly the kind of projects you wanna engage in.

Brad Aeon: I think for a lot of people, the. The, [00:19:00] the issue is that they may have the, uh, I think it's called the shiny object syndrome, where mm-hmm.

You get easily distracted from something that's important because, oh, there's, mm-hmm. I could be doing this thing, I could be doing this side project and this other side project and this other side project.

Brad Aeon: Mm.

Mm-hmm. And

Brad Aeon: I think that even though we live in a world where, like you said, there's a lot of friction from mm-hmm. Thought to execution because you have to mm-hmm. Think the thought, think about what that entails, the tasks, the subtasks, what I need to do. I need to note it down. I need to reach out to this person to, so there's a lot, it's almost like a,

Brad Aeon: I guess for a lot of people it's a useful barrier because it says there's so many things you can do. Mm-hmm. Um, but because of all these barriers, now you're gonna be forced to choose because all of these things that you wanna do require time and effort. Mm-hmm. And obviously it can't do them all without going insane.

Brad Aeon: Mm-hmm. So. You'll have to choose. And I think this [00:20:00] idea of telling people you have to choose forces them to be more deliberate about what they want out of life. Um, because there's a, I don't know if you've ever read that novel. I, I think it was, yes, it was Brave New World where instead of tasks it was, or, or thoughts about what you wanna do, psychological objects, as you said, uh, it was, uh, pleasures like you, you think of any pleasure, uh, like, uh, being with someone, eating some food, uh, at, at, if I remember, well, there, there was a, a principle in that novel, in that future where the goal of society was to remove any kind of friction between thinking about a certain pleasure and getting it almost immediately.

Brad Aeon: So removing all kinds of friction. And I think the, the subtext of that novel was that, that can't be good for you.

Francis: Because, and

Francis: that man [00:21:00] just went to Bonobos Monkeys. They have sex.

Francis: Yes. Oh boy. Who was Brad taking us here?

Brad Aeon: Well, that was essentially the what, what the society was in, in brave New World. And I think in a sense that is why a lot of people get

overwhelmed. It's, it's not that the world we live in is demanding. Uh, and I know that a lot of people disagree with this. They think we live in a world where we work more than ever, that things are more, uh, demanding and, and stressful than ever.

Brad Aeon: I think that that's kind of missing the point. If you look at how people lived in the 1870s

mm-hmm.

Brad Aeon: Um, you know, working a hundred, 120 hours a week per week, I. The mines and the fields, uh, that was stressful. That was not only stressful, that was time consuming, grueling, and I'm not even talk, gonna talk about the work [00:22:00] conditions in the mines or in the, uh, or in the fields.

Brad Aeon: Breaking your back day in, day out, you might very well die before age 50. Um, in, in many ways we have it a lot, a lot, a lot better today. And, and that also comes with this feeling that, oh my God, there's so many more things I can do. And I think that stems from this, this, this fact that things in general, not everything, but things in general, are easier to do.

Brad Aeon: Mm-hmm. Um, there, there's many ways in which starting a business is easier today, learning a new language is easier today. And so mm-hmm. The friction, the barriers from thought to execution are getting reduced, but that also means that. People might be more likely to feel that, uh, you know, fear of missing out.

Brad Aeon: Like, yeah, after I'm learning Italian, I'm starting my yoga business and doing this, but there's so much more I can be doing [00:23:00] when I look at the world around me, there's so much more I can be doing. So I think in a sense it's, it's probably good again, for most people that mm-hmm those, at least those remaining barriers exist because otherwise we would be spreading ourselves way too thin.

Brad Aeon: Mm-hmm. Um, so that's my, that's my first impression on

Francis: that. Yeah, that's an, that's an, uh, uh, an, an insight. Um, I, I'll go ring the be for that one. Um, for sure. Um, 'cause I definitely hadn't thought of it that way, that, you know, the friction actually teaches you some discipline. Um, and it, it, uh, it, it allows for, it forces a kind of reflection.

Francis: Um, uh, at the same time we, we, you know, it's great to have the technologies that we have. I, I, I did some exercise. I, I ride a stationary bike for a few hours each Sunday morning, and knowing one, again, I have a, I don't know why it happens, but knowing one, again, I have a bunch of brainstorm, usually I'm listening to a podcast or [00:24:00] several podcasts, but I had a brainstorm, a set of brainstorm, and I had about four or five ideas or actions to take.

Francis: So I'm on the bike, I'm sweating up a storm, and, you know, I have the computer in front of me. I'm doing what's called Swift, and, and I have a, a, I'm listening to the podcast on a tablet, so I have to grab the phone. I have to sweaty, sweaty fingers on all I have to go into Google Keep, I have to, I definitely have to capture these kinds of fleeting ideas because if I don't capture them right away, they're gone.

Francis: That's what, you know, things like that. And, and sometimes it happens more around conference time that these ideas just float away. And I, I'm not fast enough. But even in those moments where I'm, you know, I'm doing something else and I have an, I have a, I, I, I formed a commitment to, to do a task, and I have to capture it in that moment because it'll be gone any other way.

Francis: [00:25:00] And if, if I hadn't learned through the friction that you're talking about that I needed a, a system like that, um, I'd probably rely on memory first of all. But what, you know, what if, what if I could, let's, let's play, not devil's advocate, but let's, let's play, let's play ai. You know, what, if I had a, an un an, an open AI channel, maybe to my thoughts is maybe too much to ask for at this point.

Francis: But if I had a, if I had a, a free AI channel to dump all of my tasks upon creation, let's say that I, I did know that I was creating too many tasks.

Mm-hmm.

Francis: So you could, the idea behind capturing everything, ebi, those capture is that you capture everything. Even though you may, later on when you're doing your emptying, you may realize that half of them are, are not gonna get done ever.

Francis: Yeah. But, but the [00:26:00] unfiltered, the unfiltered capture, um, let's say that we've, we've, we've, we've learned that that's, that's a good thing. There still isn't any, as far as I know, there's no AI for capture. There's no,

there's no one trying to solve that problem. There're, there're, and it's, it, it's a, it's a completely ubiquitous pro.

Francis: Everybody has it. And, and apparently it's, it's gonna get easy. It's, I know there, there's some software that you could, you know, you could kind of, sort of, but when I'm riding on a bicycle, I can't, I can't quite command my phone to capture a, a task. My phone is just sitting there. Um, as far as I know, hold on.

Francis: Maybe, maybe there is a way to do it, but it's not connected to anything else. It's just one way to do it. Actually, I'm not sure. Have you, have you heard of any, and, and, and this is where the a the AI versus [00:27:00] just, just voice recognition. Um, those would be two different kinds of levels, but I've not seen any AI differences and I think there is voice capture.

Francis: But what, what do you, what do you know of what, what's out there at the moment?

Brad Aeon: Um, well, first of all, I think it's a, it's a very, it's, it's a very important reflex. You have to, um, capture your thoughts as seamlessly and as instantly as possible. Because the moment there's friction between you and taking that note, like for in, for instance, that's why I don't carry a, a notebook with me.

Brad Aeon: I used to 15, 20 years ago, but not anymore because I. Uh, my, my thoughts are usually it's not even, it's not a word, it's not a sentence. It's multiple sentences. So if I had to stop and actually write out multiple sentences every time, I have a thought that would take a lot of time, every day, every week. Uh, and I do use Google Keep.

Brad Aeon: That's my main instant offloading device. And, uh, because it's Google, it's, [00:28:00] it's made by Google. It's integrated within the Google eco ecosystem. So whenever I use my phone, for instance, I'm, I'm walking or I'm, uh, riding my bicycle. I, I could use my headphones and there's like a little button for the Google Assistant, and I say, uh, as, as soon as it's activated, I say no to self X, Y, Z.

Brad Aeon: And then that automatically saves it to my Google Keep, because I designated Google Keep. As my notes repository. You can do that in the Google Assistant. If you go to the Google app, go into your settings, Google Assistant, there's a, uh, a section called notes. And from there you can choose what app or what repository will, uh, capture all of your notes.

Brad Aeon: I use Google Keep, but you can use any other repository you want. I found that very useful because again, since as the Google ecosystem, I can do that while I'm, uh, yesterday I was driving, uh, while I'm driving I just say, Hey, Google note to self. And from the car it goes to my phone and it's saved on a [00:29:00] cloud.

Brad Aeon: So that later on when I come home, I'll just look at my Google key. Same thing with my, uh, voice assistants of a few Google, uh, home speakers, uh, in our apartment. And you know, whether I'm in the bathroom or the living room or I. Anywhere I can take notes at any point in time. The the other thing that's great, you know, beyond notes is often reminders.

Brad Aeon: 'cause notes are great for thoughts, but sometimes all you want is just a, a little reminder for mi minor task sometimes today or in the next few days. Like, what are the plans? Or, you know, go, go buy some milk. Uh, that's also very, very useful when you do it by voice. And that is, you know, a, a very, I guess, rudimentary form of ai.

Brad Aeon: It recognizes your voice, transcribes everything, knows that it's a task or, or, or a note. And based on that either creates a note or creates a task with a reminder. And I find that even that rudimentary AI is [00:30:00] amazing for thought capture. Right? It's great. And now there's more and more, um, I guess, apps that take that to the next level where I think it's called mem ai, M-E-M-A-I.

Brad Aeon: Where um. It's kind of like Google Keep or OneNote or Notion, except that it's AI enhanced. Um, and you know, I might be wrong 'cause I've never really used it, but from my, in my understanding, what it does is these random thoughts that you throw, you don't have to further organize them into a system with the, you know, sections and labels.

Brad Aeon: Oh, okay. It just automatically finds, I guess, links using ai, uh, based on, you know, I guess semantic similarity to the same concept, same date. I'm not entirely sure, but I, from what I understand, that's the general idea behind this kind of note taking system.

Francis: Okay. Interesting. Um, these, these note taking [00:31:00] systems are, and I, so I love, I love the ones that I, I use, but I, I love Google Keep.

Francis: Um, but they're, they're the, how can I say. I used to have a Blackberry, so back in the day, some, some of our listeners won't know what that is at this point, but, and the Blackberry had programmable buttons. And on

my Blackberry, I, I programmed the button, one of the buttons to instantly open some text program that Blackberry had, so I didn't have to turn it on.

Francis: I could just press this button and it would automatically launch this program. Um, and then I could instantly capture with that program. Now I've, I've, I've always wanted that step where one touch and then I could enter using text. Now, the reason I want that step, I've wanted that step ever since then, and I've not been able to reproduce it in my Android.[00:32:00]

Francis: The reason I wanted that step is that it was easy and it was instant. It was, you know, it was like a, it opened the door just tap and it opened the door. And it was, it was rugged. 'cause I'm not, I'm pressing the button, I'm not pressing the screen, I'm not pressing the keys. I'm pressing a button. And the buttons, you know, buttons feel rugged.

Francis: So it, it, it, it, I could fashion the blackberry so that I could instantly get into text capture.

Yeah. The,

Francis: the thing I liked about that was that it, it, it was a, it wasn't made by Blackberry to necessarily do that. 'cause you had the program, you had to assign the, the, the, the app to the button.

Mm-hmm.

Francis: But, but what, what I ended up with was, uh, it felt like a, a kind of a seamless, rugged, when I say rugged, I mean a sweat didn't bother it.

Francis: You know, that not as much. Um, [00:33:00] it was sort of customized for the nature of capturing. I dunno how to say that any better, but capturing that's behind, uh, an app is still two steps removed. On my, on my phone, I would have to open the, you know, give it the password, so I'd have to get to the password before I got to the app.

Francis: But, but what I really wanted to do is I wanted to bypass everything because the nature of capture is that you want to do this thing in many different physical circumstances. You want it to happen very, very quickly. Um, it, it, it's peculiar. But the machine that I use, my, my, my Android is not built and I can't, I haven't figured out how to build it so that it can do these things as effort they see as I want them to.

Francis: So it, it's almost as [00:34:00] if the, the, the developer hasn't. Cotton down to the nature of capturing and the challenges of the specific challenges of capturing. And that's just one step. So, because if, if they had, if Google Keep had even, you know, figured it out, they would've say, oh, people are using Google. Keep the capture.

Francis: Oh, here's how we help them take the next step.

Mm-hmm.

Francis: So there will be a little bit of AI built into Google Keep that says, let me help this person to process this task that they're capturing for the first time. Let me, I understand what it is, I understand the nature of the task and I understand how to help them.

Francis: For example, not forget. So if I, if I haven't emptied the task in two days, it should come back and remind me. Right. Because it, it understands what I'm trying to do. And it's, it's, [00:35:00] it's programmed to. To interact with me in the heat of the battle, so to speak.

Yeah.

Francis: Not when things are perfect. When I'm, you know, when things are perfect, I'm at my desk and I capture into a, a program that's a web program, and it's nice and big and I'm, I'm settled.

Francis: I'm not sweat, you know, it's, I mean, ideal circumstances and I'm using their app, but capture is not often, doesn't take place in an ideal situation.

Mm-hmm.

Francis: And no one, no one seems to have cotton down to, and this is just the first, like I said, this is just the first step. No one has caught on to the nature of this particular task and try to say, okay, how do we, how do we take away all the friction?

Francis: What's, um. The, what's the amazing way we could have our app become the app for this particular task, the way, the way a notebook LM has become [00:36:00] the standard for that particular task. You know, they figured out this problem that people have and they solve. This is an amazing solution using AI for, I'm, I'm using, I used every day.

Francis: No, I can't imagine my life without it. It's been, oh my god, this is like a huge jump from where I was before. But, but the same doesn't apply to just the act of capturing just the one, the one act of task management is what I'm, I'm, I'm, that's why I think my top, my, my capturing hasn't gotten any, hasn't gotten any better than it was 10 years ago.

Francis: Same thing. Yeah. Like if you were to put AI to that, you know, or, or just thought, heck, maybe you don't even need ai, but just enough thought to say, improve it in a particular way that is suitable for everybody who needs the capture on the fly. Whether they're driving, running, swimming, maybe not swimming, but what do you think?

Brad Aeon: Um, I, I [00:37:00] don't know if this depends on the, uh, the model or type of phone to use. I have an Android and Android myself. And, uh, the way I I do it is, um, if I'm just using the, if all I have is my phone, I don't have any headphones on me or anything. Um, I pressed the power button for about a second and, um, the assistant pops up.

Brad Aeon: All I have to say is, uh, no to self. Here's a, here's a thought. Um, here's a thought that I had. Then it automatically adds it to my Google keep. Um, if I'm using earbuds or a headphone or, or headphones, uh, usually there's a button to the left where if you press it automatically brings up the assistant. And again, all I have to do is, uh, note to self X, Y, Z, or, you know, remind me to do X, Y, Z.

Brad Aeon: So I, I think it, it might depend on how you, uh, set up your phone. Uh, I, I remember back in the day, you [00:38:00] had to download a custom ro and jailbreak the phone and set up, uh, a special, you know, like a, a special short, like a custom shortcuts for how you use the, the different power and volume buttons. Uh, but now I think, at least for Android, it's just, uh, as far as I can tell with the latest models, you just press the power button and it brings up the assistant.

Brad Aeon: And once the assistant is, uh, live, you can, uh, just say no to self X, Y, Z. And I find it even easier when, um, I'm wearing my headphones or when I'm driving, when I'm driving, when I'm driving and it's connected through Android Auto to the car. I don't even have to press on anything. I just say, uh, Hey, Google note to self X, Y, Z, uh, and that, that is.

Brad Aeon: That actually has cleaned my life safer because

mm-hmm.

Brad Aeon: Um, I don't know, 8, 9, 10 years ago, I would, I would be driving and I would need to, uh, pull over, uh, to actually take a note on my phone. Whereas now it's, uh, it's [00:39:00] automated. Uh, the transcription is, uh, uh, it's instant. Mm-hmm. And it automatically adds it to your favorite note taking tool, and in which for me, it, it's, uh, it's Google Keep, at least for the instant stuff.

Brad Aeon: Um, right. So I think it, it really depends on how you set up your, I guess your, your, your phone or, uh, the, the tools that use you with your phone, like your, your headset. Uh, I, I, I don't have anything fancy. Like, I remember even, uh, five years ago, I had some, a cheap pair of headphones that also had that little, uh, shortcut where it automatically brings up your, uh, uh, your Google.

Brad Aeon: Yeah.

Francis: Oh yeah. That, that what I think the difference is that. You can, we can make Google Assistant do some of the things we're talking about, but there's nobody as, as far as we know, nobody trying to solve the capturing problem as the capturing problem. There's a dedicated [00:40:00] solution to it that meets all, you know, all platforms, all circumstances that, that, that does this and also allows you to dispose at the end.

Francis: 'cause Google Keep isn't easy to dispose from.

Yeah, from

Francis: my use of it, it's not, it's not, you still have to get in, you still have to, there's no automatic anything going on in Google Keep. Not yet anyway. Um, but, uh, uh, uh, a smart AI could separate, for example, what I have as good ideas versus tasks that I need to accomplish.

Yeah.

Francis: Those aren't the same. Some of them are just, you know, oh look, this is an interesting idea. I heard on a podcast. I'd love to go. Research it some more.

Brad Aeon: I thought you were gonna say separate, uh, good ideas from bad ideas, because I also record a lot of bad ideas that, uh, you know, in, in retrospect when I, uh, come back to it a, a few days or even a few weeks later, I'm like, I should not even have recorded that.

Brad Aeon: But, you know, [00:41:00] uh, I also think that, that, that, um, I assume you might agree that it's better, uh, to over capture than to under capture. Yeah.

Francis: And sometimes I'm sure you, you've under captured like I have, and after, after you get back to wherever you're getting to empty, you're like, what the hell was this? It doesn't make any sense.

Francis: Now. It seemed like it made perfect sense when you captured it, but now you're like, what is this? But if the, if the AI could say, would you like to add more details? Because what you put here doesn't make any sense. Yeah. Or this is an awful, it happens to me. This is, looks an awful lot. Like another idea that you had previously.

Francis: Is it the same as that? And I would say, oh yeah, that's the same scratch that

Brad Aeon: I'm telling you. Hey, your, your memory is not as good as

Francis: it used to be. Yeah, I, I'd even, I'd take the correction, I'd say point taken, thank you very much. You prudent and whatnot. [00:42:00] But, but the, the, the, and we, I think we're just, you know, we spent 10 minutes talking about this particular solution.

Francis: If someone were to really understand it and work at it, I think they could, they could sweep the, sweep the market because they would understand this, the way notebook, LM inventors understood that they would understand this at a level at which it would, it would have the, the input would be easy, the output would be easy.

Francis: The brains of all of the powers of AI would be at work. You'd have machine learning, as you are saying, and it would, it would change the way. The task is, uh, managed once it were captured, um, and it would make our lives easier as opposed to this kind. What we're doing is dumb capture, you know, dumb emptying.

Francis: It's all very manual and very slow and, [00:43:00] and, you know, it's hard and it, but there's no effort to make it easier. I've not heard or read anything that said, oh, lemme try and make it easier. But you, you tell me. Have you, have you seen it?

Brad Aeon: Um, I actually thought about it recently, whether I should link, um, my Google Keep, uh, account to, um, an open AI account or an Anthropic account that would go through all the notes.

Brad Aeon: And then automatically either label them as, where should they go? Is this a calendar event? Is it a, is this a note for research? Is this something that you should add to OneNote? Is this something else? Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Is this a good idea? Is this a terrible idea? Mm-hmm. Um, but, and this is just my type of personality.

Brad Aeon: Um, let me give you an example. With money. Uh, with money. Many years ago, I read somewhere that even rich people, wealthy people, [00:44:00] uh, still track their money. They, they track their expenses. And I thought at first I thought, what do you mean they, they're rich. Uh, and then essentially the argument, I don't know to what extent it's true, but the argument was, well, they got rich because they tracked their expenses.

Brad Aeon: They know where their money goes. Um, and so. I tried at first. I tried, uh, I think at the time it was called the mint.ca or mint.com, and, uh, it automatically links to your bank account and tracks your expenses so that in hindsight you can see how much money went to, you know, uh, uh, bank fees, restaurants, rent, and so on.

Brad Aeon: Uh, but then I met a group of people that essentially had a different philosophy and they said, we have the technology to do this automatically. We have the technology to track your expenses automatically for you, but that is not necessarily a good thing for everyone because if you track your [00:45:00] expenses manually with your app, so every time you go to a pizza place, you record how much you spent, uh, based on the receipt.

Brad Aeon: You go to the grocery stores. Same thing. If you go to the museum, same thing. You, uh, essentially it takes not even a second, but you do it yourself. And the argument was that if you do it yourself, at least you're consciously aware mm-hmm. Of where your money goes every time you do it. Mm-hmm. And that makes you more deliberate, more intentional with the way mm-hmm.

Brad Aeon: You spend your money. Mm-hmm. Um, because when it's automatic, well, you just, you know, you spend it and spend and spend and spend, at the end of the month, you just briefly glance at your expenses and you're like, you know, whatever. Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm. Uh, but when you do

Brad Aeon: it manually every time, it really creates this level of consciousness around mm-hmm.

Brad Aeon: Expenses that I think is hard to replicate when it's automated. Mm-hmm. And so in the same way as I was trying to think through the not very complicated steps to use AI to label and even sort my Google Keep notes, I [00:46:00] thought, I still want to be in control. Uh, and I know this is objectively or, or arguably a quote unquote waste of time.

Brad Aeon: Um. But it's one of those things where, you know, an so speaking of which, an AI in, in technology in general, there's this, uh, uh, it's called the out of the loop problem, where the more you automate, the more likely it is that you're gonna be out of the loop in terms of what's going on in your system.

Brad Aeon: Mm-hmm. Um, and that might be a good thing, you know, for things that are low stakes. But to me, whatever goes into my Google Keep, I usually high level ideas, strategic ideas, um, sometimes some minor stuff, but at the very least, I want to be conscious of what's going on in there and manually. Mm-hmm. Uh, you know, remove things.

Brad Aeon: Mm-hmm. Sort things out, classify things, organize things. I wanna do it manually just at it, [00:47:00] it, it's top of mind. I'm very selective about what to automate and what not to automate, uh, just because I'm, I'm selective about. What I wanna be aware of and what I don't want to be aware of. So, mm-hmm. Again, to give you a, uh, I, I guess a, an an example, there's, uh, one thing that I automate is the hundreds of Google Scholar alerts I get every week about new research related to time management, productivity and so on.

Brad Aeon: Um, automatically sorted because there's so much of it that what are the odds that me going through each email left on unread from Google Scholar alerts going through each email, uh, manually would actually be beneficial for me. Right. It's not very beneficial because what are the odds that on any given week there's some massive new study that's gonna completely change my life and my work?

Brad Aeon: Very unlikely. Right? Um, but the things I think [00:48:00] about, you know, when I'm in the shower, when I'm riding my bicycle, when I'm, uh, doing the dishes, I. Those are potentially and very often strategic ideas for the long term for my business, for what I wanna do with my life, right? And so

those things I need to be aware of, even if it could be automated in principle, I still wanna be aware of it, if that makes sense.

Francis: Right, right. Yeah. That makes all, oh, the two examples you gave are great. 'cause we all have them going on, and they both, they both seem ripe for AI assistance. So the, the one, the one with respect to money, so that, that how you spend your money is very similar to how you spend your time, right?

Mm-hmm.

Francis: And I, I, I, I literally capture how I spend my day at the end of each day.

Francis: Then I, I, I, I put it in, into an app, but the app has no smart, no smarts whatsoever. I could, I could do what you said, right? I could, you know, port that information and I told myself, you know, I should put it into [00:49:00] AI somewhere and, and actually analyze the numbers. I haven't done it. Um, and it would be easier if it were built into the, the app itself and the app could say, oh, look, in the last month you have, and it would say, you know, you may wanna spend more time doing this and less time doing that.

Francis: You may, your sleep time spent sleeping was this and that and that. I'm a great napper, so I don't know, am I napping enough? Not enough. Does it take away from my sleep? No, no. It could tell me all these things if it had any kind of intelligence. And I imagine there must be somebody doing that particular app somewhere.

Francis: And I think, I think someone did contact me with some, but it wasn't AI driven though. But anyway, that's a, that's another simple one that if you understand the nuances of time capture, it's not the same as money capture.

Mm-hmm.

Francis: Those are two different animals. But if you understood the differences, then you could, you [00:50:00] know, stick your AI on it.

Francis: Then the ai, the AI could clean things up, represent them, understand you, provide insights, throw you exceptions, alert, you remind you do all the things that you'd want an agent to do on, on your behalf.

Yep.

Francis: But someone would've to understand the problem. And so far, I haven't found anybody, and I know of any programmers or anything I read that says, oh, this pro, these folks, they really understand this problem.

Francis: 'cause the way they're going about solving it comes from this kind of deep understanding that they, they folks who did the mint, I think you said it was Yes. The money. The money, the money tracking people. Mm-hmm. They really understand money tracking and wealth. And it shows up in the way they design the app.

Francis: It seems that equivalent hasn't happened in the um, in the in time usage space. That's the [00:51:00] first, the first, first thing that you said that caught my attention. I think that's another one of our insights I've been thinking about.

Brad Aeon: I've been thinking about this a lot and the, this, the thing that pains me is that I had this, this was just last year.

Brad Aeon: I had this, uh, I wanted to, I, I realize now that most of what I'm doing in the, in the time management and productivity sphere is very immaterial. I do consulting, I do, uh, more and more. I work with, um, um, you know, custom made applications. I, I do research. I am, uh, writing a book, but at the end of, I, I, I was thinking what's and material thing I can do in this sphere?

Brad Aeon: And I was thinking about this prototype of a. A little, uh, a very tiny necklace or, or pendant or, or, you know, pen or on your neck. It's a very tiny camera that would take every minute or so, just a screenshot or, or a, uh, um, a photo of what it is you're doing. Just a photo, [00:52:00] um, or even continuous recording, you know, uh, 24 7, just for maybe a week or two.

Brad Aeon: Then upload it to an ai, because now AI does video analysis as well. And of course, it's at, at least now, this would require a tremendous amount of compute. In principle. It is very possible to get a highly detailed conte context rich description of how you use your time day in, day out. Um, but then one thing that I really like to use AI for is here's my thinking.

Brad Aeon: A, is there anything, are there any assumptions that are wrong, inaccurate or questionable? And B, what am I not thinking of? And the reason why I decided against doing this thing is simply because, um, the main issue is privacy. Privacy, commercialized. Yes.

Brad Aeon: Um, I mean, you know, there's already, uh, some like [00:53:00] privacy conscious version of it called humanize, and it's, uh, I think it doesn't record the actual content of conversations, for instance, uh, humanize with the why. And, um, I'm like that, that's great. But again, it doesn't give you enough context and enough richness around the way you use your time.

Brad Aeon: So there's this, uh, that's why I like to use AI is to again, explore what I don't know. You know how, uh, Donald Rumsfeld said there's known knowns. You know, things we know, we know and why? So I like to explore. The unknown unknowns of what I think about. So Brad has an idea, he wants to do something, but I also, I'm very aware of my intellectual limitations.

Brad Aeon: I don't know everything and AI can help me shed light on that. So what is it that I'm not thinking of? And to me, that's one of the most important use cases of AI for productivity.

Francis: Whoa. That's a, that's a, that's a [00:54:00] really good one. Um, into what you don't know. Um, so there's two of them that you just mentioned that I, I want to comment on.

Francis: Um, and there, there actually are two more insights. So the first one was, they, they, I'm getting a ton of email, but there's, there's my, my, I don't have an agent to read it. So everyone has that version of, you know, there's a volume of email and you know, most of it is newsletters and. I use Unroll, which is

Brad Aeon: yes,

Francis: crude, technically there's no smarts in that thing whatsoever.

Francis: It's just a filter program. It's not doing anything really. Um, but it could, you know, every time I signed up for a, a newsletter, can't it tell, I mean, why do I have to tell it every single time that I sign up for it? It should have asked me, you know, it should just prompt me. It, it, this is not [00:55:00] rocket science.

Francis: A hundred thousand people are getting the same thing. So I'm obviously not a special person. You can tell. So, you know, you know, you know that this is not, it's a newsletter. It's something that I could ask you to manage via triage.

Mm-hmm.

Francis: So that's, that's, that's the one. So the volume, volume of not just email, but, but also emails that I've received because I also get Google alerts on some keywords and it's drinking from a fire hose.

Francis: I only wanna know about the two things. Same thing. You said two things per year that are really interesting. Yeah. And I could download them all and load them up into it, and I could do all that manual work, but I'm not gonna do it. Instead, I just want something smart to say, Hey, would you like me to manage these for you and tell you when something is interesting?

Francis: And I go, please, please, please do that for me. Yes. Yeah, there is,

Brad Aeon: there's more, like you said. It is, it is work. Um, so for instance, [00:56:00] for Google alerts, uh, on my Gmail, all, all I did was it's essentially create a filter where every time I get a Google alert, it doesn't show it, it's automatically, uh, labeled as red so that it doesn't show as an unread.

Brad Aeon: I wanna state inbox zero, uh, so it's labeled as red. Um, and then, uh, automatically put into a folder called Google Alerts so that once a week when on my time. I will check those alerts instead of them bothering me every time with a new unread email. Uh, something that I've been also doing recently, it's been very helpful because now I'm, I'm, uh, it's getting to a point where I'm getting too many alerts.

Brad Aeon: Mm-hmm. Uh, and so I have a very long prompt about who I am, what I do, my interests, and what kind of studies are interesting to me. Mm-hmm. I just put everything I export. I use Thunderbird, it's an email client, Thunderbird. I export all of my Google alerts into one single text file. Mm-hmm. [00:57:00] Uh, and just put it into a notebook, lm, because Notebook LM has a huge context window, which means that I can read all of my emails in one shot and give me the top 10, 20, 30 best studies that might fit my preferences.

Brad Aeon: So it's, it's two layers of ai. Mm-hmm. Because the first layer is obviously Google. Scanning new research for you and mm-hmm. Finding top 10, top 20 every week. Mm-hmm. Uh, but even that is a lot. So the second layer is Google Notebook, uh, trying to find exactly what you need. Uh, I've, I found that it saves me a lot of time, but again, like you said, there's nothing, there's no one button solution.

Brad Aeon: You have to get an email client, export your emails, put them into Google Notebook, lm, and so on.

Francis: And after you've done it a few times and come up empty handed, you're like, you know what? Yeah.

Yeah.

Francis: But the third, the third, third insight, only fourth insight that you said, um, [00:58:00] which, which is, it's, it's not really, let's, let's say that it's not a task management problem per se, but for the AI to pick out things that I don't know or I'm not aware of, that it, it.

Francis: So it's, if it, from a knowledge point of view, if, if you've uploaded enough stuff into, let's say, um, let's see, I uh, well, I just lost the name of it. Um, one we just mentioned. Oh boy, I had a senior, yeah. Hope book. I was gonna say knowledge alarm, but I said no. So I've loaded enough stuff into Notebook LM what I, what I have not done.

Francis: And I, I, I keep thinking I should do, but the, the overhead of doing it is just too hard, is I should load up all of my writing into Notebook L alarm. And if there were an easy way to do it, a one button [00:59:00] solution, I, I, I sure would. I would just say, take everything from my blog, take everything from my book, take everything from my, everything I've written over here in, in Substack and understand it.

Francis: And then if I could ask it, okay. I now want you to go through and find new areas of knowledge that I should be pursuing based on, and you could even read all my recent emails. You could listen to this podcast, for example, listen to all of my conversations online, take it all, and give me three quality new findings.

Francis: Mm-hmm. That would move the needle the most right now. You know, the, the only thing that, in a way that stops me from doing that is the overhead of all of the steps required to coalesce or to, to conglomerate all that [01:00:00] information. But it seems as if, if, you know, if I had a really good agent or a really good ai, I would just say, I would just point it in the direction and say, go look over here.

Francis: Go look over here. Go look over there. Go look over there, create a profile of what I know I.

And

Francis: what I'm focusing on and all the ideas that I have, and find the three next big ideas, uh, based on what you, based on what you see that I don't know. And I'll, I'll that it'll probably come back with two of them I already know and one that I know.

Francis: And then I will tell you, I already know that, I already know that. Go find some more. But it would be this new kind of dialogue with a invisible partner that I've never heard anyone mention the possibility of how that would work. But

Brad Aeon: yeah,

Francis: for people who are not as professionals, that would be like gold.

Brad Aeon: Yes. Absolutely.

Francis: That's a great idea, Brad. I hope nobody's listening to this and they put it in play before you do,[01:01:00]

Francis: but it's, it's kind of doable today. It, it's kind of, you know, I think comes,

Brad Aeon: I think when it comes to ai. I would say a, a good rule of thumb is if you can think about it, it's probably already doable to some extent. Mm-hmm. And if it's not entirely doable, it's definitely gonna be doable in the next year or so.

Brad Aeon: Mm-hmm. That's how, at least in my experience, is how fast AI evolves. It's evolving extremely fast and a lot of the things that we talk about today might be completely irrelevant next year or in the next five years.

Francis: You mean they would already be done or they would already have been conceived of?

Brad Aeon: What I mean is, um, AI might, the new generation of AI might disrupt the way we work economically so much that even basic things we talk about might not be relevant.

Brad Aeon: Uh, just the [01:02:00] way, I don't know, in the 18 hundreds, someone trying to talk about how this new plow is more efficient. Mm-hmm.

And maybe

Brad Aeon: they need this other kind of plow. Well, the next year there's tractor trucks and that mm-hmm. Becomes completely irrelevant. Mm-hmm. Uh, mm-hmm. And, and so I think, uh, or like, you know, the 18, 1860s people talking about this new kind of bucket, uh, that's more, you know, more efficient, more ergonomic to go fetch the water from the well.

Brad Aeon: Mm-hmm. That becomes irrelevant the moment you have, uh, indoor plumbing. Right. So that's the kind of thing I'm, I'm, I'm thinking about, so to what extent is ai, and by AI don't mean just like a little chat chat bot that we use mm-hmm. Ai, agentic ai, an agent capable of doing work. To what extent is that gonna change the, the very way we do work?

Brad Aeon: And to what extent are some of the things [01:03:00] we worry or concerned about today in terms of work, is that even gonna be relevant, um, to three, five years from now?

Francis: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I, I, I think we're, that's exactly what's happening in the world. If, if we just look at, um, the conversation that we're having now versus the one that we would have before the advent of chat GPT.

Francis: Yeah. I, I think the conversation we're having now has an urgency to it because we can actually, we can really see these things happening now. You know, before it was the stuff of maybe one day, but now it just seems like it's a matter of having the right developer decide to work on it. It, it's having seen what AI can do and, and now that we're using it every day, it's changing the way that we see, we even think about the, so the, the, the context is completely different.

Francis: Um, and I, I think it's gonna, same way you said, it's gonna, it's [01:04:00] gonna keep changing and it's gonna render some things obsolete. It's gonna create new opportunities. And hopefully in the task management space, there'll be people who take, take the, the niche seriously enough that, you know, there'll be the kind of innovation that we're seeing over in the knowledge world, you know?

Yeah.

Francis: Hopefully. Well, Brad, we're just about at the end we decided that we're meant to spend together, but we didn't even talk about all elements of task management, but, but there is a common theme, a common thread through,

through the ones that we, we talk about and the ones that we didn't even get to. Um, how can folks, uh, get in touch with you and, and learn some more about the, your research and the work that you're doing?

Brad Aeon: Um, I'm very active on social media, on, uh, uh, LinkedIn, X, Facebook, um, Instagram three times a week. I try to share, you know, the content of new research, uh, particularly on time management and productivity and what it means for you. So I, my goal really is to make. [01:05:00] Scientific research more accessible and useful and practical for everyone.

Brad Aeon: So, uh,

yeah,

Brad Aeon: social media or my website, bradon.com. That's B-R-A-D-A-E-O n.com. Um, and thank you so much for listening.

Francis: That's great, folks. I can, I can recommend that following Brad is like having a splash of cold water thrown in your face every week or so. Always seeing something interesting that I've not thought about or heard.

Francis: And it's, it's, it's just a lot of fun to, to be on the cutting edge and watching. He's kind of watching him do his work. So, and this is with LinkedIn that I'm talking about mostly. So folks, uh, keep listening. Lemme tell you what's coming up in future episodes, a future episode here at the task management and Time blocking podcast.

Francis: Thanks for joining us.

I.