The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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0:00:01 Jacob: Hello everyone, welcome to another episode of The Future of Work. Today, my guest is Jason Fried, he's the co-founder and CEO of Basecamp, he spoke at TED and he's also the author of several best selling books and I'm sure you have read several of them, including Rework, and the most recent one, It Doesn't Have To Be Crazy At Work, which I love the title of that. So Jason, welcome.

0:00:24 Jason: Thanks for having me on.

0:00:25 Jacob: I'm sure a lot of people have read something of yours, either on Medium or through one of the books that you've published, or maybe they even saw your TED Talk, but in case they haven't, can you give us a little bit of background information just about you and Basecamp?

0:00:41 Jason: Yeah, sure. Well, see, Basecamp, the company, used to be called 37signals, way, way back in the day. We've been around for about 20 years, and we started out as a web design shop and since 2004, we've been building software and Basecamp is the product we're most well-known for. It's a web-based project management tool. It's used by all sorts of companies. Anyone who has anything they need to get done and keep track of the tasks and the conversations and the decisions and the schedules and the files and all the different stuff that revolves around a project, Basecamp helps you keep it all in one place, and keep it organized.

0:01:14 Jason: We've been building that for a while, we've done a bunch of other things too, written some books and whatnot, but currently... And I should say currently we're working on a brand new product called, Hey, hey.com, which is gonna be a new email service. So we're tackling email, which is something that's... It's sort of one of these things where it feels like everyone's already done that, but no, they've done it wrong, so we're gonna try do it right.

0:01:36 Jacob: Bless your heart Jason, bless your heart.

[chuckle]

0:01:41 Jacob: Everybody wants to get the email thing figured out.

0:01:42 Jason: Yeah.

0:01:42 Jacob: And there was a while everybody thought, "Oh, you know, Slack will take care of that," but I'm sure a lot of people who use Slack know that they're actually spending more time now on technology than they did before. So it's maybe not the best solution.

0:01:56 Jason: Yeah, I mean, Slack and chat is kind of a major mess for a whole bunch of different reasons and it doesn't replace email anyway, even if it was good, it doesn't replace email. Email's

just a different method of communication, and so... But it hasn't really been reconsidered for a while, so we're here to do that.

0:02:12 Jacob: Very cool. And how many employees you guys have at Basecamp?

0:02:15 Jason: We have 56.

0:02:15 Jacob: 56? Very nice.

0:02:18 Jason: Yeah.

0:02:19 Jacob: And my understanding is that you purposely wanna leave it at that size?

0:02:22 Jason: Yeah, we wanna keep things as small as we possibly can. I mean, we... This is the largest we've ever been, but we've historically been much smaller, we started out with three people and grew to four and then five, and we're very careful about how we grow, so we tend to hire one or two people a year and keep it as small as we possibly can. I like the idea of a small company where everybody knows each other, communication is a lot easier, sharing vision is a lot easier, getting everyone on the same page is a lot easier.

0:02:48 Jason: And it's also all we need. I think that's another important part of this too, is you end up having too many people and you end up doing too many things that you don't need to do, and when you have fewer people you can't do more stuff, and that's probably a good thing. So that's our approach.

0:03:00 Jacob: What does a typical day look like for you? And maybe you can walk us through from when you wake up in the morning, all the way to when you end up going to bed?

0:03:10 Jason: Well, these days... So, I've got two young kids at home, 5-year-old and a 1-year-old. So, my mornings and my nights are dictated by them basically. So, [chuckle] I've to go to bed about 9:00, 'cause I've to get up at about 5:30 or 6:00 'cause that's when they're up. So I've got that going on.

0:03:28 Jason: But my days are, I would say atypical, in that they're not regular, every day is a little bit different, quite a bit different actually, not just a little bit. It just... My days depend on what needs to get done. So, some days I'm writing, some days I'm designing, some days I'm thinking, some days I'm doing a combination of all those things, but I try not to do too many things in one day. So, I try not to bounce around between five or six or seven separate things, I try to stay focused on one or two or three things, max. And just do a really good job with those, and give those my undivided attention while I'm doing them.

0:04:00 Jason: So for example, let's take today. Today I've been spending most of the day writing, writing up some ideas for what we're gonna start working on in a couple of weeks, and also writing up some help documentations/welcome documentation for new customers who try Hey, the new email thing, which won't be out till April, but we're working on finishing up the onboarding process right now.

0:04:25 Jason: So I'm kinda focusing on what does it feel like to be a first time user of something, what does it feel like to be a first time customer of something? And trying to write things that will be useful for those folks. So that's kinda what today is like. But tomorrow might be something

different. Tomorrow I might be working on actually sketching out some design ideas for a new feature or a specific workflow we wanna improve or whatever it might be, just my days are really kind of all over the place, in terms of focus, but when I focus in, I focus in on just a few things in a given day.

0:04:56 Jacob: And then, my understanding is that you also, you're pretty strict in terms of, you don't work like 70 hours a week, you're not... You're not at the office till 10 o'clock every night.

0:05:06 Jason: Yeah, yeah, yeah, not at all. So, we are big believers of eight-hour workdays, 40-hour weeks, like that should be enough time, it's more than enough time in fact to do great work. So, I'm home by 5:30-ish. I get... It depends on when I get to work, sometimes I get to work at 9:30, sometimes I get to work at 9:00, it just kinda depends, but yeah, eight-hour day, plenty of time, try to get a good eight hour of sleep if I can, with the kids, and no work on the weekends, and no work at night, unless I take some time-off during the day.

0:05:36 Jason: And sometimes I do that, 'cause I don't always work straight through the day, sometimes I'll take a few hours in the middle of the day to do something else, then I'll pick it up after the kids go to bed or something, I'll put in an hour or two to make up for that time, but I don't work at a night in addition to working a full day. I just work a full eight hours throughout the day, that's kind of how I do it and how we encourage everybody here to do it.

0:06:00 Jason: We don't want people working more than 40 hours. You don't need to. And if we're doing that, then we're doing something wrong, actually. I know a lot of companies, long hours is seen as doing something right, like, "Let's stay late, and let's work on the weekends and let's pull all-nighters." I think that's completely wrong. And so, we're very careful about not encouraging our employees to work that way.

0:06:19 Jacob: It's funny, when you say it, it sounds like so matter of fact, like, "Yeah, just eight hours, 40 hours a week." And then I'm sure most people listening to this are like, "What the hell did he just say?"

[chuckle]

0:06:29 Jacob: Like, "How is that possible?" And I'm sure you probably have a lot of friends and family members working at different organizations who are putting in 50 hours a week, 60 hours a week, working on weekends, working on nights. And so, what do you say to those organizations, how have you been able to just get it to be 40 hours? What if 40 hours isn't enough?

0:06:51 Jason: 40 hours is enough, because that's our limit. And what we do is, if we can't get things done in 40 hours, we don't do them, or we wait till the next day, or the next week, or whatever it is. And the idea is that what's flexible is scope, meaning our ambition, the work we take on, that's all flexible. If you just keep piling more hours into something, well, you might as well just go to 24 and never sleep. I mean, it doesn't work. You've gotta draw the line somewhere.

0:07:18 Jason: We draw the line at eight, and then we just say, "You know, if we can't get to it today, we'll get to it tomorrow, if we can't get to it tomorrow, maybe we just decide not to do it, or we'll do it next week, or the month after, or six weeks from now, or whatever it might be." We don't have to take on everything we wanna do, and try and get it done immediately. So, it's this sense of pace, of sustainable pace, I should say. And we've been in business for 20 years, we wanna be in business for 20 more.

0:07:43 Jason: You can't work 80-hour days... I'm sorry, 80-hour weeks if you wanna be in business for a long time. Sometimes you're gonna burn out, or you're gonna burn people out, and it's gonna be very difficult. Okay, maybe you can do it, but it's not gonna be pleasurable, it's not gonna be enjoyable. You're not gonna keep a good team together with you for a long period of time. And you're gonna lose a lot of great people along the way.

0:08:02 Jason: And I don't wanna lose great people. It's hard enough to find great people. So I wanna keep them happy with the reasonable work hours, challenging work, great people, great environments, and those kinds of things. And so, getting everything done is not the idea. That's not the idea for us. It's getting what we can get done in 80-hour... I'm sorry, in eight-hour days and 40-hour weeks over the course of many years. That's what we're aiming for.

0:08:27 Jacob: It's interesting, because a lot of organizations actually reward employees who work more than eight hours a day. You're seen as more ambitious, you're seen as better talent, as a harder worker.

0:08:35 Jason: Yeah.

0:08:36 Jacob: But it sounds like your perspective is that's actually the wrong message to be sending to your people.

0:08:41 Jason: I think so. I think so. And I know that's not what a lot of companies do, but I really don't care what they do. Because if you're supporting or celebrating "work ethic," and work ethic to you means just spend as many hours on stuff as you can, that's not really a good definition of work ethic to me. Work ethic is, do I wanna... Am I... Do people wanna work with me? Do I work well with others? Do I give good feedback? Do I take good feedback? I'm I doing what I'm supposed to be doing when I'm supposed to be doing it? If I say I'm gonna do something, do I do it?

0:09:14 Jason: It's those kinds of things. Not how many hours you put in. How many hours you put in is simply how many hours you put in. It has nothing to do at all, zero, with how much you get done, or the quality of your work. So I'm not interested in measuring hours beyond a reasonable work day and then equating extra hours to extra work. You can spend extra hours on bad work. You can spend extra hours on unnecessary work. You can spend extra hours doing things that don't matter. You can spend hours on... Extra hours on busy work. I mean, how is that something to reward?

0:09:47 Jason: I'd like people to put a good day's work in, and go home and do their own thing, get a great night's sleep, and they can come back rested and refreshed the next day. That's what's celebrated here, and what's rewarded here. So yeah, it's a slightly different take, but not really. I mean it's, this is how most European countries work. This is how a lot of wonderful economies work around the world.

0:10:08 Jason: So this isn't that unusual, actually, it's just kind of unusual in the United States, with our work hustle culture that's just I think really damaging and really destroying people over the long term. And I know that, hey, sometimes when you're in your early 20s you wanna put all the hours in, and you want bust your ass and the whole thing. I get it. But the thing is that it's not sustainable. And when you have companies that encourage that kind of behavior when those companies themselves know it's not sustainable, that's almost fraudulent, and I just don't wanna be that kind of company.

0:10:41 Jacob: And it's not even the companies that do that, it's also you see a lot of social media pundits do it, you see just a lot of celebrities and people with big brand names and a huge following advocate for this kind of non-stop hustle culture, work all the time. And do you also agree that that is not the right message to be sending out to people?

0:11:04 Jason: I mean, it's not my message. I don't think it's the right message. You know, like anything, there's different ways to do things. And certainly, you can point to some successful person on the internet who says you need to work 100 hours a week to get ahead. And they've gotten ahead, so therefore, that's what they're gonna say works, right? I mean, it's understandable that that's what they're gonna promote, because that's their life, and that's what they've worked for, and that's what they believe in, and that's all they've known, so they're gonna say that.

0:11:30 Jason: But I just don't think like that is... That's an approach... To me, that's an approach that just doesn't... It doesn't hold up over the long term. You can't work those kinda hours over the long-term, especially, if you... Again, if you're early 20s, I can see it's a harder argument to make, but at some point you grow up and maybe you have a family, or you meet someone, and you will have other interests in life besides just work, and before you know it, you can't do anything else, if you're just used to working that way, and if you think that's the only way to work.

0:12:01 Jason: So perhaps, in extremely short bursts, or short periods of time, I could see that sort of thing maybe being useful, occasionally. Or if there's an emergency or whatever, sure. But as a method of sustained work, I don't believe it's viable, frankly, in the long term. And by the way, the other thing you'll hear sometimes is people will say, "Well, I'm gonna put it in crazy hours now so I don't have to do it later." That doesn't typically work out.

0:12:26 Jason: Most people who profess the craziness and are all in on these long, long, long hustle things, they keep doing it until they can't. They don't choose all of a sudden, like when they're 35, to go, "Oh, I don't have to do that anymore. I'm gonna go back to a normal day's work." Because the habits they've built are all built around busy, and packed schedules, and hustling, and the whole thing. So it's very hard to break habits. If that's what you're used to doing, you're gonna keep doing that, and at some point it's going to collide with reality and life. Or it's going to keep you from reality and life. And I think that's really unfortunate too. Work is not that important to keep everything else out of your life.

0:13:04 Jacob: What about people who are stuck in that environment? Because I'm sure there are a lot of people listening to this right now who have those types of jobs. And they feel like they're stuck. Their leaders keep piling on more work. What do you do? How do you get out of that? I mean, let's say for example, you... I mean, worst case scenario, let's say Basecamp tomorrow vanishes, and you're stuck getting a full-time job for, I don't know, an IBM, or a McKinsey, one of those typical firms. What would you do?

0:13:35 Jason: Well, it's tough, it's tough when you don't have power, or you don't have control over a situation. So it kinda depends on who you are and where you are. I think the first thing to recognize is, "What control do I have over the situation?" And if you're in a place where all they do is push you to work 80 hours or you're pushed out the door, then... I mean, there's not a lot you can do. You can complain. You can also just see what happens if you work less and see if they notice.

0:14:01 Jason: There's all sorts of things you can try to do. But ultimately, if the culture there is one of rewarding whoever's the last to leave and whoever's the first to get there and whoever's

putting in the most hours and whoever's in the most meetings, and that's not the kinda life that you want to live, you're gonna have to get another job. There are plenty of companies out there that don't do that, that aren't pushing people to extreme lengths.

0:14:23 Jason: So, there are options. I mean, I'm not suggesting it's easy to get a new job. And I know it's certainly hard to quit and losing your livelihood, all these things are incredibly hard to do. But at some point, you're gonna have to figure out what kind of company do you wanna work for? What I think is probably more useful for most people, since most people don't stick at the same job their whole life, most people change, especially these days, is to think about where you wanna work next.

0:14:46 Jason: And when you get around to where you wanna work next, thinking about essentially hiring the company, not just getting hired at a company, but being very thoughtful and selective about the kinda places that you apply for a job. Don't just apply for any job, but apply for a job at a company that you wanna work for because you like their culture, because you believe what they believe in, because you believe how they treat people and they like... They take care of folks and they understand what it's like to have a life outside of work and those sorts of things.

0:15:11 Jason: So, maybe you're stuck somewhere right now. Good news is, you probably won't be stuck there forever. There'll be other opportunities that open up in the future. And when you have those chances to go look for a new job, do some hiring on your own basically. Look and apply for companies that you wanna actually truly work for.

0:15:28 Jacob: You've also written a lot about work, just through your books, through your articles on Medium. So, very high level, what is your general perspective? What are your thoughts on work today, what comes to mind?

0:15:43 Jason: What comes to mind about work? I think it's a little bit about what we've been talking about, which is, I think there's a lot of people who feel trapped by work. They feel like, it's crazy at work all the time. You just ask people what it's like at work. Just ask your friends. They'll probably say, "Oh, it's crazy. I'm crazy busy. It's crazy." And I just think that's unfortunate. And I think that... I know... Not only do I think, I know it doesn't have to be that way.

0:16:13 Jason: But people get caught up. And one of the problems is... There's actually kind of two problems, especially in my industry. This does not apply to every industry and I can't speak generally about every industry. But in the tech software world, this notion of chasing endless growth is part of the big problem. Companies go out and raise money and they attach themselves to unreasonable expectations, at that very moment when they raise money. And now their whole story from that point on is about growth.

0:16:44 Jason: It's not about quality, it's not about doing the right thing. It's about, can you grow enough to provide a certain return to an investor? That, I think is a broken path. And it's one of the sources of the craziness and the chaos and the long hours, and growth at all costs and do whatever it takes kinda mentality. And I think it's in the hustle mentality, and that gets really dangerous and destructive. And certainly, look, there's some companies that come out of that world that do great things. Obviously there's always an outlier here and there.

0:17:16 Jason: But to me, this isn't about picking out outliers and going, "Well, what about them or what about them?" It's more about what about you, what about over the long-term, what's sustainable, what's reasonable, what do you think you can live with? And different people have

different thresholds there, but... So you've got money that causes people to be focused permanently on growth. And then you've got a world full of distractions, which has gotten worse and worse and worse. And like you alluded to it earlier with things like Slack and other chat tools and real-time chat and the expectation of immediate response.

0:17:46 Jason: And everything's being sped up in a way that it breaks up people's days into tinier and tinier and tinier bits of time, which makes it really hard for anyone to settle in and focus on real work. So they're bouncing between this chat room and that chat room and this real-time conversation and that real-time conversation, this instant message window and that meeting. And there's this expectation if someone asks you a question, you need to get back to them immediately and if they don't, then they're gonna hit you up with a different medium of communication.

0:18:13 Jason: Maybe you didn't respond to the chat, so now they're gonna email you. Or they're gonna email you first, then if you don't respond to email, they're gonna chat you up in 20 minutes. And then they're gonna call you or walk over to your desk. It's like, no one has any time to do work anymore, because we're all playing this interruptions game.

0:18:29 Jason: And so I think those are the two things, this feeling of a necessity of endless unreasonable growth expectations, and then being constantly distracted all day long. These are the two things I think of when I think of work these days. And I think it's unfortunate and hope that it changes down the road, because it's gonna have to. I think people are careening into an unsustainable pace and unsustainable future.

0:18:54 Jacob: Yeah, I always say that connectivity doesn't mean availability. And...

0:18:57 Jason: Yeah.

0:18:58 Jacob: There used to be a time when, with email, if somebody sent you an email, you could get back to them in like a day, maybe two days. And today if you don't respond in 20 minutes, people freak out. And...

0:19:07 Jason: Yeah.

0:19:08 Jacob: It's, you know, email has become basically like a chat platform now. And it's totally, totally insane what's going on with this. So I completely, completely agree with some of the things that you're seeing. And...

0:19:21 Jason: Let me just add something right there. If you don't mind.

0:19:23 Jacob: Sure.

0:19:23 Jason: Part of the problem with that is, it's all comes down to human expectations. Email has not changed. There's nothing that's, if you get back to someone a day later or two days or three days or five days or five minutes, it's still the same thing as it ever was before. It's now that our expectations have changed. We expect immediate response. And it's actually a really selfish thing to expect that. Just because you wrote something quickly and you sent it off to someone instantly, it doesn't mean that they are available to receive that information immediately.

0:19:51 Jason: Nor is it fair to them that they're gonna have the answer immediately, or they're gonna have the response immediately, or that whatever else they're doing is less important than

what you need them to do. This is all about respecting one another and recognizing that very few things actually need to happen immediately. So if I email you and you get back to me a day or two later, that's fine. Of course, unless it's a true emergency. And if it is an emergency, email is probably not the best medium anyway. But then call me or whatever.

0:20:17 Jason: But there shouldn't be emergencies all the time. That's the other problem, is that everything's ASAP and everything is on fire all the time. It shouldn't be. That's another problem. So it really comes on expectations. And here at Basecamp, we do not have an expectation of immediate response, no matter what medium you use, unless there's an emergency. The expectation is, you'll get back to me or I'll get back to you whenever I have time or whenever you have time. And it will be reasonable, we're reasonable adults, so we'll get back to each other within a reasonable amount of time, not five weeks, and not even a week, but maybe a day or two, or maybe an hour, maybe five minutes if that's when I have available.

0:20:54 Jason: But the point is, that we all need to respect each other's time and attention and not just demand it from each other all the time no matter what's going on. Here at Basecamp, sometimes we have conversations that last a few days. We don't use email internally for these, but we use Basecamp, but these are long-form email style communications with back and forth comments. And we've people across the world who work for us in different time zones and we'll hash something out over a day or two.

0:21:19 Jason: It's totally fine, doesn't need to happen in 15 minutes, even though in most companies it would feel like that's too long, "A day or two, what are you talking about?" like, "What's the rush?" So, "What's the rush?", is a question we ask ourselves all the time and I think it's a really important question to always ask yourself when you expect someone to get back to you immediately.

0:21:37 Jacob: Simple question, "What's the rush?" "I have a deadline tomorrow Jason, I gotta meet it."

0:21:42 Jason: Right, yeah, sometimes that's true, right? But most of the time, it's not.

0:21:46 Jacob: Yeah, yeah, completely agree. I'm curious, have you always thought like this? If you were to go back, I don't know, five years, 10 years, even 15 years, was there an earlier version of Jason who worked the 70, 80 hours a week? And did something happen in your life or your career that made you realize that, "You know what, this doesn't make any sense and I gotta change."?

0:22:10 Jason: Yeah, I think there were moments in my life at some point earlier on when I did work more hours than I do now, but I've never been an all nighter kinda person, and I've never been a, wake up in the morning and work till it's dark kinda person, unless it's winter and it's dark at 4 o'clock here in Chicago, but you know what I mean. I've never been that person, because I try to focus on what I'm doing and really focus in. And you know what? If you put in four, five really focused hours of work, really good work, you're tired by the end of that time anyway.

0:22:39 Jason: The notion that you can actually put in even eight, but nine or 10 or 12 full focused hours of work in a given day, and not see diminishing returns, I think is completely unreasonable and unrealistic. So the truth is, I think if you're really focused on your work and you're really focused in and you're not being distracted, and you give yourself four or five hours of great work a day, you're done, you're mentally done by the end of the day, you're very satisfied, you feel fulfilled

and you're done.

0:23:06 Jason: So to me, it's not so much about counting the hours what I worked when I was 20 or 30, or now I'm 45, that kinda thing, it's more about how have I worked? And I've always tried to be as focused as I possibly can on one or two things in a given day, and worked with long stretches of uninterrupted time, like hours at a time, and then you're done. You feel like you're done, you're done, you've done your work. The thing is, is that most people don't have time at work anymore.

0:23:35 Jason: I've asked people at conferences, I go on stage and I'll speak to whatever, few 100 people and I'll ask people, "Hey, when's the last time you had four hours to yourself at work?" And essentially no hands go up. Maybe a few, right? But I did this a few years ago, like 600 people in the audience, and I get 20 hands or something went up, or 40 or something, right? A small, small number of people. If you have four hours of continuous time in a day, that's a lot of time, it's a ton of time, and by the time you're done with that time, you don't wanna work anymore, 'cause you put everything you had into it.

0:24:10 Jason: And so that's how I've always been, and I'm certain there were times when I was younger where I maybe put in more of those hours perhaps 'cause I had more stamina then or I had few responsibilities or obligations then, but I've never worked facility hours, I've never worked crazy hours, 'cause they're just not necessary. And they're also, it's very rare that you come up with the breakthrough on some creative problem when you're tired.

0:24:34 Jason: What happens is, you stop working, you go to sleep and you wake up in the morning with a new idea, or you wake up in the morning, you take a shower and you have a new idea. That's how the new ideas happen, they happen when you're refreshed, not when you're exhausted. I think that's kind of the key here.

0:24:47 Jacob: Can you walk us through how you work? Because I'm sure a lot of people listening to this are wondering, "How does Jason actually work?" Do you batch tasks, do you to-do lists, do you... How do you get those four hours? How do you actually work during the day?

0:25:01 Jason: Sure. I don't have any to-do lists or tasks. I'm not a task-based kinda person. I'll have a direction for the day, but I don't sit down and decide this direction and write it down. I just know. Like, "Today, I'm writing, I'm writing stuff." So I know I've got a few things to write, I don't have a list of those things, but there's actually a list of the things in code, "These are the things I need to do."

0:25:26 Jason: But they're not to-do-lists, they just happen to exist and they're in front of me in a folder, let's say. There's five text files in a folder, I wanna improve, so I go, "Today, I'm gonna spend all day really working on these five text files, or these five documents essentially." I'm gonna write them and rewrite them and read 'em and reread 'em and rewrite 'em and edit and read them out loud and just really get 'em right, so by the end of the day, I'm done with that and I can move on to something else tomorrow.

0:25:53 Jason: Versus, I've got this and this and this, I'm gonna bounce back and forth, this that and I'll have this work, I'll work on these five things over the next four days, 'cause I only have 15 minutes here and 20 minutes there. That's not how I work. I work in long continuous blocks of time, focused on one or two things, in this case five things, but it's really one thing which are like this series of emails that people get after they sign up for Hey.

0:26:16 Jason: And so I'm just focusing on that. And in other days it's like, "I'm gonna think through the next batch of work we're gonna do over the next six weeks." I'm gonna come up with some ideas, I'm gonna shake them out. I'm gonna sketch today, I'm gonna sketch and think and write today. I don't know where I'm gonna end up, but by the end of the day I feel like I'll have gone through some real ideas in my head, and tomorrow I'll probably prepare those more formally.

0:26:39 Jason: So that's kind of the extent of the balloon of work that I really have to do. It kind of has these... You kinda blow it up, it has these edges, and I don't let anything outside those edges get to me, unless there's an emergency or someone absolutely needs my attention for something else, that kind of thing. But that's kind of it. It's very calm. I don't, you know... One of the things that's different about us at Basecamp is that we don't have shared calendars, so I can't see what anyone else is doing and no one can see what I'm doing.

0:27:07 Jacob: Yeah, I understand you hate shared calendars. [chuckle]

0:27:09 Jason: I hate them. Because all they do is commoditize time, and they make it available for the taking. They say, "Hey, here's this person's schedule, wanna talk to them? Well, go steal a block from them, go take an hour." Yeah, then send them an invite and yeah, I guess they could click decline, but nobody does, because that's not a nice thing to do to somebody. So, everyone ends up in meetings all day or with other people's time on their schedule.

0:27:33 Jason: I want my schedule and everyone's schedule here to be completely open, every single day. Everyone here should have a full eight-hour day to themselves to decide what they need to do. Now, they work with a small team perhaps, they might be working on a project with three other people, and they coordinate with those three other people, and everyone knows what everyone's doing. And that's fine, there's conversation that goes back and forth. But everyone has a full, open day to themselves. So nobody can take any of your time without asking.

0:27:58 Jason: So if someone wants to get together with me, or I need to get together with someone else, I'll ask them. I'll say, "Hey, Jonas. Do you have an hour on Thursday, or do you have any time Friday morning? Or I'm free Wednesday afternoon, do you have any time?" And we'll go back and forth, and it'll be a negotiation, because it's their time I'm asking for. It's not my time to take. It's their time to offer, to give.

0:28:19 Jason: So I'm asking for them, and then we negotiate and figure it out. And, "Okay, cool. So we'll hook up at 4 o'clock on Wednesday? It sounds good." And that's it. And so we put out our own personal calendars. If we want, or if we don't, that's fine too. It's up to each individual person. But there's not this sense of like, "This is my week. My week is determined by blocks of color on a calendar that other people put there, and I'm basically stuck with that week." I don't ever wanna be that way, and I don't want anyone else to ever be that way. So our weeks are very open here, and that's kind of how we work.

0:28:54 Jacob: How do you get that four hours? Because I'm sure there are, like you say...

0:28:58 Jason: Well it's actually eight. Let's say eight.

0:29:00 Jacob: Eight, eight.

0:29:00 Jason: It's really eight, yeah.

0:29:00 Jacob: So there are a lot of people who want your time. I'm sure you get invited to a lot of meetings. You get a lot of emails, you get social, you get stuff from me, to do these podcasts.

0:29:09 Jason: Sure.

0:29:09 Jacob: How do you, and how can other people make sure that they get that time? Do you just say no a lot?

0:29:16 Jason: Yes. You have to say no a lot. That's number one, is you have to guard your time and protect your time and realize that... I'll step back for a second on this, because companies, and you'll hear this saying all the time, right? But companies always say, "Time is money." Time... Everyone, "Time is money."

0:29:34 Jason: Well you don't act like it is, because you wouldn't just give everyone your money. Companies have budgets and they have CFOs, and they have controllers, and they have accountants and they have all these different things. And if you start spending your company's money frivolously, they're gonna be like, "Woah, woah, woah, woah, woah. What's that about?" But there's no one looking over the time. There's no CFT. Or actually CTO let's say. Not Chief Technical Officer but Chief Time Officer, which I wouldn't want anyway.

0:30:06 Jason: But my point is that, there's no one actually guarding anyone's time. There's nobody here saying, "Time is valuable. Time is important." And we all know it inherently to be the most valuable thing. You can't buy more time. You only get a limited amount, that's it. Yet we treat it like it's this unlimited commodity. So I think you have to begin... And everyone, like you said, everybody wants everyone else's, which is why they keep asking you for it. And so you'd have to be very, very good at saying no. And I'll say no to most things, including my own ideas, all the time.

0:30:37 Jason: And then occasionally, I say yes to things that I think would be fun to do, or interesting to do, or someone I wanna talk to, or a podcast I wanna do. I leave those things open. Because I say no to so many other things, I have openings. I'm like, "Yeah, I'll do that. I'll do that on Monday." Like for example, today, we're doing this podcast on Monday. The rest of my day is completely open. The only thing I had on my calendar today, is our podcast from 2:00 to 3:00. That's it.

0:31:01 Jason: And most days are like that. I might have one or two things on my calendar and I'll tend to, if I can, I'll tend to gang them together. So if I do have to do two things in a given day, I'll try to do them like early in the morning. So then I have a full continuous stretch of time. If I have something at 11:00 and something at 2:00, well now I have like... I've broken my day up in a way where I can't have long continuous blocks.

0:31:24 Jason: If you do have to schedule things, you wanna think about how you can schedule them together essentially, so you have long stretches of time. Because if you stagger them out through the day, you're just breaking your day into small bits. And then you're kind of screwed, because you'll never get that chance to even have a long period of time. So you have to be very thoughtful about that.

0:31:41 Jacob: Yeah, scheduling tasks. Yeah, I do that a lot with email and social media. I try to only check it once a day at 4 o'clock. And then I try to also not do any meetings on Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays. So I try very, very hard to do a lot of that too, because I experienced that as well, years ago. People wanna pick your brain, ask you a question, jump on the phone for a couple

of minutes, have a chat. And then your whole day goes by and you're like, "What the hell just happened?"

0:32:08 Jason: Yeah, you're like, "Man. I was so busy today, but I got nothing done."

0:32:11 Jacob: Yeah, I felt like that all the time.

0:32:12 Jason: And that's the worst feeling, right?

0:32:13 Jacob: Yep.

0:32:14 Jason: Like busy, with nothing to show for it. And that's common, unfortunately. So yeah, you're right.

0:32:20 Jacob: And it was worse. It was also really... In my situation, where I work for myself, it was also like that with social media 10 years ago, when Twitter was getting started, and Facebook and LinkedIn were becoming more mainstream, and you'd get lots of interactions. You would just non-stop check social media, post on social media, connect with people on social media. But at the end of the day, nothing gets done.

0:32:30 Jason: Right.

0:32:30 Jacob: And so I think it's terrible.

0:32:30 Jason: Yeah, I would treat those things... Again, just to step back, I'd treat those things like breaks. You deserve some breaks during the day. And those are good moments for breaks. It's like 40 years ago, people would go take a smoke break outside, right?

0:32:30 Jacob: Yeah.

0:32:30 Jason: And everyone was like, "That's cool. Go smoke a cig." Or even, I guess 40 years ago they'd smoke inside, wherever it was. But people would take little breaks. They'd take a 15-minute break, 20 minutes. Whatever it is, that's fine. And social is a good thing for that, I would say. Social's kind of like a cigarette in a sense.

0:32:30 Jacob: Yeah.

0:32:30 Jason: And I think actually it's very addictive and I mean that in a literal sense too, in a bad way. But point is, is that it's a little bit of a moment just to take a break and scroll through something mindlessly. That's fine, there's nothing wrong with doing that. But yeah, if you're checking it every five minutes, all throughout the day, and that's actually what work has become in a sense, for a lot of people, we're just checking stuff all the time, you're never gonna get anything done, you're never gonna feel satisfied.

0:33:36 Jacob: Alright, this is a little bit of a tangent, but you brought it up, and it's about social media and addiction, because there are some people out there who say, "What are you talking about? In the '60s and '70s everybody would sit around the breakfast table reading the newspaper, or they would sit on the subway reading a newspaper. Now, it's just the device has changed, and it's a phone now instead of a newspaper. So the behaviors haven't changed, it's just the... What we're looking at that's changed." Do you agree with it?

0:34:05 Jason: To some degree I do, but the thing is is that today's things that you're looking at, are actually engineered for engagement, and engineered for addiction. So it's different, it's not that... Sometimes you'll see people with pictures in the train in their 30s or the 40s, or something, like everyone's reading a book. And it's like, "Well, see, everything's the same." Well, I don't think it's the same, I don't think it's the same, because now we're becoming addicted, methodically addicted.

0:34:38 Jason: These companies know what addicts people, they know what generates engagement. And so social and... Social is really programmed to increase dopamine hits, it's not really programmed for learning or for intellectual stimulation or engagement, like when you look back at those pictures of people reading books, I would say that that was a more valuable use of time than just mindlessly scrolling through photos. And again, it's not...

0:35:10 Jacob: It's also one way. When you read a book, the book doesn't engage back with you, but with a phone, if you're reading social media, it engages back with you, and that's the difference that a lot of people forget.

0:35:25 Jason: Yes, and not only that, these platforms are targeted in very specific ways, they know what gets you going, they know what kind of stuff you're reading, so they keep feeding more and more and more and more of it to you. It's like a rat drinking sugar water, going back and back, and back and back and back and back and back, over and over and over because that's what the rat wants, the sugar water. So these platforms are giving you your own version of sugar water, your perfectly tailored, specific to you version of sugar water. And so, we're captive to these platforms.

0:36:00 Jason: I do think it's different, I think it's quite a bit different, even though fundamentally, we are "consuming content" as people would say, which is what we used to do in newspapers, books, as well. Of course, people still do that in those mediums as well, but you have more control over those mediums. And even people who think they're in control of their social stuff, you're not, you're not in control of it, just like you're not in control of your cigarette addiction, or your whatever addiction, your alcohol diction, you're not really in control of those things.

0:36:27 Jason: These things are chemically... They chemically have their hold on you, and so do social media. And I think you can have a healthy relationship with some of these things, you can have a healthy relationship with drinking if you wanna drink here and there, whatever, you can take these things to the extreme, or you can have your say. But I think what's happening is a lot of people don't recognize necessarily how much control these companies have over them, and these companies tell you what to believe, tell you what you think is true, tell you who to vote for, all these things. That's pretty intense. And so I don't think it's quite the same.

0:37:01 Jacob: Oh yeah, not even close.

0:37:02 Jason: Yeah.

0:37:02 Jacob: So for those of you listening, reading a book is not the same freaking thing as being on social media, alright? [chuckle] Just because you're looking in the same direction does not mean that the actual interaction is the same.

0:37:15 Jason: Right.

0:37:17 Jacob: So getting back to the original thing that I wanted to ask you, is, do you say no to

your people, and how? And also, do your people ever say no to you, and how do they say no to you?

0:37:29 Jason: Well, the way we say no is, we decide essentially what we're going to do every six weeks, so we have this system we built called Shape Up. And if anyone's interested, go to basecamp.com/shapeup. S-H-A-P-E U-P. And it's a method of work, it's the actual way in which we work on product development. We work in what we call six-week cycles. Every six weeks we decide what we're gonna do for the next six weeks, we don't plan beyond that, so we're planning just six weeks at a time.

0:38:03 Jason: And so every six weeks we decide what we're gonna do, and then once we just had what we're gonna do, we set off to do it. And so there's no need to be negotiating what we're doing all the time. There's a really very little need to say no to each other or yes to each other, because the work is already laid out essentially, for the next six weeks, and we're all focused on that. And the idea is that we have to give everybody a full eight-hour day to focus on the work they're gonna do.

0:38:25 Jason: A lot of that is problem-solving, a lot of the time is figuring things out. And what we can't do is pull people off of things constantly. So I can't say, "This is your project for the next six weeks. And by the way... " And then three weeks in say, "By the way, I need you to do this, I need you to do this, I need you to do this." Because that's when things become very difficult to say no to or to say yes to, when you're running out of time, when your superior for example, tells you you need to do something else, very hard to say no in those situations. It's like we don't create those situations where people have to say yes or no.

0:38:57 Jason: The no's come from deciding what not to do every six weeks. The yeses come from deciding what to do every six weeks, and then from that point on, people basically have the next six weeks set up for them in a sense. Not task-based, but directionally, "These are the problems we're trying to solve over the next six weeks, this is the direction we go over the next six weeks." And then each individual team has control over their little project to decide what to cut, what to keep, what to add, what to lose, whatever they need to do to fit it into the time frame that they've been given to do this.

0:39:33 Jason: So that's where they start to say no, or that's where they start to say yes. And so they say yes. When they say no, or they say yes, they're essentially saying no or yes to me and to the company because we've decided we're gonna go in this direction and they're saying, "Let's go in this direction, but we're gonna take a two degree turn to the left to do this slightly differently because that's the only way we can get it done with this amount of time." So the yeses and no's are actually, it's not about meetings, it's not about... 'Cause what's hard is, someone's like, "Hey, can I talk to you?" And you're like, "No," that's a weird no.

0:40:03 Jason: The no's and yeses we have here are about the actual work itself, and everyone here is given the autonomy and the agency to decide how much and how little work they're going to do to get the idea done. So that's the control they have. As far as like directly saying no or yes to somebody, it all comes down to what the thing is, but in most cases like those questions aren't so pointed that either one of those answers would be terrible.

0:40:31 Jason: If I said "Hey Wailin," Wailin runs our podcast. I said, "Hey Wailin, are you available to get together tomorrow?" And she's like, "No I can't because I've got this. What about Friday?" She technically said no and I'll be like, "That's fine. Friday, sounds good." These are easy discussions, these are easy yeses and no's to have, because they're not based on someone feeling

like someone's taking, stealing their ability to get the work done that they need to do. It's more of like yeses and no's on the outskirts of the work itself, which are much easier to deal with. They're not so fundamental to the actual day-to-day work. I don't know if that helps or not. I know it's little bit abstract but...

0:41:13 Jacob: No, no it does. But I'm curious if somebody... The situation I was thinking of is if somebody's trying to give you more work.

0:41:21 Jason: So we don't have that. So this is actually really important. Nobody gives anyone more work here.

0:41:28 Jacob: Even if you're a leader?

0:41:29 Jason: That's correct.

0:41:30 Jacob: Okay.

0:41:30 Jason: So, work is set. Well, I mean, we do every six weeks. Every six weeks we set out to define the projects we're going to be working on over the next six weeks, and those projects are explained in a broad sense. I'll give you something more specific, like we wanna add a calendar to Basecamp or something like that. Here are the things we think we need to do, here's what we're trying to get out of it. Like, this is the big idea.

0:41:53 Jason: And then a team is assigned to it, let's say a team of three, which would be maybe two programmers, and one designer. That's the only thing that they are responsible for over the next six weeks, nothing else. So no one can pull them off their work, no one can give them additional projects to do, no one can tell them not to do that. This is all they have to do over the next six weeks. And I can't pull them off... Technically I can, but that's not how we work. No one pulls anyone off to go, "I got a new idea," three weeks in, "I got a new idea," two weeks in. Or, "Let's scrap that and do something else."

0:42:25 Jason: That's not how it goes. You can't have leadership that's having a new idea every five minutes and pulling people in five different directions every other day. That doesn't work. So we decide what we're gonna do every six weeks, we send the team off, and that's all the team is responsible for. Now, if there's an emergency, a legitimate emergency, the servers are down, the whatever is broken in a bad way and we need to pull people off to fix a hole in the boat, different story. But other than that, if there's a new idea that comes up that we wanna do, we have to wait till the work is done and then we can consider it for the next six-week cycle at work. So that's how that works.

0:43:00 Jacob: Interesting. I'm wondering, 'cause in a lot of organizations just random stuff comes up all the time. "Sit on this meeting, we need to work on this project, we need you to create a proposal for this, or a contract for that." And I'm just trying to think of, 'cause that's the reality for most employees out there. And I'm trying to think of how can they constructively say no, so that they can be able to get more time to actually get work done. I don't know if you have any suggestions on that?

0:43:25 Jason: Yeah.

0:43:26 Jacob: Well, people say no to you.

0:43:28 Jason: But the problem is there in that situation that you described, which is very common, which is new things are coming up all the time, and people are being sent in different directions constantly. This is a constant state of chaos, it's not calm. And the problem is, is not the individual employee, the problem is is the method in which the company works. The culture, the expectations, they're all out of whack. And until those are put in line with a calmer approach to work, things are gonna be forever chaotic at that place.

0:43:57 Jason: So it's very difficult then to forge a calmer approach to work and to be able to say no. Or, I mean you can say it and go, "Hey boss," or whatever you're gonna say, "Hey boss... " Jim, Sally, whatever his or her name is. "I'm focused on this right now because I need to get this done by Tuesday. Maybe I can take a look at that proposal on Wednesday," or something like that. You could try those kind of things where it's not like a no, it's like a, "Not now, how about later?" Or, "I'm in the middle of something that someone also asked me to do," or, "I have this on my plate. I don't have any time for that."

0:44:32 Jason: It all depends on who you're talking with and how they're gonna receive the news, and the culture of the company. But at some point you have to carve out your own space. You have to say, "Yes, no, not now, maybe later," whatever it is, but fundamentally, the problem is, is that if the company is always bouncing around, then you're always going to get bounced around. You think about a bounce house, like a kid's bounce house. You can't stand in the bounce house if everyone else is jumping around, you can't stand still. It's not possible, everyone is being bounced around because the system is bouncy.

0:45:08 Jason: And so you gotta find a system that it has a solid ground, that if a few people are bouncing around over there, you're not being pushed around. That's what Shape Up is for us, that's our method of work, and that's why we've written it up in detail so other people can read it and adopt it or at least take something from it. 'Cause I believe this is a really, really important thing to learn. It's how to run a calm company and not a chaotic one.

0:45:32 Jacob: It's funny, there's somebody on my team... I have a smaller team of 10 people and one of the people who works with me, her name is, we'll call her Michelle, she helps me with a lot of content stuff. When I create courses she helps me create worksheets, she creates a lot of writing and content for me. And she actually started doing this really clever thing, and it took me a little while to notice what she was doing, but she was saying no in a very subtle way. And I would throw tons of work at her and she would say, "You send me all these different projects. How would you prioritize them?"

0:46:03 Jason: Oh, good one.

0:46:04 Jacob: And then I would realize, I was like, "Oh, wow."

0:46:06 Jason: Back on you, huh?

0:46:08 Jacob: "That's a lot of freaking work I just sent you. Well, why don't you start with this and then do that." And so it took me a little while to realize that she was actually managing me, in a nice way saying, "I have too much. You need to tell me what you wanna get done first, and when I'm done then I'll move on to the next thing."

0:46:23 Jason: That's such a great... She's a pro.

0:46:27 Jacob: She is. [chuckle]

0:46:27 Jason: Because that's a seriously good way of doing it.

0:46:30 Jacob: Yeah, she's badass.

0:46:31 Jason: I'm gonna borrow that story, because it's such a great piece of advice, which is like, if you think you're getting a whole bunch of stuff that's unreasonable, just kinda ask it back to the person who's giving it to you like, "How would you handle that?"

0:46:44 Jacob: Yeah, "How would you prioritize all these different things?"

0:46:45 Jason: And they will then have to think about it, and go, "Oh Gosh, I don't know how would handle that either. That's all a lot. Maybe I would do this first." And then you kind of have permission now to stay focussed. That was wonderful, that's great advice.

0:46:56 Jacob: Yeah, because when she asks me that I can't say, "Oh, prioritize all of them." I'm forced to...

0:47:01 Jason: "I do them all at once." You would know that that's unreasonable, yeah.

0:47:04 Jacob: Yeah, I'm... I'm forced to give her an order of which to get these things done. And then everything is fine. And she basically said no, and I don't... [chuckle] So I love the way that she does that.

0:47:16 Jason: That's wonderful. That's smart. Really smart.

0:47:18 Jacob: She's... Maybe I'll have her in a podcast one day. Share her secrets. I'm really curious, we only have around 12 minutes or so, left. I wanted to learn a little bit more about working at Basecamp, because you guys have some unique ways that you work. So for example, I understand during summer, what is it, Fridays are off, it's only a four-day work week. You have some very unique and some would say quirky ways of actually running the business. So can you share any of what it's like to work there?

0:47:47 Jason: Yeah, sure. Well, let's see. We do, like you mentioned, we do four-day work weeks in the summer, so 32-hour weeks in the summer, so we have Friday off, or if people wanna take Monday off or Wednesday off, they can take whatever day off. But most...

0:48:00 Jacob: Why did you do that?

0:48:04 Jason: We did it as an experiment. And we also did it because I think that seasons are healthy. When we all grew up, most of us at least, we'd go to school, and we'd take summers off. If you have school, summers off, and maybe you did, went to camp or you had a part-time job or you hung around the house or whatever you did, right? And then school comes back online. When is it like August, October? I don't even remember. September, whatever it is. But it's a month off and things changed, and something ended and something new began and then something ended and something new began. I think that's healthy.

0:48:45 Jason: And so we were thinking about how to do that at work. And we said... We had this

idea of, what if we worked fewer hours, what would happen? Would we still get the same amount of work done, would we get a lot less work done? Turns out we get less work done but not that much less. And in fact, it's kind of a nice way to force even more focus, because when you have less time to waste, you waste less of it. It's just like any resource, when it's scarce you take more care it and you conserve it.

0:49:14 Jason: So we started running that experiment, I believe we actually started doing that all year round, and then we're like, "This is too much, we're not actually getting enough done and we're a little bit, this just isn't really where we wanna be, but we still like the feeling of it." So we said, "Let's just go back to seasons, so let's do summers off, just like you would when you were growing up." It's not summers off of work, but it's an extra day off a week.

0:49:35 Jason: And people can have three-day weekends, they can enjoy the summer. I know, depending on the hemisphere you're in. We have a few people now in the Southern Hemisphere, so it's a little bit different for them I guess, but most of us, 98% of us work in Northern Hemisphere where the summer is the summer, same months. And it's nice to have a three-day weekend. You come back refreshed, you appreciate it more. Maybe you get to do some things you wouldn't have been able to do if you only two days with Saturday and Sunday.

0:50:02 Jason: And it puts different kinds of pressure on us because we have to be a little bit less ambitious in the summer, but I think that's okay, too. Again, what's the rush? Things are gonna be fine. And let's just try to either be more efficient or not do as much stuff or say no to more things, or even find simpler versions of things to do, or cut out more waste or whatever it might be, to lead to the point where we can't cut anymore, and that's fine. And if we can't get it done, we just can't get it done. That's okay too.

0:50:28 Jason: So we just are very careful about making sure we don't create too much work for ourselves in the summer months, May through to September. Anyway, that's what we do, so we have that. We also, I think we have probably the best benefits package. I'm gonna brag here for a second. But probably, the best benefits package in the world, I would say. If you go to basecamp.com/handbook, you can see our entire employee handbook online, and you can see the section about benefits and read it for yourself.

0:50:57 Jason: We take very, very, very good care people here, and that's one of the reasons why we've wanted to stay small, because the fewer people you have, the more money you can essentially spread across them in the form of benefits and really nice perks and whatnot, so we take really good care of people that way. We allow people to work wherever they wanna work. So we have... We're mostly a remote company, we have 14 people in Chicago.

0:51:20 Jason: Actually, I think it's 13 or 12 now, two people just moved away. I think 12 people in Chicago and the rest are in 40 different cities around the world. And even the people who work in Chicago rarely come to the office, so we can work remotely. And it's just kind of a wonderful way to work. You work wherever you wanna work and in the environment that you find to be productive for yourself. You can come to the office or you can work in a coworking space. You can work at home, you can work in a coffee shop, whatever it is.

0:51:46 Jason: And a lot of autonomy, open days, wherever you wanna work, shorter summer hours, clear expectations over the next six weeks, but then nothing beyond that, and then all you have to focus on over the next six weeks is the stuff that's been assigned to you in a broad sense. It's a very, I would say this is gonna sound kinda weird, but a very adult place to work. I feel like a lot

of companies...

[chuckle]

0:52:13 Jacob: That doesn't sound weird at all.

0:52:13 Jason: I feel like a lot of companies are kinda childish, they treat adults like children. Too much checking in, and too much, like you can't think for yourself, and too much needing permission to do everything. And we're very open-minded here about... We have great people who work here here. We want them to have a full day of themselves, here's the direction we're headed, and you figure it out, you go and figure this out yourself, we trust you. And if you have questions and you need help, you can ask for it, of course we're always here to help. But for the most part we trust you to get your job done and make good judgment calls along the way. So that's kinda how we are here.

0:52:48 Jacob: It's funny, a lot of people brag, the whole Inbox Zero where they can never get rid of all their emails. And for me, that's a clear sign of somebody who's micromanaging, because there's really no reason... If you're giving your employees decision-making power and autonomy, they really shouldn't be cc-ing you and including you in every single email that goes out, and you would have no problem getting to Inbox Zero. But inside of a lot of organizations, we don't give employees any autonomy, no freedom, no decision-making. And so they always have to cc everybody else all the time, and then everyone gets a 1,000 emails every day.

0:53:23 Jason: Totally, and there's too many people involved in too many decisions, and that's the other thing we try to limit here. We don't really have meetings here, if we do, there's three people in the room, max.

0:53:32 Jacob: Wow.

0:53:34 Jason: I don't want a lot of people in the room, around any table. We can have company-wide discussions, and we do in Basecamp all the time, but when it comes down to actually making a decision, fewer people make better decisions. You can listen to a lot of people and inform yourselves, but a few people should hash it out and make the call move on. So we're very careful about that. And I think one of the best ways to be indecisive is to ask just one more opinion.

0:54:00 Jason: Sometimes we think like having another opinion is gonna make things clearer. It actually makes things fuzzier, almost always, unless everybody agrees. If everybody agrees, you probably didn't need it anyway, but it can be confirmation. But in the case where not everybody agrees, and you ask one more person their point of view, or two more people their point of views, it just slows everything down, you become, you start to second guess yourself some more, indecision sets in and things slow down, you don't get anywhere.

0:54:24 Jason: So we're very, very careful about that. We make calls quickly, recognize that most decisions are temporary anyway. There are very few things that we decide that we can't change our minds on. They're always some, but most things we can change our mind on. And we just kind of keep that in mind, so it doesn't, like we're not, we don't live in fear of the decisions we have to make.

0:54:42 Jacob: Yeah. Well, maybe one more question for you before I have some just fun rapid fire questions for you. And it's really around advice that you would give to leaders of organizations. And I'm sure a lot of people listening to this, they are part of organizations that are probably quite large,

hundreds, thousands of employees. And maybe they're looking to adopt or emulate some of the practices that you have. What can leaders do to start to, I don't know, make changes, give their employees more time, practice the autonomy, the decision-making? Any steps that you would take if you, let's say took over as CEO of a big company?

0:55:18 Jason: Yeah, sure. So the first thing I would probably do is, you gotta tread gently and lightly initially, 'cause some of these ideas are pretty radical and will flop if you just kind of try to go cold turkey and throw them all on a company. So one of the things, we encourage people to do is, and this kind of proves itself out pretty quickly. If you work somewhere where everyone's talking all the time and it's chaotic, and talking either out loud or via chat or it's like craziness at work basically, like too much communication and interruption all day long, instant messaging, chat, all this stuff.

0:55:49 Jason: Let's say, like pick one day a month, let's say the first Thursday of every month, no one can talk to each other, period. In any way. Unless, again, unless there's like a fire and you need to get out of the office, right? Like no one can talk to each other. So let everyone have a day to themselves one day a month. Not a day off, but a day at work to themselves. No meetings, no conversations, no sound, no chat, no interpersonal communication, nothing.

0:56:18 Jason: And one day a month what'll happen is, people do that, it'll be a little awkward the first time or two. Pretty soon people are gonna become much more self-independent and they are going to go, "That was amazing. I got so much stuff done that Thursday. Can we do that again? Can we do that twice a month?" And what's gonna happen is, it's gonna infect the organization, everyone's gonna want more of that, because they're gonna see what their normal days look like, and they're gonna have contrast. If you wanna change something, you need to provide some contrast to show the difference.

0:56:52 Jason: And so that's like the simplest version of difference I can come up with, which is one day a month. And if you can't spare one day a month to do this, then like, you're in deep trouble. And got to spare one day a month for experiment to improve the way you work. So I would try that. And like let the results speak for themselves, but you gotta give it, maybe have to give it a couple 'cause the first one's gonna be a little awkward. People are gonna be giggling in a strange way. It's gonna be just weird 'cause people aren't used to it.

0:57:17 Jason: But they're gonna look back and then go, "God, that was amazing. I got so much stuff done." It's just like when you have to jump on a plane and go somewhere and your flight is three hours, you get so much done in that three hours if you're actually working, than you would if you were in the office for three hours.

0:57:30 Jacob: Yeah, you can't talk to anybody. You're just sitting there. [chuckle]

0:57:33 Jason: Yeah. If you can simulate that at work, which is what we are every day, but for a company that's not like that, I would just say, take that easy step by picking one day a month and try it. And you'll see it's gonna be great. Maybe turns out that, for whatever reason your organization is not like ours and you can't do what we do every day, for whatever reason, but you can do it two days a week, or one day a week or three, whatever it is, you find the right balance for you. But I would start with one day a month, and people are going to feel it and want more of it. And then it kind of begins to take on a life of its own, and you kind of settle out and figure out what's gonna work out for you.

0:58:06 Jacob: I like that. Okay, so for leaders, try to implement something like that. Any other things that you recommend leaders do in their organizations besides that one thing, or is that kind of the best?

0:58:19 Jason: I would do that. Truly, I would just do that, like that's enough.

0:58:21 Jacob: Okay.

0:58:22 Jason: That's hard enough for a lot of companies, even though it shouldn't be, but I would just start there.

0:58:25 Jacob: Okay, cool.

0:58:26 Jason: Yeah.

0:58:27 Jacob: Well, last few questions for you, just rapid fire questions. Starting off with, what has been your greatest failure?

0:58:34 Jason: This is gonna sound weird, but I don't think about failure. I think about like, mistakes. And then they're just moments in time. So I just I don't really look back on things and go, "That was it." I mean, clearly I've made mistakes in my life, but like, they're moments and you kind of move on from them, and hopefully you don't do them again. It's not like what you learn from them, it's more like what don't you wanna do again.

0:59:00 Jacob: What's been your biggest, biggest business mistake I guess?

0:59:01 Jason: Yeah, I mean, I think, a sense of delusion. In that... Back in, before we switched our company, so we used to be called 37signals. Today, we're called Basecamp. This happened about six years ago, we switched over our name, because right before that, we built four or five or six, depending on how you count, different products. And we had a small company, we had 20 or 30 people at that time, maybe 20 or something, 20-ish.

0:59:29 Jason: And what happened was, we were, became addicted to building new things, 'cause that's exciting, you build new stuff and you launch new things. And every year we built something that we built. 2004 we launched a product, in 2005 we launched a product, actually a couple. 2006 we launched a product, 2007 we launched a product. We kept launching these things. And... But we also want to stay a small company. And what ended up happening was we had too many products, we began to neglect them. We weren't improving them over time. But we didn't wanna hire more people. So we got ourselves in this corner, which is like, we can't maintain everything we built at a high level of quality that would satisfy us and satisfy our customers, yet we don't wanna grow. What are we gonna do?

1:00:08 Jason: We decided ultimately to go all in on just one thing, on Basecamp. So we spun off other products or merged them into Basecamp, so we can go down to essentially focusing entirely on one product. That was a great idea. But before that, getting ourselves to the point of having to make that decision, I think was a big mistake of ours. We didn't see the implication, the longer term implication of building more and more new things, we didn't recognize that we have to maintain these things over time. That we'd have to improve these things over time.

1:00:36 Jason: And it was in direct conflict with our, also our interest not to grow. A lot of

companies could do what we did, but they would keep hiring and hiring and hiring, but we didn't wanna do that, so we kind of had blinders on and didn't pay attention to the reality, what we wanted and what we were doing, were two different things.

1:00:55 Jacob: Got it.

1:00:56 Jason: So it was a little bit of organizational turmoil there, and to figure out how to deal with that. But we made the right call ultimately, but I think that was... I think we got ourselves in a corner, in a pickle there and had to deal with it.

1:01:07 Jacob: What's your most embarrassing moment at work?

[chuckle]

1:01:08 Jason: Embarrassing moment. I think what I'm personally embarrassed by at the moment, is I've lost some of my skills that I used to have. And I have new skills now, I do different things now, but when I started this business, I did all the design, all the visual design, all the HTML, and then when CSS came out, basically I was doing all the CSS and all the styling and everything, right? A little bit of Javascript and all that stuff. My skills there have definitely atrophied because I haven't been focused on that stuff, I've been focusing on other things. And so it's more of a personal embarrassment to me that I can't always go in and fix things like I used to do, or go in and update things like I used to do, or change things like...

1:01:56 Jason: Or if I can, it just takes me a day to dig in and figure out what the hell's going on before I can do it, when before, I'd have been like, "Oh I know how to fix this," or, "I know where that is," or, "I know how to do that." And so this is a constant state for me now because I'm just... The last number of years I've been doing things, focusing on different things and trying to help other people and build up teams and do a lot more writing on a lot more strategic thinking and a lot more sort of "CEO style stuff", which I enjoy a lot, but it also means that I had to give up some of my other skills.

1:02:26 Jason: And they're still there but they've definitely atrophied, and I find that to be difficult to handle sometimes. More frustrating. It's more frustrating I guess than embarrassing. But I'm personally embarrassed by it, I would say, but it's really more personally frustrating that I have to ask someone else to help me to do something I used to be able to do on my own.

1:02:43 Jacob: Makes sense, makes sense. What are you most proud of?

1:02:48 Jason: My team, the company we have here. The way people treat each other. The fact that today we celebrated another employee who had their 10th year anniversary here today. A lot of people here stick around. I think close to half our company's been with us for more than five years. Something like a 25 maybe of the 50-some odd. Or 20. Have been with us more than 7 years. We have a really good crew. People who stick here, stick around, treat each other well, are enjoyable to work with, and continue to grow and become better people and take care of each other. That's the stuff that I love.

1:03:24 Jason: Aside from all the fundamental... I love the product, I'm very proud products we've put out. I'm very, very, very proud of the way we treat our customers, all that stuff. I'm proud of what we stand for. But I think ultimately I'm really proud of what happens inside the company, and how we work and how we respect each other and how we treat each other, and how we, we're there

for each other, but also how we go away for each other.

1:03:45 Jason: And that we're not working together all the time, we have lives outside of work and we're individuals outside of work, and I really appreciate that too. We're not the kind of company that says, "Everyone's family here, we're all gonna do everything for each other, no matter what it takes." I don't think that that's a healthy thing for companies. I think companies should... We should treat each other as co-workers, respectfully, but we're not a "A family who's willing to do anything for each other." But we're willing to look out for each other as friends would. And as respectful co-workers would. And I'm really proud of how that's turned out.

1:04:17 Jason: So yeah, my people, my team, being part of that team, being able to work around wonderful people every day. And also I would say broadly, even more broadly, it's our ability to maintain our independence. So to me personally, independence is the most valuable thing in business. I don't have to answer to anybody, I don't have to answer to investors, we don't have any. I don't have to answer to the public, in that we're not a public company.

1:04:40 Jason: I of course answer to some degree to our customers, but that's a much different deal. I like that deal. They pay us directly, we respond for them, we build things for them, and that's better and that's fine, than just responding to someone who happens to own a piece of your company, or the public who owns 300 shares of your company or something like that. I don't ever wanna be in that situation. So we get to do the things we wanna do, the way we wanna do them, and that's incredibly valuable to me and something I'm very proud of.

1:05:06 Jacob: What's your favorite business or non-business book? And it can't be one of yours.

1:05:14 Jason: Business or non-business book. So there's a book... Let me just get the... Saw the title over here. So it's 60 pages long. Very short. It's called The Manual, by Epictetus.

1:05:29 Jacob: The Manual?

1:05:30 Jason: The Manual. By Epictetus. Although it's translated. He was stoic philosopher way back when. And I find it to be the most profound 60 pages I've ever read. And it's not even 60 pages, because it's 60 pages, but some of the pages are like three sentences or like a paragraph or two. And it's just 60 thoughts on how to live a better life, how to live a life of tranquility or a life of calm, or a life that you're recognizing what you're in control of and what you're not in control of.

1:06:02 Jason: It's kind of how to live a good life. And it's 60 pages and that's it. And it's wonderful. And so that's kind of something that I actually try to read that book almost once a month right now, lately. Because I wanna just really make sure that I hammer these points home in my head, and I find them to be really profound and interesting. So that's something that's I'd recommend everyone to check out, and really you can check... You can read it an hour, it's very short.

1:06:28 Jacob: And last two questions for you. Who's the best mentor you've ever had?

1:06:38 Jason: I don't know, I haven't had like a mentor. I tend to just pay attention to what other people are doing. So I think typically the way mentorships... The way mentor is sort of used is that, mentor is usually someone you know, who you can call on, who can coach you, who can answer questions, who can help you with a few things. I think there is a lot... I would say I have a lot of mentors that I never met. People who I may admire, people who I respect. Businesses, local

businesses, small businesses, big businesses, all sorts of different people. I just take a little bit from everybody.

1:07:14 Jason: So I don't really feel like I can answer that question specifically. Although I will say my dad gave some advice that is probably the most valuable advice I have received in business, which is, "No one ever went broke taking a profit." And that's something that I always think about. I always wanna do things profitably. We've been in business for 20 years, we've been profitable every year for 20 years. That means a lot to me. It's very... I have to be very... I'm very careful about making sure that we don't spend too much money, that we're always coming out ahead every year, that kind of thing.

1:07:50 Jason: So I would say like this first advice, that advice I got from my dad is really, really valuable. Another piece of advice I got, this came from Jeff Bezos, was, "Invest in the things that don't change." So his whole point of view on this was, he puts a lot of money and a lot of the time and investment into all sorts of new things at Amazon and whatnot, but also fundamentally Amazon's... He would say like, people don't wanna wake up in 10... People aren't gonna wake up in 10 years and go, "I wish I got my packages slower from Amazon."

1:08:28 Jason: Or people aren't gonna wake up in 10 years and go, "I wish customer service was worse at Amazon." Or people aren't gonna wake up in 10 years and go, "I wish selection was worse at Amazon." So his idea was, he gave us this advice years ago, was just like, "Focus on the things that don't change." So figure out in your business, what do you need to be good at now that'll never not be important. And that's a double negative there, but... So for example we've invested heavily in improving and in sustaining, I think, the best customer service in the business.

1:09:00 Jason: And people aren't gonna wake up and wonder, then wish our customer service was worse. They're always gonna want it to be better, and we're making, we've just been investing so much in hiring an amazing team and getting back to people within a matter of minutes if they email us, not a matter of days or hours but minutes, with real responses. We don't automate anything, there is no AI, there's no bot, it's all humans.

1:09:22 Jason: And they're all brilliant people. They're making a career out of customer service. Like all these things. So that's an example for us of... And also performance, like people are gonna want Basecamp and our other products to be slower. So we can always invest in performance and infrastructure to make sure things... And people aren't gonna say, "I wish things were less secure." Yeah, so those are the kinds of things that I think have really helped prime us for focusing on the fundamentals that matter. And also still, of course, we wanna do new things too.

1:09:51 Jacob: And very last question for you, if you were doing a different career, what do you think you would have ended up doing?

1:10:00 Jason: I don't know. I went to school, I got a degree in Finance, but I never wanted to work in a bank or anything like that. I just got that degree 'cause I was good at it. I don't know. I think if I was to ever stop doing Basecamp, I would not start another business again. Almost certainly would not start another business again. If I was fortunate enough to just retire at some point, I mean I still always wanna do something, but I would probably get into ceramics and just learn that.

1:10:33 Jason: I love ceramics, and I think it'd be fun just to do that all day. But I don't know, I'm 45, I'm focused on Basecamp. I want to keep doing Basecamp for another 20 plus years. And so I tend not to think of other things I would do if... It's a totally fair question by the way. I just don't... I

don't have a great answer for it. I'm not sure what I would have done, I'm not sure what I would do. And I'm very lucky, and I'm fortunate that I'm able to do what I do. And I'm currently in control of that, and that's the important thing for me.

1:11:04 Jacob: Hey, that's fair enough.

1:11:05 Jason: Yeah.

1:11:06 Jacob: Well, Jason, thank you so much for your time. And where can people go to learn more about you and Basecamp? I mean, anything that you wanna mention for people to check out, I know you've been doing a lot of writing on Medium as well. So anything for people to check out.

1:11:21 Jason: Twitter @Jasonfried F-R-I-E-D. We have another podcast too called Rework, that's @rework.fm. Where we talk a lot about some of these things that we talked about. And then check out Hey, H-E-Y.com, which is our newest product which is launching in April. And there's some stuff up about it now. If you're curious about email and curious about what we're doing next, I think that'd be a cool thing to check out.

1:11:45 Jacob: Very cool. Well, Jason, thank you again for taking time out of your day. I really appreciate it.

1:11:49 Jason: My pleasure. Take care.

1:11:51 Jacob: And thanks everyone for tuning in. Again, Jason Fried has been my guest. He's super easy to find, just google him. You'll find his articles on Medium and check out some of the resources that he mentioned. And I will see all of you next week.