

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.

You can listen to past episodes at www.TheFutureOrganization.com/future-work-podcast/. To learn more about Jacob and the work he is doing please visit www.TheFutureOrganization.com. You can also subscribe to Jacob's [YouTube](#) channel, follow him on [Twitter](#), or visit him on [Facebook](#).

Jacob 00:01

Hello, everyone, welcome to another episode. My guest today is Daniel Pink, someone who I'm sure many of you are familiar with. He's written many bestselling books, including Drive, A Whole New Mind, and his most recent book called When: The Scientific Secrets Of Perfect Timing. Oh man, Dan, it's one of those days, but I'm glad I finally get it out there. Thank you for joining me.

Dan 00:25

It's.... whatever works.

Jacob 00:27

Yeah. Well, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me.

Dan 00:31

My pleasure, Jacob. Thanks for having me.

Jacob 00:32

So I usually like to get started with just some background information about the guests. So how did you get involved with what you're doing now? I mean, take us way back. Do you even remember the very first job that you had?

Dan 00:45

Oh, take me up so we can go we can go way back because I think there are I don't know maybe there are some routes or maybe the routes that it seemed to be routes when you look at them brick, respectively. So I grew up I grew up in in in Central Ohio. I You know, pretty normal, middle class middlebrow kind of childhood, went to college, majored in linguistics, decided to go to law school at the time, I was keenly interested in politics. And but to make a very long story short, I got sort of tired of working in politics and realized that deep down, I was a writer and I had always been a writer and that that's what I should be doing. And it also going back to the idea of childhood, I'd always been really interested in work, what people did for their jobs. And so that's how I kind of in a really sort of half assed meandering way ended up doing what I'm doing now.

Jacob 01:44

It's so what was the actual first full time job you ever had?

Dan 01:48

The first full time job? I mean, I worked at some jobs when I was in when I was in high school. I remember I worked believe it or not, I worked As a like in a basement doing polls like for like telephone polls, you know, like calling people and asking questions when I was I had that job for some of the time that I was in high school so I think that's I think that's the first thing that I remember. Actually the very first thing that I remember in that was I was a substitute newspaper delivery person for the Columbus Dispatch

Jacob 02:29

How did you get to be the substitute.

Dan 02:31

Well, because for whatever reason, I they would never give me like a newspaper route like I would all I wanted very badly to have like a newspaper route. This is back in it like I'm showing my age here. Because this is back in the day that not only did people have newspapers delivered to their homes, but they were often nowadays I still get it printed, delivered to my house here in Washington, DC. They are thrown from a car by an adult In the old days, it was like teenagers or even younger than that he would just ride around on every bikes. And I always wanted to do that if for whatever reason I never, they never gave me the dispatcher, the dispatcher never gave me a route but allowed me to fill in for people who were sick or away or something like that.

Jacob 03:17

Geez. Yeah, come a long way since then for sure. Well, when you look at just the world of work in general, from kind of the first job that you had to where we are now, what are some of the big changes that you think we've seen in the world of work?

Dan 03:33

Oh, my God. I mean, they're been massive. I mean, I mean, it's on on on that it's essentially bottomless. That's essentially a bottomless subject. Have you have, you know, at a very broad level, you have, you have a shift. I grew up in Ohio, as I mentioned. So at the time that I was growing up, that was that that was at the moment that routine mass production jobs were disappearing but but until that time you know, the you had an enormous number of jobs in this country that were people who were doing physical tasks, repeatable physical tasks over and over again for decent wages.

Dan 04:20

And when I was growing up those days were ending they have fully ended now that there's almost no jobs like that in the US economy and you have so but if you want me to enumerate There are all kinds of things so one of them obviously, is a shift from routine mass production jobs to other kinds of jobs but with you know, nominally service jobs, but even the category service jobs to me doesn't make a lot of sense because the person working at a fast food cat or and a person and doing management consulting for McKinsey are both service work. So those are two very different kinds of jobs. So within those jobs you have, you have a you have a divide in service jobs.

Dan 05:00

And then you know, even now during COVID, you have the where people are working has changed. So it's it's really I mean, it's pretty, it's, it's, it's pretty massive if you were to if I were to as a kid, come to my office now, you know, my computer would be unrecognizable. Like I wouldn't know what a computer was, it seemed like a lap would seem like an elaborate typewriter. The idea that I am that the idea that if I want to know even the smallest fact I can just type a few things on my computer and find it instantly.

Dan 05:34

The idea that I can video chat with just about anybody who also has a computer is is mind boggling when I was a kid, you and I, as your listeners might not know are talking via Skype. You and I are talking for free if I'm old enough to remember long distance calls. So I mean it's such a vast topic, the way things have The way that it work and how we how we work, what we do where we do it, who we do it with has changed. I mean, it's massive.

Jacob 06:06

Yeah. It's been an amazing shift. And I mean, Drive came out. I think it's almost a decade now. I think next year, it'll be a decade. 2001 is when I came out.

Dan 06:16

Uh Drive came out, I think 2010

Jacob 06:19

or 2010? Sorry, not 2001. Yeah. almost a decade. And so, have you noticed? So since that book came out almost a decade ago? Have there been a lot of changes since Drive or do you think a lot of the concepts from that book are still very much relevant and applicable today? Or if you had to add anything to it? Is there something that you would add to it?

Dan 06:40

Well, I do think the concepts are relevant. I mean, that book looks at 50 years of social science and comes to the conclusion that the way we motivate people within organizations is often wrong. And this goes to some changes in the way that work has changed. So the big idea from all of that research is that there's a certain kind of motivator that we use in organizations. Psychologists call it a controlling, contingent motivator, I like to call it an if then reward. As an if you do this, then you get that

Dan 07:21

50 years of social science tells us that if then rewards are extremely effective for simple tasks with short time horizons, they work really well. And what and the head fake and all of this in some ways is this, you know, is us thinking too much about as I was saying before, the distinction not only within service jobs, but also between blue collar and white collar jobs. It doesn't really matter in those in this case, whether the task is turning the same screw the same way on an assembly line of blue pirate job or processing paper in a certain way working for an insurance company a white collar job. If the task is simple, and a time horizon is short. If/then rewards if you do this, then you get that are really effective.

Dan 08:03

However, if then rewards the same body of research tells us are far less effective for more complex creative work with longer time horizons. And one of the big changes getting back to one of your earlier questions is that what has happened is this, in my view, we've gone most of a lot of the work happening today is not routine. So essentially what I'll give you a more elaborate answer to your future of work question by going back in time a little bit.

Dan 08:33

So you know, at the beginning of the 20th century, you had an enormous number of people in this economy in the American economy, their jobs were in agriculture, they were they were they were farmers and farm related things. Then what happened? Technology improved and so we got better at farming. We could grow more crops with fewer people, we could raise more animals with fewer people. That's because of technology, technological advances over ever so slowly, we were able to import food from other places. So we didn't have to grow all of our stuff. Trade helped us out there. And also as societies got richer, they wanted things other than food, they wanted mass produced goods.

Dan 09:17

And so eventually these things gather enough steam, and then moves us to a new era where the central economic actor isn't a farmer, but is as I was saying before a manufacturing worker whose job it was to do essentially repetitive tasks with material with material goods, and so and that prevailed for a long time, and that gave people a foothold in the middle class. But then what happened, then you had the same kind of thing we got we got very good at making stuff very good at making mass produced goods. So we could do it, we could make just as many with fewer people. We also began importing Those kinds of goods from other countries. So technology, so trade and globalization played a role, and we got wealthier.

Dan 10:07

And so we want to things beyond mass produced goods. These are these three phenomenon that I'm talking about, I like to refer to as the three A's, Asia automation and abundance. That is we can import stuff from Asia and other places. audit, we automate certain kinds of blue collar mass produced tasks. And affluence changes the demand function. So we want other kinds of things. So what happens there this is now we're getting into my lifetime where these forces gather enough steam and boom, move us to a different economic era.

Dan 10:38

This economic era is the era of the knowledge workers as Peter Drucker famously said, and so, and so the This is why when I was growing up in Ohio, that the council was changing that is, if I had grown up in Ohio, maybe 10 years earlier, people would have said, Oh, just go get a job in a factory. You're going to be fine. When I was Growing up, they said, Wait a second, getting a job in a factory isn't going to give you a foothold in the middle class, you got to go to college, you got to do some kind of you got to go become an accountant or an engineer or lawyer or something like that.

Dan 11:10

And so and so what I think is happening now, this is a very, very long winded answer to your very simple question is that the same kinds of factors that pushed us from the agricultural age to the mass production age, which then pushed us from the mass production age to the information age, or pushing us again, into a different economic Era. Because what's happening now is that it's easy to automate certain kinds of knowledge work.

Dan 11:36

So if you think about tax preparation, we don't need as many accountants or accountants do different things, at least when there's Turbo Tax. We're able to import white collar work essentially by through outsourcing and an affluence increases, so the demand so we demand different things. And so right now, I think that the future of work is people doing things that will, that are hard to outsource hard to reduce to a spec sheet and send overseas, hard to automate reduced to lines of code, or become a, you know, done entirely by artificial intelligence or machine learning, and that meet the demands of more affluent society.

Dan 12:21

And so the way this connects the motivation, if you can believe it, that it does is that you have more and more people who are doing things that are more creative and conceptual. And what we know from a rich body of social science is that for that kind of work, if then rewards the classic kind of reward that we use in organizations aren't very effective and that if you really want to prepare people for the, for the future of work and create the conditions in which people can be motivated the future of work, you need to approach that task differently.

Jacob 12:53

Are you worried at all about automation because there's been a lot of debate on whether or not this is going to be Huge negative, putting a lot of people out of work or creating a lot of new jobs. And I'm sure you've thought about this. So where do you stand on that?

Dan 13:07

Well, I mean, I I stand as a skeptic of people of most situations where people say this time is different. And I'll tell you why. When we moved from when we made that those transitions that I described in torture detail a moment ago from agriculture, say to mass production, from farmers to knowledge workers, you heard the same thing. It's like, Well, wait a second. We're gonna have widespread we're gonna have widespread unemployment. We are going to what, you know, we can't, we're gonna have widespread unemployment. All of these machines that make growing corn more efficient are going to put farmers out of work. And that ended up not being true.

Dan 13:51

I'll give you I'll give you a better I'll give you a better example of it. We were concerned about that when we move from you know, the mass production age to the information age where, you know, in again in in in my lifetime there was there have been there were like a famous example of it as in 1960, late 1960s 67, or something like that, then President Lyndon Johnson put together a blue ribbon panel of labor market experts to talk about what was going to happen in the year two, the far off year 2000,

because of the rise of these giant machines called computers. And the best experts at the time said there was going to be widespread unemployment because there's going to be nothing left for people to do. And so so every time we're at a transition like that, we were understandably worried that there aren't going to be any jobs but they're what we've what we do is we underestimate human ingenuity.

Dan 13:52

So I can personalize this when my father was, you know, living in Ohio. Well, you know what my father again on Grover, Ohio. My father says he's hearing the self proclaimed experts like his Turned out to be talking about the move from the manufacturing age to the information age. It from from a manufacturer kind of your service kind of my own father said wait a second, that's not an economy and economy is making stuff. We can't have an economy where people are running around giving each other haircuts that'll never work. And what he and others didn't realize was was all the incredible, you know, we he would have no idea Oh, people have jobs as search engine optimizers people have jobs as data scientists, people have jobs as social media specialists. The explosion of jobs in in healthcare people have jobs as as learning designers for online learning.

Dan 15:38

And so, you know, history has shown that it's a fallacy known in economics as the lump of labor fallacy that there are only a finite number of jobs to be had. And when you automate some of them, we ended up with massive job loss. That has never been the case in the past. I think it's unlikely to be the case in the future.

Jacob 15:55

I think the ATM example was another one that's oftentimes referenced as well. Well Everybody thought we're gonna have fewer bank tellers, but instead we ended up having more bank tellers as a result of

Dan 16:05

Exactly we ended up having more exact Well, we ended up having more, we ended up hiring more bank tellers, and to some extent bank tellers have done different things.

Jacob 16:12

Yep. Yeah. Well, good. I'm glad to know that you err on the side of..

Dan 16:17

It doesn't mean that doesn't mean it's going to be easy. I mean, I want to say that you what you need, what this country hasn't done a good enough job of is preparing people for those kinds of for those kinds of transitions. And so what we have now one reason we have such massive inequality is because the labor market is returning out is delivering outsized returns to some kinds of skills, some kinds of capabilities and not to other kinds of capabilities, and we're leaving, you know, we're leaving people behind.

Dan 16:53

So you can't just you can't simply say, Oh, the economy's transitioning, automation is going to destroy a bunch of jobs, figure it out yourself. You got to give people the social safety net, you got to give people

a springboard into new kinds of jobs. You got to make sure that people are educated throughout their, their their lifetimes. You know, it's a whole array of policy measures to make sure that nobody suffers because that

Jacob 17:18

Yeah, solutions not just gonna happen by itself. Make sense. Okay, so in another book, you actually talked in Free Agent Nation. That also came out quite a few years ago, where you were actually talking about what we're I think we're starting to see more of now gig workers, freelancers. What have you seen in that space since that book came out?

Dan 17:40

So Well, thank you for mentioning that. That one is 20 years old. That was about the rise of people working for themselves as freelancers Lancers self employed professional two decades.

Jacob 17:50

That's crazy that they came out two decades ago.

Dan 17:53

Yeah, I think it was a little as they say in politics, I might have been a little ahead of the voters and the You know what I, what i what i said there was that at the at the time, I figured there may be one in six people working like that those numbers, these these numbers, these kinds of things. This area is notoriously hard to count. But I think the numbers have probably risen. The numbers have probably risen a little bit. I think on that one I might have. It's pretty remarkable because I wrote that not only before we think about social media, okay, that was way before social media. We think about smartphones. That was in 2000. The, the iPhone came out in 2001. The iPhone came out in 2007. So it was six years before the iPhone. No, we didn't have smartphones, really. We didn't have social media. The amazing thing is that we didn't really have broadband.

Jacob 18:44

I was gonna say, yeah, no broadband internet.

Dan 18:46

I mean, people were using dial up connections via AOL and other kinds of things. And so the forces that allowed people to work for themselves I think have accelerated and deepened. One of them is is obviously technology. So more powerful technology, technology has gotten exponentially more powerful and exponentially cheaper. It's putting more computing power and communications power in the hands of individuals.

Dan 19:15

One other reason was that, you know, again, going back to obviously, the theme of your show is the future of work. If we go to the past of work, there was a different kind of social contract between organizations and individuals. The social contract that reigned for a long time for not for everybody, but for a large portion of the workforce was that the organization would give security and in exchange, the individual wouldn't give loyalty. That bargain is gone. And so and so, that's it. So that's another reason.

So people said, Well, if you're not going to give me security, why do I give you Why should I give you organization any kind of loyalty so you have people moving a little bit more readily from jobs to job. Job tenure is depending on how you're measure it shrinking in many, many cases.

Dan 20:05

So it's technology. It's the changing relationship of the changing relationship of organizations to individuals, a whole host of forces that that were present 20 years ago, but I think I've just boomed in the last, you know, eight or nine years.

Jacob 20:24

Are you happy that you don't have a full time job working for a big company nowadays?

Dan 20:29

Yeah, I mean, I was happy. I was happy when I was happy when I you know, I was happy when I left working for a regular working regular job to go out on my own. I think it's become, but again, I you know, I think it's become easier in some sense, because the technology is better. I think it's become easier in some sense, because more people are doing it so you're less of an outlier.

Dan 20:53

But what really matters is not so much the form of the employment whether you're working for yourself or you're working for a company, but really matters Do you have skills that are in demand. And so if you so at some, at some level that the people with skills and demand are going to be fine are fine, whether they whether they get a W2 or 1099. With the people who suffer, whether they're gig workers or or W2 workers are people who have skills that people have skills that aren't in demand, and that don't have much bargaining power, the bargaining power that comes from collective action, like unions and other kinds of associations.

Jacob 21:33

And even now, with Covid we've seen a lot of people have to make career transitions. I know a lot of just friends, family members who are moving away from full time employment to trying to do their own thing because they got laid off because you know, they're...

Dan 21:44

Sure, I mean, that's what happens with that's what happens. I mean, that was a story in this move toward this move toward free agency, some people jump some people got pushed, and so now you have now you have a lot of people getting a lot of people being pushed. I think one of the interesting things about COVID that gives us a window, at least into the future of work is the move among white collar workers, certain kinds of white collar workers to remote working at, you know, people, more people working at home. I have been working at home. As I mentioned earlier I've been working on for 20 years. When I first started working at home I was, as I mentioned also, before, I was a little bit of an outlier. But now it's become...you know over time, it became far less abnormal and exotic.

Dan 22:30

And what I think the really amazing thing is that even for people working in companies, they were often resistant to remote working because they said, Oh, that'll never function smoothly. That's just impossible. And the amazing thing to me is that after years of saying it'll never work, it's not it's not feasible. You know, in 10 minutes, organizations switched. And people are working, you know, people working remotely not so you have the Googles and the Facebook's of the world who are going to be working Remote letting people work remotely or in some cases requiring people to work remotely for the next 11 months. And so I think that's I think that's a I think that's a potentially significant lasting change from COVID. And that remote working is going to become much more much, much more much more normalized.

Jacob 23:20

Yeah no, I agree. I think the shift towards flexible remote work will be much more embraced. You know, there's so much of a stigma around it, where if you work from home, you're you're kind of lazy, you don't really want to make progress in your career. Yeah, there was always this stigma around that. And I think that's definitely going to disappear and we'll see more flexible work going forward. And you mentioned that you've been working from home for for a while. So I kinda want to give people a little bit of a behind the scenes into into Dan Pink. So are you do you just work yourself? Do you have a team that supports you with all the content that you do? or How are you structured just yourself?

Dan 23:58

Okay, I'll happily answer that. So I am so let's because I think that I mean, I actually like hearing about the nitty gritty from other people. I think it can be useful to other people. I've made mistakes I figure stuff out. So here's what I do. So on the on the forum, I have an S Corporation Daniel Pink incorporated for tax and liability purposes. So I believe it or not, myself, get a W2, I get a W2 from my employer, Daniel Pink, who pays me a salary.

Jacob Morgan 24:33

Seems like a nice guy.

Dan 24:34

Yeah, no, it's like, it's like the old joke about working for yourself. Like, you know, I love having me its boss. I hate having me as an employee because I'm lazy as hell. And so that's the that's the forum. There is one other employee of Daniel Pink Inc. That is my wife who has been working for the firm for A long time now, she does just a whole array of things from she's a lawyer, so she does all the legal stuff, taken care of a lot of the contracts, she also does all the financial, accounting, bookkeeping, all that, all that sort of stuff.

Dan 25:17

And she's involved in the editing and creation of some of the, the, you know, the media project and so forth. So, so she plays a big role in that. And then that's it. Beyond that, though, I have a lot of really talented contractors who I work with for certain kinds of projects. So whether it's my newsletter, whether it's the Pinkcast videos that I do, obviously books, I work with a publisher, you know, TV projects that

work with production companies, and TV networks, etc, etc, etc, etc. So, but the core is just as a two person operation.

Jacob Morgan 25:51

Very cool. Yeah, no, I mean...

Dan 25:53

And I work for the first part, the first stretch of real I think it's like 10 and 10. Pretty much if I think about this Yeah, I mean, you know, for the first decade or so, I worked on the third floor of my house. So we have my wife and I have three kids. So I worked on the third floor of our house. And then we moved and I now which are different house and we have took a one car garage and converted that to the office. So I'm talking to you from the one car garage behind my house in Washington DC that is Pink Inc. world headquarters.

Jacob 26:33

I love it. So the whole empire is being built from a from a garage, which has been I mean that's the entrepreneurial way right I mean, did your...

Dan 26:41

Yeah, yeah no, I thought there was something kind of I mean, it's the garage is refurbished like you wouldn't be like you would only realize is the garage when you It looks like a little It looks like a tiny tiny cottage but but once you once you because we refurbish it but once you look at the bones of it, you you realize that hey, he actually was once a garage Yeah. And so, so it's so tiny little space, but it's cool. It's mine, it works.

Jacob 27:06

So I want to jump to your new book and this time I'll get the title right without stumbling over my words, the new book when the scientific secrets of perfect timing, this is the most recent book that you that you put out. And can you talk a little bit about first the research that went into the book because as I was going through it, I was just sitting there thinking like, how, how does he do it? Like, how do you find like, where do you even begin to locate this research that you find and to even have the time to go through the amount of research that you go through? I mean, it's kind of mind boggling. I gotta be honest.

Dan 27:40

Uh, well, thank you for that. I appreciate that. Because I work my I work my butt off on that. So it's nice to hear. I mean, I I do appreciate hearing that someone at least recognizes that there was effort going into that. So, um, well, let me take a step back and then answer the question directly. So that book takes that book. That book, as you mentioned, is about timing. And I got to it. You know, again, reckoning with my own work where I would come to this little office behind my house. And I would do work. And I would make all kinds of decisions about when to do things. So when of the day should I do my writing? When should I do my interviews? When should I take a break? When should I answer my email? When should I start a project? When should I abandon a project that's not working?

Dan 28:24

And I was making those decisions in a very sloppy way which frustrated me. I wanted some guidance, I looked around for guidance. And I was surprised that the guidance didn't exist. And that got me curious, because as you mentioned, a couple of books that I've written a few books that I've written, have taken looks at large bodies of social science research, instead of wondering is any research on this question of timing? And I started looking around and it turned out there was and then as I started digging, I realized there was a huge amount of research and it was all over the place. It wasn't simply, you know, in one domain, it wasn't simply saying in Economics it was in economics, it was in social psychology. But it was also an anthropology it was in linguistics it was in molecular biology it was there's a whole field called pronto biology. It was in epidemiology. It was in anesthesia. I mean, there's like, you know, all these different fields and so, so it took me a, it took me two years to go through the research.

Dan 29:22

And it I also again, getting back to the idea of other talent helping, I brought in basically one and a half, research assistants to help me find stuff, especially and sort through stuff. So, so it was massive. It was a massive undertaking. But that's but that so that's, that's why I did and then it just and it's also paints that, you know, I sit here and sit here in this office and would read through would read through papers and make notes and then read through more papers and make notes and, you know, it's um, it's a laborious unglamorous process,

Jacob 30:02

I don't think people realize sometimes. Exactly what it takes to put out a book, like the one that you put out there.

Dan 30:10

It's kind of you say that and also like, is it something they should care about? Or is it material that is relevant, and they can trust that it's interesting that helps them to see the world in new ways. It helps them to do things differently in their in their lives. And, you know, if I say I'm gonna demand, but let's take that, but how long did it take you to read that book? Do you think cumulative?

Jacob 30:35

Um just total hours?

Dan 30:37

Yeah.

Jacob 30:38

Oh, man. I don't know. I'd say between four and six, maybe.

Dan 30:43

Okay, so you're pretty fast reader, I would think I would think it would take you know, it would take me longer to read that book. So you know, whatever. But let's just say let's, let's put up the upper end of that, let's say six hours. Okay. So I'm asking for six hours of your time. I'm saying Jacob, here's the thing. You should spend six hours with with me, um, and that's six hours that you're not going to spend

doing your other work spending time to get family exercising, eating, drinking, whatever. I'm just saying, like, it's so urgent that you hear what I have to say that the six hours you're spending with me is going to be more valuable than any six hours you can spend.

Dan 31:18

I better put in the effort, if I'm making that kind of demand on you. So I mean, it's so that's so so that's how I look at it. I mean, at some level Readers should be Readers should Readers should know that writers have put in the effort. But because that's a sign that's a sign of respect. What what bugs me is when it's very clear in a book or any other kind of piece, any other kind of product where writers have not put in the effort where they phoned it in and what what irks me about that is not only do I feel ripped off as a reader, but as a writer. I I'm I'm irritated because that person Has polluted the whole pond that that person makes a reader skeptical of other writers.

Dan 32:06

So to that person who you write a crappy book, who doesn't care about the details, who doesn't do the work? That person ends up actually tarnishing the many people who are duty to work? Sorry for that rant.

Jacob 32:23

No, no, I totally agree. Well, let's jump into that book, because there was actually Oh, man, so much stuff in there. So if there's something that that you want to pull out, feel free to interrupt me. But I have a couple things that I want to talk about. First, which is obviously the most glaring one is you talking about productivity and when people can be the most productive in the types of tasks that they're doing, which I think is very, very relevant for this audience. So can you talk a little bit about what you learned from that?

Dan 32:52

Sure. So there's a lot of research again, spread over various fields about how our performance changes in the course of a day and the day turns out to be pretty important. It's our understanding a hugely important unit of time for a whole host of reasons. So if you think about as a unit of time, you think about something like a second, a second isn't necessarily natural human beings have decided how long a second is. We could have human beings decided that a week would be seven days long. We could have, we could have declared, hey, let's make a week, nine days. And but we can't pick a day and say, Oh, I like a day to be shorter. Because we're on a planet. Well, we're not in control of how long a day, what a day.

Dan 33:37

And so the day turns out to be pretty fundamental. And if there's one thing that we should understand about the day, it's this, that our brain power, our cognitive abilities do not remain constant over the course of a day. That's really important. And I think a lot of us has had an intuitive sense with that. But the evidence on that is very persuasive. I mean, I think it's indisputable that our cognitive abilities change over the course of a day, they don't remain constant, that sometimes the fluctuate in big ways.

Dan 34:09

So the difference between a daily high point and the daily low point can be massive. And then also, the best time to do something depends on what it is you do. And once you understand those basics, you can begin to make better decisions about when to do things within a given day.

Jacob 34:27

So let's jump into a little bit about the different types of activities you should be doing depending on the day. And by the way, what if some people are listening to this and thinking like, Ah, you know, you just need a cup of coffee, or, you know, you just need to eat something and you'll be fine. You can do whatever at any kind of day. It's, I mean, it's clear that the research shows that there are very specific times when you should be doing.

Dan 34:50

I mean, there's I mean, again, if anybody looks at that book, we'll see we'll see big changes in performance based on big changes in performance based on time of day, I mean, so many examples. So you see it with, you see it with kids. So one of my, I think one of the most persuasive, one of the most interesting studies, at least to me is a study out of Denmark, where, where students in Denmark take standardized tests as they do here in the United States. In Denmark, the students take tests on a computer, rather than on, you know, bubble forms, as we did in Columbus, Ohio in 1979. That takes us on computers, but the typical Danish school has more students than computers. So everybody can't take a test at the same time. So the students in Denmark were randomly assigned to take tests of different times a day, some kids took the test early, some kids test late.

Dan 35:42

The kids who took the test in the afternoon, scored as if they missed two weeks of school that there were systematically lower scores from kids who took a test in the morning period, full stop. And again, that's not a one off. I mean, over and over again, you see differences. There's some interesting studies showing that corporate executives perform differently when they have earnings calls in the morning versus when they have earnings calls in the afternoon.

Dan 36:07

There is a massive amount of evidence that that healthcare delivery is different based on different times of day. So if you look at things like anesthesia errors, anesthesia errors are four times more likely at 3pm than they are at 9am.

Dan 36:25

If you look at handwashing in hospitals, handwashing in hospitals deteriorate significantly in the afternoon. I mean, over and over again, just about every dimension of performance, you see systematic differences in performance based on time of day. And so so so what while you might not always be able to control your schedule, most of us don't have full control over our schedule. It isn't simply the case that these differences are meaningless or that a cup of coffee can cure it. You actually want to take a much more thoughtful intentional systematic approach to when you do things in the course of the day.

Jacob 37:03

So as an employee, I mean, let's say work at a company. Um, how would you best advise to structure my day? What should I be doing in the morning, the afternoon and maybe in the evenings before I'm about to leave the office?

Dan 37:14

Yeah, okay. It's a great question and some of it and the short answer to word answers. It depends. It depends in part on something known as a chronotype. As I mentioned earlier, there's this field of science called chronobiology, Chrono time biology, study of life that looks at our biological rhythms, mostly our you know, our diurnal rhythms, all other kinds of things. And what it tells us is that human beings have different Chrono types, that is they have different propensity. Some of us wake up, naturally wake up early and go to sleep early. Some of us naturally wake up late and go to sleep late. A lot of us are in the middle and the distribution looks pretty much like this.

Dan 37:56

About 15% of us are very strong. warning people who just naturally wake up early naturally go to sleep early. So those are larks, about 20% of us are the exact opposite, we naturally wake up late and go to sleep late, those are owls. And about two thirds of us are in the middle, what I call third birds. But we sort of lean a little bit toward the larkey side of the spectrum. So to oversimplify what we can do is we can think of that we can think of the the the universe of human beings in two categories, owls and non owls, nighttime evening, chronotypes night people and the rest of us. So it's about an 80/20 split.

Jacob 38:41

So for a night person, some people might be thinking is a night person, somebody who like goes to bed at three in the morning, four in the morning, like is that what you're talking about? When you say a night owl?

Dan 38:52

Uh it depends. It's someone who has Well, I mean, there are ways of calculating so so so they're different. So there's a In psychological instruments out there chronobiological instruments out there instrument meaning like a survey and a way of measure that we were you can test this so there's something called the morning evening questionnaire there's something called the Munich chronotype questionnaire there it's someone in general whose Yeah, there it's someone who is the way that they make the way that it depends. That's we can we can we can because I don't want to be...We can figure out there's a back of the envelope way to figure out a chronotype. Okay, so the back of the envelope way to figure out a chronotype.

Dan 39:46

Let's just figure it out for you would be this. So tell me, when we have to think of a think of what's what's kind of biologists call it free day, a free day, which is a day where you can wake up when You want to sleep whenever you want, you're not catching up on sleep, you're not exhausted and trying to overcome a sleep deficit. You just wake up when you want go to sleep when you want. And that and that kind of a day, a free day. When would you typically go to sleep?

Jacob 40:13

Um probably somewhere near midnight.

Dan 40:18

Okay, so what we can say midnight, and when would you typically wake up?

Jacob 40:21

Assuming I don't have kids waking me up probably eight-ish, seven-ish seven or eight.

Dan 40:27

Okay, so this is so. So what we're, what we're doing here is we're figuring out the midpoint of sleep. So the midpoint of your sleep is 4am and here's what we know. Very common chronotype it's my chronotype as well, if your midpoint of sleep is before 3:30 you're probably a lark. If your midpoint of sleep is after 5:30 you're probably an owl. And if your midpoint of sleep is between 5:30 and 3:30, you're probably in between. And so you would be in between at with 4am That's exactly where I am. It's a very common chronotype. You're larkey, but not a full fledged Lark. So to be an owl, you would have to in this back of the envelope way your midpoint of sleep would be your midpoint of sleep would be say, let's say you go to sleep at two in the morning, and you would wake up at 10. So your midpoint of sleep would be 6am.

Jacob 41:22

Got it? Okay, that makes sense.

Dan 41:23

So yeah. So that's to me that unimaginable that, like, go to sleep at 2am. Or to wake up at 10. So, but But anyway, but so all this is to say, but what about 20% of population is that way. And going back to some of the early things we're talking about, you know, large organizations are not amenable to those kinds of folks. Those kinds of folks don't do well in large organizations because the boss wants you there at 8:30 in the morning, and you naturally want to be asleep at 8:30 in the morning, even though you're raring to go and doing great work at 11:30 in the evening.

Dan 42:01

So, all of its circling back to your original question, here's what we know. We're going to divide the world between owls and non owls. So late night types and the rest of us, for 80% of us, we tend to move through the day in this order a peak, a trough a recovery. We have a peak, early in the day, a trough in the middle of the day, and recovery later in the day. Owls are very different. owls hit their peak much, much, much, much, much, much, much later in the day, late afternoon, early evening, mid evening, late evening.

Dan 42:34

Here's what we know, during the peak, that's when we are most vigilant. Now again, for that's most of us, it's the morning, early in the day during the peak, that's when we're most vigilant. What does it mean to be vigilant. Vigilance means you're able to bat away distractions. So that makes the peak the best time to do what psychologists call analytic work. Analytic Work is work that requires heads down

focus and attention crunching numbers, writing a report, analyzing the steps of of a strategy where you have to be locked down, focused and non distractible. Writing is a good example of that. Because the greatest enemy of writing is distraction. So you want to do writing when you're at your, your least distractible, which for all of us is the peak for 80% of us that peak is early in the day.

Dan 43:23

During the trough early to mid afternoon. terrible time of day, all kinds of drops in performance. What we should be doing in our in our trough period is doing our administrative work, work where we can work that doesn't require massive brainpower or creativity. You know, quintessential example would be answering your routine email.

Dan 43:45

Finally, during the recovery period, which for most of us, 80% of us is late afternoon, early evening. Here's what happens there. Our vigilance is down later in the day, but our mood is actually up and that is a pretty interesting combination, high mood, low vigilance, that gives us a kind of mental looseness that is good for what psychologists call insight tasks. Those are more creative problems, problems with not obvious solutions, problems that require divergent thinking iterative thinking things like brainstorming. And, and that's pretty much the recipe here that what we should be doing is doing our analytic work in the peak, our administrative work in the trough, and our insight work in the recovery.

Dan 44:30

For most of us, that means doing our analytic work early, our administrative work in the middle of the day, and our our insight work, late afternoon, early evening, if you're an owl, it means that you should be doing your analytic work at night. And so, and again, with the science doesn't tell us that every like some of the life hacking sites say everybody should get up at 430 in the morning or 630 in the morning, and work for a certain amount of time and then take a break. You know that science doesn't give us that granularity of like actual, you know, the precise time you should start. But as a general pattern, that's what you should do analytic work in the peak administrative in the trough, and insight work in the recovery. And the trouble is that we don't do that.

Jacob 45:15

Yeah, there's some very like, prescriptive, you got to get up at 430. You got to get up at five without taking it out of consideration. Like who you I mean, none of the stuff that you talked about goes into the consideration that just to me is complete. I'm sure you found that to be quite annoying while you were working on the book, because you're like, wait a minute, this this whole 4:30-5:00am thing that's not quite so simple.

Dan 45:39

No, because here's the thing like, like, okay, so so you could tell me to wake up at 430, I could wake up at 430. But I feel miserable, and it would take me a long time to adjust and I still wouldn't feel great because my body doesn't naturally want to get up at 430. Now, here's the thing. If I were in the military, if I were a surgeon, if I had, you know, in an urgent work that I needed to do, of course, I could do that. But when I have some discretion over it for someone like me, it's not a great idea for me to get up at

430 in the morning. I'm better off getting, I'm better getting up a little bit late. I'm gonna get more work done if I don't get up at 430.

Dan 46:12

So all which is to say that what we need, but the really important point that you're raising there, because all of all of which is to say that one of the things that we can do, to figure out the right time to do stuff, is have this general set of principles of, you know, administrative work in the trough and insight work in the recovery and analytic work in the peak, but also just observe our own behaviors, see how we're feeling it, you know, experiment a little bit, observe how we're feeling and and and just try to recognize that all times a day are not created equal.

Jacob 46:43

Did you find anything about morning routines specifically, did that play a role into any of the research that you looked at?

Dan 46:50

Yeah, I mean, there's there are, I think the key with morning routines is for people to find the one that works for them. I don't think that there's a single one that is that is magical in any way. I mean, one of the things that I try to do, but again, you know, I'm a lazy, flawed person just like anybody else is for that helps me So, I mean, let me just personalize it so again so as we know, I'm more much more of a lark than an owl, but I'm not a super Lark. I'm, you know, in the middle, but larkey.

Dan 47:23

So for me, I am better off doing my analytic work in the morning. And I'm a writer, so I should be doing my writing in the morning. And so what I do now is it which I didn't always do. So what I do now on writing days is, is I get into my office, I don't get in if certainly early, I mean, you know, maybe 830. I mean, God bless in the pandemic I'm like, I'm getting to my office late 930 because I'm reading the paper and shaking my head in disbelief in the morning. And so, so, but I get into my office and on writing days, what I'll do is I will give myself a number of words that I have to write not a massive Number maybe like 500-800 or something like that. And I won't do anything else until I hit my number, I won't answer email, I won't bring my phone with me into the office, I won't have a meeting, I won't do anything else until I hit my number.

Dan 48:12

And for me, that kind of discipline, knowing that I am better doing that heads down work in the morning than any other time of day is one of the most important things that I do for my own productivity. And then I take the rest of the day to do other things that aren't writing. So that's so that's what I do. Because I don't because I do have this relatively short lived precious block of time, that I'm at my best for that kind of work. And I don't want to squander it, answering email.

Jacob 48:44

You know, somebody is going to be listening to the saying, well, Dan, that sounds great, but I can't really control my day or my schedule. My client wants to meet it this time. I can't do the stuff that you're talking about.

Dan 48:55

Yeah, I think that's I think that's a great point. So there are other things So let's say if it's a client, you know what you can do two things. Number one is you can just concede because the client is typically you want you want to serve your client as best as possible. The other thing is that you make a case to your client that for the best time that that it's in the client's interest for you to meet at your all your adoptable time.

Dan 49:24

If you're working for if the barrier is your boss, then it's a different it's different, but I think there's something to be said for having a conversation with your boss about when you're at your best. And so I've talked to people say I'm remember this guy in Philadelphia, who is a work in advertising agency who said I do my best. I'm a copywriter do my best right in the morning, but my boss makes me go to a nine o'clock meeting and a 10 o'clock meeting every day. So I have two hours of my best time to squandered. And so he went and talked to his boss and the boss is like, oh, okay, well, maybe we can do, you know, do things a little bit differently.

Dan 49:59

And then if you don't have control of your schedule, you know, work the margins when you can. So, so if so let's say that, let's say that you don't have any control of your schedule. But if you can get a half an hour during your peak period to do some heads down work, do that, take that half hour and declare victory. Don't take that half hour and go on social media or enter your email.

Jacob 50:20

Make sense. We only have a couple minutes left. So I want to touch on a few other interesting things that I found. One, you actually had some great tips for people who are at a midpoint slump, which I feel like a lot of people might feel like that now. So what were the four tips that you're talking about to get out of a slump?

Dan 50:42

Well, another aspect of timing is episodic time so that it beginnings affect us one way midpoint, specters another way endings affect this another way and midpoints are kind of peculiar because they have a they have a dual effect. They sometimes they drag us down at the midpoint sometimes at the midpoint we drag down, other times it fires up.

Dan 51:01

And so the first step in dealing with a midpoint slump is to recognize a midpoint. So, which we often don't do so for certainly for projects, if a project has a beginning and an end, by its definition, it has a midpoint. And the first thing to do is to acknowledge the midpoint and recognize the midpoint, there's some research from Connie Gersick showing that when teams got to the midpoint of a project, that when teams did a project, they spent the first half of the time doing very little, it was only when they got to the midpoint with that sort of freaked out a little bit and got to work.

Dan 51:34

And there's so So recognizing the midpoint and and understanding to do so one thing, recognize a midpoint two understand that midpoints have a dual effect and that you have some control over that. So use a midpoint to wake up rather than roll over. And then the third thing that you can do at a midpoint, which is effective and built on some research in about the National Basketball Association is to imagine that you're a little bit behind at the midpoint. There's some fast Did any research done by Jonah Berger at Penn, Devin Pope at University of Chicago...

Jacob 52:04

Yeah, I had Jonah Berger as a guest.

Dan 52:08

Yeah. And he's also he's also has a recent paper relatively recent paper on people's eating behaviors in the morning and for breakfast and lunch based on diurnal rhythms. So it's kind of an interesting, it's a very interesting, it's not in the book that came out after my book, but it's a very interesting paper. So he's done a lot of really cool work.

Dan 52:25

But what Pope and Berger did is they looked at National Basketball Association NBA games. Now one of the things that's interesting about basketball games, in contrast to life, where in life, the midpoint is often kind of murky or invisible in basketball, it is explicit. It's called halftime, right and, you know, a horn sounds. And so what they did is they looked to see whether the score at halftime predicted the final score of the game. To what extent the score at halftime predicted the final score of the game. And it turned out that teams leading at halftime were more likely to win, which is not a shouldn't be a shocker. You know, their teams ahead in the games have over.

Dan 53:09

But the exception to that is that teams that were trailing by one point, at halftime were more likely to win in teams that were ahead by one point at halftime, that being behind by one at halftime was as advantageous as being a head by two. And this is and they did some other research showing that when people feel like they're slightly behind at the middle, they really bring it in the second half. If people feel like they're way ahead of the half, they get complacent. And if they feel like they're way behind, they give up, but there's something about being slightly behind at the middle that seems to spark our motivation. So, you know, for midpoints is acknowledgement points to use them to wake up rather than rollover, and one way to do that is to imagine you're a little bit behind.

Jacob 53:52

I like it. I think it's very practical. I actually need to try that. I'm gonna try to implement that as well. Okay, so we just have like two, three minutes left. So I thought we would wrap up with just one, based on the research from your new book. What advice do you have for leaders out there who are leading teams? Should they change the way they do anything, maybe get to know their people a little bit better and kind of their preferences?

Dan 54:18

Yeah, I mean, I think that they should put us on the daily time, they should recognize, again, that that their team's brainpower doesn't remain constant over the course of the day. And that when people do stuff has a material effect on their performance, and you just have to be intentional about it. So you know, these leaders are intentional about what to do, you know, they all have to do lists and strategic plans and all that they're intentional about how they do stuff because they have, you know, they have coaches, they have learning and development and training departments. They're intentional about who does stuff because they have an HR department that hires people, but when it comes to when they do stuff as leaders or when their team does stuff, they think it doesn't matter and it matters evidence is overwhelming that it matters.

Dan 55:01

So my best advice is to fact is to give the when a seat at the table. I don't think that when people do stuff is more important than what they do, or how they do it, but it's as important. And so the biggest counsel is, especially when it comes to things like time of day is recognize that that the time of day when people do stuff matters.

Dan 55:23

The other thing is just to pay more attention to the temporal aspect of our lives, that leaders are dealing with they're leading episodic lives, and they're dealing with episodic situations in their firms so that every project has a beginning, it has an end it has a middle and just knowing that beginnings affect us one way. So actually picking the right date to start a project gives you a better chance, we talked about midpoints being where midpoints and the dual effect that it can happen and using it as a spark rather than a slot. Ending endings are enormously important in leadership endings, endings, endings can energize people if they see an end, and endings become an important way that people encode entire experiences.

Dan 56:12

So being so I guess my big point on this is to be aware of the effect of time and timing and to be intentional about doing something about and unfortunately, leaders in the rest of all of us when we essentially make our timing decisions by not making decisions at all, we make our timing decisions by instinct by guesswork by default. And what we should be doing is being aware and intentional about it.

Jacob 56:37

I think that's awesome advice. Well, I know we're pretty much out of time. You know, one of the things I loved about talking to you is that you don't take yourself too seriously. You're, I make some self deprecating jokes. So I bet. I mean, do you handle criticism? Well, if somebody says that they don't like your stuff, or they leave you a negative review online, how do you handle that stuff?

Dan 56:55

Well, I mean, I'm like I'm a human being so some something so if someone criticizes may sound like I relish it, but I, I, but, you know, I pay attention to it and I don't you know, I, you know, I like the I like to hear people out. I don't, you know, I don't. It's like, it's like, I think the way you deal with criticism is that you listen to it, you take it seriously, but you don't look at you don't you don't let it you don't let it destroy

you say is there something to learn here? If there is learn from it? If there's not, no, you know, don't let it destroy you.

Dan 57:26

It's like, it's like Eleanor Roosevelt had this famous line where she says no one can humiliate you without your consent. And so it's like, so if someone criticizes you know I get all kinds of nasty emails. And do you really know? Oh, yeah. And people? Yeah, not a lot. But people will say people say, I can't believe that. They let you write a book, online and that sort of stuff. And it's like, okay, like, I'm sorry, I haven't given you consent to make me feel bad about this.

Jacob 57:51

Yeah, that's crazy. Well, Dan, I know we're out of time. Where can people go to learn more about you and grab your book, you have the Pinkcast, which I've seen quite a few of those. So anything that you want to mention for people to check out, please feel free to do so.

Dan 58:04

I just go to my website, which is DanPink.com and there's all kinds of groovy stuff there.

Jacob 58:09

Awesome. Well, Dan, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me.

Dan 58:14

It's been a pleasure.

Jacob 58:16

And thanks everyone for tuning in. Remember, grab his new book, and I promise I'll say it correctly When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing, and I'll see all of you next week.