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Tue, 7/27 5:37PM 18:59

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

meetings, people, zoom, book, hours, spend, remote, objectives, team leader, accomplished, performance reviews, mit, boss, success metrics, lots, bob, advice, positive feedback, praise, mandarin



00:16

Good morning, Bob. It's nice to see you. How are you? Good. How you doing? Right? You're looking good. I like your background. We both spent some time at MIT. Yeah, it's a different perspectives. looking looking out at the river looking from across the river. It's good.



00:36

Yeah. So nice to see you today and for everyone joining us. So Bob is a professor at MIT. And before we work at MIT, Bob has done lots of amazing things in his career, whether it's being chairman of MFS, which is very large company now, thanks above helping it grow. He is the President at Fidelity Investments. And he's also had lots of experience with corporate boards, also in government. So he's had a career that's really kind of spanned many different experiences. And that helps Bob be able to share some of his experience with all of us around productivity, especially. So if you have a new book coming out, right? Yep, absolutely. Come out. So what was it about six years ago, you had your first book on productivity come out? And what was that called?



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That was called extreme productivity, boost your results, reduce your hours. And it was published in 2012. It made some top lists for business books and translated into 10 languages. So anytime you want to read the the Mandarin version, or the Japanese version, you can



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I have my husband and speak Mandarin. So maybe as a Christmas present? Yeah. Okay. So I'm French and German, Spanish, and my Germans, and that's a good anymore. But this is where, okay, so today with a world with COVID, and working remotely, and the game has changed. So I know that you have a new book coming out, he talks a little bit about that. And what inspired that.



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Yeah, the new book grew out of an executive Ed course that I taught at MIT, where we had all these mid level executives, and they were very interested in, you know, how they're going to work from home, at least part of the time, most of them working full time from home, but they expected to come back some part of the week. And the new books called remote Incorporated, how to thrive when you're working wherever you are. So it will really focus on remote work. That's a great title. Like, it's good. Like, I liked the title, because it can captures what we're trying to say here is remote incorporated means like you as a remote worker ought to think about yourself, as if you own your own business, and you're running your own business from your heart. So rather than you're being micromanaged by your boss, is going to tell you everyday do this, do that. You're gonna you're gonna agree with your boss on a set of objectives, and what we call success metrics. Meaning how we're going to actually measure your success at the end of the week, or the month, whatever time period, and that it's up to you to figure out how and when you do this. So that gives you a lot more autonomy, and allows you to reach a balance between work your work life and your home life, which obviously, is much more salient now. And it also gets away from this whole micromanagement thing, which I think will lead to much higher productivity.



04:07

Okay, yes, there's someone running a company. Now I can guarantee you with phones ringing off the hook people, children running by getting's all the time. This is something the dog in the background, this is something all of us need. So it's great.



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I think I think the book is filled with practical advice, as well as this conceptual framework. So it's the combination of a new way of thinking about this with a lot of practical advice.



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I love the practical part, because that's something I've always enjoyed, like with the MIT work you've done is that what do you apply today? Like, how can you change your life and make it better today? So I think that's been great. And then you have a co author this time. Who's that and what's her background?



04:53

Yeah, I have a co author Alex Samuel. She often writes for the Wall Street Journal, you'll see your columns She's been working remotely now for over 20 years. So she's a real expert on remote work. And also, she's an expert on social media technology tools. So she's going to really help the book, especially from the point of view of including new types of tools or software that you can use to make your remote work life better.



05:30

That's terrific. That's great. Okay, so getting into some of the details. Every one of us right now is getting swamped by meetings. Like, I have to tell you, I can spend 12 hours a day having meetings and probably never get any work done. So what advice do you have around meetings, because that's a big one for everybody. Right?



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So meetings are a really big one, you're right. And the first thing is not to scare drug to back zoom meetings, you should make sure that you have at least an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon, with no zoom meetings scheduled. So you can think think is thinking is a really important part of most jobs. And we don't want to make believe that going to a meeting is the equivalent of thinking you need thinking time. And second of all, you don't want to have zoom meetings lasting for a full hour, I strongly suggest that you have no zoom meeting more than 45 minutes, so that you can have a break between these meetings. Another thing is, you really need to spend more time preparing for zoom meetings to make them productive, you don't have as good communication, in zoom, there are you don't get as much, you know, informal cues. So So you got to work harder to tell people well, this is what we're really going to cover here. And this is what we hope to accomplish. And then if people don't think that that's part of their agenda, that's not important to them, they should be able not to attend, they shouldn't have to attend every zoom meeting. But you can't know that unless you sort of have a detailed agenda. And then a fourth thing is, you want to have the leader start the zoom meeting by not going

through a long speech with lots of slides. But spending 10 minutes saying, Hey, this is what we're really going to talk about, here are the key questions, here's what we want to accomplish. And the leader should not also, if there are background materials, spend most of the 45 minutes going through them. So what you want is to tee up debate and have as much debate and discussion as you can. Last thing is at the end of the 45 minutes, you really got to have good closure. People always walk away from these zoom meetings to say, Well, what exactly did we decide? I don't know, well, that's really bad. You don't want that to happen? And you also want to know, what are the next steps? And who's gonna, who's gonna take those next steps? And what's their timeframe? So those are a few things that we preach in terms of improving Joe meeting.



08:22

And I think that's great. One of the things we struggle to is with teams, making sure everyone's together, but then they're getting all their work done on time. And if they're getting the right work to, because you can't just stop by someone's desk and just do that regular check in. So is there anything like around the check ins? Or like how you're managing teams, any of that work? That's Yeah, no,



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I think that's something we're gonna spend quite a bit of time in the book about managing the team. So you want to you want to make sure that there are regular team meetings, you really need a regular team meeting every week, to make sure that everybody's on the same page. But that team meeting should not be backward looking. It shouldn't be like, this is what we've done in the last week, that can be communicated through email, or slack or any message system. What you want is people to say this is what I'm going to be doing this week. And, you know, I'd love to have your help on this, like substantive help with the policy issue or technical help. I'd love you. If anyone knows someone from this other division or other company, that'd be great to contribute. So those are the sorts of things that you could do a really forward looking meeting, business meeting. Another thing is that you really need to have some social meetings for the team. You can't just be meeting business. So you know, people have had some real success with you know, virtual cocktail parties. So people may or may not drink. But I think actually things like game meetings, puzzle meetings, these are sort of more cooperative than, and you need to give people time before and after any team meeting to have informal chats. That's really critical. Last thing I'll say on that is that the team leader should try to have some individual one on one meetings, as you say, the team leader can't stop by see how you're doing all this stuff. So you need to have some one on one meeting short meetings. But

meetings where you can sort of ask as a team leader, how's this person doing? You know, how they feeling? Is there anything you can do to help them? And we all know that one of the big problems of remote work is you're feeling isolated, you're feeling out of it, you're a little lonely. And so this is a way for the team leader to show you that he or she cares. And that, you know, make some sort of personal connection. I think that's really important.



11:07

Yeah, I have to tell you, I think that's great advice. One of our guys today said, well, you guys are having all these meetings without me. No, we're not having these meetings. We're gonna help you. And so I think everyone today is wondering, are they involved in the things I need to be? Are they being cut out of things? Are they included? So I think that's very practical. Good advice. Okay. So the last one we'll wrap up with is, this is what I need help with, with performance reviews, it just seems like because it's such a different world, and how do you? What are your suggestions on doing those?



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Oh, that's a good question. And it goes back to, you know, what are the objectives and success metrics for that particular employee, you don't want to have a performance review. That happens where you don't in advance know what the criteria for. I mean, most performance reviews of most companies are a joke. They happen once a year, they're very formal, no one gets a bad rating. They're these very vague things like, exceeds expectation meets expectation. No one really knows what the hell those things mean. So if you establish objectives, and you establish metrics, then you can talk about concretely whether there were met, and if they were met, to really congratulate the person, I'm always a big believer and a lot of positive feedback. If they weren't met, don't play a blame game. Let's see how we can avoid these problems in the past. Let's see how we can make things.



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Oh, you have a saying about mistakes? What is it like, make the mistake, what's the one,



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they could do mistake, make a new mistake, okay? make one mistake in good faith. You know, people are even very good people make mistakes. But you want to figure out how not to make that mistake again. So if you're making the same mistake two or three times,

then that's a real problem. I think the other thing about performance reviews is that you shouldn't wait to have them once a year, it's much too long a time, you really want to have them at least once a quarter on a more informal basis. And if you have a big project, you probably want to have them at the end of the big project. So you want people to get as much feedback as possible. Again, another problem with remote work is lots of people working at home don't feel like the boss knows well enough what they're doing. They don't feel the boss is seeing their great contribution. So that's why you need to have more performance review type discussions at the end of every large project or quarter, and you don't want to wait till the end of the year.



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No, I think that's great advice. And one of the pieces of advice that I try to follow to your viewers is make sure you lavish people with praise, because I am very guilty of thinking, Well, I'm I do that all the time. But no, when you ask people, they're like, No, you told me I did this wrong. I did this wrong. I was late on this. And I said, Well, no, I



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told you, you did a great job. And people don't always perceive you have a huge difference between if you're the boss, you're saying all the bosses I've ever interviewed, or most of them say, Oh, I'm always giving up praise. I'm like a praise machine. And then you talk to the people who work for them. And they say, gee, this guy or lady is really critical, almost never gives me positive feedback. They're always emphasizing the problems. So I think there's a very much an asymmetry there, that the boss tends to see. Mainly the praise they're giving out they don't realize how sensitive people are criticism from the blind, especially



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online today, I think that you know, that's the one thought that they live with. And you can't see that they're down, right, you don't run into them in the office to view to see that they're not smiling that they're not reacting the way you want. So I think especially, you know, with online and remote work right now, I think the importance is almost double.



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Yeah, I agree with you, you don't have a lot of these nonverbal cues. But the other thing

you got to do is you always, if he can, don't have phone calls, don't have these video meetings where people have an image or, you know, an avatar, you really want them to have video on, audio on and video on. So you can actually see their reaction as best as you can, that at least gives you a shot at understanding what their real responses.



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I think that's great advice. So okay, so we're about out of time. But if you could leave us with just a few more thoughts, and again, remind us of the book title. And when it's coming out, I think that'd be great.



16:00

Well, the book title is remote Incorporated, how to thrive when working, wherever you are, it will be coming out in around March. And the main point I want to leave you with is that lots of organizations are still focused on hours, they're still trying to think about, well, how many hours you work. And now even when you're at home, they're monitoring your screen to see how many hours you're on your screen. Oh, that's just crazy. In a knowledge based economy, it doesn't matter how many hours you put it. What's important is what you get accomplished. If you spend, you know, 20 hours on a software project, and it comes out really bad. People aren't going to say why you work so hard. If he spent six hours on the same project that comes out really good, which is better. So we've got to get people away from ours, and focused on what they get accomplished. And that's why we talked in the book about success metrics, you know, what do you try to accomplish? Let's all agree on these success metrics. And then that gives us the right focus, not the focus on how many hours you spend, we know now that there are some people who are like other computers all day and maybe even all night, because there's no boundary here, they don't have a commute in or out. So sometimes the structure remote work, can encourage people to work many, many more hours. And that that's probably very destructive, not just to their own productivity, but to their home life and their family's life. So that's not a good thing. So what we want to do is have people focused on what they're getting accomplished. And make sure that it's significant in terms of the objectives of the boss, the objective of the organization. So it's worthwhile taking that time upfront, to discuss and define what you're really trying to get accomplished. That gives you a chance to get off hours and to a different, much more fruitful system.



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That's great. So okay, so we'll wrap up, but I want to make sure it's a remote incorporated

in about March, it's coming out. And hopefully we'll be able to share maybe a few more points along the timeline until March. But thank you, Bob. And we'll make sure we can share this on LinkedIn and Facebook and make sure that it's available to everyone because there's lots of great advice here. So thank you all. Thanks



18:38

very much. That's it's great of you to take the time to do this. I appreciate your letting this go out on social media, and hopefully, people enjoy it. Thanks. Take care. Take care. Bye bye.