

[00:00:00] Bonni Stachowiak: Today on episode number 387 of the *Teaching in Higher Ed* podcast, Dave's back, and we talk about translating intentions into action.

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[00:00:12] Production Credit: Produced by Innovate Learning maximizing human potential.

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[00:00:21] Bonni: Welcome to this episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed*. I'm Bonni Stachowiak, and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

[00:00:49] Dave: The mental, physical, social, and emotional loads most of us are carrying have increased so much since the pandemic hit in early 2020. More than ever, the systems we use to negotiate different priorities, practice self-care, and manage all the information coming at us are essential. In this episode, we're going to explore five ways to translate intention into action, have more peace in our lives, of course, and be able to be more present for our students. I am glad to be back for the conversation. Bonni, thanks for inviting me back.

[00:01:21] Bonni: Dave, I am a person who wrote a book about productivity and a person who is now ashamed about having written a book about productivity. I think

I've been reflecting on it so much, and part of it is there's so much shame right now, so much guilt and shame around things of whatever it is that we call productivity, so many of us feeling like we're not enough, we're not passing this test, or we're not doing it, whatever is good enough.

I wanted to start out with really us being gentle with ourselves. Part of that is I think people really subscribe to a lot of myths about productivity. Especially if they read content about it or listen to people like you and I talk about it, there's really some myths here that I think we should try to dismantle before we even talk about what these five messy imperfect recommendations might be.

[00:02:13] Dave: Yes, indeed. You can get really good at trying to put together the systems and the software. It seems like anytime I talk to any of our members in the Academy and Coaching for Leaders, this conversation tends to start with, "What's the system I should use, and what's the checklist, planner, software, whatever I need to buy?" That's all cool. You and I both spent a lot of time geeking out on that stuff over the years, as I know many other people have, and then to never actually really be more productive with it.

At the end of the day, it's ultimately like, what are the things you can do to get the work done? I think as much as we all love the technology and the systems, as simple as we can keep it is best on most of these things. If a simple system, software, or maybe just a pen and paper will work, why make it more complicated and try to add more complexity to our lives? I think today's conversation will hopefully be a bit in the spirit of that.

[00:03:13] Bonni: I like your use of the word "getting the work done." I think that's another myth that we have that somehow we will have gotten all the work done, that at some point, you will check off the last check box on your checklist and that other people do that and that somehow you are alone in your inability to move forward in meaningful ways and really being too hard on ourselves.

It reminds me a little bit of the conversation I got to have with a colleague, I know you know him as well, Andy Stenhouse. He came on an episode and talked about

some of the myths around work-life balance and both how not true that is as if that was possible to attain but also how not helpful that analogy is that it's a scale. At some point, you land perfectly on the scale, and it's all balanced and that other people live that way.

What's wrong with you? Why can't you have it perfectly balanced? The research that he has done is around something called work-life spillover. I think that's something we can, both certainly the two people recording this podcast and probably many people listening to it can envision the ways in which our work and our personal lives spill over into one another in both negative ways, yes, but he shares about also in positive ways.

I find that more helpful to think about in terms of productivity, rather than thinking about this binary thing, we got it or we didn't, we're perfect or we're not, we're doing all the stuff or we're not, and as you said, David, we have the perfect tools that are working perfectly all the time or not, to think instead about the roles that we play. This is how I start a lot of conversations around productivity is talking about that at my work.

I'm a dean, so I consider that my role would be a leader. I'm a podcaster. I think about my role would be-- in that case, a teacher. I'm a professor and of course, in that role, also a teacher and a learner. Then I'm a parent, and I'm also a partner. Dave, what are some of the roles that come to your mind as you think about your life and the ways in which the different roles may spill over in positive and negative ways into each other?

[00:05:38] Dave: Many of the same roles you have, podcaster, parent, partner, of course, business owner, a coach, and then friend, of course, and a few of the other roles that may not take as much clock hours during every week but ultimately are just as important for health and happiness and the joy out of life. I actually have-- I don't know if I shared this with you. I know you know I do a 90-day quarterly planning, and I actually have it divided up by roles.

I have my role with Coaching for Leaders, I have my role as a parent. I have my role as handling finances and others 8 or 9 or 10 that are there. I don't populate every one every 90 days, but I do think about all those roles, and what do I want to spend my time and attention on in the season, whatever that season is? I start from a standpoint of thinking about it through the lens of, what are the roles that are most important to me?

[00:06:36] Bonni: There's some ways in which we can do this and should do this with intentionality. You talk about having that plan for the upcoming weeks and months and then life happens. You recently had your grandmother pass away and that meant that while you were only gone for a relatively short period of time-

[00:06:57] Dave: 36 hours.

[laughter]

[00:07:00] Bonni: -that could certainly throw a person off, given that you and I don't have a lot of margin in our lives at this particular juncture. When things like that happen in one of our roles, in this case for you, a family member, then that can obviously affect the other roles as well and we have those kinds of spillover. We're going to be looking at some approaches here that can help us think, but I know, Dave, you have just one final caution before we jump into those.

[00:07:31] Dave: Well, actually, I was thinking about a really beautiful fable that I heard a while back. It's a fable about the founder of Aikido, O-Sensei. The fable goes that one day a student was watching the master, and he was observing him, and at the end of the exercise, he said, "Master, you're incredible. You never lose your balance." He responded by saying, "You're wrong. I'm constantly losing my balance. The skill is in regaining it."

I think about that fable often when I think about productivity and roles in that we are all going to get knocked off our balance all the time. I don't think it's so much a matter of if we're going to get knocked off balance, which is one of the reasons I'm glad we're not talking about balance, per se, it's what do we do to respond to that to come back to a bit of an equilibrium and how quickly can we do that and

respond to it? I think that that's really where the opportunity is for all of us. It's the response time and the ability to come back.

[00:08:33] Bonni: The first approach we're going to explore sounds condescending at first but bear with us for a moment. The first recommendation is to use your brain. David Allen writes in his book, *Getting Things Done*, "Your mind is for having ideas, not holding them." I see this time and time again, where we put so much pressure on ourselves to ask our brains to do things they were not designed to do. I'll reread his quote, "Your mind is for having ideas, not holding them."

A recent book by Annie Murphy Paul came out called *The Extended Mind*. I am excited about reading it. I suspect based on everything I've heard from her on podcast interviews, as well as from others who have written about her work, that I am going to be recommending it in an upcoming episode. I don't recommend books I haven't read, so I will be looking forward to doing that in the near future.

Matthew Tenney, who's been on the show previously on *Teaching in Higher Ed*, he wrote a blog post, which I'm going to link to in the show notes, called *Extending the Mind* about the book *The Extended Mind*.

He talks about it that as he read Annie Murphy Paul's book, he was putting a bunch of sticky notes in it and wanting to remind himself of what was resonating. He realized the very sticky notes he was posting inside of the book *The extended Mind* was in fact an extension of his mind. The ways in which we can take our mind and extend it and rely on systems that actually were designed to be good at holding ideas frees us up to be able to tap into our own sense of creativity, the state of flow that we can get into when we're having those ideas, when we're dreaming, when we're thinking about what can be, instead of trying to remember what we need to buy at the grocery list, trying to remember that we said we would get back to that person about X, Y, or Z.

All of the stresses that we have by trying to hold things on our mind, it wasn't designed to do. I did want to mention, like I said, one way or another, we will be talking about *The Extended Mind* because there's so much more we could do here,

but I think it's important to orient ourselves around using our brain for what it's good for before we talk about these other approaches.

[00:10:59] Dave: I think that this is a real shift in the last 20 or 30 years. When I think back to when I was a kid and when my parents were kids, traditionally, you had to go to a person who had a title like "professor" to get knowledge about something. There was a lot of value and power in holding a lot of things in your brain, a generation or two ago. That is less important today than it ever has been because of the access to the internet. I think David Allen's quote and we've seen a whole bunch of folks now who have--

The ... movement has become big. I'm excited about Annie Murphy Paul's book, find out about that. Tiago Forte has the Second Brain. There's all very much in these similar concepts of let's instead of thinking about being a person who helps and supports people and adds value of "I know a lot, and I have a lot database up in my brain," of "Let me instead use these systems and the tools and the ecosystem and the internet around me to be able to find that knowledge things so that I can really free up the time and space in my brain to," like you say, "be present with students to ask great questions, to listen well, to do the things that no encyclopedia, Wikipedia, whatever resource out there is ever going to do."

I think that that's a real shift for the Academy, and I say academy and higher education institutions, is that the opportunity for educators to be able to move away a bit from that traditional thinking of, "I need to have all the answers," to "Let me see if I can do a better job of asking questions and being present and to use the resources around us." I think that really speaks to the spirit of David Allen's quote and so many of these other folks who are thinking about, "How do I really free up my brain to use it for the things that will help to do the things that the internet's never going to serve?"

[00:12:55] Bonni: I'm thinking about conversations that I've had a number of times with James Lang, where he cautions us, though, to not try to rid ourselves of the idea that memorization is never important. In fact, he would stress exactly the

opposite that there are things that we should hold in our mind that then help us be able to connect these neural networks that are able to produce deeper learning.

I'm also thinking about the research on things like retrieval practice and that. We're not at all saying that it isn't important to have things in our minds like facts and dates and figures, but just that I'm going to go, Dave, with grocery lists, not a great thing to hold in our brain, remembering to tell our seven-year-old to make sure that she brings something with her on Thursday and then our son on Friday has the clarinet that needs to come.

Those are the kinds of things I'm not sure are going to produce a tremendous amount of value in my mind, as opposed to tools that can help me be better. I know we're going to be getting to some of that a little bit later on as well.

[00:14:02] Dave: Yes. No, I think it's a great distinction is to be mindful about, what are the things you're trying to hold in your brain? If it is all the 29 things that have to happen logistically to get kids to school this morning or to file whatever report or to do whatever expense thing, that's not really high-value space for your brain, use your brain for the things that are actually much more high-value, in the spirit of James Lang's message.

[00:14:30] Bonni: Our second approach here is to get some tools. In *Getting Things Done*, David Allen says, "All we need are lists and folders." I believe that *Getting Things Done* has been criticized, I would say probably rightfully so, Dave, that it can be confusing, complex. People can seem overwhelmed, I think especially because sometimes when people might reach out for a book like that, they might be in such a state like you talked about a little bit earlier, Dave, just looking for the one quick fix, "If only I had this thing that could fix all of this for me."

it can seem overwhelming, but I want to explain a little bit about what he means and when he talks about when he says all we need are lists and folders. He really breaks it down into three categories of tools. One would be what he calls a next actions list. I generally call these a task list, and I generally keep my task lists in the same place as I keep my project lists.

I've got a list of projects and then a list of, again, what he calls next actions, which is what's the next thing that needs to happen to move this forward, closer to done? I don't think he talks enough about that generally speaking, Dave, I don't know if you find this to be true. I've got a lot of things I'm thinking about that need to happen to move things forward. I capture those ideas. I don't literally only focus on the one next thing that needs to happen.

Sometimes you have to do that if it's a nebulous project, but there are, "Set this up and do this," especially if it's something that has been done previously, but when he says all we need are lists and folders, he means, we're going to need something to keep track of our tasks, we're also going to need something to keep our calendar stuff in. We hear things we need a calendar, which essentially he points out, a calendar is really just a list, it's just arranged often graphically where it might be arranged where you see a list of things on today, or you see a list of things on a week view, or a month view, or a year view, but essentially, a calendar can be things of time and/or day-bound specific items.

"I'm going to meet someone for lunch from 12:00 to 1:00" is going to go in my calendar. It's going to work a lot better there than going on my task list because time-bound things go on the calendar. Now, I know both you and I, Dave, will do what's called time blocking. We'll look at a task list and we'll say, "Hey, wow. I got to make sure that I get out." Both you and I send out a weekly email to people that are in our podcast communities.

If you're going to finish that in some of the weeks that we have, you're probably going to need to block out time, just so that you're aware because, otherwise, as we well know, that's going to spill into the evenings or spill into the weekends, so trying to think about-- which, by the way, just so we're being clear, a lot of my work right now is spilling into the evenings and weekends.

I don't want to give a false impression here, but just being able to look at a week of our calendar of the things we've committed to show up for but then also taking things from the task list and blocking out the time to allow us to work on things there.

Then the last thing that he talks about with regard to getting lists and folders together is needing to have what he calls notes.

This could be anything from digital files, or it could be file cabinets but really just folders or archives, whether they be digital or analog, of non-actionable stuff, stuff that you don't need until you need it. It doesn't show up on the calendar, it doesn't show up on a task list, which by the way, though, when we get to the task or when we get to the calendar item, we might need to go in and reference something that are in our notes in some way.

[00:18:26] Dave: I think the two things I'd add to this list is that I don't know about you, Bonnie, but I tend to run my day off my calendar almost entirely. I will sometimes go a day or two without even looking at my task list because I use the calendar to actually make the decision on the next action, actually block whatever that is in my calendar. That's just a hack that's worked well for me.

The other thing that I think maybe you said this but that David Allen doesn't necessarily have a separate tool for those, I'm not sure, is the capture point, what's going to capture things. For me, I use an app on my phone, and I know you use it as well, too, Bonnie. It's on Macs and iPads. I believe it's Apple only, it's called Drafts, and it is a very simple app.

You can do some powerful things with it, but all it does is basically, it opens up a screen to a cursor, and you can capture things really quickly and then it just saves it.

I found that to be really useful for capturing ideas, tasks, things that will become actionable later or not. Sometimes I'll go through there and just delete things that aren't actionable but really, anything that comes into my brain that I don't want to forget, I will put in Drafts, and then I have points throughout the week where I'll then go and decide if those things need to be actionable or need to be data-based in some way.

I guess one other thing I'll say on this, you asked me earlier or prompted me about a warning, and I don't think I ever looped back to that. The warning I guess I'd have,

as we talk about all these things, is don't try to do all of this, right? We've been developing these systems for years, and as Bonnie's alluded to, we're certainly not perfect and, in fact, struggle with these all the time. As we're talking through some of these ideas, I think our invitation to you would be, pick one that resonates with you, that seems like fun and joyful to start with.

If you start there, then that will be a really great place to begin, and you'll figure out something as you go. You'll either figure out it doesn't work for you, or you'll say, "Hey, that's ridiculous, running my day off the calendar, but actually, the task list works great for me." At the end of the day like you said, Bonnie, there's no award. No one shows up with like, "Hey, congratulations, you win the productivity award."

The goal is to get stuff done, so whatever works if posted notes work, if Drafts works, if pen and paper works, if a fancy planner system works. I've seen so many different kinds of systems that have worked for people that I would think would never work for me but worked for others. I've also seen tons of people over the years with really fancy systems that don't really get much done because they spend too much time thinking about the systems and always going on to the new shiny thing, and they're not really spending the time doing the work.

[00:21:13] Bonnie: The third approach that we would like to share with you is to put it away, and by this, we mean having a place for things. You just talked about that warning, Dave, and wanting us to pick one thing that resonates with you. Something that I have found really brings a lot of joy to people is to separate the ideas that we have about, "Wouldn't it be great to do X, Y, or Z? Wouldn't it be great to read this book? Someday I'd like to try out this technology. In fact, I'd like to try out this Drafts app."

People come across all the time with things that are what I would call little, small dreams. I don't want to sound overly dramatic, but they're not really stuff that we're committed to doing, so much of these ideas can come to us, especially when you're working in a context like we are where you're just surrounded by opportunities to learn and explore things. It can be both exhilarating, and it can be overwhelming.

David Allen recommends setting up what he calls a Someday Maybe list, and the Someday Maybe list might be trips that someday you might like to take. It might be new hobbies that you might like to explore learning something new. It can just be a way of separating out the task list or the next actions list that we talked about earlier. Those are things that you really are committed to doing, perhaps to yourself but oftentimes committed to do for other people or with other people.

The Someday Maybe list is an area where you can keep these dreams, big and small, separate from a task list so that it doesn't become overwhelming, your task list doesn't become meaningless to you, but it is so energizing. You talked about something that would bring you joy, Dave. I go into my Someday Maybe list, and it just brings me joy. There's all this really cool stuff I thought it would be great to try someday.

Either I go, "You know what, it doesn't sound great to try anymore," and I have a little place where I don't delete it. I have a little place where I'll drag it to be like, "Oh, this is stuff I've decided maybe I'm probably not going to be that interested in," but it's just like a playground of really cool dreams, big and small, that I might want to explore someday, and I love the freedom that brings me so having a place for things. Have a place for dreams and ideas, big or small. Have a place that you can manage your commitments, like a task list.

I'll tell you something, email is not a great application for managing our commitments to others and ourselves. Problem is, it's pretty external, as in, oftentimes people asking us for stuff, and it's really hard to keep organized. We keep falling into the trap of if I mark it unread or if I flag it and at some point, it becomes like a snowball, and people have shared having 7,000, 10,000 unread emails and all of those emails to them, I've literally had people weep with, Dave, just when we finally start talking about, "This isn't happening."

You're not actually going to get through 10,000 emails and be able to check off those. Every time you're going in there, it's representing, for you, failure, shame, delay, overwhelm, so a lot of people subscribe to something called Zero Inbox and

the idea that we transfer things that will take longer to do into a task manager so that we can look at those things.

In fact, most of the systems will allow you to even email yourself a task.

Dave and I use one called OmniFocus, and we have a special email box that we can email tasks straight from email into that system so that we can look at those commitments in relations to the commitments we have to ourselves, some of the longer-term, deeper work that needs to happen beyond just the, generally speaking, transactional nature that in email inboxes can become.

Some people criticize the Zero Inbox because they think of it as too legalistic. I get that and don't all at the same time because I think it's like treating it as if you've got to zero inbox, that somehow you actually keep it zero inbox. I think, generally, at some point, it is a goal to have that it gets down to zero at some points. Now that "at some points," to me, depends.

Are we having a pandemic or not? What kind of a week am I having? I do find a great deal of peace when things have a place and when I'm using tools for what they were designed to do and email applications were not designed to be task managers.

[00:26:12] Dave: This is where so much of this comes down to what works in practice, too, and like you said, not being legalistic with it. I fully agree with everything you said, and I think email is a really poor task manager. I say that and I know right now, I have, in the last day or two, sent myself emails to remind me to do things. Actually, in some ways, it's because my systems are almost too good on the other side.

I'm so good at putting things into Drafts that I'd don't worry, I need to think about that if I put a task that I really need to do today in Drafts are my task management list, I'm not going to see it sometimes for several days or weeks or months, in some cases. I was just looking through my Drafts list, and the hydrangea project in the backyard is still there. I have not forgotten about it, that we were going to do.

It is in there, but it's been a couple of months since I put that in there because I just haven't taken the time to process it yet. Part of this is not being too legalistic with yourself of I don't use my email box as a task manager but I still like once in a while. A couple of times a week, I'll send myself a message like, "Okay, because I know I'm going to be in my inbox, I'm going to see it," and I keep it pretty low and will act on it because that's where it's actionable.

This is where you have to try some things out, see what works to you, and this is going back to our main message of this episode is, pick one thing, try it, see what happens, see what your experience is of trying one of these systems, and then if it works for you, great, keep going. If it doesn't work, that's great, too, because you found out something that doesn't work, that's going to lead you to the next thing to try, the next way to manage a task or a calendar or the thing to not worry about as much.

I'm sort of cracking up thinking about email and how you describe it, Bonnie. I heard someone, either this was in a book or an article somewhere, describe email as an unordered list of other people's priorities. That's not entirely true, but I think it's a pretty good summary, and to what you said earlier, other people's priorities are important. We need to be responsive, especially, too, I think about the work so many people in this community do with students and staff.

How many times have we heard the story of like, "I sent a professor an email, and I never heard back or never got a response after multiple attempts"? That's really important to be responsive and to find those ways, yet it's also important for us to be conscious of the fact that our email boxes often aren't ordered, it's not in the order of what is most important to do today, so keeping it in the mindset of that context when we're utilizing it as a tool to be helpful to others.

[00:28:37] Bonnie: That's so helpful. I love that. I also think about his two-minute rule. If something takes less than two minutes to do, do it. You don't need to put it in another ... just do it right there, and we shouldn't be legalistic about two minutes. For me, sometimes two minutes translates into five minutes. If it's going to take me less than five minutes to respond to this email, then I might as well just do it now.

If something really deserves a conversation, if it's going to contain more than one step with more than one person, then it can be a little bit maddening to try to bend email to make it work for those kinds of conversations. I laugh because I also email myself, Dave, and you reminded me that he talks about having things show up for us when we need them, so it's not just having a place for things but having a place for things that will allow things to show up for us when we need them.

Like you, I use Drafts. Like you, boy, especially right now, [laughs] ... it's a pretty long list because it's my scratchpad. I don't put things in there that are urgent because I know I'm not keeping up with that regular maintenance of that particular tool at this moment. I would like to be better at it. I just know, realistically, I'm not so if I send myself an email, it's going to show up there, and then I can be sure to get it into a system where I know it's going to show up for me to remind at such a time as when I need that information.

The next item, the next recommendation that Dave and I have for you is around, check it off. Check it off. Create checklist. The power of checklists. I do want to mention that I did an entire episode way back when on Episode 78, can you believe it's that long ago, Dave, called The Power of Checklists, and we're going to revisit. We'll do a mini version of that episode now, but if you'd like more information, I did want to mention that that episode is there. Dave, I'm going to let you share a little bit about checklists.

[00:30:34] Dave: I think probably the best resource on this is a brilliant book by Atul Gawande called *The Checklist Manifesto*, which is a book about checklists, which sounds super boring and is actually one of the most compelling reads I've had in the last 10, 15 years. It's an amazing book. He talks about the power of utilizing checklists, and he is in the healthcare space, for those of you who aren't familiar with him.

He talks about how, in hospitals, surgeons have more recently been using checklists effectively in order to not miss the obvious things, just like pilots do in the cockpit and have for years, and that has made air travel so safe. There are so many examples of utilizing checklists well, and he teaches you how to do that in the book.

In fact, there's even a checklist for checklists I think at the back of the book on how to form your own checklist.

Whenever you find you're doing something that's repeatable and that you are wanting to remember some key things but it can get very rote and mundane if you don't actually have that documented somewhere, a checklist can be a really useful way to do it. He says good checklists are precise and above all, practical. Where we've been utilizing this most recently in our house is we were doing I think pretty good with getting kids ready for school in the mornings and all that before the pandemic.

Generally, we would have our systems, and we'd remember what has to happen in the morning. We were, I think for both of us, just at the level of cognitive load where it was really complicated every morning but enough that you can keep in your head, and then the pandemic happened. Now in addition to all the normal things of getting ready for school in the morning, there's we need to make sure everyone has masks, we need to make sure temperature checks have been done.

Our school has, you have to actually submit temperature checks before you even arrive to school on an app. In addition to all the normal stuff, the complexity level of a morning, none of it is hard, but there's a whole bunch of different things that need to happen, and our kids are older now, and they're bringing instruments to school, and there's homework, and there's so much more complexity than there was before.

Again, any individual thing is simple. Is the homework folder in the bag? Is lunch packed? Are the water bottles there? Not big stuff but all of a sudden you put 10 or 15 of those together every morning and then the first few days of school this year, we showed up with, "Oh, we forgot something at school inevitably." I thought, "Hey, I know pilots use a departure checklist when they're in the cockpit. Let's have a school departure checklist."

I created a little checklist, and it's fairly simple. It has eight or nine items on it that every morning we need to do. Just this morning we were leaving for school, and we

ran through the checklist. The way that I do it is we get in the car, everyone's strapped in and before I put the car into gear, we run the checklist with the kids, and I said, "All right, everyone got masks?" and sure enough our daughter didn't have a mask this morning, for whatever reason.

She went back in and got it and came back, and we had everything. We've been doing that consistently, and it's worked out great. That way, I don't think we've forgotten anything in two months going to school, which is amazing. That's a great track record. It's made it simple. Again, the things that I don't have to spend the time holding that in my brain, I can spend the time a little bit more in the morning being more present with the kids. "Oh, what podcast are we going to listen to on the way? What science show are we going to listen to on the way to school this morning?" That can be more of the conversation versus, "What are we forgetting?"

[00:33:51] Bonni: The last recommendation that we have for you is to be intentional, and I can think of no better representation of how we can bring more joy into our lives to release our stress than this quote from Christopher Emdin. He talks about really who we spend our time with as teachers and being intentional about that. This is a quote from Christopher Emdin.

"The kind of teacher you will become is directly related to the kinds of teachers you associate with. Teaching is a profession where misery does more than just love company. It recruits, seduces, and romances it. Avoid people who are unhappy and disgruntled about the possibilities for transforming education. They are the enemy of the spirit of the teacher."

When I was getting my doctorate, I was really good. In fact, both my master's and my doctorate, I think I read every single page of every single book that was assigned with one pretty big exception. The book was called *Social Intelligence*, and I think that's Daniel Goldman. Is that right?

[00:35:02] Dave: It is Daniel Goldman.

[00:35:03] Bonni: It's funny because I read so many wonderful books and just consumed them with such joy and vigor. For some reason, I remember starting it,

but whatever was happening-- By the way, I'm not saying it's not a good book. I'm just saying I didn't get through it. I remember it's something like 400 or 500 pages or something like that. It did feel a little bit like the same message said in a lot of different ways, so that was the one I failed at. I admit it.

What I remembered taking away from the portion that I did read is that emotions can be contagious, and I feel like that happens with joy and with the opposite of joy. We're not able to always control the people that we spend time with, but we can really be intentional about it in the ways in which we can. One of the things a colleague and I do pretty regularly, her name is Shannon, we work closely together.

We almost all workdays now, whether we're actually working in the same location or not, will put our little earbuds in and go for a walk "together," and that together is in air quotes in the sense of we're often not literally together in the same space, but we're together in time and in conversation. We'll call each other and just go for a walk. It's a nice time to catch up on stuff with work, but she's an incredibly positive, joy-filled, authentic person, and she brings me a lot of light so I can be intentional about both getting some exercise but also spending time with someone who brings me so much joy.

That's a recommendation as we close this out. When we think about productivity, it's not about always having the right tool. It's not about if just had the trick or if you just somehow passed the test with perfection but being intentional because these kinds of efforts, spending time with people who we know will be infectious in their joy and meaning and significance in their work to be done is going to allow us to have a greater sense of what actually matters, and I just find that incredibly powerful.

[00:37:13] Dave: Couldn't have said it better.

[00:37:14] Bonni: I like to close with a quick story. Dave, I think you know a little bit of this story. Both Dave and I, we love listening to geeky podcasts, and one of them is called the *Mac Power Users*. Yes I know, geeky. Geeky people over here. One of the co-hosts of the *Mac Power Users* is named David Sparks. He recently started

doing webinars, and he offered a webinar, something like Taming the Email Beast or Taming the Email Monster or something like that.

You want to bet that I saw that and I was like, "Boom, I'm enrolled. I can't wait to be there," and I had such a ball, geeking out with him on that webinar. I think it was about 45 minutes or an hour or something, and he's going through talking about all these ways of automating email where you don't even have to pick up your mouse. You can just through keyboard shortcuts that you program in, move them into the special folders, and he talked about creating rules and all these different apps and processes and all these stuff.

I was at my most geeky self, just drinking it in like candy. He even talked about something called Stream Deck, which I have a Stream Deck, and it's a separate apparatus you can connect to your computer. You've got your keyboard, you've got your trackpad or your mouse, and you've got a Stream Deck, and it has buttons, and you can make those buttons do things, and you could have screens and screens of buttons.

Now not only can I program my email through these shortcuts, but I can also push a button over here. You should have seen me, Dave. I'm just like, "Whoo, whoo, whoo" just having so much fun, and then he ends it. He says, "One more thing," which by the way if you're a Mac person is an inside joke because Steve Jobs, before he passed away when he used to do the keynotes every year for new product releases and stuff like that, he loved to play games with our mind, and we thought he was done, and then he'd come back and say, "One more thing."

Anyway, David Sparks was just being silly with his one more thing, but here was his one more thing. He said, "You can learn all these things and take this stuff away, but I have one more thing I'd like to tell you: don't be good at email." He went on and just shared about how sometimes he has put too much pressure on himself to think that he has to write back to every single person in the world who just decides to send him an email with an idea or a question or whatever.

He's like, "I can't keep up with everybody who has a question," that kind of thing and that he's recognized he's not going to be perfect at this stuff. Even if he tried to be perfect, he got close to some approximation of perfect, it comes at a cost. It comes at a cost of the things he really wants to be good at in life. He wants to be a good partner. He wants to be a good parent. He wants to be a good leader and all of these things and that if we get too wrapped around perfection on these kinds of things, he just encouraged us to be good at other things.

[00:40:08] Dave: I love it.

[00:40:09] Bonni: In terms of being good at email, though, if you actually did want to be good at email, today's sponsor happens to fit perfectly. I promise I didn't plan it that way, even though it totally seems like I did. Dave literally had to point it out to me, "Did you realize that today's episode actually fits perfectly?" No, I didn't realize it until Dave pointed it out it.

[00:40:28] Dave: It could very easily be your one action because, actually, SaneBox does make both of our lives a lot easier on organizing our email every day and definitely saves both of us time every single day on prioritizing.

[00:40:40] Bonni: Today's sponsor of the episode, again, not planned, just happens to be SaneBox. SaneBox is a service that allows you to have their artificial intelligence or your email incredibly smartly. It will take just reading the headers of the emails through their artificial intelligence will sort things into Sane Later folder, for example, emails that could be read later and don't necessarily need to show up in your inbox where some of the more important stuff might show up.

They have a Sane news folder that you can activate where newsletters and subscriptions like that will go into. They have all kinds of ways you can trick it out, including you could ask it to remind you in three days, or you could snooze an email and have it pop back up, you could be reminded if someone hasn't replied to an email in three days, all kinds of ways that you can use SaneBox in order to spend time reading the emails that really are more important.

It's super easy to train if it ever gets it wrong. It cracks me up though, Dave, because I just literally can count on one hand. Over all the years I've been using it, it just hardly ever gets it wrong, but if it does, all you do is just drag it from where it was into where you'd like it to show up, and it learns that way, it's very, very smart. If you'd like to check out SaneBox and take advantage of an offer they have for *Teaching in Higher Ed* listeners, you can head over to sanebox.com/tihe, as in *Teaching in Higher Ed*.

Again, thanks to SaneBox for sponsoring today's episode. I encourage you to head over to sanebox.com/tihe to learn more. This is the time in the show where we each get to make our recommendations, and my recommendation is pretty simple: pick one thing that Dave and I talked about that started to spark something in you that maybe it'll bring you a little bit of joy, maybe it will bring you a little bit of peace and just do the one thing.

[00:42:42] Dave: My recommendation is, just start with the checklist, start with something, the 1.0 version of it, and also start with the intention of, if you start a checklist, you're not going to nail it the first time. Start with the Drafts, see how it works, add to it. I've done this for years with packing checklists, I have a big master packing checklist, and inevitably, something happens once in a while where we go somewhere and I say, "Oh, that really should have been on my checklist all this time."

I just go open it up, add it in, and the next time, it's an even better checklist. Whatever you start, whether it's a departure checklist for school in the morning, or a packing checklist, or a checklist for something you're regularly doing and you maybe are going to forget a task, start there, and then go in and with the intention of making it better. As you find things that need to be added, add on to it as you go.

[music]

[00:43:33] Bonni: Thanks, everybody, for listening to today's episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed*, 387. If you'd like to see the show notes for the episode, you can head on

over to teachinginhighered.com/387, but I'll do you one even better, consider subscribing to the weekly update because if you do, you're not going to have to remember to go over to that link in order to see the show notes.

You can have them arrive in your inbox or if you subscribe to SaneBox, yes, they could go into your Sane Later, but I'd really rather they go into your inbox. I'm kidding. You can get quotes from the show. You can get other recommendations that are over and above what Dave and I shared today. It's just another way to connect with the *Teaching in Higher Ed* community. If you'd like to subscribe, head on over to teachinginhighered.com/subscribe. Thanks, Dave, for joining me on today's episode.

[00:44:34] [END OF AUDIO]

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