

# *Business901* *Podcast Transcription*

*Implementing Lean Marketing Systems*

## Pinck on Kanban

Guest was Pascal Pinck of the  
Strategic Collaboration Company

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[A Strategic Collaborator's use of Personal Kanban](#)

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## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

Pascal Pinck works as a [Strategic Collaborator](#) with individuals and teams who face high levels of uncertainty in their market context. More specifically, he educates and coach leaders and team members who are working to:

- increase performance through agile and lean thinking
- improve distributed decision-making and delegation
- heighten trust and transparency
- build a culture of constant value creation
- engage stakeholders to help mitigate risk
- turn resilience into a competitive advantage



Pascal provides coaching to individuals and teams with a focus on productivity, resilience, and non-linear growth. He also designs and facilitate immersive workshops for learning and transformation. Some examples are:

- *"Ready for Anything": Tools to Improve Organizational Performance in Conditions of Uncertainty*  
3-day workshop for leaders and managers in business and government (non-software/IT)
- *"Lean/Agile Boot Camp": Paving the Way for Success*  
5-day workshop for software-creating organizations that are contemplating a move to an agile way of working.

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## Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

**Joe Dager:** With me today is Pascal Pinck of the Strategic Collaboration Company. Pascal works with individuals and teams who face high levels of uncertainty in their marketing context and one of the tools he uses is the Kanban which is what we're here to talk about. So Pascal, could you tell me a little bit on how you use Kanban?



**Pascal Pinck:** I'll tell you the way I use Kanban day-to-day is that I have a personal Kanban. Small business, a business of one and so the time that I have and the focused attention that I have at my disposal on any given day is the asset. It is the only asset that matters in my company, in my business. So the first thing that I did when I started thinking about using Kanban and playing with it, is that I realized that what I was really doing here is that I was just creating visibility, transparency and visibility into my own portfolio of how I use my own attention. Once I understood that, I was hooked.

**Joe:** So, you use it every day but do you use it electronically? Or do you put it on a board next to your desk?

**Pascal:** You know there are so many great ways that people like to do this. I was in Phoenix recently tagging up with some friends and one friend of mine he carries around sort of a letter-sized day planner and the front cover of his day planner is his Kanban board and he uses little tiny miniature post-it stickies, the real little ones?

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He has his columns, right? I guess it's probably on the level of ready, or to-do, doing, done and he has stickies with him in his bag all the time and when he thinks of something he wants to add to the cube or one of his cubes he just takes out a pen, writes up a sticky, tacks it on his board and every time he takes out his planner, it's right there. So I thought that was really clever. But to answer your question, I do use the electronic version because I travel a lot. I use LeanKit Kanban and there are a couple great tools out there. People love Agile Zen and that's a great tool as well and there are others.

But there are some specific things that I like about LeanKit Kanban and for one it's really easy to create swim lines and we can talk about those details more in a little bit if you like since we're still kind of at the eye-level. It's really easy to use, they're kind of featured to add colors to different kinds of the tickets, and this gets back to what something you and I were talking about before we started the podcast. One of the most powerful things to me about Kanban and in every arena of knowledge work and activity, is that it really gives us the some great tools to visualize the balance of the portfolio or of whatever flowing assets - of whatever flowing value matters to us, we can visualize the balance between the streams that matter in a really intuitive way.

I'll give you an example of how I do that. I have different swim lanes for active client work. I have one for home stuff, errands, things that need to be done. For getting the kids ready for soccer or whatever it is, picking up this or that, taking care of this or that. Then I have a stream for kind of community engagement, outreach, just being involved - whether it's the writing or blog post or going to community activities, doing meet-up groups, stuff like that. Then I have another swim lane for what I call self-care and fun. Which comes out of the recognition that my personal - the value that's generated from me and everyone in my family and everyone in my community depends on me being

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healthy and balanced. It may be the most backwards thing in the world but I use this tool to make sure that enough of my time and attention is focused on things that are going to help me stay healthy and strong and be able to continue to do the things I like to do.

**Joe:** Well I think that's an excellent description of it because people always, I always go back to, I probably read the third book every published on the *Seven Habits*? I just grabbed that right away. That was the Christmas present that I got all my staff, *The Seven Habits* book and a planner which I'm sure they loved, but when you go back to the original *Seven Habits*, it was very much like that. You had the calendar stretched out and balancing your day with the *Seven Habits*.

**Pascal:** Yes, I mean to me, again, I'm grateful to the really deep Lean philosophies that have really helped me see this in a more profound way for my own understanding, which is to understand what it means to optimize for the whole. I really reject the delineation between our work life and our personal life. I don't believe that that is a meaningful distinction today. I am in my late 30's, so I don't know what things were like 50 years ago, maybe it was more relevant. But today, for me, for the world that I know, certainly the way that we work today, in knowledge work in particular, I don't think it's a useful delineation.

I can't be effective in my home life if my work life is out of balance and completely out of control, and I cannot be effective at work if I am burning the candle at both ends or if I am focusing on only one aspect at the expense of everything else, If my health is suffering. That's just on a personal level. I believe to have a life that's engaged and enriched, that there has to be a balance, and I think that's true beyond the level of one individual. I see that a family is many things. But among the things that it is, it's a team. Right? I would like to be part of a team as a family. I would like to operate in my community in that way too. I

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would like to make choices in terms of how to invest my time that the community as a whole can benefit.

**Joe:** So in your personal Kanban the swim lanes are really your team membership lanes, aren't they?

**Pascal:** That's exactly right. That's exactly right. I think that if you think of concentric circles, right? If you think about taking care of yourself, think about exercise, think about nutrition. The different components of your body work as a team. Your organs, your muscles, your body and your mind work as a team. Your emotional health and your physical health they work in parallel. When you are feeling well your body, your mind, your heart and your soul is all working in collaboration, in high performance. That's when you feel good, when you feel that feeling.

When things are out of whack, when they are out of alignment, when you're distracted in three different directions, when you're not paying attention to how are feeling, when you are not paying attention to how other people around you are reacting to you, the feedback loops are disturbed.

One swim lane I guess in essence for me and again, I haven't thought about this until this conversation, the one swim lane for me of self-care that's about the team of my body and my mind: the team of one person. All the parts that go into that and then there's the team of my family, the team of one. Then there's my work relationships with my clients, I'm in a team with them. We have shared vision and shared common goals. I want to learn things, I also want to earn a living, I want to support them. They have their goals and we have - in a good healthy team relationship - we have an alignment and that's definitely shaped how I look at my client relationships and how I see my professional interactions.

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Beyond that, there's a team of the people in an environment that I live in and my community and so I think your observation really strikes a chord for me, these are concentric teams.

**Joe:** In talking about a Kanban from the higher level, it sounds real simple, but doesn't all these different teams have different objectives and you have to make this, create this wild board with all these columns and everything that only work for, half the people or half the time. How does your board really work? What does it look like?

**Pascal:** Well, you know, I think back to some of the parts of David Anderson's book that have been really influential for me and that is, I think, you know, he has been very rigorous about asking us to understand before we ever draw a line on the board, right, to understand what the input and what is the bookends of the part of the value stream that this process is looking to visualize.

He doesn't start with, and this is really profound to me, he doesn't say what this board is looking to control. That is not it at all, it is the reverse and he is right about this. The board simply reveals. It visualizes the part of the value stream that is already existing and so to be able to visualize it clearly you have to have a clear delineation from where this particular part of the value system starts and where it ends. And, so the way that my board is outlined it starts and ends with the things that I control in my daily life in terms of how I spend my time and attention. My family has many objectives and the many objectives, desires, goals and hopes of my family are not visualized all as separate streams on my board. This board is just for me. If I told my wife she had to use a Kanban or that we had to use one common Kanban board, she would say, you know what honey that is great, but I have my process.

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That process is right for me not for her. If I told my kids, you know my seven-year-old daughter, honey we are going to set up our plans for the homework for the week and you are going to move stickies. She might think it was cool. I would certainly encourage her if she was interested, maybe someday she will be. But, I'm not trying to make a board for our team as a family. This board is for my part of the value stream. I have a backlog and for clarity sake, I separate the backlog into general work stuff and general other stuff. I don't want to make my backlog too overly complicated, it is a holding pen. It is a place for stuff to go in. It is a way for me to sort through the biggest priorities that anyone day or anyone week.

**Joe:** I always think what is interesting when you have a backlog, and I have just reflection of mine, is some of these things just sit there and they never get done and it is why they are backlogged, maybe they never needed to be done.

**Pascal:** You know, that is a really interesting topic because lately I have been part of, we had a lead Kanban meet up here in Los Angeles, that I am fortunate to be a part of. We had a conversation at one of the recent meetups about the differences and also, in a way, some of the overlaps between GTD, you know, "Getting Things Done," David Allen's work.

And personal Kanban because some of the folks there were using it like I do what we started to think about there is, what happens to the stuff that isn't a high priority. Because if you look at the objective, I will make an argument, I mean I am no GTD expert and so I am not trying to say something definitive. From where I sit the objectives for me if I am using personal comment verses if I might be using GTD around the most important issues, the stuff I am going to do, you know, today, in the next couple of hours, tomorrow, that kind of high priority stuff.



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I think probably the objectives in some of the basic kind of way that the flow works is pretty similar. I don't see huge significant earth-shattering differences around the areas of the most important stuff. Where I think there are some interesting philosophical differences, this doesn't come from Kanban per se, but more from the lean philosophy, is how we treat things that are at a relatively or very low priority. You talked about this issue of I put stuff in my backlog and it stinks. I think GTD has the tickler file if I may be using the wrong word, but stuff that is not important, but it is something you want to hold on to in your system because you do not want it stuck in your head. Certainly I am all in favor of taking stuff out of your head and putting it down. You know if the best place for you to put it down to feel OK about is your backlog or your GTD tickler file or a shoe box full of post-its. It does matter that we all know that you have got to get it out of your head. I mean, otherwise you're banned with your work in progress cognitively is just going to suffer dramatically and you are not going to be able to perform.

The question that really interests me is once I put it on paper, I got it out of my head or I put it in some kind of electronic form, what happens to it then? GTD is very clear on this. It is like you put it in a setting where it is contained, but where periodically, maybe over a period of months or even years, you can come back to it. I think the lean philosophy that we are working from when we use Kanban, personal Kanban, is a little different. My feeling is that what I have been able to see as a result of working with personal Kanban for some time now is that I have been able to understand in a way that I did not before that having something that I keep track of that is something that I might do some day, that no matter how small it is, it has a cost. That there is an inventory cost to holding on to something as something that I might, a particular task, activity, objective or whatever it is that I might do someday.

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In thinking about that inventory and the desire, that I kind of come back with from coming from my infinite to lean thinking is, I want to reduce my inventory and the desire to reduce my inventory and the recognition that that inventory has a cost has helped me give myself permission to drop stuff out of the long-term backlog. As a result of practicing this, I delete stuff all of the time that has been there for three, two weeks, three weeks, a month. More and more I am coming to the opinion that if I have something in the board and it has not moved in a couple weeks, then you know what, it is not important enough to pay interest on. Pay the rent. I think that is probably the best way that I would describe it. If I have something on my board somewhere, whether the board is virtual or whatever form it is, to have it take up that space on the board, I am paying rent because something else could be there or better nothing could be there.

**Joe:** I think that is very interesting thought. I think that is what you need to do when it is visual then you are going to eventually do something with it. If you just put it away in a file and put it over there, all you are going to do is just collect inventory until you need a new file cabinet.

**Pascal:** I am just more and more coming to the opinion that I really love to discover new things. That is just part of my personality and I think a lot of people do think about the kind of things that we are talking about here, they probably share that. What I have come to understand is that for me personally, and maybe other folks are very different, but for me personally to discover something new requires first the creation of an empty space. I need to create a container in my life and often this is not even a container of time, it is simply a kind of a mental container of, it is like creating a vacuum.

That vacuum will like attract things. It will attract new ideas. It will attract new observations. It will attract insight. I need to do something first around the self-discipline for that to be possible. I

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need to throw away the stuff that was in that place before. Working with personal Kanban and understanding the cost of the rent and actually seeing the thing visualize in terms of rent, real estate, right? We can talk about the screen as having real estate.

Seeing my screen as real estate reminds me of the cost, when I throw it away. I have more self-discipline, more urgency about throwing it away. When I throw it away it creates mental space, not just on my board, but in my brain. Like in my consciousness and into that consciousness, if I am rigorous about keeping that space open, new ideas and insights can flow. That has been pretty powerful for me.

**Joe:** We talked about the backlog in allowing us to take things away and get rid of it and give us the permission to do that. But, as we go across the board do we set a higher priority and importance then? As you go, move it in a To-Do file, let's say or a Doing file and do you really follow that procedure religiously? Is there stuff in your Doing file that is overloading it that you kind of all of a sudden move something from To-Do into Doing because you want to do that first?

**Pascal:** I don't put any pressure on myself to keep the backlog on a prioritized order in terms of numeric prioritization. Kind of 1, 2, 3, four kind of stuff? I don't do that. Jim Benson has talked about this a bunch where this whole thing of what it means to have different sizes of items in your queue. David has talked, a bunch of guys have talked about this. If we hold ourselves too rigorously to numeric backlog order then what happens is, we can find ourselves in a position where we have a little chunk of time, a little bandwidth to do something, you know. five minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes. The three things at the top of our list are all kind of bigger chunks, right? If we only had chunks of that size, we'd say to ourselves, "Oh, never mind. I'll do something else with my time, maybe just surf the Internet."

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Of course if what you're going to do with your time is take a walk around the block and you're wasting time with the dog or whatever, that's a good thing. We want to encourage that. But sometimes we know we have a call in 10 minutes so we're not going to leave the house. We can't really kind of empty our minds; I can't really empty my mind to do something really rejuvenating.

So I think to myself, "I kind of want to do something but the thing I want to do, I don't want to do something I can do in five minutes." And so what I do is, I try to keep enough things in my backlog of different sizes and kind of relative criticality. So if I want to do a kind of like a B-level thing that takes five minutes in between two other A-level things that are each going to take 45 minutes, then I can do that!

I think giving yourself that, for me, giving myself that freedom is really important. In terms of how stuff move across the board? Yeah, I have two parts in my backlog. I have a kind of Coming up Soon part and a Less Soon. The Less Soon often becomes just a parking area for the stuff that I'm going to throw away anyway.

I think as I get more experienced I'm putting less and less stuff into the lower priority backlog at this point. I'm getting more and more to the place where I can, if I'm looking at the backlog and I'm thinking of putting stuff in there and I realize that it has no chance of even bubbling up the higher priority stuff, then I can almost throw it away now from my mind without even making a sticky.

That's the kind of goal, is to be able to actually just get to the point where I can really throw the unimportant stuff away. But among the important things, you know. I actually have two Ready columns and I guess that's a little bit unusual, I don't know if a lot of people do that but I have an Upcoming and Ready To Go.

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Because a lot of times what I'll do is I'll use the Upcoming column as kind of a look at my next day or, like of a Friday I'll move a bunch of stuff into the Upcoming column for Monday. That actually allows me to get a little bit of an advanced sense of what's heading down the pike.

If I need to do some portfolio balancing it gives me a little more time to do that. I see a bunch of stuff is piling up on something related to work and I'll say to myself, "Hey that gives me an early heads up that want to I actually maybe want to call one of my clients and negotiate a later deadline."

Or something like, I can squeeze in something enjoyable like taking the kids to the park. Because I know that if I do those three or four big work things in a row I may get burned out. It gives me a little bit of a kind of advanced situational awareness and that's proven really valuable. Beyond that, I just have Doing and Done. Sometimes I'll forget to move the thing from Ready into Doing and so I come back to the task having already done it. So now I've got to move it from Ready straight to Done. That happens I don't think it's a big deal.

**Joe:** You work with a lot of teams. Have you used Kanban with teams?

**Pascal:** The thing that I find Kanban most useful actually for is as a way to help people, team leaders and organizational leaders, learn about Value Stream thinking and Lean thinking. I actually use it as a kind of a learning tool. A lot of times the organizations that I work with, they're inviting me into their circumstances in a situation where they're in a period of some crisis. There have been some issues around business strategy, around business model, around fundamental team dynamics.

The issues that come up are usually not just about the value stream or not just about process. Usually the problems that I tend to get brought in around, the problems manifest around

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some process malfunction but the issues are usually deeper. They have to do with the lack of vision, lack of alignment of vision, lack of communication, really kind of foundational stuff.

For instance, broken trust between leaders and teams or amongst the teams themselves. So what I'll do is, I'll use Kanban concepts as a way to visualize the things that are going on as a way to, basically as a discussion tool. I'll use the board and will make stickies and stuff to actually just create a picture of what's actually happening. Just to get them to start looking at the actual flow of value and the actual kind of dysfunctions that are occurring, especially around decision making.

If you actually ask people to talk about a specific case, they get very defensive because then everything becomes personal. "You blocked me. I didn't do what I was supposed to." "No, you didn't do what you were supposed to." What Kanban can do for us, it can give us a way to make things be about stickies moving rather than about people betraying each other. That's one of the most exciting areas that I found to begin to use Kanban in in my work.

**Joe:** You also work with individual teams who face high levels of uncertainty. I think the biggest blockage to flow and to work being done is clarity which, the other side of the coin is uncertainty.

**Pascal:** Sometimes clarity can reduce uncertainty. But sometimes uncertainty is in the very nature of the properties of the living system. I'm most interest in living systems versus engineered systems. So knowledge workers are always using engineered systems and creating engineered systems and those are interesting and important. But what really compels me, the kind of work that I enjoy doing is working on the properties of the living system that is actually trying to create this value and deliver it to customers and develop the technical solutions.

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What we know about living systems is that every case, to a greater or lesser extent, the kind of complex adaptive nature of this system itself and the environment in which that system is placed creates, this simply causes uncertainty that's in play in living systems to show itself.

To a degree, clarity helps us reduce the static, right? Because there's a certain amount of uncertainty that just comes from static: things not being explicit, from things not being mutually understood, from people using the same words to mean different concepts, from people using different words to mean the same concepts.

Tools that visualize parts of the value stream or behaviors in a concrete way, of which Kanban is one, right, are extremely useful to make that static go away. Something like reducing work in progress is incredibly powerful to make the static go away.

Because all the hubbub and hullabaloo about doing 17 different things suddenly disappears when you're just trying to do one thing. The fundamental dysfunctions that are preventing you from doing the one thing well suddenly become clear. The thing famous drawing, I guess it was in Poppendieck's book? About lowering the surface of the water to show the rocks?

I think that's great but then on this other level it's when you're actually trying to understand the properties of the living system. One of the things that we want to help people understand is that the uncertainty is actually part of what it means to be in a living system.

I feel some affinity with Don Reinertsen in this one, what are the costs of reducing variability when we are talking about living systems? Reducing variability means that the system will die because it becomes extremely vulnerable to sudden infection.

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One thing goes wrong, when all the elements of a living system have exactly the same properties, one antibiotic or one virus can wipe out the entire population. What we know in the living systems is there's a lot of strength in diversity. Diversity becomes simultaneously a driver of resilience and a driver of uncertainty.

What we want to do, in part, once we've gotten the static to go away, is we want to help teams become more comfortable with uncertainty. A lot of these concrete and reflective tools, like my friend, John Heinz, talks about, again in which Kanban gives us some amazing tools and techniques and vocabulary to work from and concepts to work from, can help us and can help people become more comfortable with uncertainty.

You'll notice that in my trying to work with my personal Kanban in my personal life, I'm not trying to reduce uncertainty. I mean, my life is full of uncertainty. I have two small children. Anybody with that will know what it's all about, uncertainty.

The point is not to reduce uncertainty. The point is to give myself freedom and resilience in terms of how I'm able to make choices around handling my attention and my energy and my engagement to be able to deal with that uncertainty in an eloquent and graceful way, at least some of the time.

**Joe:** Is that what your Ready for Anything workshop is about?

**Pascal:** Yes, it is. It's about understanding, it's about understanding how the engineered systems that we've created for ourselves in business, and this has nothing to do with technology. When I talk about engineering system, I'm talking about the kind of top-down, command and control policies that tell everybody in the organization from marketing to HR to even to the C-level exactly what they're supposed to do in any given situation on the basis of specific protocols, right? Do this, input this, output that. That's an engineered solution. And, if we're talking about a queue for a network router, that's a perfect and



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fantastic way to go, but in an organization what that's going to give us is a lot of robustness, but zero resilience. You know, Dave Snowden from Cognitive Edge talks about this stuff in just a really compelling way, how systems that last for a long time like medieval villages or towns that have endured until today.

How have they done that? Well, they've done it not by being robust, not by having the perfect set of properties that has allowed for the right kind of protection or the right kind of sanitation. What they've had is an incredible resilience to be able to change in a controlled way as circumstances change.

That's what we do in my workshop is we understand how to start looking into the domain of resilience to kind of make our choices in terms of how we structure ourselves and not being so focused on getting the robust engineered solution for one particular set of challenges.

**Joe:** It's interesting that you talk about that because so much of us are trying to reduce uncertainty in our lives, in our processes, in our businesses and organizations. But you, tell me if I'm wrong, I'm reading it that you're saying don't reduce it, embrace it.

**Pascal:** That's exactly what I'm saying.

**Joe:** I think that really adds a lot because, Look at forecasting; just the nature of the word is uncertainty. What you're saying is we embrace that change, we build our systems and we'll go into where we've moved into the agile type things, into the shorter development fields, into shorter iterations because of the fact that we are embracing uncertainty rather than trying to get rid of it.

**Pascal:** To me, it's just a logical extension. I mean, the core concepts that agile and scrum has given to us is this idea that you might actually gain a lot more performance by letting go of

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certain kinds of top-down control. And to me, this work, and it's not just me that's doing this, a lot of really smart people are doing this and I'm learning from them.

**Joe:** When I hear software people talk about lean, they're always saying well, it's not manufacturing, we're not making 10,000, and we're not making 1,000,000 widgets. Most manufacturers only wish they had 10,000 widgets to make. They're surviving on shorter supply chain cycles and customization. That's really what the future of manufacturing is in the states is embracing these principles of agile and lean.

**Pascal:** I really appreciate that viewpoint. I mean, what it comes down to for me if we really want to break it down, is the philosophical foundation is the starting point to return to sort of reconnect, to try to understand how to take next steps in my work and in any work that I'm working on with the client is the realization that we actually know nothing about anything regarding what really matters in knowledge work. Who was a really fabulous beacon of this was the elder Toyota who started looking at the process of weaving through the recognition that the one thing you could be sure of was that something would go wrong, and when it went wrong, it would be important to stop the line.

I mean, that is the ultimate embrace is that we know nothing. I'm inspired by that all the time because, I mean, the failures of those of us, and certainly I'm guilty of this myself like anything else, all the times in my life, professionally or otherwise, where I was sure that I could predict the future, knew exactly what the range of inputs might possibly be, I was always wrong.

Why not stop doing the things that we're always wrong with and try some other stuff?

**Joe:** I think that as we develop a team concept, the team gives us such quicker feedback and more immediate feedback around a

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subject that we need because ultimately, we probably are not right about it. We have to have that feedback back from the people to be able to determine whether we're right or wrong sometimes.

**Pascal:** Straight forward kind of summary of what I feel like I've been learning about. And, what's kind of amazing is there's some really amazing work being done in the U.S. military in DOD around understanding how situational awareness and the changing conditions of the operating theatre of the military basically provides the necessary inputs for a decision making process that can either lead to its success or guaranteed failure.

The traditional thinking that we think of outside the military is the generals at the headquarters, they've got the overview. They know what's going to happen, what's supposed to happen, and they're the right ones to make the decisions.

The modern U.S. military has left that behind a long time ago. In fact, some of these folks are on the frontier really understanding what strategic influence means, how that dovetails or doesn't dovetail with particular interpretations of command and control at different levels.

I think it's really kind of wonderful and slightly ironic that the U.S. military, who many people probably think of as a quintessential command and control organization, has some of the most forward thinking people around these feedback loops and common understanding of what's actually happening in a complex situation as it's developing in real time. I can recommend to you some of the if you just kind of look into some of these writings. It's great stuff.

**Joe:** I think so because I just had a podcast the other day on OODA loop and even Don Reinertsen and Bill Dettmer referred to the OODA loop in their latest books. They really go back to the

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strategic thinking that's happened in the military which is really eye opening.

**Pascal:** Yes, it was for me.

**Joe:** Personal Kanban as you apply it in your daily life it's really allowed you the freedom, I think, to open up and look at things and step back and look at some of your decision-making process because of the use of it, hasn't it?

**Pascal:** Absolutely. I mean, I really appreciate that insight. I mean, before this conversation I would have certainly agreed with that, but I don't know that I would have been able to put that into words because you've helped me in asking me these questions. You've definitely helped me clarify my thinking. To me, that's what knowledge work actually is. What we produce in knowledge work, the output of knowledge work is decisions.

**Joe:** When you get to the process and you're done with something or you move it to done are you really done with it? Do you find it recycling back on the board? Or do you feel like sometimes you just moved it there because you just wanted to get rid of it?

**Pascal:** I'm pretty disciplined. I don't move something until it's done. I think for those of us, who do Personal Kanban: we put something in the backlog and we're kind of, maybe a little lazy sometimes. A little fuzzy in terms of how we actually delineate what it is that we're thinking of doing. It's kind of shorthand for us. I know it is for me sometimes. I'm moving fast. I'm actually working, you know, one or two other things. Something comes to my mind that I know I'm going to want to do. Hey, I just put it down. I put in one or two words.

You know, the board doesn't have to be self-explanatory it to thirty other people, right? It only has to make sense to me. So I give myself the freedom to use, you know, whatever, you know,

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to be as efficient as I want to be in terms of delineating what it is that, or describing what it is that I want to do.

The thing is that laziness that I exhibit at the backlog stage, which may be the most efficient way to go, you know. I don't know. But it certainly feels OK to me. But once, as I move rightwards on the board, as I get into, I told you I had my two ready queues, my upcoming and my ready to go. Once I go from backlog to upcoming, all of a sudden the board is asking me to get a little bit more specific.

I'll find myself opening up the ticket that I created with two words at the backlog stage. I'll rephrase it a bit, I'll add some additional words, and I'll make it more precise for my own way of thinking.

What happens a lot, is that if I notice that I'm kind of, if there's a task that needs to be done. I find myself kind of dragging my feet on it. I'm kind of looking for excuses to pull something out and move it ahead.

What a lot of times what I've discovered with that, that's actually the cue to me, is to actually look at that task that I'm kind of dragging my feet on, and recognize that it's actually two separate tasks.

There's one thing, you know, usually a smaller piece, maybe 25 or 33% of that task that actually I know I want to do right now and that really needs to get done right now and then two-thirds of it, or three-quarters of it actually can wait.

**Joe:** That's a good insight. That's excellent insight.

**Pascal:** ...at that moment, what the board is doing, is the board is making me true up. It's a really powerful expression. I can't remember who taught it to me. But this idea of, truing up to yourself, what actually you want to do and what actually you need to do, and what actually you're going to decide to do. So at

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that moment, this instinct that I've had I don't really want to do the whole task, I true up to myself. But that is actually exactly the right decision to make. I separate it out into two parts. I'll move the smaller part, the one I feel like I really want to do, up a step, either to ready or to in progress.

Then a lot of times what happens is, I wind up not leaving the bigger part of the task in the queue where it was. It actually has to go back to the backlog. Sometimes this is not frequent, but also not entirely uncommon; I wind up deleting that two-thirds of the task and never, ever doing it. That tells you something, doesn't it?

**Joe:** It does. I was going to ask that question. Do you ever get something that goes along the board, gets into your doing file, and then it ends up reverting all the way back to the backlog, or maybe even deleting it.

**Pascal:** Yes. Like I said, it's rare that something will cycle all the way back. What happens is something that was larger gets kind of disaggregated. Then parts of it get filtered based on that, that disaggregation.

**Joe:** I think that's great insight. Since you've been practicing Kanban, what did it replace? What were you doing before?

**Pascal:** I was kind of using Microsoft Outlook to stage tasks and activities. I was, you know, just using to-do lists. I was working at that time in an Outlook environment, I just made it, I used it to organize some of my activities. But it was never satisfying. I certainly never thought about it in a systematic way from a process standpoint.

**Joe:** Have you found it limiting using an electronic Kanban system?

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**Pascal:** You know, I think that for personal Kanban it doesn't matter what you use. It's whatever feels right to you. Whatever is going to encourage you to use the tool actively, or to, you know, use the board actively. For one person, it doesn't matter. I will tell you if we're talking about more than one person, anytime we're talking about a team; I'm going to encourage a physical board not just with stickies but with big stickies and a big board with big stickies as much as possible.

We use the work Kanban, but we really are talking about a bunch of different things. We're talking about, like, a way of organizing your thinking. We're talking about a way visualizing flow. You know, probably a couple other things.

We're also talking about creating an information radiator to anybody that walks by. Which is to me the two most powerful uses of Kanban in the workspace. It's an excuse to disseminate information in an intuitive way to a large group of people on demand.

People walk by, you know, the classic concept of the information radiator. I just think that's enormously powerful because it triggers conversations that otherwise wouldn't happen. From a team dynamics standpoint, which is where I spend a lot of my time, that is absolutely critical. The other thing is it creates a nexus where people are going to look at a problem and reflect on it together before they take action to find a solution.

Why is this important? Because all of us are fixers, we're all engineering types. Or we're all, hands on get it done types. You know, whatever we are in business or engineering, or wherever we are, we love to make, find solutions.

Solution finding is our favorite thing in the world. But as we know, the reflections and writings and insights around continuous improvement - and some of these examinations of where improvement comes from, you know, where radical increases in

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value generation come from - what we know is that the number one prerequisite to being able to have those reflections, and especially reflect on them with other people, is the mechanism by which we can foreclose or forestall, or at least defer, solution finding.

The Kanban board, a large Kanban board with real good tactile stuff, big stickies, and different colors. Jim Benson has some examples of people that draw really evocative like little cartoons and stuff, on the stickies to kind of evoke their state of mind or state of the task or a project.

What this does, is this creates an opening to reflect on what's going on as it's going on without jumping to a solution. I think that's the most important thing of all, you know. The Kanban board is so contained and so structured that it invites the kind of injection of information, even a personality.

**Joe:** What's on the horizon for you?

**Pascal:** Well, you know, I'm kind of an addict for learning new things. As I'm sure a lot of folks are that listen to your broadcast. I'm sure that I know, in fact, that you are yourself. This has led me to want to deepen my understanding of some of the parts business practice and business concepts that I don't have any formal background in. Things like accounting and operations. I don't have any kind of manufacturing or operations background. So I have just started a part-time MBA program. I've gone back to business school part time.

**Joe:** That's kind of exciting.

**Pascal:** Yeah, it's fantastic. I've found this really wonderful program. I'm just, you know, such a fan of. I can really recommend it any number of folks who would be the kind of folks that I think you'd probably be interfacing with. It's at Portland State University in Oregon. Really strong, their focus is on

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innovation, sustainability, and leadership. And if that's not a great tasting cocktail, I don't know what is.

**Joe:** Would you like to add anything to this conversation I didn't ask you?

**Pascal:** No, Joe. It's been a pleasure and thank you for giving me a chance to chat with you. I think I've learned a few things during, along the way. So thanks for that.



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**What others say:** *In the past 20 years, Joe and I have collaborated on many difficult issues. Joe's ability to combine his expertise with "out of the box" thinking is unsurpassed. He has always delivered quickly, cost effectively and with ingenuity. A brilliant mind that is always a pleasure to work with." James R.*

Joe Dager is President of Business901, a progressive company providing direction in areas **such as Lean Marketing, Product Marketing, Product Launches and Re-Launches. As a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt**, Business901 provides and implements marketing, project and performance planning methodologies in small businesses. The simplicity of a single flexible model will create clarity for your staff and, as a result, better execution. My goal is to allow you spend your time on the **need versus the plan.**

**An example of how we may work:** Business901 could start with a consulting style utilizing an individual from your organization or a virtual assistance that is well-versed in our principles. We have **capabilities to plug virtually any marketing function** into your process immediately. As proficiencies develop, Business901 moves into a coach's role supporting the process as needed. The goal of implementing a system is that the processes will become a habit and not an event.

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