

The Peaceful Productivity Podcast

Ep #79: Beyond the To-Do List

With Erik Fisher



Full Episode Transcript

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Welcome everyone. I'm Kim Christiansen and this is The Peaceful Productivity Podcast, where I share strategies to help you get the most out of your time and feel better in the process.

Hi everyone. Welcome to this episode of the Peaceful Productivity Podcast. I am so excited to have you join us today because I have a very special guest come to the podcast. This guest's name is Erik Fisher. Erik is the host of his own podcast called Beyond the To-Do List, so we are siblings in our interest and passion for all things productivity. So I'm really excited to talk to him today and get his perspective on a lot of different matters. First, I'll let him introduce himself. Erik, welcome. Tell us a little about yourself.

ERIK: Thank you for having me. First off, I'm so glad to be here. And yeah, like you said, I guess we're kindred spirits, we're siblings in productivity.

KIM: Yes!

ERIK: I've been doing, I've been doing my show for, I mean, I love, loved productivity and been fascinated with it for way before I, I started the show, but I've been doing the show now for over 10 years.

KIM: Wow!

ERIK: Which is one insane to do anything for 10 years, but let alone something that's, doing consistent output in any kind of media, anything.

So yeah, it's been thrilling and there's been seasons to it for sure.

KIM: Yeah, that sparks so many questions. First, the consistency, which we'll get to in a minute because that is a challenge that I have some experience with myself and also, Yeah. Why podcasting? What brought you to podcasting in the first place?

I would imagine you're one of the longest lasting podcasters out there with 10 years under your belt. Can you say more about that?

ERIK: Yeah. Well, I can say there's definitely other people who started before me and are still going strong, so I won't claim that. But I did have other shows that I was a co-host on and things before that.

So, you know, cumulatively we're talking. Ooh, like, let's see, 2007 was the first time I was ever on anything, and so that's... Man, that's what, 15 years ago? Something like that.

KIM: Yeah.

ERIK: Wow. Anyway, 16 years something. Yeah.

KIM: So how did you come to it? I don't think I knew what podcasts were in 2007.

ERIK: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you this, but when I first found out what a podcast was, I was sitting in a cubicle doing data entry.

In the summer of 2005, and I decided when the little iTunes icon, you know, window popped up and said, update is available. I thought, great. An excuse to get up and get another cup of coffee, use the restroom. So I hit okay and it relaunched and then rebooted, and I sat back down and then I looked over and said, what is this little thing on the side, this little tab that says podcasts? And I clicked in and it took

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me a couple seconds, but I realized, oh, these are radio shows that I can download and pause here in my cubicle. I'm not stuck just listening to music anymore. I can pause these radio shows and I can listen and learn. It was, it was like early days of ham radio in a way, cuz some of the stuff that I was listening to, it was, you know, they were receiving people calling in on phone, leaving messages, and then they would play them in their show. And it was just fascinating to me. And so at that point I said, oh, I'm gonna do one of these.

KIM: It was love at first sight. Hey?

ERIK: Yes. Yeah. So that means that it's been 18 years, almost 18 years now since I've been listening to podcasts.

KIM: Wow!

ERIK: Gosh, wow. But I loved it immediately. I just thought, cuz I used to do radio stuff in college and I used to, when I was younger, run around with a little tape recorder that I would hit record on. I'd sometimes walk into, we'd have holidays at different, you know, my grandmother's house I'd. Hit record on it, walk it into a room, leave it there, and then walk away, and then later come back and get it and listen to everything the adults said that they didn't think we could hear.

KIM: Oh, that's hilarious. I love that. So amazing. Yeah. Well, and look at here you are now 10, 15 years later with your own podcast beyond the to-do list. So tell me about that topic...

How did you come to create a podcast called Beyond the to-Do List?

ERIK: Yeah, well, I mean, it, it ultimately was born out of, let's see, so, uh, January of 2012, when the show started in August.

That January, I was co-hosting a show and the host decided he was doing so many different podcasts, he was going to pair them back. And I said, I applaud you for that. Totally cool with that. This is now my license to go and do my own thing, you know, now I get to be a solo artist and so I thought, well, what am I gonna do?

And at first I thought, oh, you know what? I should do a blog. And I pretty quickly decided that was not what I was going to do because I would rather, instead of sit and write, actually just talk and, and video was still kind of, you know, getting good quality video and uploading it and all that kind of stuff.

YouTube, I think, was not just there just yet. Although, if I'd known it was coming, I probably would've integrated all that into the mix too back then. But hey hindsight. But I decided, you know what? I need to talk to people. I wanna have guests, I wanna talk to people, I want to network. I wanna build relationships, but what do I wanna do that around?

Like what's the central thesis of the show? And I thought, well, I mean, I want, I'm curious how people plan their day. I'm curious how they spend their time, how they are intentional with their use of their time. How do they manage themselves? How do they do the good work that they do? How do they manage creativity even when they don't feel like it?

And I started to come up with all these different fringe topics like that and, and I thought to myself, well, there's a commonality here. What is it? And I thought, well, it's, it's kind of like a productivity show, but it's beyond just the to-do list. And as soon as I said that. I knew the title for the show.

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I knew that it was a productivity show, and I said, oh, this means I get to go anywhere with the topic. This is awesome. I immediately started writing down... One, I kept that list of topics and built on it, and two, started writing down guests potentially that I would want to talk to. And I thought, well, if I can get this person, then I can get that person and then if I can get that person, I can get this.

And so it just kind of fell into place. And I started working out on an over the matter of months, it was a slow, you know, back burner, crock pot type of a thought process, but eventually landed in and launched in August of 2012.

KIM: Wow. So many things I can take away from that because I'm now only a year and a bit into my podcast a year and a half, and I bet you have a lot of really great tips and wisdom to share with us newbies, as well as maybe some pitfalls to avoid.

Can you share any of that?

ERIK: Well, let's start with the pitfalls because I can tell right now that about a year in I was like, is this sustainable? And I thought, you know, do I wanna do, maybe I need to do like, well, I'll, I'll be honest, I did about 16 episodes and then I said, okay, I'm gonna call that a season.

And I took about a month and a half off. I just thought, you know what? I need to regroup. And this was early days, again, over 10 years ago now, and I thought, gotta make sure this is possible to stick with it, or I just need to stop doing. And so it was kind of, you know, rediscovering the why regrouping and saying, okay, what's another group of people that I would like to talk to?

What are topics that I wanna keep refreshing and coming back to. And so it was not just refreshing, you know, and making exciting and keeping it, you know, alive, which this is something that's happened multiple times. There's, there's been about three, maybe four or five over the course of, you know, it's, it's about every year and a half, two years.

It's okay. What's the, the state of the podcast is good, you know, the state of the Union, and it's like, I've gotta reassess.

I've gotta check and see where things are out, how sustainable, how much forward momentum is there, because you don't wanna get stuck in a rut because that's where you start putting out crappy shows and then it dies anyway, so... So that's one thing I learned.

Another is, is that in, kind of in tandem with that, is being aware of what season, literal season of the year, but also what kind of season of life you are in that makes certain things possible. So I've learned quickly that when working from home, which the majority of the recording process has been for the show, recording during the summer when people are home from school, isn't nearly as easy, so it's nice to batch as many as I can early. And then likewise batch as many as I can to not have to record around the holidays at the end of the calendar year.

KIM: This really loops us back to productivity. , in my opinion, one of the core fundamental concepts of productivity is around consistency and showing up consistently. So can you share with us anything that works personally for you?

ERIK: Yeah, kind of alluded to it from learning from mistakes and learning from, oh, I've got a show I've gotta put out next week. Oh, I'm all out of shows that are recorded. I've gotta scramble and record with

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someone. Which as you've got enough under your belt, you can do reruns, you can pull out older shows and refresh the intro.

And I don't mean this as a cop out, but like, oh, you know what? I've been rethinking this recently and this was a great conversation and I wanna bring it back up because oftentimes if you're that far out, you know, years into a podcast, lots of people do go back and listen to lots of old back catalog episodes, but not everyone does.

And if it's a really good one, it's worth putting in the feed once more.

KIM: Absolutely, I agree. I've only been doing, what is this, 75 odd episodes, and I've already got a new perspective on some of the content that came out in the early days. So that fresh perspective to, uh, something that is like a core concept, I think it's totally valid to speak to that in a different way. Yeah.

ERIK: Yeah. I, I totally agree. And thing is, is like I've even re-released an episode where I've gone back and re-edited it. Kind of cut down or cut out maybe some of the stuff that I thought, oh, that was great at the time, but years later, tighten it up, make it a little bit more accessible, and then you can, with fresh ears, having listened to it again, speak to it in a new way in the intro as you're leading people into it and even revamp the title.

All those, all those kind of good things. So that's very helpful. So in terms of consistency, it takes that kind of maneuverability and it, it takes refreshing and it takes looking back and saying like, what have I already done and what can I use out of that? Or what guests have I already had on? Or what topics have we already done and what's a new spin on those? Or a new conversation I can have with somebody that I've already had a conversation with, because if they've already been on once, chances are they probably had a good time and don't mind. Especially I've got some that have been on multiple time, you know, I already know that like I can pretty much get a yes from them to come back again.

KIM: Exactly. Oh, that's so good.

Well, speaking of guests, you've had a very impressive portfolio of different guests come up over the years, and I'm curious, who are some of your favorites? And who are some that like maybe you wouldn't and well, let's not go there.

Who are some of your favorites?

ERIK: That's funny. Yeah, there's obvious. I'll throw out some of the obvious ones that have been on a number of times. People like Michael Hyatt and now his daughter Megan Hyatt Miller, they've been on a few times.

Todd Henry from Accidental Creative is always great.

John Acuff.

I'm trying to think of... Laura Vanderkam has been on multiple times.

Uh, Chris Bailey now has been on multiple times.

Mike Vardy of Productive Conversation. A or the, he's a friend. Let's see who else.

Those are some of the, the, the repeat ones.

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One of the ones that I had recently late last year was uh, Kendra Adachi, and she's the lazy genius. She has a podcast called The Lazy Genius. She has a book called The Lazy Genius Way. and also then at that time was coming to talk about the lazy genius cookbook and lazy genius basic. I mean, I can't say enough about how awesome I think her show is cuz I think it's a lot of what I'm trying to do with mine just stated more succinctly, lazy genius means you are a genius about the things that you've decided matter the most.

And then you let everything else, you let yourself be lazy about the other things. And I was just like, oh my gosh, that is such a great way to look at it and you don't have to be stuck in that phase of what? So if I decide I'm gonna be lazy about something, now I can change up and not be about lazy about it later, but ultimately allows you to be productive and guilt-free about everything.

So, oh, that was a favorite. Yeah, that was a real favorite.

KIM: I love that. I can see why, because it almost, and I saw this on your face for our listeners, so I can actually see Erik while we're talking and the the relief that sort of came through when you were talking about that. I think for many of us who are invested in productivity, we can put a lot of pressure on ourselves.

So giving ourselves permission to not have to do all the things and not having to do them all. Amazing. I think of course that's going to land with us, so such a great point. And you also mentioned Chris Bailey, who is a favorite of mine. In fact, I took a, a note from his book when I created this podcast.

His book is all about experimenting with different productivity techniques and sharing the results of his experiments with his readers. And that's what I like to do with my listeners, is sharing what's worked for me and what's not worked. So, in terms of productivity.

So if you had some productivity techniques that you have really resonated with over the years and tried and continue to try, I'd love to hear about those. And maybe conversely, not everything that works for everybody else is gonna work for us as individuals, so what doesn't work so well for you?

ERIK: Yeah. Uh, man, I will say this, what doesn't work for me all the time and sometimes out of necessity it has to happen is getting up super early and working on things immediately, like doing work, work.

And I don't love, one, I don't love getting up early. I don't, for a long time I thought I was an early riser or a, depending upon. What your chronotype is, if you're not familiar with chronotype, it me, it's basically a more modern version of the early bird, night owl kind of thing. But there's actually two other types. There's not just early birds and night owls. There's two other in between and you know, different styles, in other words of ways to be in ways when places and times that you're most productive.

Getting up early, getting up at 5:00 AM even four something, not my favorite thing. I don't like doing it and then I especially don't like doing work at that time, but yet I thought I had to, to be productive.

And thing is, is did I have to be productive at a certain season? Yes. It's the only time I could fit it in. I had to get up early. I had to work on stuff then because my evenings were went for family stuff and my day was already spoken for for my day job. And if I was going to get up and I was going to do reading or research or writing of show notes or even editing, I had to get up early to do that.

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And so that does not work for everybody. And even I've learned that the converse is also true. I don't like staying up late. I'm not young anymore. And so it just doesn't work.

Pulling the all-nighter is not an option for me. Me going to bed at a good time and getting up early and at least having gotten a good chunk of sleep before then working on something, that's another story.

KIM: Yeah, those are such good points, and I think that what stands out for me about that is that it seems like that for you, the desire to start a podcast and make it successful, that really outweighed your discomfort of getting up early, at least in the beginning. So it all comes down to priorities.

To your point, I think that we have to find the techniques and strategies that work best for us and our own individual style in accomplishing what it is that we want.

And I also think that our preferences and our physiology can change over time, so that maybe, we once were a morning person and we're not anymore, or vice versa, like it can change, even our own styles can change over time.

What do you think about that idea?

ERIK: Well, that's definitely true. The guy who coined the term chronotype, he talked about this where essentially, Dr. Michael Bruce, he wrote a book all about that and essentially he said teenagers kind of are outliers in those chronotypes early rising or staying up late or whatever, that they are in their own way unique and they change into other types as they grow out of that kind of phase of life. And so even if they're one phase now, they will end up changing. Physiology definitely changes things.

KIM: Yes. As the parent of a teenager, I can attest to the fact that their, their sleep patterns are very, very much the outlier in my family. For sure. Over the years, you've had the chance to experiment with a lot of different productivity techniques, and you've mentioned that you have ADHD, and I'm curious what productivity techniques work best for someone who is newly diagnosed with ADHD or who may be searching for some new techniques to try to manage that.

ERIK: Yeah. Well, I will say this. I had been prescribed something when I was diagnosed and I was diagnosed as an adult, and though I found that it helped, it didn't help my sleep. And so it was almost like, well, you're taking one step forward and two steps backward. And so then from that awareness and deciding not to take that medication anymore, I realized that sleep deprivation, since we've been talking about sleep, it's a huge, I should say, catalyst in the arm of ADHA. So if you have ADHD and then you're adding on top of that lack of sleep, then your brain has that much quicker of a, I dunno, jumping off point to any other thing quickly. And so it's imperative to get not just as much, length-wise, but as good much quality-wise, sleep as you can.

So that's been something that I've strived for since then.

And then as far as dealing with it, as far as as coping with it, as far as working with it and being productive while having it, a few different things come to mind. One of the things is to have one, put as many guardrails as I can up for me to then sit and focus, so I can use something like Brain FM, which is music that kind of puts the, the blinders on like a horse.

You've seen 'em, it covers their eyes so they can only look forward.

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It kind of gets your brain into a mode, a brain wave mode sooner and faster to sit and focus and get into the zone quicker. That's one method.

On top of that, I'll often keep an analog pad of paper and pen close by, but just out of reach. So if I'm sitting here focusing, doing work, and a thought comes up that wants to start distracting me, I can pull that pad over, pick the pen up, write the thought down.

Acknowledge the thought, a lot like meditation, and then push it away again.

And notice I didn't say my phone. My phone needs to be in do not disturb mode and probably not even on my desk if I'm going to sit into that focus time block. And by the way, in order to have that focus time block, you need to block that time out first and foremost and put it on the calendar.

It's a date with yourself, whatever you wanna call it. It's an appointment with with yourself. It's a meeting with yourself. Block that time out and state how long you're gonna do whatever it is that you're going to do. And again, knowing what time of day to block that out for certain types of activities also factors in.

So I feel like there's one other thing, and then I mentioned meditation, and I think that's one of the things that helps me the most is. Just practicing, not constantly picking up a phone, not constantly flipping channels, chasing, which we're all kind of habitually training ourselves to do these days anyway, with never ending... Not agitation, what's the word? Stimulation.

Stimulation, yes. So because of that, it's even more imperative to slow down, to pause, to stop, to take breaks, to change up your environment and your activities from if you're, if you're somebody who's sitting and on a screen all day long than you owe it to yourself to stand, move, get off screens as much as you possibly can, and all those things.

Incorporating everything I just said has helped tremendously.

KIM: Hmm. Such good tips there. I really like the one about the, um, piece of paper and the pen to jot down the thoughts because the biggest distraction for me is my own thoughts.

So the reason I titled this Podcast "Peaceful Productivity" is because I'm someone who really enjoys pursuing goals, enjoys the feeling of being productive, but never at my own expense.

I always want to be finding things that serve me and help me to feel good about what I'm doing versus putting a lot of pressure on myself and forcing myself to be productive.

So it begs the question, why is productivity important to you?

ERIK: Well, to me it's important because it. It's not about getting things done. It's not about doing things or... because there's always more to do. There's always more to do. I mean, you can clean your whole house and then start all over again and just keep doing it over and over.

That's not what productivity is. It's not doing things. What it is is making a good use of your time, and that's one definition.

Another would be matching that good use of your time with the things that matter most. So, again, kind of a little bit of a that lazy genius thing that I was talking about earlier, but that's what it comes down to

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is that time is finite. We only have so much, so I, without going on an ever-present guilt trip or a constant weight or pressure of, oh my gosh, I've got a carpe diem, or I'm wasting my life stress.

You don't want to have that stress, but you want to have a happy medium between, okay, I'm aware of my finite existence and my finite choices and what I can do with this life. I wanna make the most of it, but at the same time not freak out under the weight of that and actually enjoy it. So it's kind of finding that medium, middle phase, middle place where, you're aware of it. And you also say, yeah, but to only, to a certain extent.

KIM: Oh, I love that you brought that up. It brought to mind the idea that it's a spectrum. It's almost like being productive because it serves us and it feels good, not because we have to or because of that guilt or pressure that you mentioned earlier. Yeah. So good, so good.

I have a couple more questions. The first one is around business. So I believe that you have made a business out of podcasting. Is that true?

ERIK: Yeah, there's revenue.

KIM: You would call yourself a business owner. Is that also fair to say?

ERIK: Yes, I would. I would even say professional podcaster.

KIM: A professional podcaster with a business. Exactly.

KIM: So productivity, we've spoken about that very important to business owners. What are some other business tips that you can share with the listeners, especially as it relates to podcasting?

ERIK: Yeah. I would say for me, having done this for this long, I still go back to, okay, it's okay to reassess.

It's okay to pause. It's okay to say, is this working? It's okay to say, do I need to change things up? Do I need to add things in? Do I need to cut things out?

You need to do that from time to time. You need to reassess. You need to take the pulse. You need to see what's going on, what's working. If something's not working, how can you take time, pause, fix that.

That's just one aspect. I would say that on top of that, you've gotta realize that, like for me, for a long time it was not a primary thing.

If you are doing something on the side. Then just make sure that you have the bandwidth for it. That's where streamlining processes and workflows comes in. Reassess, okay, I know how long it takes me to do a certain thing and it took me way longer this time. Why? Or maybe, you know, making a challenge, getting it down on top of the fact that sometimes you need to add people into the mix that you delegate or assign things to. It took me too long to get to the point where I had an editor for my show that wasn't me, and I'm so happy I have that now.

KIM: Awesome. Yeah. All really good points. About building a bit of a team, delegating what really is less essential and getting really clear on the vision and the goals. And I loved that you, you've brought this up a couple times now, revisiting your why and giving yourself permission to like either keep going or change direction. I love that. How did you come across that idea?

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ERIK: I've kind of made a habit of taking David Allen's brain dump method, and I just decide, you know what things go for so long and then. That you either get bored with it or you feel like, yeah, you know what? I don't really feel like doing this right now. Okay, hold up because you've made commitments, so you've gotta figure out how to make this work.

And so for me, I'll do a brain dump. I'll get a big legal pad, and I'll go to like a coffee shop or something, and I'll have a coffee and I'll just write down any and everything and just get it all outta my head or make it focused.

But like, then you can use that. And by the way, going back to that whole, the pad's over there and I pull it close, write an idea. You have permission once you're done with your time block to pick that pad up and say, okay, now what was the stuff I wrote down? Was any of this any good or was it just distraction?

And once in a while there's one or two things on there that are like, oh, that's a good idea. Let me make some time for that in the future. Mm-hmm. So that I can further research that.

KIM: Yes. Make some time giving yourself the space and grace to actually think about what it is that you're doing in advance and upon reflection. Brilliant.

ERIK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Acknowledging that and building in that thinking time as well. Yes. You know, not exactly, not saying I'm gonna, I'm gonna run at 90 miles an hour every hour of the workday and the work week. No. There are moments in the week where it's that curve that says curve, take this curve at 30 miles an hour. Oh, okay. And sometimes you don't and you see why you should.

KIM: Exactly. Exactly. I love it. So last question. What do you do for fun?

ERIK: I probably play too many video games, but I try to do that with my kids.

When I do that, I enjoy reading. I really enjoy listening to music. I like walking my dogs love hanging out with my friends. I like coffee shops and motif here. I love going to the coffee shop and just talking with my friends about, you know, latest movies or things like that. That's, that's kind of what I do is like, I, like, I still like talking constantly, I guess.

KIM: So you feel like you've struck that work-life balance, whatever that means to you?

ERIK: I think that that's something that's constantly shifting, but I think that overall you shift with it, and again, that's the seasonality of it. Yes, yes. Overall, I try to, you know, oh, you know what? Haven't been able to connect with this person in a while.

Let's do that. Or, hey, this is a busy week for me, let's do something fun this weekend, kind of a thing. And you know, you even it out, it's never gonna be 100% perfect. You have to accept that.

KIM: Wonderful. So good, so much that you have to share and so many episodes of your podcast that we can listen to. Where can we find you?

ERIK: Yeah, well best places to just go to beyond the to-do list.com. That's where you can find all the episodes. You can shoot me a message, you can follow me on all the socials. I think they're listed there and yeah, that's the best place.

KIM: Amazing. Thank you so much for coming today, Erik. I really appreciate it.

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ERIK: You're welcome! Thanks for having me.

KIM: Take care.

Are you looking for a coach who will help you increase your business profit while protecting your time and your wellbeing? If so, I'll invite you to check out my website, FinancialWellnessCoach.ca.