Scale! with PREDICTABLE SUCCESS

David Allen

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***Note**:This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity and understanding.There may still be grammatical and spelling errors,*

Les McKeown: Well, welcome to the latest in the Predictable Success podcast series in which we're interviewing people who have achieved Predictable Success in their own chosen field. I'm Les McKeown, founder and CEO of Predictable Success. And today I'm delighted to be joined by David Allen. David of course needs little introduction as an author, consultant, international lecturer and founder of the David Allen company. David is widely recognized as the world's leading authority on personal and organizational productivity. David's Getting Things Done (GTD) methodology is one of only two external resources we explicitly endorse here at Predictable Success. For many of you, you will be very familiar with David and his work. Welcome David,

David Allen: Delighted to be here with you Les.

Les McKeown: Thanks for joining us, David. I really appreciate it. Like I said, most of the people listening are going to be very familiar with you and GTD - we mention it, we recommend it regularly, but most of the folks aren't going to be familiar with your background. Would you share with us a little bit of what led up to GTD - did it sort of emerge fully formed one day in a visionary trance? Were you working on it for years and years? How did you get to that point in producing it into the book form that you did in 2001?

David Allen: Well, let's see... very long story, very short would be no big overnight epiphany, small little epiphanettes over, over an extended period of time. you know, I didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up all the way into my thirties and then, I sort of helped friends start businesses - was kind of number two guy in a number of small enterprises and, and, you know, I just kind of showed up and it turned out I happened to have a knack for trying to be as lazy as possible and seeing if they were overdoing something and working too hard at something - I'd say, look, can we, can we do this easier? So, at one point I said, well, after 35 professions, it's either consultant or flakes. So I decided to pick, take the positive route, hopefully hung out my shingle, started my little consulting practice where I just said, okay, I'm going to trust...

David Allen: ...If I show up with that kind of focus - how can I make things easier - I'll learn some stuff and hopefully be valuable enough to pay my rent. And then I met some great mentors and I was hungry for this. Another vector here that sort of merged together was my interest in the

human growth field out there. And how do, how do we improve ourselves andI was particularly interested in models and principles that if you go apply the principle, apply the model, things work better. Well that's, that's mr. Lazy, I'm the laziest guy in the world. So I intended to be a scientist about how to explore all that, and also discovered what I considered the strategic value of clear space, you know, like nice to have a clear head. In the martial arts training that I did way back in the early seventies, as well as other meditative and contemplative practices I was involved in 'clear space', which was a nice place to operate from.

David Allen: I was smarter. I could see things better. And, as I got more into the professional world and sort of started to consult with a lot of people who were living in very unclear space. And so I was hungry to find what are those things that allow us to stay focused, even in the middle of four people jumping you in a dark alley and, you know, long story short again, I wound up finding and discovering some really great techniques. I had several mentors. I list them, I think in my first book and I, and I began to pull it together and it turned out these things really, really worked. So it took me a long time to kind of figure out what I'd figured out, because I thought I was the last guy in the world to learn this stuff.

David Allen: I did not have any kind of formal, you know, business training or education. All of mine was just street smarts out there. And I figured all the really successful people would have already figured this out. And then over the years, as I began to discover, I seemed to come up with stuff that nobody else seems to have recognized. I didn't make it up. I would, I just began to explore and recognize what were the best practices on the underlying principles. And then how would you apply that. And then long story short through various iterations of little boutique kind of consulting gigs and partnerships essentially I kind of scaled all back to just me and my wife back about the end of '96. And by that time I'd done a good bit of work out there for, you know, I've been invited into some of the larger organizations and corporations, and I seen how successful my work was.

David Allen: I'd been asked to format it into an educational model. I discovered ways to work with people individually and apply these principles. And then that sort of hit a nerve out there. And it was really very referral-based. We had no marketing or sales - it was just picking up the phone and saying, who wanted me next? All that's to say it took me about 20 years to figure out what I'd figured out. Finally, working with a very big global client, with some of the best and brightest business people in the world that basically this, what I was doing, the individual coaching I was doing, as well as the workshops I was doing started to go viral inside that organization. I said, well, look, everybody works here. Their immune system will spit you out in about two seconds if your stuff didn't stand toe to toe with that kind of energy, then it must be worth it.

David Allen: So all that's a very long version of a very short version of a very long story about then I decided to write the book. I had a bunch of advisors say, look, David, I really want to grow your business. You need the book out there as a business card. So I said, Oh, okay. And I knew

that I needed to write a book and sort of create a manual for this because there wasn't one, and there didn't seem to be anybody else who'd come up with what I come up with. And, I wasn't sure I could get it into a book, but I, I, that was an agonizing process. Les, you're probably aware, you know, to get something simple like that, but get it into a form and a format that is actually usable and useful in a virtual format, like a book, and then the book launched in 2001, and, you know, the rest is history as somebody says.

Les McKeown: At the point that you sat down to produce the book, David, by that time had had GTD coalesced into an overarching philosophy, sorry, methodology, I should say.

David Allen: Yeah. It had, I that's one of the things that I had, that's why I felt competent writing the book, I really knew it worked. And I really knew what the process was. And I knew that I had had thousands of people by that point go through public seminars, as well as in-house seminars. And a lot of people that I, and other of my small staff had worked with, it never failed to work. Every single thing worked all the time, always. And so I said, okay, it's good enough to then put into that package. So the methodology was pretty big. And by the time I started to sit down to write the book, the challenge was how they, how would you transmit that If I didn't have two days, one-on-one for 16 hours with somebody to get it to them, or a whole day or two of seminar and workshop that I could sort of walk people through it and demonstrate it and model it, how, how could I virtualize it So, yeah, the the methodology was pretty much baked in by that time.

Les McKeown: So had there been a point when you realized - was there an aha moment when you thought - I don't have a series of individual best practices anymore, I have a methodology? Was there a final sort of capstone at any stage that sort of slid into place and you thought 'that's it it's done now', or did it just organically...?

David Allen: Yeah, no, that's, that's a real good question Les. You know, in a way, there have been some epiphanous moments (if that's a word) where I realized that what I had uncovered was really the hallmark of a much deeper set of principles, right? So the principle didn't change, but you know, I'll go out on a limb here and say, look, from my working hypothesis about what we're on the planet to do there are two things we need to be responsible for: where we have put our creative energy karma (if you want to use it and risk a word like that). But it's like, okay, look, you commit to something. If you don't close the loop you will be responsible and held responsible at some point. So somehow being responsible for what we have created and simultaneously being responsible as ongoing creative, you know, energy fields, you can't stop creating.

David Allen: So how do we now be responsible for where we put our focus? So essentially, you know, I really recognized that the best practice is about how do you clean up your desk and your email and your head happened to be the best practices on the planet. I realized, look, we need to be responsible for what we have put in motion and engage with it appropriately so that

we can then engage appropriately with where we put our energy. And so when people started to implement GTD, I watched them go from being driven by latest and loudest, essentially the victims of life to being in the driver's seat. It may not be fun. It may not be easy, but at least they got hold of the wheel. So that is a key.

Les McKeown: And when the book came out in 2001, did the book immediately have an impact on your business and your life, or did it, was it a slow burn?

David Allen: Yeah, personally, I have to say the first time that I walked into Barnes and Noble in Santa Barbara and saw my book on the shelf, I went, 'Oh my God, it's a real thing'. Like giving birth to a baby. I got there and it had been a long, a very long agonizing process. And at some point I always thought I wanted to write and I wanted to be a writer. I wasn't quite sure how, or in what way, but that's always been attractive to me. So just personally, there was a nice completion about that. And the first time I got an email from a woman who had picked up my book on a shelf in a, I dunno, a Borders bookstore somewhere and had actually walked herself through the process. as I wrote it in the book, Getting Things Done and wrote back to me that it absolutely had changed her life.

David Allen: I went, yes, that was a milestone. I was thrilled, you know, that my physical body did not have to be there. And at least some, if not a significant portion of the essence of the best practices that can improve situations was baked into the book. And that was a very big thing for me. in terms of the business, you know, Viking the publisher and then Penguin, they warned me. They said, look, business books over the last five to 10 years have started to go through a cycle where sometimes it takes two to three years for them to bake out there. You know, I think it's because there's more than three business books published every day in the United States. There's literally over a thousand new business titles, just in the US alone. So with that,

Les McKeown: I'm ignoring those statistics, thanks...

David Allen: It's scary, isn't it? And I mean, we're all behind in our reading, obviously. I'm, you know, I'm sitting there looking at a huge stack of stuff on my, in my inbasket waiting for me to try to get through. But I think because of that, there's a kind of a numbness and a skepticism out there. I don't, I think even if you wrote the truly, you know, the next major, major mega hit that, you know, it takes a while for that to sort through. And everybody's kind of, I think everybody kind of subliminally waits around and waits for all the fluff to die away - was that just the buzzword du jour? - will your book just have its own short little tight life lifespan? I don't know. I'm not sure I'm pretending I know something about all that now I'm sitting on the other side.

David Allen: I just wrote it, you know, but how so I guess the simple answer is no, not overnight did we get stuff, but I think it was considered a best seller, you know, in hardback when it was launched, given what happened. And there was a lot of commensurate press that happened along with that too, for me to end, it was kind of hard to say, which is which as you know, there's just

lots of ways to get your message out there. And that starts to triangulate by the fifth or six times somebody sees it in a different form. And then here's a friend talk about it, you know, then they decide they pick up to pick up the phone.

Les McKeown: The thing that amazed me about it is how quickly it just became an, an evergreen, bestseller is not the right word, but a classic. And I was amazed when I was just trying to remind myself ahead of the interview here that that was 2001, I, I I've said to people I've been using GTD since I started in business in 1976, and it's chronologically impossible, but it feels it's got to be right. And I think that's the reflection of what'd you said a moment ago that what you're writing about, isn't just a series of productivity principles. It's how to live in the world. And it just, I've always said, truth always feels right. And I guess that's what you have.

David Allen: Yeah. Well, it takes one to know one Les, come on. So we can flip the tables here in terms of it. That's why your book so resonated with me. As I said, this is evergreen, this is a guy who's lived it, he's done it. He's baked it down to what's going to be true no matter where he goes in, as I think I told you this, you were, you, you were a person of equal laziness. You know, I said, I wanted to find out what was true so I didn't have to keep recreating a story with everybody I talked to.

Les McKeown: Yeah. And the last thing I wanted to do, as well as write a book that had to be updated every year. So,

David Allen: No, I think you're right. And I sort of recognized that to begin with. As a matter of fact, I had two line edits that we really gave that book a bath looking for any time-based, you know, terminology and also any business terminology, which since I've been in the business world for so long, I couldn't even recognize that myself. So I had to have some new eyes on it. So they took all that out because I think, and we, we thought this really, truly could be evergreen. And I think 10 years from now, nobody's going to write another Getting Things Done. You know, I think that I got it very much, like by the way, Getting to Yes, you know, Yuri's book about negotiation, and nobody's going to write another one of those.

Les McKeown: Somebody might steal about one third of the title, but that's about it. So tell us a little bit about your role in the David Allen Company.

David Allen: Well, it's just been morphing as a matter of fact. You know, I wasn't really a very ambitious person saying I'm going to go out and take over the world. I was romantically thinking, gee, GTD, you know, everybody in the world who needs to keep track of more than one thing in the moment can use it. So, you know, I would like to share it with as much of the world, and it improves without exception - always improves people's conditions and situations. So there's a part of me that's sort of more as an educator, more than a, I guess, an entrepreneurial or a business person. So in a way I was very, I kind of had the entrepreneurial zeal about getting the

education out more than anything else. And to a large degree, you know, I kept management of the company and it really grew primarily by, by simply client demand, as I began to do work.

David Allen: And a big client said, God, we need more of this, more of this. And I just had limits to how much I could do. So I actually have a great network of people and folks that I knew and trusted could catch my DNA and that I could trust to do that. But it grew very, very slowly and very organically, mostly just keeping up with demand and, pretty much, you know, one of the basic principles I had early on in my company is we're all, we all act as if we're all alone in this together, you know, I needed people that could manage themselves. And you know, you have very few consulting firms ever get past one or two people because you need to hire really good people to do it. And if you hire really good people, they can do it by themselves.

David Allen: And they say, well, I don't need you. So almost nobody breaks through that barrier. You know, of, of being able to expand, you know, what they're doing, if they're the guy or the woman who wrote the book or who sort of captured the methodology, if that's what you're trying to grow, but I sort of did start to morph that way. We just had attracted great people that were very interested in this. And, you know, I pretty much reinvested all of my stuff back into growth. And a lot of that growth was just hiring really good people that could help try to figure out what to do with this animal, because, you know, GTD, especially once the book was out, was in both the self-help world, as well as the organizational change world. And those are two very different businesses. I mean, I've had very smart people tell me I've been very dumb to try to have my legs in both of those camps.

David Allen: It truly is like having your feet on two icebergs because, you know, it was very different business models for those things. But the truth is I could not - and none of us around here could - divorce ourselves from both those camps, because the truth is that when GTD is applied in an organizational setting, a lot of the change happens because of the individual best practices that key people began to install and implement. And I could not tease those apart. And we weren't sure whether this was where it was going to grow and how it was gonna grow anyway, that much longer than what you ask about.

Les McKeown: Not at all. You don't split them internally? You don't have different...

David Allen: We don't, no we don't. What we wound up with and, you know, we've got a company of, I guess, 45 people now, including some of a few international folks that have their own practice, but they're full time, you know, working with our work, well, we, we wound up developing just different lines of our business, different distribution channels. The core business, really, which we wrap under what we call workplace learning is really about organizational change and organizational education and best practices and how you get them into the organization. That's been our core business anyway, in the training and development world and in management and professional and executive development. So that's where a lot of that is. And we've tried to build a set of products and services that serve that so that we could scale it. And

this was actually fairly recently that we've decided to invest our resources to make that happen. So that started out with one on one coaching developed into seminar and workshop business, but now we've added an eLearning component to it, a train the trainer component, sort of internal certification for the large organizations that want to, you know, internalize the IP.

David Allen: But we also have products, you know, we have a few pieces of cool gear that I've designed and sort of not invented, but sort of customized, that map to the GTD thing. And then a number of products that we're developing, like, you know, audio and video things that people can get through our store. So that does address empowering a lot of individuals to do it. We also have an online marketing, a business where we, you know, ultimately what we do is, people can as individuals be members of that. And that's something they pay for individually, but it's also is included as part of our performance support package, that, you know, organizations get when they sign on to do seminars with us. so we got a lot of number of those kinds of things. Now, the individuals out there, obviously a lot of people, buy my book individually.

David Allen: A lot of people tap into us through a husband or a wife who went to a seminar inside of a big company. And they came home and said, gee, dear, you've got to know this, you have to do this. And so they come to public seminars. So we were still reaching out to all those different venues and avenues. But I think right now we're focused, especially to keeping ourselves viable and growing well and really expanding our work and making sure that sticks out there in the corporate change world and the workplace learning aspect of it.

Les McKeown: And your role at the moment, is that of chairman. What does that mean?

David Allen: You know, well, I ran the, I ran the place myself, kind of the reluctant CEO is what people call me, it's like the last thing in the world I really felt like doing. I've always been interested in learning new stuff. You know, I have a 2.2 year cycle with all my hobbies, you after 2.2 years, I'll sell a sailboat, I'll get rid of my Bonzai plants and, you know, I'll get bored with chess and go and move into learning Go, you know? So I'm a Jack of everything, but I don't stick with it, so I did actually want to learn. I was very fascinated about, well, okay, how would I grow this thing and make that happen? And I have a very sort of collaborative style anyway.

David Allen: But the truth is that got out from under me. I had a bunch of advisors tell me this should be much bigger than it currently is, but to do that, I would need some professional expertise that I didn't really have, nor was I particularly interested in developing it. So long story short three years ago, I brought in Pat Smith as my CEO, he'd been an advisor to me before that to begin with. And then that was all part of a bigger strategy and game to say, okay, how can we grow this thing you know, out to where everybody says its potential really is. So I brought Pat in and essentially, you know, we'd been through the tough, but very rich and rewarding experience of how do I bring somebody on, how do I let go? How do I move myself up to it because quite frankly, and we've joked about it, but it's the truth, my job is really as an evangelist and visionary. And I needed somebody to really take this business as an education distribution business and

build that - somebody who had a lot more experience than I did and more reach that I did, and frankly, thicker skin than I do - to be able to just manage all the management stuff that you have to deal with it, to grow a business.

Les McKeown: So, given your druthers on a given day now, David, where would you, what are you most get energized spending your time? Is it with clients? Is it working out...

David Allen: Talking to people like Les McKeown! You know, quite frankly, that's it. I love meeting bright, interesting people doing really good stuff. You know, part of what floats my boat is thinking of building a global network of best practitioners who don't have time to hang out with each other, but when they do cool stuff happens that we can all collaborate, get together and do good work, make money, and have a lot of fun, you know, so anything that moves things in that direction would be great. And it's fun for me. I love the ability to range around and follow my intuition about, you know, I think I should read this guy, Les McKeown's book. I got 1520 books here, but that one sticks out. And so the freedom to then do that, discover what was in there, know how to then bring that back in and access that value, you know, create a network and collaboration and connection with, with, with folks like you that's really fun, which you're not gonna do that forever.

Les McKeown: Yeah. One of the things that I've always enjoyed has just been following these sort of little droppings that you leave around - people's names and things that they do. And what's cooler is that what 'this guy' is doing has always been high added value content. So, you know, even just on your Twitter stream, I find something that's fun and enjoyable like two, three times every month - you've got that natural ability to do that, I think.

David Allen: Thanks. Thanks. That's been fun. And, you know, writing is something I actually love to have done, right Les? I love the final result of it. And it is truly agonizing, but you know, it's delicious agony and reading is much more fun.

Les McKeown: On that note. You'd mentioned to me that, when you read Predictable Success, which you had done in galley form, that it had helped as a catalyst in your own thinking. What was it about the book that struck you?

David Allen: It was huge. There were a number of numerous things that I don't know if I could pick one that stood out more than anything else, but, you know, just top of mind, I would say, - look Les, what you did was you identified a whole lot of things that in the growth of my own business, I, once you said it the way you said it, I recognized it, but I didn't have the overarching model to know that there was light at the end of my tunnel. And I think that was the biggest end result of reading Predictable Success was really recognizing, that you had nailed essentially that, that kind of tone. I think of a business that's, you know, in that place where when you push the pedal, it goes, you know, you take off the pedal, it stops, you know, where it's highly responsive to what's going on on it.

David Allen: And that very much matches, you know, what I've explored, personally, but you had done the same thing I think that I had, which was to create vocabulary around this. So I could understand it and use it as a model to help other people understand what were the things we were experiencing. And it wasn't the end of the world. It was actually a sign of positive growth. So that was, that was huge. Just huge to do that. I think your definition, you know, the, the different stages and what kind of person and what kind of behavior works there, because, you know, as, as you know, cause we, you know, for those of you listening, we brought Les onboard. Once I read it, I said, God, we got to get this guy in here because our company is going through some of the, the upheavals of growing something from a mom and pop to a larger organization and really recognizing what is Whitewater and how that works.

David Allen: And that it's just an indicator of growth. And then here's the key about how you thread through that and here are the things to watch and so forth. So all of that was just extremely valuable. And I, it was a context I had never really had before. I, you know, I've read Itchak Adizes and some of the other folks who've written about the organizational life cycles, but nothing like the way you had had nailed it really hit the, hit the nail on the head. I recognized us and not every model is a little simple as you know, you know, nobody's exactly fits the model, but it gave us a common vocabulary. We've already found that extremely useful in the company here, just given some of the fast changes we're going through as a way to have an outside source, kind of let us know, give us a reference point to be able to thread through, you know, intricate and kind of, you know, sticky conversations and things.

David Allen: And, you know, Hey, the salespeople versus the operational people who just hate the meetings. They just want to be out there getting it done. And yet you got that me and Pat both have this visionary component where we're dropping, you know, you know, we're flying over and dropping things on the boat on a regular basis. And, you know, we've got process - where do we need more process? Where do we have too much process? And just great vocabulary, common sense stuff. As, you know, all this is in retrospect, but it was very freeing.

Les McKeown: Well in the, in the mutual praise department, I had two books very much in mind when I sat down to try to carve Predictable Success out. I had entirely resonate with what you talked about at the top of the call, just that agonizing notion of trying to get something that you typically spend one and a half, two days with people interacting with them, and trying to put it into flat words on a, on a printed page. The two books that, that most had in mind as a model where Christopher Alexander's Design for Living stuff where he, you know, shows visual models for what a community should look like. And he just has these beautiful, elegant hand drawn diagrams. And I thought, if I can, if I can get something done in that format so that viscerally, when you look at something, you can get an almost immediate sense of, 'Oh yes, I'm here'. And on the other hand, the way you had done in GTD, which literally sat beside me when I was writing this to produce a vocabulary says, okay, I don't care whether he actually used the words that I'm giving you, but if you can take a set of vocabulary and share it with the people in your

organization, it short circuits the discussion so much. So that that's where that all came from. And I'm glad it worked for you.

David Allen: Cool. No, it's fabulous. And I think we're just beginning to take advantage of it. And, you know, it's providing a great framework for us as we're threading through, how do I get to graduate more into my sort of chairman and visionary and evangelist role? How do we grow our team that they can build this into the Predictable Success quadrant or frame in that to say, are we there yet? Are we not there yet? And now our newly formed sort of corporate board to be able to hold the company now accountable on a regular basis. SoI've charged Pat with, you know, the three things called manage the business, manage the culture, manage the brand. And now we have a reference point for managing the culture. It was kind of a throw a dart before and kind of hope and just intuit. And we don't know, but now you gave us a great model for mapping, at least that very critical component for a lot of businesses these days - how do we make sure that we've got the culture that can deal with change appropriately? And of course, correct things when they get off and that's great stuff.

Les McKeown: Well, thank you. I'd like to link that to something that you said earlier about the fact that when you go into work, when, when David Allen Company goes into work with a company, you're dealing obviously on an individual basis with senior executives, you're helping them get their productivity together, but they are large companies - are they typically bringing you in because they feel that there are specific individuals that could benefit? Or are they looking to have David Allen company bring a sort of systemic change to the way they operate? And, and how do you think that...

David Allen: All the above. It's interesting when you think about it, you know, organizational change is made by key individuals that have organizational responsibility, right? So there is no organization per se. You know, that's the problem. If you say, well, the team should do it, who? Who on the team should do it? You know? So there's always an individual that needs to be involved. At the same time, the principles of GTD - I wrote this in my last book, Making it all Work - are really applicable across an enterprise, not just an individual, cause an individual's an enterprise themselves anyway. But the same thing is true - organizationally, the organizational issues are exactly the same as the individual ones. There, things are not under control or things are not appropriately focused. So those two things - we have things appropriately under control, and that's where the systems and operations and so forth, you know, are appropriately there.

David Allen: And that's also even where the vision component needs to come in. If you don't have appropriate vision, then you will not be aiming the shift where you need to go, and you're going to run into tough waters. You shouldn't have run into. So that all of it has a control factor to it. And then you do exactly the same thing, come in with the teams and say, what's got the team's attention. You know, what's the clarification the team needs about what's pulling on it right now - What are the projects? What are the objectives? Who owns it? What are the action

steps needed to be taken? How do we allocate resources? As you know this, GTD is nothing but just good business language and good business practices. And so, yes, there is a real application of that. Once people have a micro model for themselves, personally, they recognize how critical this model might be for the organization.

David Allen: So to your point, we can build in, and that's what we're doing now to some major organizations right now is they're using this to help establish a common language as well as to help us facilitate those just good old discussions called 'what does 30,000 feet look like? What does 40,000 look like? How will you know when success has happened? What what behavior changes in the organization need to happen to move the needle? What is the needle? You know, all those great kind of business questions. So giving a framework where they can trust, we can really build in the vocabulary. I think the big key for us is, we have the key to execution. And that's usually where all that stuff tends to fall down. So everybody can think through all kinds of models, but when it comes, really comes down to it, when you walk out the door, it really comes down to what are people going to do physically differently that afternoon, based upon that great conversation, the great strategic plan, the great vision session, the great, you know, whatever that was. So being able to build that in, and trust that then people will have a systemic way to ensure that things get done on the front end, as opposed to on the back. That's I think where, where people are starting to see, wow, you got to, you got a neat mix of stuff that we can bring into a culture.

Les McKeown: Do you have the situation that happens with me, where you go into an organization, you bring that approach, but there's one key individual who just doesn't want to get on the bus.

David Allen: Yeah. Happens all the time, you know, but it's not like our stuff created that individual. We can speed up the process of having it recognized and much like yours too, I'm sure. It's kind of like when you see it, as soon as you have stable data, you find out what's unstable. If you have no staple data, then the unstable stuff can keep wandering around and nobody ever knows where it's coming from. It just feels that way right now.

Les McKeown: Do you act proactively in that situation, or do you let them work it out?

David Allen: You know, pretty much we let them work it out. It depends on who's writing the check. Come on, you know, let's get real. It's like, well, who's your customer? We have always worked - like everybody has to - about managing the expectations. You know, who's bringing us in? For what reason? What are they willing to deal with? Do they really want to get there? And our job is then to let them know, well, here's what happened. Here's what showed up. The truth is, is once people start to get GTD, I'd say 98% of the time, most people, once they sort of catch this, really come on board, they realize it's not some foreign thing that's going to be inserted in there, and the immune system is not spitting it out.

David Allen: As a matter of fact, the organism is going - wow, this is really what we needed because we didn't have to change. It just turbocharged us. Right. But when that happens, you know, if people have been able to get by with pretending they were more organized than anybody else, and suddenly their boss is a lot more organized than them, that shifts the conversation fast. In other words, they can't play those cards anymore. So there's a lot of times what it does is it clarifies 'Is this yours? Is this mine?' and it really gets people accountable to, you know, managing themselves appropriately. And they can't play the victim card a lot after this

Les McKeown: On a somewhat different note. I'd just be interested in the answer - which may may be just 'no', but are there any areas in which, people don't get what you - David Allen company and GTD can do for them. Do you get put in a sort of two dimensional cartoon box, where people think, Oh, that's about three ring binders or software?

David Allen: Oh yeah. Most of the time, that's the big rock we're trying to push up the Hill right now - how do we get people to not put us in the time management box? You know, because that's not what this is about. It's much deeper than that. That was one of the, you know, back to our earlier conversation, that was one of my big ahas. And also one of my big concerns was that nobody would really catch what was really unique about GTD because it's such a noisy space out there - personal organization and productivity. It's not even about the organization. Everybody calls me the organization guy, because quite frankly, that's mostly what people need to get more under control is they need better systems, because most people have over created like crazy, then their system couldn't catch up with it.

David Allen: But the truth is a lot of people are over organized that need to unhook from that and focus a lot more on the vision and the 30 and 40 and 50,000 foot stuff they need to be focused on. So I guess the biggest, if there were a frustration, it would be, and that's, that's our big challenge we've got - is to position ourselves, not as just okay for the lowly schmucks of the world that need time management, but I'm a lofty executive and I don't need that. Well, you know, Drucker, you know, hopefully put the nail in that coffin, but I think having people understand the subtler aspect of these, these core principles and how they apply and that they can be applied culturally. I don't think there's been a lot of success factors out there about it. So I understand the skepticism. but yes, that's our marketing challenge.

Les McKeown: So what's next, you know, that's one challenge. What else are you going to grapple with over the next couple of years?

David Allen: They're trying to figure out how to do international. That's a big one. It's a big piece of ours. Yeah. Trying to figure out what's the best way to do that, where you can keep the quality control and you really can build a network out there of people that don't start pulling some part of your animal, you know, in ways that it doesn't want to go. Right. And, and, you know, trying to get that one right. I think that's a big piece. I think we're at a place now... and you know, when you did your workshop with us, you caught us really at the cusp where we've just gotten

to the point where a lot of the tiers of services and products we can now do are now scalable really globally for a very large organization. So, you know, we need to get that under our belt.

David Allen: And I see that as very much parallel with, as you coached us, it's probably going to take us anywhere from three to 18 months to get through the Whitewater. And a lot of that I think is because that's what we've taken on now, those kinds of jobs, those kinds, we have those opportunities - the phone's ringing every day now. So we have the stress of those opportunities. And so standing up to that and getting this on to some level of next level of cruise control for the organization, so that we're just producing that much more value on a much larger scale. And that's a big gum to chew. That done successfully - not that we need to be huge, but that we are appropriately positioned with the right kind of clients that we can really, really, really do the kind of good work that I think GTD embedded will bring forward - and having that happen on a much more consistent basis on a larger scale. That's what's pulling me.

Les McKeown: Well, you've done a magnificent job so far. And one of the great pleasures I had of spending time with you and your team was to see what an incredibly loyal group of people that you have. Many of them been with you for a long, long time and are highly committed and boy, are they whip smart. I mean, that's one intimidating group to go stand in front of, but you've got a huge amount of power under the hood for that engine, so,

David Allen: Thanks. Well, yeah. Yeah, I think so. And I think, I think a lot of it is just the nature of the material is so powerful that I really feel like there's something bigger going on than me. And I'm just a, you know, I'm just a warden, essentially a ward of that. And hopefully I'm not in the way and it's attracted some really great people. You're right.

Les McKeown: I think there's not a single person that would take the view that you're in the way. Well, I just want to wish you all the best. I'm hopeful - I'm really excited about - watching everything that happens from here on in. It's been a pleasure to get closer to you and your team. And, I hope that we'll get to talk many times in the future. David, thank you very much for spending time with us

David Allen: Very much my pleasure, Les.