

Andrew: This session is about how to grow your company with a remote team. It's led by Jason Fried. He is the founder of Basecamp, whose project management software helped over 285,000 companies in 2013 alone. Our conversation today is based on his book, *Remote: Office Not Required*. Here's some of the screen shots and the illustrations from the book. I'll be here to help facilitate.

My name is Andrew Warner. I'm the founder of Mixergy, where proven founders like Jason teach. Jason, I'd like to illustrate the problem with the real world example, and you just told me what happened when you put up a help wanted ad on your job board. What were you seeing?

Jason: So, we are currently looking for another product designer, interface designer. And we're getting really interesting results this time. We've gotten about 130 applications so far in about a week. So, it's a lot. But what we're seeing is a fair number of people are applying for the job because we allow remote working.

And so they're actually saying in their applications, and their emails, and their cover letters, that one of the reasons they're looking for a new job is because they're current employer does not allow them to work remotely. And they actually like their job a lot. They like their current job. They feel good about it. But it's not satisfying completely for them, because they don't want to have to go to the office every day. They don't want to fight the commute and the traffic every day.

So they're actively looking for a new job, even though they love their job, and they're looking for a new job because they want to love the new job, and they want to be able to work remotely. And so, we're seeing a lot of really interesting applications. People that normally wouldn't be looking for work but are, because they're being forced not to be able to work at home.

Andrew: I see. And I can see in that, the duality, the danger, and the opportunity. The danger is the people who you want are going to be looking elsewhere, even if you give them a great job that they're happy with, if you just don't let them work remotely. And you've got a job board right here, where you allow people to look for remote work. And that's the opportunity. If we allow our people to do that, then they're going to be much more likely to work with us.

By the way, I saw this just moments before we talked. Here is a post by Tim Bray, who is leaving Google. He says he loves Google. The reason that he's leaving is because they will not allow him to work from Vancouver. Everything else he loves about it, but they're missing out on great talent. Even Google has this problem, because they don't allow remote work.

Jason: That's amazing. I hadn't seen that. Was that just posted today, or recently?

Andrew: Just minutes ago. It hit the top of Hacker News, which is the reason why it caught my eye. It said, wait someone's leaving Google? And that's the top, and now I understand why. Alright. And so we're going to allow people to capitalize on some of this. As I said before, I pulled out some ideas from the book that I wanted us to talk about. And the first one, this is an important one, you say allow overlapping schedules.

By the way, the images in the book are so good. I just want to show people. Right there. Allow overlapping schedules. Why should we allow overlapping schedules? If people are working remotely, especially if they're all over the world, what's the problem with just saying, show up anytime?

Jason: Well, I think you want a little bit of overlap, but most of the time you don't want to overlap. The reason you want a little bit of overlap, is because you want those moments during the day when you can have rapid fire back and forth. Discussion, review, conversations. But if you have that all the time, what ends up happening is you end up disrupting each other, interrupting each other non-stop.

So it's nice to have a couple hours, three hours maybe, where you can get feedback nearly immediately from somebody. But then the rest of the day, the next five hours, or whatever it might be, you can go off and do your work in a quiet environment where you're not being bothered. If you don't overlap at all, let's say you're working in Chicago, and someone's from New Zealand, and there's very little overlap. It ends up taking about 24 hours to ever get feedback on something, and that, ultimately, ends up being too slow.

So by just having a few hours during the day, when you're overlapped, you get enough of the bandwidth for quick feedback, and then the rest of the day you actually have enough time to do the actual work.

Andrew: You know what? And that explains why so many people don't like having out-sourced teams, or remote teams, because the idea of sending something at the end of your day and not getting to check back on it until the following morning is pretty frustrating, because then you have to wait till the end of the day again before you can send out for feedback. What kind of

Jason: By the way, I think that's one of the issues people have always had with out-sourcing. When they think of out-sourcing, sometimes they'll think of out-sourcing to India. And in the U. S. And one of the big problems with that is not necessarily just quality. In some cases the quality is fine. In some cases it's not. But the problem is that the feedback cycle is basically twice as long, which is difficult and frustrating if you see something that you changed or you need to kind of stop someone before they go down the wrong direction.

It feels like forever to get a response back and to be able to correct course and stuff, and I think that's one of the tough things. So outsourcing is a concept that's strong, but I think at a certain point if it's too far away and there's not enough overlap you run into really weird situations.

Andrew: Okay, and so at Basecamp you look for four-hour overlap, and that way there's enough time for people to interact but basically a little more than half the day is no interaction, quiet time.

Jason: Roughly, if it's three it's fine, but we've gotten some applications from people in New Zealand that were quite good, but I think it's tough, it's just a little too far away and the time zones don't overlap. If we had, for example, a designer in the

U.K. and then someone in New Zealand we could make it work, because there's some more overlap with someone else. But we don't have anyone that's really within the 12-time zone and so it's difficult.

Andrew: So it's not that the whole team needs to have a four-hour block that everyone is working together. You're saying within the people who work together there should be a four hour block overlap?

Jason: Yes, for example, our support crew, we just hired someone in Australia and we have some people in Germany and like there's enough overlap throughout the whole team to have continuity. So there's always someone else around when someone else is around. But if there's no one else around when someone's around it becomes really challenging.

Andrew: Okay, on to the next big point here, direct from the book, Remote. Share your work with your team. This is a program that I'm using right now, frankly, to record a backup of our conversation. How do you use this and how is this an example of how to share your work with a remote team?

Jason: Yes, we use ScreenFlow a lot. ScreenFlow is great. There are a lot of tools like it. Often times when we're presenting progress on something rather than just describe it or share static screen shots, we'll just flip on ScreenFlow, record the screen, put our head in the bottom right corner and just talk through what we're doing.

So when we show the work the words match up with what's on the screen so it's just easier to follow, especially for someone who's not involved directly in the project. If you're just trying to describe the project it can be complicated; but if you're showing it it's great.

We just upload a movie to Basecamp screencast to Basecamp, and then the whole company can watch it and get up to date on what's been going on; it's fantastic.

Andrew: What kind of things are you taking ScreenFlow videos of?

Jason: Like for example, right now we're working on an iPad app for Basecamp, and we just completed one of the most complicated parts of it, which is the to-do functionality. And the team that's been working on that has been sharing some screen shots of it along the way, but when it was all wrapped up they recorded a video of themselves using it. And you just connect the dots better when you can just watch the thing being used rather than trying to imagine how the screen interacts with the screen.

So that's a great example when there's a flow, when there's a process, when there's a desired outcome and there's progress being made on something. Seeing it visually, seeing it move is just a much better way to communicate it. But if you're just showing a few static things that aren't linked together and aren't pieced together in any coherent way, it's not necessarily better to do it in video, and it might be more distracting in fact. But if you want to show progression through something video is great for that.

Andrew: I see, otherwise something like Sketch would be helpful, you take screen shot arrows. What are some other tools? We have ScreenFlow. Snag It, I think, is a program that a lot of people like for taking screen shots or videos. What else is there they can use?

Jason: A lot of us use the built in Mac OSX image capture. I've lost my memory here. It's shift-command-4, or whatever it is.

Andrew: Yes, shift-command-control-four I think to save it.

Jason: That saves it to the clipboard actually, and then I think just command-shift-four will save it to your desktop and then you can get a selection marquee. It's funny, like I've been doing this for years, and I have a hard time explaining it because it's just muscle memory. But that alone is great. And then we'll either throw in the campfire or throw it in to BaseCamp or [IMed] or whatever it is. It doesn't matter what tools you use, just like that's a great way to do it.

We use Skitch sometimes; the support crew uses Skitch a lot to point things out to customers when they have a question about how something might work, so they'll take a screen shot of that, throw some arrows on it, highlight some stuff, throw some text on it and shoot it over to a customer. That's handy.

There is also a tool called [intellect lice MCE] or something like that. That's not quite right. It saves a screen cast as an animated GIF, which then we can upload somewhere to put it on a web page really quickly if you want to show some really quick short animations or quick interactions, which is handy. Something else called like...

Andrew: Is it QuickCast?

Jason: No. I'll tell you right now. It's called... There's also one called GIF Brewery.

Andrew: Okay.

Jason: And then the other one is called LICEcap, L-I-C-E-C-A-P.

Andrew: Got it.

Jason: That's the other one. It's kind of a weird open source thing.

Andrew: Ah, there, and we can see it right there at the top of the screen how...

Jason: Yeah.

Andrew: ...they're creating it. Got it.

Jason: Yeah. It's cool because you basically just draw a square around something on your screen that you want to share. Then, you record it just like you'd record video, but it's saved to an animated GIF instead. It's just nice because you can

quickly pop that on any web page and someone can view it without having to hit play and that kind of stuff.

Andrew: I never heard of that. Alright. The big idea here is to not just show with text when someone's not there to look over your shoulder, reproduce that over the shoulder feeling with a screen capture app.

Jason: If you can.

Andrew: All right. Let's go onto the next big idea here. The next thing you say is to keep all important documents accessible. You guys use this program which you happen to also make. There it is. How do you keep it all organized? How do you know what to keep, and how do you keep it all organized?

Jason: For us there's a lot of stuff that goes into making a project. We will often put the keepers in Basecamp, the stuff like the final work. Or, if we're asking for review or we're asking for feedback on work we'll put that out there, but we'll tag it as like request feedback, or requires feedback, or not final, or something like that.

Out of the potentially it could be a thousand documents of some sort, either files or images or whatever it might be that go into a project, we'll typically just put the final ones there. Or, we'll label them as for review or something like that.

Because I think if you have too many things going on in one place it's hard to follow what's important and what isn't. Things get kind of pushed away and that sort of thing. You can star things. You can label things. But, still, it's just I think better to keep it as tight as possible with only the things that really matter for everybody or for like final deliverables, that kind of stuff.

The key, though, is however you work, because everyone works differently... Some companies want to document every last thing. We don't do that, but you can.

What's important, though, is that everybody knows where everything is. They know that there is a place to go to find the latest version of something, or there is a place to go to find the PDF of something. It doesn't matter what tool you use. There's thousands of them out there. Well, that's maybe an overstatement. Hundreds of them out there. But, whatever it is, use that tool and make sure that everybody knows where everything is so nothing falls through the cracks. That's kind of the big deal behind this.

Andrew: So, Jason, this is something that we've done here at Mixergy. One of the challenges is that someone will have a great PDF up there that's helpful. Then, we'll need to update it but we don't want to delete it. We're not even sure if we should. So, we add a second one. Or, maybe we make a mistake...

Jason: Yeah.

Andrew: ...and we add a second one that's different. Keeping track of what's most up to date, is that someone's job? Or, is it something that everyone needs to have a process for doing? We've been having trouble with that.

Jason: It's a challenging thing. One of the things is it depends on the type of thing. If it's a text document, Google Docs is actually quite good at that.

Basecamp also, for example, has a text document feature which saves all the past revisions of every single revision for a document. You can go back; you can compare differences, that sort of thing. If it's a spreadsheet, Google Docs is great for that. There's some PDF stuff that has track changes and annotations and stuff.

It's complicated. I think we're sort of in a weird phase of the world right now where a lot of documents are stored locally. Some are stored in the Cloud. Some are able to be modified live. Some are not. We're in this weird thing where everything's shaking out right now, so I think there's a lot of confusion.

Basecamp Classic, the first version of Basecamp, had file versions. We pulled that out of the new version because even though it's logical to someone like you who might understand what a file version is, a lot of people don't understand file versions and what would constitute a version, like maybe a small change shouldn't be a new version.

It's very complicated for a lot of people, so we just felt like the way that most people do it is they'll post a message. They'll maybe attach a file to that message. If there's any future versions of that file, they'll just post new comments below with the latest version of the file. That way you have a full history of all the different changes and you can see what changed and people can make notations about what changed along the way.

Andrew: Okay.

Jason: That's kind of how we do it and how others do it. But, I imagine more sophisticated solutions will come out. The key is... Like, there's a lot of great stuff. You can use GIT for this too and stuff. But average people working with GIT, it's not going to happen. So there needs to be something simpler. At the same time, I imagine in a few years, you'll be able to edit all these documents live anyway.

So it's kind of like how much work do you put in the meantime where there's sort of just this temporary time when things are a little bit weird. And things will get better in a few years. I don't know. It's kind of a messy problem.

Andrew: We have one process, for example, for editing this conversation down. Someone else could say, I have a better way, but I don't want to delete what Andrew created. I'll just create a new document. And then we end up with two. We haven't found anything that works, but what we ended up doing is there's someone here in the organization, AnneMarie, who's just really organized.

She'll go in and delete and just say it's okay to delete because everything is saved somewhere anyway, so go for it. But I guess what you're saying is, Andrew, we are 80 to 90% of the way there, don't sweat the last 10%. Just keep going and the software will catch up with what you need.

Jason: I think you pull in 20 companies and you ask them how they do things, they're all going to tell you slightly different ways. And it's fine. As long as whatever you're doing works for you, that's fine. The key is making sure that everybody on the team understands how you do things.

So if AnneMarie is in charge of just organizing stuff, because that's her forte and she's excellent at it, everybody just needs to understand that AnneMarie's going to make these calls.

Andrew: Mm-hmm. I see.

Jason: Everyone has to just know. Everyone's got different systems. It's funny. We've been doing a lot of customer calls with base camp customers. And it's amazing to see every single person we talk to uses base camp completely differently. And it's just kind of fascinating. And it's, like, sometimes I'll see the way they're using it. There's a much better way to do that, but I don't say that.

Because it doesn't matter if there's a better way. For them, it works. They're comfortable with their method and their process. So as long as they understand how to use it that way, it's great for them. Who am I to say that you're using it wrong? You're not using it wrong. You're using it right for you.

I think that's how software is in general. A lot of people will use Photoshop in dozens of different ways. You might be, like, that's how you sharpen that mask. That's not how I do it. But it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter because as long as it works for you, it's fine. The trick is when you're working for an organization and a group of people. They all have to be on the same page about how you do things. Otherwise you're going to have total chaos.

Andrew: Okay.

Jason: So I think that's key. It's more of a communication and cultural thing, more so than it is good software is going to save the day.

Andrew: Speaking of AnneMarie, for this next point, I asked her to find a visual and she found one that she wanted me to bring up to you. Let me bring up, the next point is to create a virtual water cooler. Did you post this? I couldn't believe it. I said, let's check to make sure.

Jason: Hasn't loaded yet.

Andrew: Hadn't loaded yet. Huh?

Jason: Did we post that? It looks like we did. Those are our people.

Andrew: And it looks like you personally, Jason F. Right?

Jason: That would be me.

Andrew: Okay.

Jason: Okay.

Andrew: I'm such an anal person sometimes, that if you even just relax and kid around me, I think you're wasting my time and you're wasting your own time. Let's get down to business. And I look to you as the organized person who does not allow stray pixels on your website. Everything's clean. And still you do this. Why is this such an important part of running a remote team?

Jason: I think it's an important part of running any team. Human beings are meant to screw around here and there. We're not meant to be buttoned-up for eight hours a day. It's very frustrating. So we use our campfire chat room for all sorts of stuff that is crazy. We have separate rooms for these things too.

We have a room called All Pets where people throw silly pet pictures and animal pictures in one room. We have a room for comic book lovers. And they talk about comic books. We have a room for film nerds who talk about film and stuff like that. So I think this kind of stuff brings people closer together.

People bond over these things more than they bond over work. And I think if you want to build a strong team and a loyal team and a team that understands each other, these moments of letting off steam and just kind of goofing around and getting to know each other on a deeper level than just simply like the work that needs to be done is not only valuable, it's critical.

So if you were to look at our campfire rooms, you would find a lot of, let's just call, culture. You'd find a lot of things that make sense to us that are inside jokes, that are goofy, that on the outside would look like just screwing around in a bad way.

But for us, it's like this is all who we are and we have fun with it. And we can do stupid stuff together because we know each other, and it just forms deeper bonds between people. So I have no problem with that all. I would rather that happen than not happen.

Andrew: Then I want to start to structure it too much, but I think what I need to understand and take away from this is, create a relaxed atmosphere, a place for people to post this stuff, that's not directly related to work.

Jason: Let people be themselves. And I think, if you try and squeeze this kind of behavior out of your company, you're going to create a scary place.

Andrew: But you're almost saying, Andrew, squeeze it in.

Jason: Yeah.

Andrew: Because it belongs in. Even if it doesn't naturally happen, using the tools that you have, create a tool that would allow it to naturally happen, right?

Jason: Give people some permission. And this is you, leader of the company, give people some permission to screw around a little bit. If they're afraid of doing that,

that's not going to be good. You don't want repressed people working for you. [laughs] It's going to affect the work itself. So, give people an excuse to goof around here and there, and I think everything will turn out better. Even the work itself.

Andrew: All right. That's something I'm going to come back to in the final point. But, let's continue here. Next big idea that I pulled out of the book, out of Remote, is, "Create weekly check-ins." I was trying to find a good image. I just copied one out of the book. You guys always have great images in there.

Weekly check-ins. I used to do that at my last company. And then, we all would sit around. And the first session was great. We had stuff to talk about. We were excited that we were all talking together. Then the next week, it was a little bit less exciting, more work. And then, by the 10th week, we were done. We were just sitting and going through the motions.

What happens in these weekly check-ins to keep people engaged and to keep them useful?

Jason: Well, they're not in person. So, I think, sometimes when you do them in person, you have to come up with things to keep people busy.

Andrew: Mm-hmm.

Jason: And then, you end up either doing busywork or like you said, there's nothing really to talk about. So what we do is every week or roughly every week, it's not always every week, but we have whoever's leading a project, write what we just call our, "Heartbeat," a lot of companies call it something else.

Andrew: Mm-hmm.

Jason: Check-ins, dailies, whatever, we call it a Heartbeat. And it's basically a summary of what's been happening since the last Heartbeat, and what we're planning on working on next. And we post that to Basecamp. And it goes out to the whole company.

So every project that we're working on, everybody in the company gets the Heartbeat. So they have a sense of what's going on. But they can read it on their own terms, and we're not pulling everyone into a room, and feeling like we're forced to talk about something.

Andrew: So it's asynchronous? It's not . . .

Jason: Correct.

Andrew: . . . all even in the same Skype chat at the same time?

Jason: Nope.

Andrew: It's . . .

Jason: A-sync. A-sync, although sometimes, groups in the company, like, the programmers or the designers or Ops or support, will use Google Hangouts or something, and they'll all come together every couple of weeks and just mess around for an hour talking about stuff, like ideas or wherever it might be.

So that does happen, but that's not on a regular, automated basis. It's, like, "Hey, it's been too long. Let's do this." But the Heartbeats are becoming more and more automated. And they're just write-ups. Sometimes, they have video, if we're talking, like, earlier. Sometimes, they're a screen cast, sometimes it's just text, sometimes there's screenshots.

Andrew: So it's an update on what they've been working on over the last week, related to the project that they're discussing?

Jason: Yes. That's it.

Andrew: And is there . . .

Jason: Sometimes . . .

Andrew: . . . a goal?

Jason: . . . I'll do . . . I'm sorry?

Andrew: Do you also set goals one week and then come back the following week, to not just do an update, but to match it up against the goal you set the previous week?

Jason: That's up to each Project Manager, Project Leader to decide how they want to run their projects. Some of the goals, the scales are different for some of the goals. One of the projects that's been going on for a long time, is we're opening a second data center. So we have full geographic redundancy. And that's a long-term project. And it's not about weekly goals, as much as it is monthly goals.

But then, there's other projects that are definitely evaluated on a weekly basis. It just depends. We try not to have too many rules, other than, use your best judgment about what you need to convey to the rest of the company, so people understand what's going on in the company, what projects are happening. Also, every Monday, we have a product called, "Know Your Company," and every Monday, everybody in the company's asked to simply write up what is it they've been working on.

Andrew: Mm-hmm.

Jason: And it's just one text field. And they write that up, and that goes out to everybody in the company, as well. So Project Leaders will write up the Heartbeat of the overall project. And then, each individual person on Monday will write up what they have been working on. And that could be a bullet point, it can be one, it could be three bullets, it could be a whole paragraph. It could be a short story. It doesn't matter.

Sometimes, mine are just three or four things. They can be really general. So, it could be strategy thinking and interviewing candidates for the design job. And some people are really specific about how they detail the work that they're doing.

The point is, is that I think you just got to let people be who they are. And forcing too many layers of, "You must work this way," on people, I think, it's just not really . . . this is a weird way to think about it. But it's more, like, federalism. The U. S. system, you have federal government, but then you have all these individual states. And the idea behind federalism, and the individual states is that each state gets to run slightly different experiments.

One state might deal with education this way, another state might deal with healthcare this way or another state might deal with insurance requirements this way. And the idea behind it was that when you have a lot of experiments going on, you're going to learn more. And certain things are going to bubble up and become the way other people do things. And certain things aren't going to work as well, and you can adopt someone else's idea.

And so, I like the idea of running the company in that way, in federalism style, where, I haven't really talked about this before, maybe I'll write this up, but where people are free to experiment with how they want to tell their own stories, and how they want to share their own work.

And what's cool about that is that different people will come up with different ways of sharing work. And someone will be inspired by the way someone else did something. If we prevented people from having unique ways of presenting their own work, then we'd all be doing the same thing all the time. And we wouldn't have a chance to grow, and new ideas wouldn't come up.

So I really like the idea of not having too much structure. The only structure is, like, "Hey, keep people updated on what's going on. How you do that is up to you." But the regularity is what we're more interested in. And the reminder that it's important to keep everyone updated is what's important.

Andrew: Gotcha. This is it, right? The "Know Your Company" product?

Jason: Yes.

Andrew: And it's still not public, right?

Jason: No . . .

Andrew: It's . . .

Jason: . . . it is.

Andrew: Oh, it is?

Jason: Yeah. It's actually something that we've spun off into a separate company now.

Andrew: Okay.

Jason: But it's a very different story. It'd be fun to talk about this some other time, but so, Claire Lew now runs the product. Separate company, now.

Andrew: Saw that.

Jason: We own a piece of it. But the idea behind that site, was that it was actually a letter. We didn't show any screen shots, it was all about, "Who are the companies that are really motivated to use this thing? And then, we'll give them a personal tour." And anyway, that's a whole other thing.

Andrew: Okay.

Jason: Yeah.

Andrew: I love the post that you did about how you're doing that. That you want to talk to them, you want to see them, you want to hear them.

Jason: Yeah.

Andrew: Alright. Onto the next one, which, almost shouldn't be on here, but I'm embarrassed to say, well, first let me read it. It says, "Judge people based on what actually matters." I'm almost embarrassed to say that when I work remotely, that naturally happens to me. Now that I have someone who's working here in the office, I mentioned Ann Marie, I find myself judging myself, and thinking that she's going to judge me based on how much time I'm here, based on what I show. It almost feels like, when you are working remotely, and there's nothing else to judge you, based on no face time, etcetera. That's more natural.

Jason: Yeah. Hey, I was going to say, "Loosen your tie," but you don't have one on. I mean . . .

Andrew: I put on a nice shirt and jacket for you.

Jason Fried: Well, I mean, it sounds like you're kind of uptight about some of this stuff. And you don't need to worry so much. And you don't need to control so much. And, yeah. Just don't worry about that so much. I think, what people want to see, I don't think other people are thinking about how you spend every minute of your day, and exactly what you're doing. What they want to see is what are you producing. What are you working on? What are you making? How are you pushing the company forward? How are you making progress together? That's the kind of stuff.

And that stuff is not directly tied to, "I was here for an extra 25 minutes or an extra hour," or "I got here at 9:00 a.m., and you got here at 9:30." It's not about that stuff. It's about the actual work and the output and the thinking and the creativity that you bring to the company. And that stuff's not measured in time, in my opinion. It's measured in output and "What'd you produce?" And so, I think that's what people

want to see from one another. That's what inspires them.

I mean, work ethic can inspire, as well. But just being somewhere is not work. Just showing up and being there for eight hours, doesn't mean you're working for eight hours. That sort of thing.

Andrew: I think the first time that we spoke, years ago, you threw this "remote work, work on your own time" idea out there in the world, and people all battled it. And my question to you, at the time, was "What if people start to procrastinate when they're sitting at their desk?"

I remember the example, even, specifically, was, "So Jason, what if someone sits down to do the work that you hired them to do, and then they go out for tea? And then, they make another cup of tea, to avoid work. But they are thinking that they're doing something important? And they have to go the bathroom, and then they have to come back."

And since then, what I've realized is that hasn't been an issue. People aren't shirking work. What is more of an issue is what we're going to talk about in a moment, which is overwork. And I'm wondering, is that just lucky for me that I ended up working with people who like to work a lot or is there something that you can do to encourage and foster this environment of caring so much that people are involved?

Jason: I think people blow stuff off when they don't want to do it. And they're looking for excuses when they don't want to do it. And a lot of people are procrastinators naturally, I am, as well. But all the stuff you explained, like, "Well, I want to avoid work, I want to go make some more tea," or "I want to go to the bath." All these things, it's just probably because they're not enjoying the work itself. And the work itself isn't motivating.

And look, not every day are you going to be doing something that's just totally amazing and blowing you away. So there are going to be lows in creativity and the work that you do is not the highest level all the time. You're not always working on the most interesting problems. But, on balance you want to make sure that the work that people are doing is interesting enough that they want to do it.

I believe people want to work. People want to make things. People want to contribute, and they want to create. I think it's a human thing. If they're given interesting things to do I think they're going to prefer to do that than prefer to blow it off. But, if you're not giving them interesting work to do and there's nothing stimulating about it then they're going to find something else that's more stimulating, and that might mean just walking around the office, or making some tea, or whatever it might be.

It all, to me, comes down to the work itself. That's what ultimately we have to motivate people. If the work doesn't do it you're going to have to come up with a bunch of artificial motivators, and those aren't going to last. Those are going to dry out, too, and you have to come up with more and more fake artificial things. That's not going to lead you anywhere.

Andrew: You know what? I have found that exact thing to be true. I've now worked with enough people that if there's one thing that I can see that someone doesn't love, and they're procrastinating, I almost realize that if they're not producing it fast it's because they don't love it, and they're procrastinating, and they're going through their own little hell...

Jason: Yeah.

Andrew: ...that spiral of feeling guilty for not doing it, and then not doing it because you feel guilty, and then feeling more guilty. So, at that point I try to reach out and say you know what, if this isn't your thing I can find someone else to do it and it'll be perfectly fine. People when they hear that feel really a sense of relief.

Jason: I think if you do that people will respect you, too. Because they know that you're paying attention and that you're being a human being. You're like hey, you know what, maybe this isn't... It's not that you're bad. It's just like this work, I get it, maybe it's not for you. That's totally [Inaudible 0:01:39]. We'll find something else for you to do that's more for you.

I think people appreciate that, too, that they know that you're watching and that you care. Otherwise, it'd just be like hey, do this work. I don't care if you like it or not. Like, I'm going to crack the whip. Who wants to work for someone like that?

Andrew: It's a different mindset, though. It's a mindset of understanding that there are good people that do want to do good work as opposed to feeling why doesn't anyone work as hard as me, why doesn't anyone care about my thing. Once you shift that mindset I think it becomes a lot easier to accept this person isn't crazy about it, let's see if we can find something else.

Jason: I think so, too.

Andrew: All right. Final point: beware of overwork. Last night I had some Mixergy interviewees over at my place for scotch to, like, whiskey tasting. We had five different whiskeys we tasted. It was great. I wish you were in the area to try it.

Jason: Where do you live? Where are you now, by the way?

Andrew: Yeah, when we first talked I think I was in LA, then Argentina, then DC. Today I'm in San Francisco and, hopefully, going to establish a family here and live here forever.

Jason: Got you. Cool.

Andrew: Yes. There are so many things to do here for work after hours. I stayed up late at my place with the scotch. Then, I got up this morning and ran into work and was here at 9:00 showing up for a conference call. I think I'm overworking myself.

Now, you give... Here's something that you guys do. You've done this now for a while. This is from March 2008. Do you still run workplace experiments and

specifically shorten up weeks some part of the year?

Jason: Yeah, we do. From May through October we just do four day workweeks. That doesn't mean compressing the other four days into, like, ten hour days. It means actually a shorter workweek maybe. We don't count hours, but let's just call it 32 hours instead of 40, that sort of thing. We do that in the summer.

Andrew: Okay.

Jason: Yeah.

Andrew: What about, then, the rest of the time? Because the rest of the year we're still all working normal hours. Even, frankly, as you said, it's easy to start to compress more into the days that you're working in the summer if you're working fewer days. What do you do to help people not get sucked into the work?

Jason: What's sometimes hard about remote working is that people end up doing more work because they're so close to the environment where they do the work. So, people work from home, sometimes it's hard to close at 5:00 or 6:00, because they basically just move rooms in their house. Compared to if you work in an office, you leave the office and it's easier to leave work behind. It's harder to leave work behind when it's in the same place that you are doing the work and where you live.

Sometimes you have to just spot over work. It's subtle, though. Because one thing you'll notice is sometimes some people's tone will change. Sometimes people are like we're very, very friendly and accommodating and cool, and then all of a sudden they'll get a little bit passive-aggressive.

This has happened to me in the past. I've always noticed that it's [Inaudible 0:04:35] I'm busy. Like, I'm overworked when I'm acting this way and my tone changes. So, you can spot that either in a Basecamp message, or Campfire, or email, or whatever you use. You might spot someone who used to give really thoughtful, long answers is now all of the sudden getting really short, short answers - like yes, no, that kind of stuff.

Andrew: Yeah.

Jason: You're like something's up there. Let me just talk to them and see what's up. Almost always it's overworked, frustrated, I don't have the patience to be patient anymore." And then you're, like, "Okay, man. You should take a couple days off. Just take a few days." Or in some cases, we said, "Take a sabbatical. Go away for 30 days. Just get out of here for a while. Leave . . .

Andrew: And your company can still run, Jason, when you have someone take off for a couple of days or 30 days?

Jason: Yeah, for sure. Everybody who works here, I think, I'm trying to remember the exact rule. But I think it's if you worked here for three years, might be four, three or four years, I think it's three though, you get 30 day paid sabbatical. And so, we just work that into our schedules on our calendar, and we know someone's going to

be gone. And other people fill in. And then, that's just the way it is. Now . . .

Andrew: What happens if your co-founder David needs to take a month or two off?

Jason: We're the same way. That's just the way it is. If we need a sabbatical, then we need it. Just like if someone else needs it, they need it. And we manage. It might be different for you, because you're doing these interviews. And maybe you're so attached to the interviews, that you couldn't have someone else do those interviews.

And that would be difficult for you, to have someone else fill in or for you to take a month off. But I'll tell you what, if you took a month off, your business would not go out of business. You just wouldn't do interviews for a month. And you'd survive. Things would be okay. People would understand. Of course, you're . . .

Andrew: People would be devastated and destroyed. They would be burning themselves in the street, are you kidding me?

Jason: [laughs] You're right.

Andrew: [laughs]

Jason: So I think, in most cases, people will pick up. Good organizations are flexible. And I think they can fill in the gaps if there's a crack in their organization or if someone takes off. They'll fill in the gaps, and they'll be fine until that person comes back. That's, I think, just a healthy sign of an organization.

If one person leaves and the s*** hits the fan, your "hit by a bus," factor is too high and that's a sign that you're spread too thin or there aren't enough people doing the right things or you don't have a framework in place to handle this sort of stuff. So, I think it's just a sign that your organization needs to be more flexible if you can't handle someone being gone for a couple days.

Andrew: All right. We're getting better and better at that.

Jason: Mm-hmm.

Andrew: And I do plan to take a month off and record . . .

Jason: It's hard.

Andrew: . . . programs ahead of time.

Jason: By the way, in last August, I took about ten days off, two weeks off, which is the first time I've taken two weeks off in maybe, ten years. So I take a lot of short weekend-style vacations, three or four day things. But it had been, I think, about ten years since I actually took a full, two week vacation. And you know what? For a long time before that, I'm, like, "The company can't afford me to do that." But that's an egotistical way of thinking about things.

Yeah, you know the company can survive just fine without me here for a couple of weeks or even a month or more. I'm sure it could. It would have to. If I was building a good company, it should be able to survive without me here. And I took two weeks off, and everything was great. And in fact, I came back with renewed perspective and a renewed point of purpose. And I felt better about things, and we made this big change where we renamed the company and the whole thing.

That all stemmed from taking some time away. That gave me some new perspective. And that's very valuable for me. Actually, taking a vacation made the company better in the long run. And, so I think that's the other way you have to look at it sometimes.

Andrew: The change, of course, from 37signals, is the company name, to Basecamp, and the focus on this Basecamp Project Management Software that we talked about earlier . . .

Jason: Yeah.

Andrew: . . . for the company.

Jason: Yeah.

Andrew: By the way, I asked my researcher, can you find pictures of Jason on vacation? And we found Jason Fried on Instagram, all these great pictures, people with their shirts off partying.

Jason: [laughs]

Andrew: And I said, "That cannot be Jason."

Jason: No.

Andrew: And I zoomed in, it was not you.

Jason: No.

Andrew: You're not . . .

Jason: First of all, I don't send any pictures of my personal life outside of, so that's one thing. I don't have an Instagram account. But, yeah. I'm not a big vacation guy.

Andrew: I figured.

Jason: There might be a few pictures of me on a tractor, because I have a farm. And I do that sometimes. But that might exist.

Andrew: What happened to my researcher? We should've found him on a tractor. Final question is this, these sections came out of our conversations with the Mixergy audience, and frankly, as you can see, we're running an organization here, too. And we need a lot of this, ourselves, and so we picked what would work for us.

Is there anything that I missed from this, that you wish we would've included or that you wish more people knew about from the book, "Remote," and the concept behind it?

Jason: I think that two things I would say that are especially important about the idea of remote working, I'll talk about one from the employer perspective, and one from the employee perspective. From the employer perspective, you get a chance to hire the best people in the world. You get exposed to more and more talented people because they're not all around the corner. They're not all in one physical location.

There are great people all over the place and when you permit yourself to hire anybody, anywhere, you're just increasing the talent pool available to you. What business wouldn't want to have access to more talented people? That's one of the great things about allowing your company to hire remotely. From the employee point of view, you have the opportunity to work in more places for more companies. You can live anywhere you want.

We have some people who live in small rural areas who could never have a software job because there are no software jobs around where they live. They couldn't actually live there, so they'd have to go live somewhere else. They don't want to live somewhere else. They want to live on a farm.

Andrew: Hmm.

Jason: They want to live in a small town. They grew up in a small town. They want to live near their parents. Whatever it is, it doesn't matter to me, but they get to live anywhere and they can still have a great job with a great company and that's meaningful to me as a person who provides those jobs but it's really meaningful to that employee who gets to not only live in a place where they want to live but work for a company they want to work for and have it all, which I think is just awesome.

It's also great because, from both perspectives now, we've had an employee, Kristin. She runs our support group. She started off working here in Chicago. She's awesome. She moved to Portland, Oregon. She didn't lose her job and we didn't lose her. That would've been a terrible outcome for her to say, 'I want to move to Portland,' which would mean that we would have to lose one of our best employees and she would have to quit a job that she really liked. But, instead, we said, 'Go ahead. Move to Portland. That's cool. We still get to work with you, you still get to work with us.

Everything's worked out great. It's just about respect and treating people fairly and understanding that people's lives don't revolve around their job. If you make people move for a job, that's saying that their life revolves around the job, that the job is the most important part of their life and I don't feel like that has to be the case. I think there are a lot of great things on just a pure human level and a respect level that companies can benefit from hiring remote workers and employees can benefit from working for companies who allow them to work from anywhere.

Andrew: Mrs. Hearn [SP]?

Jason: That's her.

Andrew: That's her.

Jason: Yep. That's Kristin.

Andrew: Alright. I think there was a time where we limited our customer base to whoever happened to be close enough to our location and then we realized how ridiculous that was and, through the internet, we were able to reach out, not just outside of our location, but outside of our state and country and so on. I'd like the same thing to happen for workers, for co-workers, for employees, and so on. It's not as easy. It takes some time.

I appreciate you talking here about how to do it and not making it sound like, "Oh, it's a snap. Just go do it." It's a process. There are things that you've learned . . .

Jason: Yes.

Andrew: . . . and we get to learn from you.

Jason: Let me just say something about that, too, real quick. This is not easy for companies who are not used to it. We sort of grew up as a company this way and so we understand it really well, but it is not easy. It's a big change. You're probably going to hit some stumbling blocks. You're going to be like, "This isn't working." It's hard. You've got to practice this stuff, just like anything you want to get good at, you have to practice, so you have to keep trying it.

There's some really good information in the book on how to do that. It's all about small steps. Just take it one thing at a time and you'll find out if it's right for you, but you've got to give it a chance and you've got to give it a chance to go wrong a few times, too. It has to have the room for you to adjust and get used to it, but I believe it's absolutely worth exploring and trying and I think your company and your employees will be better off for it.

Andrew: Alright. We just pulled out, as I said earlier, a few ideas from the book that we thought would be most relevant to the Mixergy audience and to you, the person who is listening to us right now. The book is Test Remote, the company now is called Base Camp. There it is, getting great reviews on Amazon and other places. Thank you so much, Jason, for doing this.

Jason: My pleasure. It's always fun to talk with you.

Andrew: Thanks. Same here. Thank you all for being a part of it. Bye, everyone.