

## S3E12 – Jake Kahana Transcript

Peter Margaritis: Hey, welcome back everybody, man. Do I have an important guest today and someone that you really need to listen to. Jake, I appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to have a conversation with my audience around your work. So first and foremost, welcome to the show.

Jake Kahana: Thanks, Peter. I'm excited to be here.

Peter Margaritis: I'm excited for you to be here. So in doing my research. Deep focus. I keep hearing about and seeing your name associated with, and listening to some of the other podcasts and interviews that you've done. Oh, excuse me. No, that's not deep focus, right? That's a distraction. So can you give us some insight into what's your definition of deep focus and in the work that you're doing currently.

Jake Kahana: Sure. I think it's helpful to start with sort of the opposite of that. Let's talk about shallow work for a second. I think a lot of us have this experience of doing shallow work every day. And Microsoft did a study about three years ago, that said that the average focus time at work is 40 seconds at a time, and obviously part of that is external distractions. Right? Our co-workers sending us an email, maybe our phone buzzes, but we also get in our own way a lot. You know, I know that sometimes I'll start an email, it'll get hard. And as soon as I'm not sure what to write, I'll open up another tab and I have to, you know, edit a Google Doc, and so I start writing that. And you know what, I have to check my bank account and I opened up my bank but it's loading slowly. So let me just open up the Amazon. And suddenly I'm buying toilet paper when I was supposed to be writing an email. And this idea shallow work is what a lot of us are used to it sort of this reactive, you know, as the work comes in. I'm just trying to get it off my plate, answer emails, answer slack messages. You know, get back to colleagues and clients and those kinds of things.

Jake Kahana: But when it comes to the kind of important work. That will make our days feel more productive and make us feel more accomplished at the end of the week, and really make our careers more fulfilling. It requires deep work. And we define deep work as Focus without distraction on a demanding task.

Jake Kahana: And we spend very little of our time doing that, but the more that we can sort of prioritize the important work in our days and then in our lives, you know that that project, that podcast, that company, that new product that you want to launch. You know that requires sort of focused attention without distraction in order to get that kind of work done. You want to write a book as part of your, you know, career legacy or whatever. That requires sort of prioritizing that work and really focusing on the stuff that matters, not just the emails and slack messages.

Peter Margaritis: I've got this huge smile, kind of laugh on my face because I think you just described my last four hours here today and thinking about the deep work. I've got some posted flip charts up on how I'm trying to redesign my business, which requires deep focus and trying to write another book, but I'm playing in the shallow pool. Way too much.

Jake Kahana: Yeah, and we all do it. Because it, it feels good to have these short bursts of, you know, crossing things off our list to clear out our inbox. To know that, hey, I have to respond to that thing. And I'm just going to get to it and it takes a lot more effort and we're rewarded less often by prioritizing those things, you know, it doesn't feel good to sort of sit with that book and write it, write a 200 page book over the course of nine months and struggle with that process.

Jake Kahana: You know, we don't get those intermittent rewards that we do like when we check our phones or when we respond to an email, and so it requires a different kind of thinking, a different kind of motivation and a different kind of structure for our work.

Peter Margaritis: So in thinking about deep work and deep focus. Does it also go with, when are we the most productive. I'm a morning person. I don't know how I became a morning person, but I'm a morning person. And I know that about three o'clock in the afternoon. My mental capacity, my desire. That's when I really should be reading my emails.

Jake Kahana: Yeah, yeah. I think, I think there are different kinds of workers, right. I'm a morning person too. I wake up at 5:45 every morning I do my best thinking before 10am. But, and I know that there are night owls too. My co-founder tends to do his best thinking between 7:00 and 10pm. It's fine. What, what we've, not us personally but what the science of productivity, has shown is that everyone has a peak, a trough and a rebound. Sort of this time when you're most focused, your brain is at its highest energy.

Jake Kahana : We all have that trough that low point of you know that three o'clock crash that after lunch, you know, needing a coffee, pick me up. And then we all have that little rebound and most people, there's been thousands of workers, you know, that have been studies that show that most people's peak tends to be between I think it's like 10 and 11:30am. And the trough tends to be that 2:00 to 4:00, and that rebound comes right after. And like you said, you know, it really whatever works for you, but scheduling your day.

Jake Kahana: By taking your most important, highest priority work and putting that in the time where you're doing your most your highest energy, when you have your highest energy. And doing the sort of administrative easy stuff when you have the low, your trough because it doesn't make sense to be spending time in emails and scheduling when your brain is like firing on all cylinders.

Peter Margaritis: So in full transparency, I'm a procrastinator. I'm an improviser. I can write it in my calendar. I can put it in my full focus planner. I can put it, one of my top three. And I got an

erasable ink pen. I could put it in my Google Calendar. I find myself and I think others. That we know that we do our best work, but there's just something about getting... I think it's to your point. Look at all these little things that can take care of, and feel good about being an accomplishment versus.. So how do we begin to change our mindset, and really, is there some tips, tips or techniques that that you can share to help us be focused when we need to be focused?

Jake Kahana: There's a great book and research done by author Gretchen Rubin. Her book is called *Better than Before*, which outlines the four tendencies. Oh, shoot, it's another book. But it's this idea of like how are we motivated. How do we pick up habits? And some of us are obligers. Some of us are upholders, rebels or questioners. And it's this idea that when there are rules, how do we respond?

Jake Kahana: So I know that I am an *upholder*, which means, if there is a rule I will uphold it. Meaning, I can say I put this on my calendar. I'm going to do it. I made the rule. I keep it. Some of us are *obligers*, which means I need someone else. I need to sort of be obliged to someone. So if I need to really do this work, I need to say, "Hey Peter, I'm going to send you my presentation by Friday, if you can just sort of, you know, respond to it, or you know, tell me that you got it." You're going to hold me accountable. It's the same thing. Why we have workout buddies and book clubs and those kinds of thing.

Jake Kahana: And then there are *questioners* who are sort of like I'm on a diet, but you know, it's my partner's birthday. I'm going to have a piece of cake. They question everything and make sure it makes sense for the given situation. And *rebels* are the opposite, right? There's a rule, and I'm going to go against it. So, I'm not promoting her book, but she has a little quiz that you can take to identify which of the four tendencies you are, that will help you do that.

Jake Kahana: So I'm going to do a little bit of a self-plug. I'm sure we'll have some time later, but Cave Day offers facilitated deep work where you can join our sessions. Be around a group of people, you know, join us on zoom and do some deep work around other people so that when you get stuck, you know, you can sort of look up and see 80 other people working hard and it's helpful to sort of keep us on track.

Peter Margaritis: So tell me more about Cave Day, and I will circle back here in a second, but I went out to the website and I looked I went "okay?" and you do offer these remotely? Using Zoom. So I've got 15-20 people in a gallery view and I'm doing deep work. So the audios off, but the videos on. So everybody's on mute. We're working, and we should look up I'll look, everybody else's working so I need to get back to work.

Jake Kahana: Yeah, that's basically the concept. I think we've added some extra layers in it in terms of we tried to create a space that we call a transformative space where the rules in this space are different than the rules out in the world. We did a lot of research in terms of things like funerals, things like adventure clubs, things like sex parties. We did a lot of reading, not attending. To feel like we really understand, how do we create an environment where the rules

here are different than the rules out there? And part of what we do is we create an opening and closing of every Cave. We call our sessions Caves. So when you come into the cave, we do a welcome circle. We check in. You know, what are you working on today? We break you out into little groups so that you get to know people a little bit better. And I get to say, you know, “ I'm Jake. I'm calling from New Jersey. I'm working on my newsletter today. I'm going to leave out checking my email.” You know, it's important that we identify what's going to distract us in the Cave, leave things out. And the same thing at the end of every Cave. We say what was your accomplishment today. What is one win you can share from today?

Jake Kahana: And part of that is you know when we're working at home by ourselves. And most of us are these days. We don't have anyone around us to say, “Hey, I got so much done today or that thing I've been putting off for months and months and months, I finally, you know, put up my blog or whatever.” And when we're in the Cave, when we have this facilitator, when we have this community around us sort of supporting our work. It feels really good.

Jake Kahana: So that what I was talking about before, when you're you know slogging through writing that book for nine months or 2-3-5 years without any sort of intermittent rewards. What we're trying to do is sort of feel like we're making incremental progress and getting rewarded for that. So, not only is there this opening and closing ritual, but we also break down the time so science shows us that our brains can focus for most 52 minutes at a time.

Jake Kahana: So in the cave we break down our work into like 40 to 50 minute work sprints, and in between we take group break. So, it might be anything from a stretch to a breakout room where you're talking about, you know, what are you looking forward to this weekend? It's a chance to counteract some of the negative effects of working remotely, specifically isolation and feeling drained at the end of the day. So, the more that we can create some physical activity. The more that we can connect with each other. The more that that energy gets funneled into our work, and we can end our day not only feeling accomplished but feeling energized.

Peter Margaritis: So when you join a group? Is it for 90 minutes? For full day? What's the time frame around that?

Jake Kahana: Currently at the time of recording, our sessions are three and a half hour long.

Peter Margaritis: Okay, Okay.

Jake Kahana: It's a half day. So we have an early morning session, a morning session and an afternoon session. Those are East Coast times. We're currently in the process, I'll say right now this is being recorded in mid-May, and we're currently in the process of expanding our schedule and offering shorter sessions. So likely by the time this airs, there will be, you know, one hour sessions, two and a half hour sessions, three and a half hour sessions. And you can join us for you know any of them.

Peter Margaritis: Yeah, this will air, I believe, it is July 9<sup>th</sup>, so it was still a couple, few months away. But I can see how you're modifying the product offering and to meet a variety of different needs. Because if I need something, I just need an hour to just power through.

Jake Kahana: Right.

Peter Margaritis: In three and a half hours might be too much. How long ago did you start Cave Day?

Jake Kahana: Sure. We started in January of 2017. That was our first event. And it was really meant to be very casual, me and my two co-founders, my good friends, Molly and Jeremy. We had this idea that, hey, we like getting stuff done. Our friends have projects. What if we started the year, you know, doing some research, creating this event where we would spend a day just working together and feeling energized. And so we like, you know, got catering. We sold tickets. And you know, we had 50 people at the first event. It was a full day in New York City and we sold out, and we made 300 bucks each or something like that.

Jake Kahana: Was like...That was, that was cool. This, this is gonna. This is something and everyone was like, I got so much done. And I feel energized and I made new friends. I would do this every day. And so for about the first year, we ran once a month. It was a full Sunday. That was people coming together as an event to get their stuff done. And over the course of the years, we've changed our model. So instead of it being a one off event that we sell tickets to, now we sell memberships. We run currently, six days a week. I think like over 50 sessions, a month.

Peter Margaritis: Wow.

Jake Kahana: And so we've got people joining us. So we started doing remote things about a year and a half ago. When all of this COVID stuff happened, I think the first week of March, we shifted everything to remote. Which you know, good or bad, it's sort of being. It's a weird time to be a company that is growing and doing well right now, but I think people need this kind of structure and community to get their work done so.

Jake Kahana: Yeah, we run 54 sessions, a month. And we're trying to help people work smarter.

Peter Margaritis: Wow, because I think about that one segment of my audience who are entrepreneurs who, they're used to working at home. And the challenges of working at home by ourselves and being motivated and getting things done. We're playing in the shallow pool way too much. With the opportunity to go and spend that time and environment, albeit Zoom and I'm still by myself. I'm with a group of people and I've done all the right things to put some do not disturb on my door, to shut down.

Jake Kahana!: To remove those distractions. Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: Remove all those distractions and just focus on something. I think that's the sort of, I mean, that's just brilliant. Well, it's obviously you're successful like this, as it has grown and evolved since 2017 and now being forced into this remote world, which I would assume that once we get to the other side of this and start offering you know live as well as keeping the remote piece.

Jake Kahana: Yeah, it's hard to know what work will look like. I'll say even two months from now, let alone, six months now. A year from now. I think that the remote Caves that we're running all the time now are pretty magical. You know, people are saying they're getting two and three times the amount of work done, people are, you know, feeling like they're a part of a community. And it's really a rewarding experience for a lot of people, but I will say that I miss being in the room with people, you know, it's sort of the same thing. I don't know. I don't know if any, I'm sure some of your listeners are, you know, doing workouts at home, and I know I'm trying to work out watching a 15 minute 20 minute YouTube video and you know doing jumping jacks in front of my computer. And, you know, I'm getting a decent workout, but it's definitely not the same as being in the room with people like you know you want a good workout. It's being in a room with people that are all sweating and all pushing you. I think it's the same thing for Cave Day and for work, it's, it's even more magical to be in the room. So, we'll get back to running in person one but for now. The remote Caves are still a pretty magical experience.

Peter Margaritis: As we're having this conversation, something just popped into my head and I've read, and I think it follows the same philosophy. And if it doesn't, please correct me but I start reading stuff about flow, getting into the flow, is that similar to this deep focus deep work?

Jake Kahana: Yeah, definitely. We talked a lot about flow in our teaching and our workshops. So flow is this idea, for those of you who don't know, coined by a psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. I don't know how to spell his name, but his first name is Mihaly. So it's pronounced Me.Hi. But um flow is this idea of being fully immersed in your work. It's sort of that in between state where you're like, not so bored that you want to quit and not so challenging that you want to give up. So it sort of in between. I'm challenged. I know what I'm doing. I'm like, in the zone.

Jake Kahana: And part of what we try to do in the Cave is to like trick our brains into getting into that state faster because our work performance goes up. We learn faster. We're more creative and we're generally happier when we're fully immersed in whatever we're doing.

Peter Margaritis: So how do we trick our brains?

Jake Kahana: So I'll give you, we have three conditions that we say. When we run our workshops, we say there are three conditions to trick your brain into going into flow. Now, your brains are all intermittent, in terms of like, you know, I don't know about you, I didn't sleep very well last night. I feel off today and my brain can't just flip on and say okay go into flow. So, the three conditions that we talked about are *definition*, where you're defining the work that you're

doing for a set period of time. I'm saying I'm going to write my newsletter for the next period of time, and nothing else. Defining what I'm working on and likely choosing one of my priority tasks. If we call deep work focused without distraction on a demanding tasks or choosing demanding tasks. It's hard to go into flow and you're just writing your emails are doing not demanding tasks. So, *Definition*, number one.

Jake Kahana: Number two is *time*. So, setting a range of time in the Cave. I said, our sprints are about 40 to 50 minutes I'd recommend something similar. But, having a set period of time where you say, I'm just going to do that amount of work for that period of time. And if it's possible, sometimes what will tell people is to get like a kitchen timer and just sort of twist it around 30-40-50 minutes. It doesn't matter if it's 37 minutes or 41 minutes. If you have some flexibility in your schedule, you know, twisted turn it around. And it'll be the best \$3 you ever spent on a timer, because that allows us to get into flow mode where it doesn't matter how much time. I'm letting the work sort of take the time that it needs instead of saying like, oh, it's three more minutes until three o'clock. I better just check my email, real quick. So, *time* is the second one.

Jake Kahana: And third is *focus*. So we talked about removing all of your distractions. Putting your phone on the other side of the room across the house, whatever, out of sight, out of reach. Closing all the tabs or applications you don't need. And monotasking, we're used to thinking that multitasking is a way to be productive. There's a lot of science. I'm not going to go into it on now, that shows us that monotasking is actually the best way for our work to get done and for flow to happen. So, definition, time, focus.

Peter Margaritis: Yeah, I agree. We can't multitask, and I realized I discovered that I have a new type of situation going on and somebody explained it. I have a EADD, entrepreneurial attention deficit disorder.

Jake Kahana: Okay, tell me more.

Peter Margaritis: Which is the shallow pool. I've got so many things that have to do. I think I create more distractions as an entrepreneur, because, you know, I mean I do have a virtual assistant that helps, but it's still primarily everything laying on me. And you know, I didn't make that up. I've heard someone say or read it in a book. I went, that makes it even harder to get into this deep focus and shut up all those distractions.

Jake Kahana: And I want to just also encourage you to be a little more self-forgiving and a little bit more, recognizing that like that is what makes us successful as entrepreneurs, because we're aware of all the things going on, always thinking about work.

Jake Kahana!: But at Cave, we want to also make sure that we're aware that we don't burn out. That kind of constant work can get in the way of like our relationships to other people. It gets in the way of our self-care and making sure that we're sleeping enough and eating properly and

exercising and all that. And that's a really important part of our work too. So I've never heard of EADD, but I think it's a real thing, whether it's diagnosable or not.

Jake Kahana: But when it, when it comes to that first part, the definition and trying to define our work. One thing that we said, we tell people is to define what finished looks like. I know it's really easy for us to come up with a to-do list of all the things that we want to do today. But for the for that for that sprint that you're about to do some work or for today's day, you know, what does finished look like? Because we all know that there is more work that we could be doing it. I could be reaching out to more clients. I could be researching, you know, as a creative person too I could be designing more or writing another version. And if we just said that for the next period of time for the next 45 minutes sprint, or for the next day, I know that I've this most important task, I need to make this presentation and finished looks like...Getting the slides done. Or finished looks like 30 minutes without doing anything else. Or finished looks like, you know, just sending off the email. I know that there is more work to be done, but unless we find some way to sort of cap our work day or work periods of time. We're constantly working and again next dangerous relationship to work where you sort of are giving and giving and it's never enough.

Peter Margaritis: It's one of the curses of being an entrepreneur. I say, I say this, jokingly, but, you know, people ask me, how many hours do I work? I haven't worked one day since I started this business because I love what I do now, ask my wife and you get a completely different answer. And it's not, you know, and so it's actually been a somewhat of a challenge. And I will, I will take my work on vacation with me. This past year we spent some time down Sanibel Island. I didn't do my normal get up in the morning work until 10. They get up. I did less amount of work. I enjoyed myself a lot more. But then again, you know what happens when you go on vacation when you get back? It's all still sitting there.

Jake Kahana: Yeah, exactly. And that's the curse of being an entrepreneur.

Peter Margaritis: Yeah, that is So, as the workforce has now been forced out into a remote workforce and by the time this airs, you know, states will have, we're all beginning to reopen. Here in Ohio, we started a soft opening on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Manufacturing, distribution is back Yesterday, we had retail establishment open. Restaurants are starting to open again. But there's still this group that will probably work remotely, and I'm talking to other Organizations that they're thinking about getting a smaller corporate real estate footprint.

Peter Margaritis: So you've talked about it, but from a remote workforce that's at home, who's not used to it. When I first started this business, Jake, do you know what my biggest distraction was? The refrigerator would wink at me when I walked past it. The pantry would go (*whistles*) And then the TV. It took about two solid years until I can actually work out of the house. So, do you have any tips on and we've talked about a lot of these specifically trying to adjust to a remote workforce. When I have other people in the house too. And that's been some of the big question I've been asked it a number of times.



Jake Kahana: I think the short version. And it's not very satisfying. I don't think that there are like easy tips. I don't think it's sort of like just do this and the refrigerator won't be enticing. Just do this and you know your couch won't sound better than your office chair. It doesn't work like that. I think ultimately what we have to do is One: recognize that those things are real, and Two: feel like we can manage our impulses.

Jake Kahana: That in some ways, you know, I could give you a lot of little tips. Everything from sort of like portioned out your snacks ahead of time. Or scheduling, you know, in your day when are you going to take breaks and what are you going to be doing and planning that out ahead of time so that you can just stay on task and not feel that, you know, now is not break time, now is not my snack time. My snack time is at 11:30 and at 4:30 or whenever it is.

Jake Kahana: I think those are small tips that could help. But ultimately, we have to recognize that we need to manage ourselves and that we need to manage our impulses. And that if that's your weak point, how can we, we talk a lot at Cave Day about creating friction. Right, like putting steps in between you and what you want, in order to make it harder. So things like again putting your phone out of reach, out of sight. If the refrigerator is distracting to you, can you put a note on the refrigerator? Can you work on the other side of the house? Can you put all of your food in Tupperware? Adding extra steps can get in the way of saying like, actually, is it really worth it to me to do that. So maybe not a satisfying answer, but I think creating friction is probably the easiest tactical thing.

Peter Margaritis: That wasn't what I was expecting, but that's what we need. I haven't thought about from that perspective, but I think I agree that there's no easy to do it. But I like the idea of creating friction and that might help and adjusting to a 'now-normal, new normal' world where we're having to work, my office is in the basement. And just getting the custom to our surroundings and the distractions that are there. And also recognizing the flexibility that we have.

Jake Kahana: Totally there you know some of us love the independence and flexibility of working from home, and for other people it's a curse that going to the office and having that structure is actually what they need. And I think in some ways, the more that we can like define our workspace, as in the same way we can trick our brains into going into flow mode, we can trick our brains into going to work and, you know, I'm at work or I'm not at work. And part of that might be creating rituals at the beginning and end of your day. Whether that's going for a fake commute or getting dressed and showering and, you know, sitting down at a specific...you know, this is my table with my computer and my computer does not leave this table. It doesn't join me on the couch. My computer doesn't come to bed with me. Creating defined spaces for work might help. Sort of say that, hey, this table, this corner, this chair. When I sit here. I'm at work. And when I stand up, I'm not. You know that mental shift.

Jake Kahana: One of the small things that we tell we've told people before is when working from home even putting on shoes. You know, you get dressed and you put on shoes. And you say, when I wear shoes, I'm at work. At the end of the day, I kick off my shoes and close my

computer and I'm done. And, those kind of mental rituals, create the same thing that a commute will do. Right? It's that mental transition away from home into work and vice versa.

Peter Margaritis: That's, that's a good point because I've always gotten in the habit of once I started getting up in the morning, taking a shower act like I'm going to work. Getting dressed, but not dressed as if I was going into an office, but at least having a pair of jeans, a collared shirt or whatever. And then came this whole thing , dressed above the waist. And I've tried it. And I found that that if I'm just above the waist and wearing sweatpants or scrub pants or something like that. It just doesn't feel the same. Just doesn't feel.. To that point. I make sure and I have to be fully transparent. I'm wearing sweat pants today. It's just been one of those days that I came down, worked out. And then all I got this call, and it's just kept moving in that direction.

Peter Margaritis: But it feels a little, it's been feeling a little weird all day, all day, and I should just put on a pair of pants, came back down. But that's something I've been using to trick my brain.

Jake Kahana!: Yeah, it's a great point that having that mental transition from I'm putting on pants I'm showing up to work. It tells your brain to take it more seriously. Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: It does as we can wrap up.

Peter Margaritis: How can people contact you? How can people find you?

Jake Kahana: Sure we're at [Caveday.org](http://Caveday.org). We're not a nonprofit, but we are a community based organization. [Caveday.org](http://Caveday.org) you can learn about us. You can contact us. You can sign up for our mailing list for a free session. And find us on any social media. I believe we're just @Caveday on Instagram, Twitter, Product hunt, Facebook. All of the social medias but go to our website, learn more [Caveday.org](http://Caveday.org).

Peter Margaritis: It's a great website. Product hunt, I never heard of that one.

Jake Kahana: Product hunt is a system for people to discover new tech products.

Jake Kahana: It works a little bit like Reddit. Where you post something and people can upvote it. And the more popular something becomes, the more it gets attention. So I've seen anything from online legal help to a hobby club. Where every week you get a new hobby emailed to you, and together with a community you learn how to bake bread or whatever. It's really interesting products on that site.

Peter Margaritis: Have to go out and visit. Well, I can't thank you enough for taking time out. I've enjoyed this conversation. It really intrigues me because I know my weaknesses and I know I need to strengthen and become that focused. And you've given me some great thoughts and ideas to do.

Peter Margaritis: And you will find me. I will sign up for the newsletter and take a test drive because I'm even more curious now than it was prior to this interview. So thank you for your time. It's been great. I appreciate it. And I look forward to someday our paths actually crossing in real life.

Jake Kahana: Yeah, I love that. Hope to see you and your listeners in the Cave soon. Thanks, Peter.