S3 E11 Achieve Your Goals with Leantime’s Project Management Software for People Who Think Differently

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 00:01

Hello and welcome to Changing What's Possible: The Disability Innovation Podcast brought to you by Cerebral Palsy Alliance Research Foundation or CPARF. I'm your host, Dr Marie McNeely, and this season, we are excited to bring you cutting edge stories and insights on research, technology and innovation for people with CP and other disabilities. Before we introduce you to today's guests, listeners, we are excited to let you know about CPARF's STEPtember campaign, which runs for the whole month of September. Join thousands of people across the country to raise funds for life-changing cerebral palsy research and assistive technology that will positively reshape what it's like to live with a disability. And if you want to pair any physical activity with your fundraising, you can challenge yourself to get moving all September long. Make a team of up to four people and get your friends and family in on the fun. Sign up today for free at www.steptember.us w.stepmber.us, that's www, dot, S, T, E, P, T, E M, B, E r.us, and now we'll get started with today's episode. In this episode, you'll hear from two guests, Gloria Folaron and Jonathan Stevens. Listeners, Gloria is CEO and cofounder of Leantime, one of the startup companies in the 2024 remarkable us accelerator program. She'll be talking more about Leantime in the first half of this episode, and in the second half, you'll hear from Jonathan, an independent director of product design and development who has been helping design Leantime software and work on product strategy. We're looking forward to learning more about Gloria and Jonathan, as well as the story behind Leantime and the product they've created. So Gloria, thank you so much for joining us today. How are you?

**Gloria Folaron** 01:53

I'm doing well. I keep losing track of what day it is. It's been that kind of week, but I'm so excited to be here and looking forward to talking with you.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 02:02

Well, I am delighted to have the opportunity to chat with you today and to learn more about you and your work. So Gloria, can you start by telling us more about yourself?

**Gloria Folaron** 02:13

Yeah, so I'll go with me without the company on it, just so you have some background and context there. My first career, as I like to call it, was in nursing. So a little unconventional in terms of where I'm at today, but a big component of how I got to where I am. Outside of the nursing career, I moved into technology through starting my own and first health tech startup, and then moved into startup product management, working on web applications, content, SEO and first customer acquisition.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 02:46

Very cool. Well, Gloria, it sounds like you've had a really cool career path. And I'd love to talk about some of these details, because I think a lot of entrepreneurs I meet have these interesting paths to get to where they are today. So let's talk a little bit more about your story. Can you tell us what motivated you to maybe make that transition initially from your nursing career, your first career, into this kind of startup and entrepreneurship space?

**Gloria Folaron** 03:12

Interestingly enough, the brain differences that I see now as part of my neurodivergence was not always well received, even in the healthcare environment, there used to be the expression early in my nursing career that nurses eat their young, and there is a lot of bullying and challenges in nursing. So there's a component of that that went into this environment that I love helping and impacting people in a different way, in their weakest and most vulnerable moments, and I have the ability to help lift them up. And I love that part of my career, but there's these other parts of it that were push, pull, dynamic in terms of how my brain worked. And then one day I had a patient come in, and I was working in the pediatric ER, and this was a, I think, a three day old baby and a three day old baby should never, ever be in the ER, in the middle of fall, when cold and flu season starts, because three day old babies don't have an immune system, and those first 30 days are pivotal in making sure that that baby doesn't get sick, because if they do, they'll get sick really quickly. Well, this baby came in because they were constipated, which is a very normal experience for a newborn baby for the first seven days of their life, and somewhere that didn't get communicated. And as a ER nurse on a 12 hour shift, I could not make that difference for that parent where it would have prevented them coming in. And so my first health tech company ended up being because of that, where, at the time, telemedicine didn't exist. But my first company was a health tech company focused on telemedicine for pediatrics. So if a mother with a three day old needed to get a question answered, they'd be able to. Lots of more story in that, but it was really the reality of there was only so much I could do on a 12 hour shift. And I realized that technology and the combination of business have the ability to impact people on a broader scale.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 05:14

Absolutely. And I think it's amazing to see people just sort of recognize this need and decide that they are going to be the ones to take action. That's something that I definitely admire about all of these startup founders that I have a chance to talk to. So Gloria, can you tell us what motivated you to found your company Leantime, and how did you get started?

**Gloria Folaron** 05:33

So in my technical half and I had worked together for quite a while, and when I first started on that health tech startup. We were doing a lot in Lean Startup methodologies. This was a while ago, and we very quickly found that I was struggling personally and getting to the point of, how do I take what I'm actually doing on the day to day and align it with what I was trying to say I was trying to accomplish, and there was a huge disconnect. So we started even, like the earliest drafts of what Leantime is today, just by adding in intentionality around how do I connect the Lean Canvas and what I say I'm going to accomplish to what I'm actually doing on the day to day, and really started to absorb through that. Through fast forward a little bit. I've worked at other startups, and I saw over and over again that as I was working at those startups, there is a level of disconnect, both from having gone from nursing into a business career and from a team dynamic across platforms. Everyone is using a very different language, and that language disconnect often excludes people from the tools that exist in the space. And as an example, there are a lot of tools that engineering workflows are ingrained into and to describe a task or to do, they'll call it an issue. Coming from a product and marketing side of things, I don't like working on my issues with to do it just doesn't feel quite right. So as we started to like look at more of this broader space of where exactly does all of this live, we saw several things that were constantly popping up. It was this language disconnect of, how do you bridge this gap?   
  
And then I was diagnosed with ADHD two and a half years ago now, after we found my daughter started showing symptoms, and I went online, and I was looking through things, reading about her, and suddenly saw a list of my entire life on a piece of paper, and started to talk about that, and was finding that there were more and more folks in the work environment whose brains worked a little differently. And as we were been going through that and experiencing that, the work environment is just not set up for that difference and what we need and how we need that information put together. And so that really spurred out this stronger shift to — accessibility is not just rooted in the language, it also needs to be rooted in how we share and communicate information.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 08:14

I love that Gloria, and I appreciate you sharing this piece of your story. Can you tell listeners what's Leantime’s mission.

**Gloria Folaron** 08:23

I mentioned that neurodivergence piece for myself, mine is ADHD. My daughter is autistic with ADHD, and Leantime’s mission is to, I want to say, normalize the playing field in terms of what our brains do and what our brains are capable of. That disconnect that happens with that language. There occurs a power shift and a power struggle when somebody holds that I have the language and you don't, and we want to bring that back together so that everyone has equal opportunity to be able to be successful in the job that they do. And we focus on that largely by supporting workflows for folks in a project management sense, because I don't think we've actually introduced what the product does, but we do it from a project management stance, using AI and behavioral science, then to support folks who have ADHD, dyslexia and autism in order to help them do their best work, but also feel good about the work they're doing.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 09:24

I think this is amazing, and I'm curious to hear more about this product you mentioned. It is sort of a workflow project management software. What problems does your product solve?

**Gloria Folaron** 09:34

Project management is a busy market. Most folks have heard of tools like Trello or Asana or JIRA monday.com, or spreadsheets. That's how a lot of folks will do their project management or a good old to do list. But the problem with things like a good old to do list is that they don't scale once things get more complex, and for folks who are neurodivergent, what motivates a lot of us is to see what is that big picture, and to understand the why I am doing something, not just be told to do something. And it's that connection that really creates value and intrinsic motivation, even if you're not neurodivergent.   
  
So we're really tapping into the why you're doing something so reconnecting the goals and intentionality and then aligning that with the science around, how do I decide and how do I know what is most important to work on?   
  
How do I get started to begin with? How do I decrease the overwhelm and cognitive overload of all of these things are swimming in my head all at once, but I need to be able to focus on this one thing to get one thing done. The other thing we find is that, particularly in the neurodivergent population, the rates of diagnosis have — think ADHD alone since 2020 went up almost 400%. It's a significant increase for even women, 23 to 49 their rates of diagnosis have doubled. And it used to be we thought that adults didn't get ADHD, or that if you were a child, you grew out of it. And so we've got a huge group of people who are discovering themselves and identifying “Hey, that feeling I had that I didn't quite fit in. It's not that I didn't fit in, it's that my brain worked a little differently, and the rest of the world wasn't accommodating of that, and wasn't inclusive of that.”   
  
And so we find bringing that back to the problem statement of that there are so many folks out there who their relationship with productivity and what it means to accomplish something is covered in words, like you're lazy, it's covered in the not just lazy, but you could accomplish more if you applied yourself harder. And it's never that any of us were not applying ourselves. It's that what people were expecting wasn't always what our effort looked like.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 12:01

That makes sense. And you mentioned some just remarkable statistics about ADHD diagnosis. Do you know, are most of these new diagnoses based on symptoms that people have had their whole lives, or is it more new onset cases?

**Gloria Folaron** 12:15

So I haven't seen any firm statistics kind of breaking that out one way or the other. For the most part, all of my customer discovery calls, and the folks I talk to on a regular basis, most of them have said that, “yeah, no, I saw this my entire life.”   
  
That was my experience, too, in terms of reading that list of things and being like someone wrote my entire life experience on a piece of paper. How did that happen? And we see it a lot now too, in terms of just the exposure and the way Tiktok has brought in a lot of folks who are talking about these different experiences now, and it's opened up a entirely new world around things like aphantasia, if you've heard of that, where the thought is that folks cannot have visual images when they think.   
  
And so the world, for a long time, just assumed everyone thought the same way. And the reality is like, until we sped up this level of communication, there was a lot of bias and judgment and lack of empathy in the psychology world, where some of these things were just not looked at or considered.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 13:22

Definitely. And I think bringing that awareness to the forefront is tremendously powerful for people who have been perhaps experiencing these things their whole lives and not really felt seen, or maybe felt like they had to hide it. And I think you mentioned some really important points there in talking about your product. So you mentioned the sort of ability to take a step back and see the bigger picture and how your work contributes. And I think that can be really powerful and motivating, maybe to help our listeners conceptualize what this might look like in the actual product. Can you talk more about how that software works?

**Gloria Folaron** 13:55

Yeah, so I'll cover it from a big picture, and then I'll tell you a little bit more about where we're going right now. On the big picture sense, we incorporated mid 2022. We launched our SaaS offering, which is software as a service, in January of ’23, and prior to that, we had some version of our tool in the open source community, which allowed engineers and folks who had those skill sets to download and self-host the software — and it still is open source.

We've always prioritized decreasing cognitive load and accessibility throughout all of that. What we've done, and spent the last year really doing is building in the base work of what does parity look like in terms of the other platforms and making sure we have the right features. Also building in what we understand from our own backgrounds as the hybrid approach to project management. It used to be folks were always doing Agile or Scrum. They might be doing Waterfall, and those are types of project management workflows.

In those types of project management workflows, people tend to get very it's all this one way or the other, but a lot of the research supports that what actually makes the project successful is the people. And so we've taken a hybrid approach and built that into the system with the foundational elements of behavioral science, and connecting these components. One particular feature that we've been really excited about that's already in the system — we allow you to rate how you feel about your work on an emoji rating scale, so red, angry, swearing face to elated unicorn — those rare tasks you'd love to see more often.   
  
And then as you do that, so we use AI to help prioritize your personal tasks in a way that if you have a task that you don't like to do, we're looking to see if there's context that we can align it with the tasks that you do like to do that makes it easier to get in motion. And then if you aren't rating on the emoji rating scale, we do allow prioritization based on science-based best practices, so we'll use AI to even do that. The future goal of that feature is really to go to that next level of making recommendations of who to assign tasks to based on their interests and who likes to do what work. Getting away from that idea that it's in your job description you have to do it. Research shows that people are better and more engaged and happier when they do things that they enjoy to do.   
  
So that's one element of “hey, here's how we're building this in,” especially for folks who having each state in particular, because doing the thing that you don't like to do is even harder than anything else. Example, I hate putting data in spreadsheet. If you give me a deadline, that will be the very, very last thing that I do, and you will get it three seconds before it was due. Going deeper into that right now, I'm actually working on the next level of, how do we support that step back moment? A lot of times, the research shows, particularly for those with ADHD, their brains, essentially see almost all of the tasks at once, and there's no prioritization filter. So instead of being like, I know this goes first, I know this goes first, you're overwhelmed with all of them all at once. And then, if you're autistic, the research shows that you, at times, might take up to 40% more information than somebody else's brain, and you'll hear them say things like, “I can hear the electricity from my refrigerator,” because they're able to take in so much more information. If you're taking in all of that, it gets very overwhelming very quickly.

So right now, I'm really working through this new onboarding flow that helps use a principle called implementation intentions. And implementation intentions and the literature has been described both at helping individuals with ADHD, with self-regulation, and then also with the prioritization aspect and the how do I get started aspect, and then lots of other things in terms of actually accomplishing and reaching their goals. So there are a lot of those components. Another feature that we're getting ready to build out is called goal alignment, when you have a list of 200 tasks. And getting back to that, how do I prioritize the right thing? We're working on building out a scoring model that allows you to look at the goals that you have set for either your company project or your personal and then allowing and creating an alignment score with your tasks so that you know if you have a higher alignment to that goal on your task, you should be working on those and not the ones that are on the lower level.

What happens is sometimes, when we look straight at a list, there's a concept of completion bias, where it's easier to pick something that's a low hanging fruit, just so we felt like we completed it. And this is one of those ways of like now you get to see the bigger picture and really see how your goals are moving and how the things that you're doing are helping you get there.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 19:10

I think that sounds wonderful. And then in terms of, if someone wants to get started using your software, how does that process work, in terms of them kind of getting set up initially?

**Gloria Folaron** 19:19

So right now, if somebody wanted to, they could go to https colon, forward slash, forward slash, Leantime, that's L, E, A N, T, i, m, e.io, and sign up and create an account and get started.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 19:36

Now, is there a lot of information that has to be input before people can really leverage some of these cool features that you talked about, is there like a training period for this, AI, or are things kind of available right off the bat?

**Gloria Folaron** 19:47

It's available, get up and go as a you start building out your project. I will say that what we see coming here in the next two, three months are really even next level guided experience where we're helping you with that. Folks usually have a question of, where do I even get started? How do I put this information even in here? And we're building on a process that bypasses that question entirely and walks you through it.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 20:14

That makes sense, and now you've mentioned some of the different features that are involved in your product. What really do you see as the key differentiators, the features that make it different from some of these other products available for people with disabilities?

**Gloria Folaron** 20:27

The other tools in the space often sell productivity, and they're often selling it to the company. We make you more productive. The word productive or productivity doesn't have a tangible or meaningful meaning. It's not personal. It's not relatable. What I would say that we do different is that we are not selling productivity. We're really focused on the individual and their relationship with their ability to accomplish something, because it's when you get that relationship right and that connection, it's easier to, one, not beat yourself up, but two, really get into the root of, I'm making a difference and I'm accomplishing something, and then aligning that with your internal self of I have meaning and I have value, and I do bring those things to the table. And when you're in a team environment, it's even more important to be able to own those things.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 21:25

Absolutely. And are there specific features that you'd like to highlight, that you think other competitors in the market don't have, that you think are really making your product shine?

**Gloria Folaron** 21:34

I mentioned two of them already. Those are not features that you'll find in any of the other tools, including the task sentiment rating The other things that we do that right now that you could have access to, we use AI to create individual project descriptions. Oftentimes, a project will be written more at the stakeholder and project manager level and not be related back to what the individual is doing. So we use AI then to look at that description, look at your job title, the task that you're assigned to, and write you your own personalized story in either a medieval knight, Pirate voice or motivational speaker voice. Some of the other elements and things we do. We have a what we call our AI coach using the principle of variable rewards, will actually have AI as you complete tasks, pop up with a reframed version of things that you've just accomplished. And we find that that reframing of, hey, I have a task title that says I needed to write a pitch deck, the reframing of you didn't just write a pitch deck, but you found a new way to share an incredible story of your mission and vision starts to change how people think about things.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 22:47

I love that sort of seemingly subtle shift in perspective that can just have such a tremendous impact on how people think about the work that they're doing. Now you mentioned a few categories of people who might benefit from using your product. But who do you think could benefit from using your product, sort of on a broad scale?

**Gloria Folaron** 23:05

Yeah, so it's kind of the curb effect in terms of, once we built and made curbs more accessible for folks with wheelchairs, you've got the UPS guy using it. You've got the mother with the stroller also using it. So definitely agree with that sentiment of if we're building to support individuals who struggle with their productivity, or in ADHD, it's often referred to as executive functioning, if we can help and solve for that, then it absolutely broadens the scope for the larger groups out there. On the disability side, right now, we're largely focused on making sure that things are accessible from a dyslexia standpoint, that often includes not just making sure you have the right fonts and color contrast, but also that things are more visual and that we can see the connections on a visual basis, and not just from a wall of text at me, and then both autism and then ADHD as well. We are, as folks are listening, also looking at other forms of accessibility, as we've gotten to have conversations in the Remarkable program, we're finding over and over again that folks are struggling with the accessibility of other tools as well, from both a what they're able to do on a mobility sense, or even dictating language and navigating the tools and their responsiveness. So we're starting to look at that as well.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 24:32

Certainly. And I think when people think of you know things they have to do for work, there are certain professions where you know things like project managers, where this is a huge part of the job, and then there's other jobs where they may or may not use project management tools traditionally. What do you see as the scope of sort of job roles or careers where this product might be beneficial?

**Gloria Folaron** 24:51

So right now, we see a lot across anything that you might categorize as knowledge work, so largely technology. Focused companies or technology-based companies. But I say that, and we've had folks who have a piano business also use the platform.

One of the things I discovered really early on in my product customer discovery questions was that this idea of accomplishing something is so innate to human nature that we're all trying to do it. We all have the ability to plan and make a trip, but what we don't always have the ability to do is to one, impact that dynamic that we've been carrying on ourselves. And then two, we don't always have the ability to really scale that and make that expand and blossom within a team environment.

I'd like to say we're absolutely a horizontal product in that sense. That said, right now we're really focused on ensuring that we're building the best product for the neurodivergent community, and we see that trickling down even more across multiple sectors and business types.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 26:03

So we talked about how you're working to sort of personalize this experience for people who have neurodivergence, but also, you know how it could apply to a lot of different people. But specifically as you were developing this product, how did you incorporate feedback, or maybe the perspectives from people with disabilities, as you went through these design phases.

**Gloria Folaron** 26:23

Being in the open source community, which has really got its own ecosystem to it, gave us a lot of initial feedback, and since then, that has really only continued to grow. So we have a really active community Discord server that allows us to tap in, and we keep an open dialog around that. I'm also very open about my own neurodivergence and make that accessible. And then we also build along the content and community platform around there as well. Even more than that, though, we do regular interviews and product discovery calls, and then I have regular calls with our customers for onboarding as well. Saying all that, though, we are in the process of building out a special cohort for some of these new features that are coming up as we want to test them out. So if there are folks who are listening, I would be thrilled to have folks get in touch if they would be interested in being more on the front lines of these features and understanding how that works for what they need.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 27:28

Very cool. So Gloria, do you have maybe an example or two that you could share of feedback that you might have gotten from the community that really changed how you approached this or changed how you adapted a feature?

**Gloria Folaron** 27:38

When we look at the market space and what exists, we find that there is a significant level of customization, and customization, in and of itself, is not necessarily a negative — folks need to be able to work the way that they need to work. But what we found and discovered in having conversations with folks is that people will ask for a feature, and they'll ask for it in the way that their brain works. And if we don't go a step beyond that and follow up with what was the goal of what you were trying to do, or what is the outcome of you being able to do this motion or this feature, these steps, it would be really easy to build a software that is completely customizable, and we will end up looking just like all of the other tools in the space.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 28:23

Customizable and overwhelming, I think in some cases.

**Gloria Folaron** 28:29

And that's what we see, especially for folks with ADHD, they're just so cognitively overloaded already that by the time they get into the tool, at least for me, I'm like, Oh no, this looks cute. It was a nice effort, and then I can't do it anymore because I've got other things that need to come first.

And so that is something that we discovered really early in the process. And it wasn't just neurodivergent feedback, it was engineering feedback, it was pm feedback, it was product people feedback that really forced us to think, okay, what are we trying to accomplish? And making sure that we're staying aligned in that vision. The other things that I think the feedback in terms of shift, I had an email come through not that long ago who said that I've tried a ton of tools, and this is the first one that structures information in the way that my brain works.

And those comments, for me, really reinforce that the structure is so important. And I think sometimes that gets missed in terms of, hey, here's a picture. People need to be able to follow that picture. I'm currently working with our designer, and one of the things we talk about is that the brain leans into heuristics, which are rules of thumb or quick shortcuts to understanding kind of what's in front of us or the picture so we can make quicker decisions.

And the experience of managing a to do list needs to be similar to walking in a museum. Where you see all the direction and the steps that you need to go, and it's just natural and fluid. So it's those comments around, yeah, it's the way my brain works. But okay, so now, how do we even improve on that?

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 30:11

Now, Gloria, you mentioned some interesting features that you are currently working on. So it sounds like there's some exciting things in the pipeline, but what is your vision for the future of Leantime?

**Gloria Folaron** 30:22

You asked a question that always gets me choked up, and it's interesting. I spent most of my life in what I like to call masking right as an emergency room nurse, I would have four patients, and sometimes I would turn over all my rooms. I would see over 20 patients in a 12 hour shift.

And it didn't matter if the patient in the room next to me was barely hanging on, I had a new patient come into another room, I needed to check all of that emotion at the door so I could focus on just who was in front of me. There's a concept in the neurodivergent community called masking, which is that we live in a world that is not okay with our discomfort. And so I preface with all of this because I start to get choked up about it. And I, for years, was never okay with being choked up in front of folks or having those conversations because of those rules of masking people will throw what I like to call toxic positivity at you.

It's just pull yourself up by your bootstraps, and it's good to be emotional about it. So it's very, very impactful and meaningful. And so I throw way more at you than you need for that, but I say all of that because my daughter, she's eight now, she was diagnosed two years ago. She's brilliant and brilliant in a lot of ways that catches folks off guard sometimes, and not enough. She's reading a two, not an A. She can do all this math sort of way. She's able to do what I see a lot of other neurodivergent folks do, and it's pull all the pieces that don't look like they're connected, and see the connections. And the work environment has not truly appreciated what that skill brings.

And for myself, there's the study for Autistics that found that there's a concept called the bystander effect, which in nursing that translates to if somebody falls on the ground and you need somebody to call CPR, you have to point and say, You call 911, because the bystander effect says if somebody sees something wrong, everyone will assume that somebody else is going to take care of it. Autistics don't follow those rules, which even means for myself and the work environment, I will question why. I will ask those questions so I can understand how those pieces connect, and people find that threatening and have reacted very poorly and just not a good work experience. And I want to live in a world where she doesn't have to go through that.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 32:48

Oh, I think that is tremendously inspiring and powerful, and I truly appreciate this vision that you have for the future and how what you're doing there at Leantime could really make a difference for so many people with disabilities or people who just think differently in a work environment.

**Gloria Folaron** 33:05

I appreciate it. Remarkable had us on a roundtable earlier today, and the folks that they brought in were so inspiring. We all come from different backgrounds, and we all have amazing skill sets, but there's something so raw and beautiful in the community of folks who have done above and beyond what is expected in society and are just never-ending kicking butt along the way.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 33:32

absolutely Well, Gloria, I am sure you have inspired our listeners and given them a lot to think about with what we talked about in our conversation today. If our listeners would like to learn more about you and want to learn more about Leantime, what is the best way for them to do so?

**Gloria Folaron** 33:48

I mentioned our website already, which was the Leantime.io, and then I am also always happy to connect over LinkedIn, which would be linkedin.com, forward slash, I N. Forward slash, my name, which is Gloria Folaron or happy to also take emails, which is gloria@leantime.io.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 34:11

Perfect. Well, Gloria, it's been such a pleasure to chat with you and to learn more about Leantime today. So thank you so much for joining us on the show.

**Gloria Folaron** 34:18

No — thank you for having me, and also the remarkable program has been amazing.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 34:23

Phenomenal. Well, Gloria, we appreciate you joining us to share your insights and experiences with our listeners today, and now I'm excited to introduce you all to our second guest, Jonathan Stevens, who's been working with Leantime on their software. So Jonathan, welcome to the show, and thank you so much for joining us today. How are you?

**Jonathan Stevens** 34:43

Good, good. How about yourself?

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 34:44

I'm doing quite well, and I'm excited to hear about your experiences with Leantime. But perhaps we can start by giving our listeners a little bit of background. Can you tell us a little bit more about yourself?

**Jonathan Stevens** 34:56

Yeah. So Hi, I'm Jonathan Stevens. He/him. I. I've been professionally designing and building things on the internet for the past 16 years. In the past decade, I've helped scale booking.com to over 2.3 million properties and 1.6 million room nights booked a day. I started as a designer and worked my way and started leading teams and then managing departments of teams focused on localization and then B2B side of things. Nowadays, I'm using that sort of transformative experience of hyper growth, both personally and professionally, to sort of help other companies scale focused on startups and scale ups transitioning through this various stages of growth. You can find more at jonathanstevens.us for that.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 35:39

Fantastic. So Jonathan, it's great to hear a little bit more about your professional background, and I'm curious to hear where Leantime fits into your story. So how did you find out about Leantime?

**Jonathan Stevens** 35:51

Last year, as my partner, we're finishing our move from Amsterdam to North Carolina, I started looking for interesting companies building interesting things. So there was an announcement from one of the North Carolina's entrepreneurial ecosystem partners, and so I went through the recipients of the award and messaged every company and startup on there through their contact forms on their website, and Gloria was one of the few to respond. And we've kept in touch since.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 36:21

I love it. So what made you want to try their product, or perhaps learn more about Leantime?

**Jonathan Stevens** 36:26

A few things. One, I’m late diagnosed neurodivergent so that was sort of the past few years. Is, well, what does that mean? And learning how to work with my brain and how that works, rather than against. And a lot of my time at booking.com was spent on inclusive leadership and learning how to not just how, but the need of you need your tools to work for you and work with other people, and just how complex working with other people can be. And then when, if you have differences across even with just nationalities, like 60 plus nationalities, you can’t assume there's one way of working or that everybody understands. So there's a lot of that all mixed up together. And then, as I was going through these, I felt like project management tool? Cool, tons of those, but I've never seen one that's focused on developing tools for neurodivergent humans, because the paradigm and what that means, and just linear versus nonlinear thinking, or structure versus unstructured processes, etc., there's a lot more to it than just a Kanban board and 123, steps are done in order. So I thought it was super interesting. I thought it'd be fun to sort of connect and get involved in.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 37:41

Well, Jonathan, it's great to hear a little bit more about kind of this first introduction to Leantime. And I think for a lot of people who think differently or who identify as neurodivergent, there are particular things that maybe they've struggled with in their professional lives or even in their personal lives as well over the years. Were there particular things that you were struggling at work with that you realize Leantime might be able to help you with?

**Jonathan Stevens** 38:05

To a certain extent. I saw a lot of really fun features that could help me, but I take choosing tools very seriously, and it wasn't quite fit yet for me. But I see a lot of the features that were exciting in terms of sentiment-choosing for tasks — like one of the methods that I used when managing or leading teams working with people that were sort of too stressed or outside of their capacity or overwhelmed, was doing energy management, what we called givers and takers.

And so this test sentiment thing is really small feature, just smiles, and you can click an icon, emoji, and over time, you can build that out. And it's really interesting to sort of start having that inside the tool, to know what gives you energy and you enjoyed, or what takes it and drains it. I got really excited about all the possibilities, what it could do and how it could be used as an individual and as part of a team and running a business or organization together.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 39:05

So can you share then, what has your experience been like as you started using Leantime and becoming more familiar and starting to work on the software?

**Jonathan Stevens** 39:13

So it's been really fun working with Gloria and Marcel, the founders, just to be able to talk with people that get it. Saying, we don't just get it, but we wanted to make something that worked better for us too. And that's really been a big fun aspect of working together.

And then sharing resources. Here's this cool article, or here's this interesting aspect of neurodivergence that we could sort of take into account for developing the tool, or just interesting aspects or dynamics of possibly routes to take products or features. That was most of what, even before I started working explicitly with Leantime, that was something that developed over conversations on LinkedIn with Gloria. But what's been really fun and getting into using. And I try to dog food the tool as much as possible. So basically, it's the eat your own dog food and use your own tool and learn the bugs and understand what that means.

So that's been a critical aspect of me getting to know it, but also in terms of designing it and creating a design system as well, and helping build out and standardize and create some consistency across the tool has been really fun. Specifically, I really like the goal setting and how they're working on trying to guide you through how to set goals. So it's this, I think we said it yesterday, an edu tool, right? So there's an educational aspect of trying to change your relationship with productivity and what that means understanding the context of differently wired brains. But there's also the sort of aspect of you still have to get stuff done.

Snd it's an interesting sort of dichotomy of guidance and using it to get things done in progress. So goals might be differently structured, or milestones, or even the view might not work in a Kanban board that's very linear. Maybe it's something else. So there's a lot of possibilities and things, and it's feature-rich right now, and it's sort of, how do we surface or hide different features at different times to make sure we're not distracting or causing focus to go elsewhere, or making it too difficult or complicated to just get the job done. So there's just a lot of complexities when you really start looking into the neurodivergent needs and the accessibility of the experience.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 41:36

Definitely. Well, Jonathan, it's great to hear more about your experience as you've kind of gotten more familiar with Leantime the software, and started working on it and further developing it. And Gloria had mentioned that the Leantime community online is an amazing source of inspiration and information and suggestions. Have you been able to interact with this online community on Discord?

**Jonathan Stevens** 41:56

Interact in a somewhat quieter way? Yes, it's one of the really fun things about open-source tool development is the interaction with people that are more open source oriented. And a lot of that is and conversations and that sort of transparency, or if you want the buzzwords of radical transparency that it takes to sort of develop something. So I've been reading history, going back, and been being tagged and finding different features, etc, and it's fun.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 42:27

So thinking about the future, it sounds like Leantime is still progressing and developing, and it's being streamlined in this iterative way. But what do you see the potential impacts Leantime could have in the world, and how do you feel being a part of this?

**Jonathan Stevens** 42:42

So the impact, I think, is self-evident. I don't know the numbers, but millions and millions of people all around the world are neurodivergent, and there's a gravitation towards knowledge, work, like software, etc. So just in terms of impact, if you think of the human relationship with technology and computers and the need to sort of collaborate and get things done at an individual level that contributes to scale, the impacts can be sort of astronomical, I guess does work if someone's building software for space. But the potential impact is limitless because of just the gap and the need that is fulfilling and fitting in and the niche is finding. So that's one aspect of satisfying a need and fulfilling a gap of experience and how to do things at a brain level. But there's also the thing of accessibility and disability, justice and rights, right? If we make these things better for everyone, everybody else also benefits from that improvement and that sort of change of mental shift. So the impact on the specific users and niche and community in terms of neurodivergence is big because there aren't very many tools. I don't think there is a tool that focuses on productivity as a project management productivity tool for Neuro divergence. But if you multiply that by just how many humans are in the world that may not be neurospicy or neurodivergent, that just compounds the impact. And then there's another layer of potential impact, in terms of the rate of undiagnosed or unrealized differences, right in terms of just all the things that are around, what diagnosis means, from the social and from the clinical sort of aspects or ways of looking at things, it just potential impact is enormous.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 44:35

Absolutely, and for you specifically, what does it mean being a part of this initiative that has the potential for such a tremendous impact?

**Jonathan Stevens** 44:42

For me, one of the exciting bits is just the challenge of designing and building this product. One it's at a stage of growth and at a stage of sort of product development that we're taking a step back and looking at the fundamentals of the design system in terms of accessibility of colors, fonts, differences to how ADHDers or autists or dyslexics or dyscalculites might need for color and color contrast, or what that might mean. We've debated on our communication channel, icons versus emojis, because for me, emojis are super distracting if it's in the interface that's different than the icons throughout the rest. So it brings up a lot of questions of, what does this mean in terms of not just brand design and brand development or product development, but when we get down to those basics, we have other questions. It's also exciting because it's the first time I've really gotten into design in a long while, because I've been working with people and building products at a very different scale. So it's been exciting to get into that side of things too. Research is starting like published papers. They're starting to catch up. You have the disability rights and the autistic advocates and writers everywhere, in terms of you have auto collab and all these resources and all these things that are coming out right now, and it's really interesting to sort of look at the common practices or assumed defaults of how things should be, alongside the wealth of lived experiences people are now sharing and able to because of the internet, social media and communication. And then the research from a clinical aspect, not DSM sort of thing, but more the actual understanding how the brain works, and realizing, Oh, these things work like that. So trying to synthesize all of those into product development or project development or productivity tool. I'm just excited by all of that.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 46:45

Well, Jonathan, it's wonderful to hear more about your perspectives and how you've been able to incorporate some of your own experiences and your own knowledge as you go through some of this research to develop a stronger product. And I think this is really essential in the disability space. So when you think about the landscape out there of people who are working, who do you think might benefit from using the Leantime software?

**Jonathan Stevens** 47:06

I honestly think everybody would benefit from using it, just in terms of reorienting to goals. I think that it's in a stage of transition right now, because it's going back to the edutainment, Edu tool side of things, you have to work with the paradigm of project management from what we have now, right? We have the Atlassian JIRA and Trello. You have the Kanban boards or strict lean, or strict agile or safe, or all these sort of processes, etc.

But we're transitioning to something different and something new. So in terms of benefiting, I think if you want to be a part of experiencing that transition or even helping it develop, but like, give feedback and be a part of the community as we do those changes, think it's a great time to get into it now and start using it so you can, like, Ah, this isn't working for me because of these reasons. Ah, this is rough. Because then you can be a part of making it a better tool for everybody.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 48:07

Well, Jonathan, for listeners out there who might be interested and might be considering using Leantime or learning more about it. What would your message be to them?

**Jonathan Stevens** 48:15

Go to LinkedIn. Follow Gloria Folaron on LinkedIn, a lot of her posts and everything else are just full of really cool and interesting perspective insights and information. Apart from that, I mean, leantime.io, their website, also tons of good documentation information. You can just dig deep and dive into it.

If you want the open-source side of things, you could join their Discord or go to the GitHub page and just start trying it out yourself, or create an account and just play around, explore and just start using it. And then, for listeners that are just they've tried everything, all sorts of different productivity tools and trying to make sense of the chaos that is life or work. I mean going from the 30 different notebooks and ways of taking notes to filling everything out on a Kanban board, the Leantime's different, and it's worth trying. And if you try it and it clicks for you, or you see that it could click and you want it to click because you've tried everything else, and just want something finally, come on and try it out. Give us your feedback and use it and then help develop it with us.

**Dr. Marie McNeely** 49:30

Jonathan, thank you so much for joining us on the show and sharing your insights and perspectives with everyone today.

**Jonathan Stevens**

Thank you, Marie. It's been lovely.

**Dr. Marie McNeely**

It's been a pleasure. And listeners, as always, it's been great to have you here with us as well. We'd be grateful if you could take a moment to leave us a review on your favorite podcast platform to let us know what you think of the show. We look forward to connecting with you again in our next episode of Changing What's Possible.