

## Convene Podcast Transcript

### Convene Talk, ep. 24

*\*Note: the transcript is AI generated, excuse typos and inaccuracies*

[00:05] **Magdalena Atanassova:** This is the *Convene* podcast. Welcome to another episode of the *Convene Talk*, where we discuss interesting stories that appear in our popular newsletter, news junkie. My name is Maggie, digital media editor. Jen. Tell us more about the story.

[00:20] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** Sure. Thanks, Maggie. This is Jen, senior editor. So the story that caught my eye this week was in the *Harvard Business Journal*. It was written by Michael Norton, who is the author of the recently published book *the Ritual Effect*. So in this book, he kind of explores the most recent research about workplace rituals. And he found that most of the time, workers create and rely on their own unique rituals, meaning they're not made up by their companies. And they found that they can actually be quite effective, and that can be when it comes to providing structure and meaning to their work day or just being successful at whatever tasks they're doing. So what kind of rituals is he talking about? It can be something as simple as starting the day with a workout coffee, which is an obvious one. So I find that coffee is a non negotiable for me. But I also find when I actually sat down and thought about it, that I have other rituals, and I just didn't really realize that they were rituals. And I think one of them is intention setting, which I think more plainly can just be sitting down and writing down what my goals are for the day and basically a to do list. And the other one that I find that I need to do as a creative person, as a writer and an editor, is getting the easiest, quickest tasks out of the way first. And I find that that leaves me with the space both in my calendar or in my day's calendar, and just mentally to dive into more complex creative projects. So I didn't even realize those were rituals. But as I kind of read this article, I realized that they are, and they're pretty important to my workflow. So he also provided some examples that I think were interesting to our readers of team rituals. And I'm curious to know, maybe, well, from all of you guys, one was, what are your own rituals that you like to incorporate into your work day? And then do you have any examples that you can think of from meetings or events like team rituals that you think were really effective? So, yeah, whoever wants to jump in first, go right ahead.

[02:42] **Michelle Russell:** This is Michelle Russell, editor in chief. I don't know that I have rituals. I mean, coffee for sure, and a to do list definitely helps. I feel sometimes I forget to put something on my to do list, and then when I do it, I actually write it in and then cross it out I feel like, oh, I did something that I was supposed to do, but I didn't even realize, I didn't even put it, write it down first. But now that I did it, I want to, like, acknowledge it. So I guess that's a ritual. I'm interested, though, because I do the same thing. Take. Take care of the easy stuff first, and then you'll be more in the mindset that you can devote to something that's more complicated, takes more brain power. I've read that you should do the opposite, that you should start off with something that's intense and takes a lot of your brain power. Cause you're fresh. And then give yourself time to do the, like, breaks between. Give yourself time to do the stuff that is easy to check off because you'll just have more energy that way. My first inclination when I sit at my desk is, all right, let me just get rid of this stuff and get this off my plate, and then I will have more time. The problem with that for me is that as you get into the day, I get more and more emails and distractions and calls and meetings, and I don't end up doing the really big project that I wanted to spend time working on or I need to spend time working on. And then, you know, you get to the end of the day and you don't have the energy or the brainpower to do it. So I try to kind of flip that. But I also have the natural inclination when I sit at my desk to just cross off the easy stuff first.

[04:27] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** I was just going to ask, I know you're a morning person. I wonder if whether or not you're a morning person has something to do with that because I feel like, as a non morning person, like, my. My brain would explode if I tried to tackle, like, a really intense story first.

[04:44] **Barbara Palmer:** I don't.

[04:45] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** You know what?

[04:46] **Michelle Russell:** I am not sure if it's because I'm a morning person. I think I got into the habit of getting to my desk really early in the morning when my children were younger and I had to take them to school and I wanted to at least have an hour to figure out where I needed to spend my time that day. And it's just become a habit where I come to my desk first thing in the morning, coffee in hand, because that's a necessity. So, yeah, I don't know. I'm definitely not an evening person if I'm a morning person that day, because by the evening, I'm just. It's too many hours have gone into sitting here at the desk, and I'm kind of spent. Maggie, what do you think?

[05:29] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Well, I'm also a morning person, and I like that idea of doing a hard task for, you know, eating the frog first, which I hate this expression, it's disgusting. I don't know if I do it, but I think, first of all, when I read the article, I was like, I have no rituals. But then when I started getting to the examples that I actually could name a ritual for each part of the day. So morning, noon, evening, task wise. So I guess I'm way too rich oriented. I believe for sure there is something to do with the fact if you're a morning or an evening person, definitely, because your whole biology is different, I believe. So. It's not something you can change, and it's how you're wired. For me, personally, my biggest ritual that actually guides everything else is creating a schedule for my whole week. I put in my calendar exactly what I want to tackle when in terms of which part of the day, and I believe that really sets the tone for me for the whole week, but also for each day. So each morning, I can just open my calendar and see where I am, like, what I have to do this day. And of course, I leave blank space for distractions or things that just come up naturally during the work week or during the day, because that also happens. So I'm flexible. I'm not like a military person if I don't manage to stay on schedule, but it really helps. I think it guides me. And then I can go back into my tiny little rituals in each part of the day and make sure that my day goes smoothly. And I think a fun one, probably like the coffee. I don't know if it's a ritual, but it's a thing for me. Midday is dark chocolate, 100% dark chocolate, and then I can work.

[07:32] **Curt Wagner:** This is Curt, digital editor. I think my only ritual is that I procrastinate a lot. I don't know if that's a ritual or not, and I don't know that it serves me well, but I feel like I'm not a very good to do list writer because I forget to write them. I need to put them on my to do list, and I'm not that well organized. But I think that what happens in the morning when I get up, if I like that thing that I'm sort of afraid to do, or that's the biggest that's going to cause me the most brain drain, you know, is going to be the one that I'm, oh, let me do this other stuff first. So I think my writing gets pushed, but any other task that I have to do, because I find that writing takes me a while, and I have to, like, it's really a big tax on my brain. And so then I sort of push it a little bit or a lot, and I just do all this other stuff, and some of it has to do with work. So that's my thing. And I guess it could be that I'm pushing the more difficult things later and that kind of thing, but I don't really think about it that way. I just think about, oh, I don't want to do this other thing, so I have to do this, like, you know, it was like when I was growing up, if you are supposed to clean your room, but you know it's going to take forever, then you just make your bed instead, and then you try to go and get away with not cleaning your room, you know, or you find other things to do or, oh, yeah, I have to do the dishes. You still haven't cleaned your room. You know, I had to feed the cat. Oh, you still haven't cleaned your room. You know, that kind of thing. I just kind of feel like I've always done that. But I do have coffee in the morning, and I have to have coffee in the morning, so maybe that's my only ritual. And then in the afternoon, I usually have some tea and something sweet.

[09:21] **Casey Gale:** It sounds like you're a fan of productive procrastination, which is something I also am guilty of doing a lot where.

[09:29] **Curt Wagner:** It's like, and I know how productive it is.

[09:31] **Casey Gale:** Well, it's like when you say, like, oh, I really have to do this important thing, but I could also do these 20 not important things first. And that's what you opt for. This is Casey Gale, managing editor. Like you guys, I didn't really think I had any rituals when I first started reading the article. And then as I read on, I thought, oh, okay, I do have some things that I do, especially, I think, to start my day, I'm fortunate that I have a separate spare bedroom that I use exclusively as an office. And I think that's probably my biggest ritual, is that in the morning I open the door, and when I'm done, at the end of the day, I close the door. So kind of just like how sleep experts say you should only sleep in your bedroom and not, you know, work in your bed or anything like that. I think it's sort of the same thing with my home office. It kind of just my brain switches to work mode when I enter, and then when I leave, I'm done for the day. And I think that's especially important when you work from home to have some sort of designated work area, even if you don't have a whole room, just have a space that's just for work, and then you can kind of turn it on and turn it off. And my other ritual, I think, can kind of happen at any point in the day, but it's just when I'm about to start deep work or go into a meeting, and that's just make sure I have all the drinks I could possibly want, because I get really distracted if I run out of drinks. So I make sure I have coffee and water and iced tea if I think I'm going to want it. So that way I can settle in for a long time and not have a reason to get up and go rehydrate at any point. What about you, Barbara?

[11:20] **Barbara Palmer:** Thanks, Casey. This is Barbara, deputy editor. I also thought I didn't have any rituals till I thought about it a little bit. And one of my rituals is around the non negotiable of coffee, but I grind beans every morning, and I do pour over just one cup at a time. And, you know, I know I could do it more efficiently, but I love that ritual. Like, the beans smell so good and the steam rising from the, and it kind of fits in with, the other thing that I do in the mornings is write down some of the

things that I'm thinking about before I look at email, before I look at social media, because I do think our brains are working all the time. And just if there's, you know, if I wake up with a thought, I just try and spend a little time contemplating. And I usually read something that is kind of uplifting, but something to kind of set my mind in a really, like a really calm space before the onslaught. It has been challenging. I'm in a time zone that's 3 hours behind. And when I was in New York, I really had enough of a cushion that, you know, there was plenty of time for me to. I usually meditate for a little while, and sometimes meetings start at 06:00 a.m. Or seven. And so it's been a little bit more challenging, but it's also helped me be a little bit more deliberate and realize like, oh, I really need this. And this is how I can do it quicker, only this much is going to fit in. This morning when I read that story, I had just been thinking about how much I needed an evening ritual. I always try and check in with the sunset, and I always, there's some redwood trees in my backyard and I always check in with the trees. But I feel like a shutdown ritual would be really beneficial to me. So I am interested in all these rituals that we don't think we have, but when we look at what we're doing, we do have them.

[13:50] **Curt Wagner:** Barbara, I loved what you said about you sort of have your thought in the morning about whatever you were thinking about, and you sort of worked that out before you look at the paper or social media or anything like that, because I do wake up and usually do my games, the New York Times games, and then read the New York Times, you know, read the paper or read stories in the paper that I would read. And then you sort of, I've stopped thinking about whatever it is because I think inevitably, you wake up in the morning and you're like, oh, I got to do. I have this thing that I have to do. And I think what you said, if you actually think about it a little bit and even jot something down, it will help you later in the day. And maybe I'm going to try that. That'll be my ritual now, just a little thing. So thanks for that. But I think my afternoon ritual, I may quit work ritual is when the cat tells me, you're done working, because I want to sit on your lap, and then I have to go sit in another chair and so she can sit on my lap. So I think that that happens automatically, too, without me deciding.

[14:54] **Michelle Russell:** I think one of the things that most of us have worked remotely for a long time, but one of the things I thought was interesting during the pandemic were the people who were used to going to an office. It was the time commuting to the office and the time commuting home that they had. Like, it was a transition period. And you don't have a transition period when you work from home. Like Casey said, she closes the door to her office, and that's like, now I'm entering into my private life. I think we probably could create rituals so that we don't just go from work to, you know, making dinner or personal time, but just having, like, a space to sort of, like, wind down from the day and, like, transition. This is those transition spaces that I think we probably should have more rituals for, so that it's just not either on or off. It's just more of a balance between the two or a bridge between the two. But I think, Jen, you had something you wanted to say?

[15:57] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** Yeah. Hearing what everyone's saying, it kind of reminds me. It's interesting. Sleep doctors will talk about sleep hygiene, so, like, all the things that you should be doing, like brushing your teeth, blah, blah, blah. Like, regular personal hygiene, but to do it for proper sleep, which is, you know, I think the really common, well known wonder, like, you know, not having the light from your phone and having a time that you start to wind down every day, you know, whatever it is, and how, if you don't have those things in place, like, you're not. If you struggle with sleep, like, I have my entire life, like, you're probably not, you know, going to get good sleep. And I feel like you can apply that to work. So work hygiene. And it's interesting because I feel like these rituals are, like, an integral part of that work hygiene. And especially as people, we all work from home, and I've worked from home the majority of my career. Having those rituals kind of creates that good work hygiene, which I'm guilty of not having. I work from bed all the time and don't judge me. It's honestly where I do my best writing, and it's where I've always done my best writing since I was a child, because I used to. I'm sure everyone did this, but for me, it was like, my safe place to hide under the covers of my flashlight and read and write. And that's still, if I'm really trying to be my most creative, where I will go to write, which is totally against every piece of advice that any expert has. But whatever, who cares? You do. You. But I think it's funny. I think these rituals are an essential part of a work hygiene, which we so desperately need when we need a work life balance. But are there rituals that you guys have when you're dealing with something difficult at work, whether it's gearing up for a difficult conversation or doing something you feel uncomfortable doing, are there rituals that you have to kind of get yourself in your most best mental and emotional space?

[18:09] **Barbara Palmer:** I have kind of a silly one.

[18:11] **Casey Gale:** Okay.

[18:12] **Barbara Palmer:** Like, if I'm struggling with a story that is really important to me, like, they're all important, but some of them are a little harder than others. I changed the font to Palatino because that is my favorite font. And I usually write in Cambria, which we use, but I'm very sensitive to fonts,

so I kind of save Palatino. Like, you'd think, oh, you love Palatino, why don't you use it all the time? I save it for when I need it, I'll bring up. I know. I feel like when I thought about these rituals, I feel like my rituals are so quirky, but I'm sure everyone's are.

[18:56] **Casey Gale:** I love that you said that, Barbara, because I also write in my preferred font, which is not what we submit in. I just. Cambria does not spark joy for me, so I'm more of a Calibri person, so that's what I usually write in, and then I change it at the end.

[19:12] **Michelle Russell:** Yeah.

[19:13] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** Okay.

[19:14] **Curt Wagner:** I wonder what this tells us about each other when the font she choose. I wonder if there's some kind of study that explains what that means. What do I write in? I think I write in Helvetica, which is pretty boring, but that's just what it goes to right away at first. Jen, I suggest you try to sleep on the couch now, and maybe that'll help your sleeping if you work in the bed.

[19:36] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** Curt, my sleep habits are so horrendous. You have no idea the challenges I've had in my life to get good sleep. And the rituals that I have now to get good sleep. It's a cocktail of melatonin and music and vibes and low lighting and, yeah, it's. It's a difficult thing. I also need about 12 hours of sleep. I'm one of those people who needs, like, an extraordinary amount of sleep, and that's normal. No judgment. I don't want. I don't want people who are like, oh, I only need six. No, everyone needs different amounts of sleep. I have this verified by a sleep doctor. Don't come at me. Yeah, like Oprah, who's like, oh, I only need 4 hours of sleep. Like, she's an alien. And congratulations. Like, that's probably a reason why she's one of the reasons why she's so successful. Like, we'd all love more date, like, more hours in the day. But anyway, I think that you do like, you do you. You do the rituals that work for you, and no judgment. So come. Come at us with the quirky, the quirkiness, the quirky rituals.

[20:42] **Curt Wagner:** I think getting back to your question about when you had the difficult story, what do you do that's different? And I think I tend to research even more. Like, I find myself going down rabbit holes a lot on a topic and just going, oh, this is cool. This is cool. And absolutely none of it do I need for the story, because it just makes the story so long, and it's all the stuff that's not necessarily important to it. But I find that that's what I end up doing. I just keep looking for more and more and more stuff, and that's kind of, you know, that's another form of procrastination, I think. But whatever. Casey, what about you?

[21:23] **Casey Gale:** When I'm working on a difficult story, that just kind of sparked what I do because I wasn't sure how to answer that, but I kind of fill in as much as possible if I don't know how to get started. So I'll go through the transcript and I'll pick out all my favorite quotes, and I'll write down the person's full name and their title and make sure I have the name of the conference correct. And just fill in all those little details that I can to start that I know I'm going to have to go back and look at anyway. And then the story kind of starts to take shape based on the quotes I've picked out or some ideas I've gotten just through reading back through the transcript. And that helps me begin, because sometimes it's really hard to just start from the first paragraph if you don't know what you want to say.

[22:11] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** So can we talk about music as a ritual? Because I think when you think about music going back to, like, I used to go to catholic school, church, growing up, and, like, the music that would start the mass and, like, punctuate the different parts of the mass. And then when you think about events, you know, there's always, like, a really upbeat, get them riled up song to kick off a keynote or kick off, you know, the general session or whatever it is. And then in my own, like, personal life, I feel like I have different music and playlists that I go to, depending on what I'm doing, whether it's writing, working out, whatever. And I'm curious to know what y'all think about music as a ritual, how you use it as a ritual, and how you, if you've seen it used at events in an interesting way.

[23:01] **Magdalena Atanassova:** I cannot work without music.

[23:04] **Casey Gale:** Same.

[23:05] **Magdalena Atanassova:** It's actually killing me that I have to record without music, even though I have headphones on. You're a little bit.

[23:13] **Michelle Russell:** I cannot work with music.

[23:16] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** Interesting.

[23:17] **Barbara Palmer:** I am the same. I get drawn into the music and my attention is divided.

[23:23] **Michelle Russell:** I got very distracted.

[23:27] **Barbara Palmer:** I love to work where there's a little buzz around me. I like to work in coffee shops. I like to work in libraries. There's something about the little hum of other people around me that helps me focus.

[23:44] **Curt Wagner:** Barbara?

[23:46] **Michelle Russell:** I don't like the music, and I like the people I think it's our newspaper background.

[23:51] **Curt Wagner:** Barbara, is that because I think I worked really well?

[23:55] **Barbara Palmer:** It probably is.

[23:56] **Curt Wagner:** When you have all this stuff going on around you and you focus more.

[23:59] **Barbara Palmer:** You just, like, I think about that like you're like an air traffic controller or something. Like you're, I think about how you would be in these desks everywhere, and some of the desks were facing you. Like, if you looked up from your computer, you were looking straight at another person. And yet I just had this zone of focus. But somehow it helps you stay there because you're all working together for this deadline. I don't know. I think newspaper deadlines can really set these patterns of, like, the only thing I actually think I ever count as work is actual writing, even though we do so many other things. I'll be like, oh, I haven't gotten anything done. And it's like, oh, it's because you didn't finish that story. But, you know, it's like the deadline. Deadlines are interesting.

[24:59] **Casey Gale:** I also need some form of outside stimulation, not necessarily music, because especially if there's singing in it, it just distracts me when I'm trying to write. But I like to put on ambiance videos on YouTube of, like, a background with rain or snow or a fireplace or something like that. It just makes me feel kind of cozy and more focused and gives me a little bit of sound without being too distracting.

[25:30] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** I love those, too. And, like, depending on the season or where I am, like, I'll find, like, I did the fireplace one all winter.

[25:39] **Casey Gale:** Yeah.

[25:39] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** I love. For those of you who don't like listening to music, I wonder if it's because it's not the right kind. Like, I can only listen to very specific music when I write or work. And it's usually something like karanga bin, like, basically moody, atmospheric, like instrumental, some classical, depending on what kind. I have very specific work and write and read playlists and I wonder. But it took a while to figure out what works and what doesn't. Because you're right. Like, I can't listen to, like, regular pop, upbeat, like that kind of thing when I'm working. Like, it's just not, it's just not the right mood.

[26:18] **Casey Gale:** Yeah, I'm the same. I. There's certain, I like to listen to music when I read, but it has to be really specific album. Like, it can be one artist, but it's like a specific album and it has to be at a certain volume and it kind of random. Some of them are a little bit more upbeat and some of them are more, like, acoustic and relaxed. But for whatever reason, that doesn't bother me when I'm trying to focus. But it does have to be low. Otherwise, it's too much competing in my brain. And, you know, that's funny, because I can remember being in college and trying to get work done in Starbucks, and I liked the hum of the people, like you were saying, but if they played jazz music, it would make me so angry.

[27:02] **Barbara Palmer:** It.

[27:03] **Casey Gale:** It was just the most distracting music I could possibly think of. It made me, like, enraged.

[27:10] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** I don't.

[27:11] **Michelle Russell:** I don't. Also don't do well with jazz. It's really not my jam. I can't. It's not controlled. I can't. Yesterday, on the way back to Union Station in DC, the cab driver had classical music on. It really relaxed me, and I thought, this is some classical music still has a place in the world. Maybe print still has a place in.

[27:34] **Barbara Palmer:** The world, and it will never go away because it exists.

[27:39] **Michelle Russell:** It still exists with all the other genres, right? So maybe I just thought to myself, well, maybe there always will be these other platforms where we talk about, oh, they're going by the wayside. People don't do that anymore. All they do is look at their phone or their screen. I still think there'll be a place, certainly. Like, I've just been reading that books, print books are more popular than ever, and that Kindle never took off like they thought it would. And so I guess maybe because all roads lead to my job, I just made that connection in my head. But I think that it just shows with all these music genres, there's a place for everyone.

[28:24] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** I think you're spot on. So we have something here in Charleston called Spiletto, which is a month long arts festival of all different mediums. And the one that I am dying to go to sold out immediately. And that's a concert with Yo-Yo Ma, a cellist. I'm sure everyone's heard of him because he's super, super famous, but there's no way to get tickets. And I'm, like, bereft. I'm so sad. But also speaking to that, I have a friend who just opened a wine bar here in Charleston. It's a part wine bar. Part or I guess bar, because she's serving beer, too. I think it's just wine and beer. Haven't been yet. But it's a bookstore. It's an actual bookstore. And it's already been written about, like, three times. People are loving it. She used Kickstarter to help fund it. She raised tens of thousands of dollars. I mean, it's taken off. It's not the only one in our town. So I agree with you. I think those mediums are still very popular. And I think like, kind of alluding to our next story, people kind of

want the tangible, you know, when everything is on a screen. I think people are now looking more towards the tangible and the classic more than ever.

[29:37] **Barbara Palmer:** If you would put a cellist in the corner of that bookstore wine bar, that would just be heaven.

[29:44] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** Oh my gosh, it would. I have it explode with happiness.

[29:49] **Casey Gale:** And I think physical media is still really popular with all ages. I know I'm a huge reader and people my age, like late twenties, early thirties, there's a huge community online of people who absolutely love reading and love reading physical books and collecting books. And so I think those mediums are still alive and well.

[30:14] **Jennifer N. Dienst:** Yeah, book talk.

[30:15] **Casey Gale:** Book talk is. Yeah, yeah, I love book talk.

[30:19] **Barbara Palmer:** And I wonder, for those that listen.

[30:22] **Magdalena Atanassova:** To us, if they have actually event team rituals, you know, when you go on site, what are the team rituals? I've seen a few and I hope that those that have listened so far would just write to us with some of their team rituals. That would be super fun to explore. And on that note, thank you all for this very fun conversation. The main article will be linked in the show notes.

Now, there will be a transcript in the show notes linked as well. And if you like us and want to support us, just subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. And until next time, bye.

[31:01] **Barbara Palmer:** Woohoo.

[31:02] **Michelle Russell:** Good job.