

# How a Covenant of Work Will Strengthen Your Hybrid Team

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

covenant, people, leaders, seth, book, team, teams, work, obligations, expectations, partnership, tim, talking, consultant, meaningful, meeting, workplace, collaboration, creates, consulting

## SPEAKERS

Ginny Bianco-Mathis, Mitch Simon, Tim Franz

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**M** Mitch Simon 00:10

Welcome to another episode of Team anywhere where CEOs, leaders and experts are building teams, companies, organizations

**G** Ginny Bianco-Mathis 00:20

and amazing cultures share how to lead from anywhere in the world. I'm your co host on the East Coast, Judy Bianca Mathis,

**M** Mitch Simon 00:28

and I'm your co host on the West Coast, Mitch Simon. And we invite you to join us team anywhere. What if every leader in your company created a contract or a covenant that stated their obligations to their team? What if every team created a covenant where they shared their obligations as a team with their manager? Certainly the employee working 1000s of miles from the home base would feel more taking care of since he or she would know exactly what to expect from the leader. And they would also have the ability to share with their leader just how the leader is doing. On today's podcast, you will learn how to create a workplace covenant that ensures mutual accountability and success between leaders and teams, anywhere. Hello, and welcome to another episode of Team anywhere. I'm your co host Mitch Simon on the West Coast and I've got our amazing co hosts, Dr. Virginia, Bianco. Math is on the east coast. And today, today we have we have an author, we have an author, a star, a professor, a Superman, and it's Dr. Timothy brands. And let's face it, many team members feel unsupported by their leaders. And it's the single biggest reason why people quit their job. It also turns out that many leaders feel similarly unsupported by their team. On today's podcast, we have Dr. Timothy Franz I just introduced, he and Dr. Seth silver, just co wrote the book, meaningful partnerships at work how the workplace covenant ensures mutual accountability and success between leaders and teams. That's a long title. And I can't wait to dive into learning more about the new covenant for this new way of working. Tim, Welcome to Team anywhere.

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Tim Franz 02:25

Thanks for having me. Really appreciate it.

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Mitch Simon 02:28

I was great, too. Great to see you. And so Tim, Tim. Tim is in Rochester. So he is very far away from San Diego, where leaves turn color, we have our leaves turn color, like they target like like an April they fall

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Tim Franz 02:48

down this week, so this will be at.

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Mitch Simon 02:52

Great. So you know, I would like to know, first of all, Tim, how did you and your co writer meet? And why did you both decide to write a book about meaningful partnership?

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Tim Franz 03:05

Well, we've been working together for a long time. I think we met back in 2001 2002. Somewhere around there. I moved to Rochester from my where I worked before this, started teaching at St. John Fisher. And at the time there was a graduate program here in human resource development. Seth was a half time faculty member and mostly consultant and I was a full time faculty member and part time consultant. We always joke about this that he's a consultant who professes and I'm a professor who consults and so exactly we've been we've been working together a long time on teaching and research on consulting on so many different things. And we actually live about a mile away from one another to and our daughter's just graduated high school together last. It's been a long standing relationship. Now how did we get to this book? Yeah, and I'm gonna give credit where credit is due to Seth. This is Seth's idea, this workplace covenant idea. And it really started when he was back working at a fortune 100 technology firm in Rochester, New York. Gee, I wonder that could be Xerox. So he, he worked at Xerox and he started listening to managers talk about their teams. And the managers would say, Yeah, I've got a pretty good team, but I wish they'd communicate better. I wish they'd send me more emails. I wish, I wish, I wish. And then he talked to the team members. And the team members would say Yeah, our managers pretty good, but I wish they'd give us a better vision. I wish they'd support us to leadership. I wish I wish I wish And there was always this in some teams as you know, very high level of frustration, and in some, at least a moderate level of frustration or a little frustration, a two way street of frustration. And so he started talking with these teams and leaders about their obligations to one another. Now, about 2007, he introduced this concept that the term he developed the workplace covenant, and covenant doesn't have a religious connotation at all. But there's workplace covenant, a set of agreements based on obligations that carry some level of weight behind them. And back in 2007, as a full time professor, I was doing academic research at the time, I looked at what was happening with this, and I saw the theoretical foundation, why this worked, I could tie it to all these different ideas in my field as an organizational psychologist, and I got really excited about it. So after a few years, because you all know, you blink, and another four years goes by, and we started doing research about the workplace covenant, we started doing more consulting together about the workplace covenant. And then finally, we started to write the book. And then COVID

head, and we jokingly refer to this as our COVID. Vacation. We were both ended up. We both ended up with a little extra spare time. And we had started the book before that. But that gave us enough spare time to finish this book. So we we write about in the book, the process, we actually give it away. Once you read this book, you could actually do the process of the workplace covenant. And while writing the book, we realized that the point the title changed halfway through writing as long as Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And so we realized that the book wasn't about the workplace covenant, the workplace covenant is just a tool to get to this goal of meaningful partnership, to have everybody rowing in the same direction going on the tracks together, moving together in alignment, and really sticking together and working towards the same thing, working as partners.

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Mitch Simon 07:20

Wow, I have a question about what you just said. But I just need to clarify something. Jenny, are you a consultant that professors or a professor that consults

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Ginny Bianco-Mathis 07:28

I do both? I said, I got a foot in both camps. I got talking to you later. Yeah. Cool.

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Mitch Simon 07:42

So I guess my question going back is you mentioned, you mentioned to him, that it's obligations that carry some level of weight behind them. So what do you mean by by? That's the obligations. I mean, when I think of an obligation, it does carry a level of weight. What do you mean by that in a in a team setting?

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Tim Franz 08:00

Well, the way we work this process to try to give them this obligatory sense of weight is, first of all, people have more buy into things they develop. So a team separately, works on their expectations of their team leader, and then lists their obligations to the team leader. And the team leader separately. does the same thing. What are my expectations of the team? What are my obligations to the team, and then those lists through a facilitated dialogue are merged. The leader lists their obligations to the team. And the team says, well, here are our expectations, those lists are usually about 70 to 80%, overlapping, and the expectations are merged into the leader obligations,

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Mitch Simon 08:54

ground and in how does a team monitor and work through when obligation expectations are met, and then when they're not met?

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Tim Franz 09:04

Well, one of the things I love about this process is so many organization development interventions are one shot deals, and I'm gonna criticize myself. You know, some work I did, which, you know, we've all done this job. I was working with a nonprofit locally, this was not with Seth about five or six years ago, and after

three sessions with this group that was having conflict and communication problems, they, they said, Well, this is great. We love your ideas. We love what you're doing, but how do we keep it going? And I said, Well, I'd love it if you had me and again, but that's, you know, that's the leaders in the organization's job. And if we talked about this, every three months, we would change the culture. That is the key is this workplace covenant. The leader has obligations to the team. It's signed, the team has obligations to the leader. They're signed, and then on both on it formal and formal basis every two to three months formally and informally and one to ones or team meetings, you revisit this covenant, and I wish I had mine to Seth, it's at my home office. But I could hold up my, my covenant to Seth and show him the video. It's on my wall. He has a covenant to me, and it's on his wall. And we take these things seriously about our working together. Now we're friends, but we still developed one around working together on this book. So it's on the wall, you bring it up in the one to ones, you bring it up in the team meetings. In fact, we just worked with a team working, they're about two hours away, and we just worked with this team. And they are going to put their covenants at the top of the agenda as the first item for every meeting. So it's this constant revisiting. And at first, that facilitated dialogue between the team and a leader, it's great to have somebody in between but our job is good od people is to work ourselves out of business. By the fourth review, they should be doing it on their own. And we're going to be putting some videos up on LinkedIn, and one of the members talks about how every two or three weeks he'd go to the covenant, it took four minutes at the beginning of the meeting, how are we doing up down in the middle? And they got it done? They said, Okay, this is what we'll do better, blah, blah, blah, moved on to the

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Mitch Simon 11:27

ER like that. So easy to just, you know, meeting just to go okay, how are we doing? Thumbs up? Thumbs down? Hey, we're deep. We're great. Awesome. Are we suck? Awesome. Deep? Do you have a question?

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Ginny Bianco-Mathis 11:37

Yeah. QUESTION input. I have found and see if I'm thinking I'm hearing what you all try to do. You facilitate the team and the leader through the process of the covenants. And then I think the the real punch as an OD consultant is now what are you going to do with it? How do you make it real? Even just putting it on the agenda is like one of four maybe things we have to do on a regular basis? How do we know? When you said, we have found I have found that? Yeah, I may have to be there like four times. Wait a minute, do you want to rephrase that Bob, given covenant number four, right. And then they learn how to do that. And then as a good OD consultant, you, you move out, because hopefully they've they've been coached towards those skills.

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Tim Franz 12:39

Absolutely. And that is the goal to coach them to do their skills. Now, the first, sometimes in some teams that are really struggling, those those first meetings are really tough. And the first meeting to develop the covenant, you can see them change by the first covenant review, you can see their demeanor, change their behavior change, but you still, you know, those first covenant reviews do take about an hour, they take some time. But over time, and Mitch, as you said earlier, you know, five minutes at the beginning of meeting, it could be boom, boom, I need to fix this, I'll try to do it by doing this, boom, move on. Okay. And it becomes this instead of two way street of frustration. It's a two way street of feedback, and ongoing feedback. In fact, I just did a presentation for St. John Fisher here where I was talking about feedback, because they were talking about annual evaluations. And I said, feedback is not a one shot deal. At any

one valuations. It's an ongoing conversation, you constantly have to be building that trust by giving ongoing positive feedback, here's what's going well, here's what's going well, because as soon as you have to give some developmental one, you're going to make some withdrawals on that trust bank account.

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Mitch Simon 13:52

I love and I love about this, because I do work with them. Some really good companies, where the the leader, you know, after let's say, a one on one, you know, these, you know, highly higher developed leaders will say, Hey, how you know, okay, well, you know, that now that I've given you direct report, some feedback. Can you give me some feedback? And usually, though, I don't know what to say, Now, with this covenant, it's like, well, let me just pull out the covenant. I mean, now I understand what your expectations to me are. And I can tell you, you know, item number four, that yeah, you're actually meeting my expectations, or you're not meeting my expectations. The thing is, is that if those expectations aren't clear, then I really don't know how you're doing or how you're doing or is really just my opinion about anything.

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Tim Franz 14:41

Right? And this gets those expectations to be completely explicit. No longer do you have that implicit expectation where you have violated I can remember on my 2000 back in 2000, I violated an implicit expectation here. At my department, I write about it and one of my other books, it's really funny story. But I violated it, I had no idea because it was an implicit expectation. So this gets all those things out on the table. And it does. It creates this system for feedback, that is psychologically safe. Importance of psychological safety to make teams move forward, it's psychologically safe at the beginning, because the team is working together. And you're not saying, Mitch did this, or Jenny did that and said that did this, it's, it's the team wants you to do this, the team wants you to do that. Right. And so that starts at off on the foundation of psychological safety. And then, as you said, Mitch, it's perfect, because the ongoing discussion is one that everybody gets used to,

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Ginny Bianco-Mathis 15:52

and mature doing. As the coach, OD consultant, both is role modeling, when you are helping them putting that covenant together, you're helping them also with the language of the feedback, you're helping them with. Well, what do you mean by that? By their third meeting, they hopefully are learning? Well, let's get more explicit. Do we mean this shade of red coming in or this shade? What does it mean for us? Yeah. And you said that at the beginning, it is a powerful tool that gets to all the right things,

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Tim Franz 16:35

right? That gets to helping people to have, we talked about the foundations for this, it, it creates empathy, it creates respect, it creates trust, it aligns the leader in the team. Those are the four foundations, the psychological foundations of why this works, and creates this level, this tool creates this level of meaningful partnership that so many leaders and teams want, but don't know how to get there. Right?

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Mitch Simon 17:03

So I want to I want to ask, because we are the team anywhere show. I'd love to ask how, how you've seen this impact virtual teams or hybrid teams?

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Tim Franz 17:14

Well, this is this is a good question. Because before COVID, we did this face to face, and then lockdown. Yep. And again, giving credit to my colleague, friend, co author, Seth, he was he was in a group right then, where they were halfway through, they had done their covenant, but no reviews yet. And so it was a real quick transition. And Seth and I worked together to help figure out how to do this in an online environment. And since then, we have moved this to an online environment, we can do it fully partially, you know, this is I started teaching remotely before lockdown. So I had some of these remote skills to begin with. And we learned pretty quickly how to make this work in a hybrid or fully online environment. Right now. We're, we're working with an organization that's probably Jinni closer to you than it is to us. We are never going down there. We talked about it, but they've got some people who are fully virtual on that team. And we'll never make it there. Because there, there's no reason for us to go in if 20% I'm doing that now, too. And so it's amazing how well that works. I was shocked to be honest at how well this works in an online environment, it does require a lot more dialogue and talking it does slow the process down as we find with any virtual work. virtual work slows teams down some, but it does work. It works great. We've had success with it since again, if you'd asked me this in 2019, my answer would have been very different. But we've all learned how to make these, these these things work. Now,

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Mitch Simon 18:59

it seems it seems that you know, if I'm, you know, if I'm remote, and I'm in someplace like Rochester, and you know, my bosses and I don't know, Washington, DC or Virginia, and it just it gives me a sense of clarity about my relationship with my boss, and also my relationship with my company because there's, you know, a lot of people would say, Well, you know, there's your company values, which they're nice. It seems a Tim that now I am very, very clear. What my what my expectations are to the to the team, but but even more so I'm very clear what my expectations are for my boss to me. So then I don't feel so confused and alone and isolated. But I feel like there's a covenant, right, there's a there's a promise. And I'm just I'm just wondering if you've actually experienced, maybe higher retention, because teams have a covenant versus teams that don't I don't know if you've noticed anything Think about that, Tim?

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Tim Franz 20:02

Yes, we have seen people well, we have seen people, there are some great stories in the book about covenant procedures that we've done. And we have seen people who are on their way out, survive and thrive. After the covenant. We have seen people who, one of the stories, somebody left at the end of the covenant, and that actually was in, in a very sad way that was turns out to help the team succeed. But we have direct evidence that shows that team's conflict goes down, engagement goes up, team performance goes up, teams are more aligned and work together as partners. We lay all that out in the book, but our research shows that this works, that it does make a difference for teams,

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Mitch Simon 20:51

right? You're making me want to buy this book,

**G** Ginny Bianco-Mathis 20:52  
I'm buying it.

**M** Mitch Simon 20:54  
I'm having my students buy these on Amazon right now. There it is this money. Buying? Yeah, well, you know, you're talking to two consultant professors. I'm actually just my first question was, as as I was learning more about you is, I'm going to read the the if we have enough time to be on the podcast can read the title of the book, again. So meaningful partnership at work, how the workplace covenant ensures mutual accountability and success between leaders and teams. I'm tired. So the so the the first, the first two words, says meaningful partnership at work, it doesn't say meaningful partnerships at work. And so I really want to understand what does meaningful partnership mean, and why it's singular, not plural.

**T** Tim Franz 21:41  
This was actually a it's kind of funny you pick pick up on that? Because, yeah, it was a long conversation. It was Seth and I talked as we changed, again, change the title of the book from focusing on the workplace covenant, and saying, Well, that's only a tool to this idea of partnership. Because the ideas, though, can certainly be used to cross multiple teams where you have multiple covenants and multiple partnerships. It really is a relationship, this bi directional, this two way relationship between you and another person, whether it's you and a customer, you and another team, somebody else on another team, it really does have to do with this idea of I'm an individual, I have a partnership with another person, that the model we often use, and as you picked up out as the team leader to the team, and that can be a CEO to the executive team, or a frontline supervisor, to the people on the floor.

**M** Mitch Simon 22:49  
Great. And, and, you know, I always talk about some of the work that I do is I'm really trying to build collaboration, what what, you know, on a team, so what's the difference between a meaningful partnership and just collaboration or just collaboration? Like what how would we How would I see that happening different on a team?

**T** Tim Franz 23:09  
Well, we think that collaboration is part of meaningful partnerships. So you're talking about building collaboration. And a meaningful partnership is an elevated sense of connection, cohesion, and collaboration. That is the goal that people are more connected at work that they're more cohesive, and, as a result, can collaborate more. So it's not just collaboration, but it's this idea of an elevated sense of collaboration.

**M** Mitch Simon 23:42  
And I love I'm learning this for the first time, but I love that sense of connection. You know, in addition to collaboration, which again, again, is one of the things that Ginny and I are finding from this podcast is that

seems to be the first thing that was necessary. With with with hybrid and virtual work. And perhaps, you know, it's always been necessary. It just hasn't been talked about. And I do think, you know, these days, it almost goes without saying that if you're not creating connection, then you know, number one, you're not going to have collaboration. But number two, your your employees are just going to take off and go find it somewhere else.

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Tim Franz 24:23

And right now, that's what we're seeing. In fact, program seven I did back in April, we predicted this idea of people leaving, especially for these leaders who aren't working towards who aren't recognizing the Alien Isolation that people felt during COVID That really changed how they looked at their job, and made them really rethink this idea of employment. So it really exacerbated issues that already existed, the issues were there, and this made it worse. And now we've got leaders who are making Who, who wanted their employees to do all this work remotely for 18 months, and we trust you to do it, we trust you to do it. And now they're calling him back and saying we don't trust you, even though we had to trust you, we don't trust you. And so it's been this interest. Some leaders just I think, don't get the, the idea of the importance of connection at work. We are social beings, here's where you get the social and organizational psychologist at the at the bottom of my truly soul somewhere is people want connection people want, we're social beings, they want that social connectedness, whether it's remotely, which works now we found out or whether it's face to face, different people want different levels of each.

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Mitch Simon 25:43

For him. I gotta I gotta follow up on that. So would you now define employment as something different? Because you know, back in the day employment was you you do that thing? You build those widgets I pay you? Is employment. Now something different? Is it a different covenant? Or must be a different covenant?

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Tim Franz 26:04

Yeah, that's an interesting question. I think it's still an exchange relationship. It's foundation. It's an exchange relationship. But absolutely, people want more from their work than simply an exchange relationship. And in there, a lot of people talk about the generational differences. And most of the time, the Gen eight generational differences are, you know, I'm all I'm getting near 60. And it's I'm getting near 60. And these people are at a different point in their life, it's not really generation at age, but there are some and what we're seeing in this new generation is they do want more, they want more self guidance in their career, they want more vacation, they'll take a job with more vacation and lower pay. Whereas, you know, me the cusp of the boomers many years ago, it was all about pay and recognition and hard effort, and it has changed. I think the nature of work has changed. And even people like me who grew up and then, you know, cutting their teeth, so to speak in the late 80s. Era. It's changed. So,

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Mitch Simon 27:15

Jimmy, we got we got to write an article on the new definition of employment, because that's what this is pointing to. Oh, totally. So I'd love to ask another question. So what do what do you and Seth hope to accomplish with this book?

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Tim Franz 27:31

Well, really, we would love the workplace covenant and meaningful partnership to become words that are used regularly in an ongoing way. At work. I really speaking very frankly, for years, I did, you know, somewhere behind me in this video where you can see and the listeners can't. There's a blue binder that says publications. And there are a whole bunch of academic publications, which are great. And I love that people do that academic research. But really, I've looked at my career and reflected and I want to make a difference, not just do another publication, I want to make a difference in the world. And people go to work. And so many people are dissatisfaction, this satisfied, disengaged, and they don't want to be there. And they're miserable when they go home. And you know, my mom died years ago, but I'm going to pick on her anyway, for a little while, she used to say she threw her work troubles over the bridge on the way home. And now as an organizational psychologist, I think she did it fairly well worked with heroin addicts in her life. But it's so hard for most people. We don't throw our troubles over the bridge on the way home, if things are bad at work, it affects our our spouse or partner at home, our kids at home, are our pets at home. And this book, I think, has the ability to make positive change for so many people at work. And so it's kind of been a change in my whole career trajectory by writing this book, because all of a sudden, I feel like it's something important that I'm doing. And again, not that academic research is not important. But I've got some papers, I think four people have read, and a lot more people have read this book already. Wow.

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Ginny Bianco-Mathis 29:27

Yeah, it's very practical. And it came out at the right time did it not? Well, for the redefinition of work. And this fits right in into that. It's a marvelous tool.

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Tim Franz 29:41

Absolutely. I think you hit right on it.

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Mitch Simon 29:44

So what what is the one thing you would hope that people would do right away? To take this idea of a meaningful partnership or a covenant and put it into action?

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Tim Franz 29:58

actually read the book And, again, we've given away the process, you can do this on your own, it's easier to have an outside facilitator. But I think if people really put into action, the things that we talk about, try to get those obligations spelled out. So they're, they're not implicit. So they're explicit and it focuses on instead of my expectations, it focuses on my obligations, what I have to do, this is an important change in how we view how we work together, what do I owe you so that you can feel supported and be successful? It does change the nature of the relationship so that people have this meaningful partnership.

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Mitch Simon 30:47

That's great. Okay, so I want to know, how can we find you how can we find the book? How can we find

staff? Okay,

**T** Tim Franz 30:57

so, all of Well, first of all, Seth and I are both very active on LinkedIn. We've been having publishing a lot of articles these podcasts so my LinkedIn is Tim Franz consulting Tim dash friends to dash consulting Seth's LinkedIn is looking it up very quickly, is Seth our silver EDD is his LinkedIn and like I said, we're both very active, he has a website, silver consulting, Inc, I have a website team building, process calm. So we are pretty easy to get a hold of and of course, I also as a college professor, as, as you know, JD My information is out there publicly say chances are college I am easy to find. So those are the best ways neither of us are really active on Twitter, but LinkedIn, and our websites, you can get the book at amazon, or direct from our publisher, which is that conglomeration of Taylor and Francis Rutledge Corwin and productivity press are Oh, yeah, they're all together.

**M** Mitch Simon 32:12

That's great. Yeah. And the book came out, I'm looking on Amazon, it came out on August 27 2020. One's a brand new book. And, gosh, this has been fun.

**T** Tim Franz 32:25

Real fun. Well, great. So

**M** Mitch Simon 32:27

thank you so much, Tim, please send our highest regards to your to your partner, Seth. We want to thank you, Jenny. We really we all want to thank everybody. I want to thank our listeners who have been I think we're gonna hit about 6000 downloads this month, which is pretty cool. It's November now as we as we record this, and so if you if you've loved our podcast, please share it with your pets. As Tim pointed out, and your your colleagues and your friends, your family. Please give us a rating five stars. And we look forward to seeing you on the next episode of Team anywhere