

Interview with Neil Coleman – VP of Post Production at Eyeworks USA

Dave: Welcome to the Elegant Workflow Podcast - A member of the Tech Podcast network Today we are speaking with Neil Coleman – VP of Post Production at Eyeworks USA. Neil, welcome to the Podcast.

Neil: Thanks Dave. It's very nice to be here.

Dave: Please tell us a little bit about your career and your path to your current position.

Neil: Well I'm relatively new to Los Angeles. I'm a Chicago-an, born and raised. I started out actually editing in a post house in Chicago and primarily that was commercials and music videos. Chicago's bog advertising town, or at least it was anyway, and the majority of the work done, there was commercials, a lot of ad agencies, but another big entertainment piece of Chicago was the Oprah Winfrey show and I ended up getting a job there as an online editor. Online back then meant actually that you work in a non linear bay with old school CMX or Grass Valley edit controllers and a switcher and DVE or DME which control the video effects which were very basic but at the time that was, you know, cutting edge. And as the Oprah show started to migrate to an Avid kind of structure, it grew quite quickly and the need for some kind of an organization or a system to keep track of everything and make sure everybody was working forward rather than working sideways became apparent pretty quickly. So I kind of migrated out of editing at Oprah and more into managing and it was at first, managing, you know, specific elements of specific shows and some of the Oprah shows, some of the individual elements of the Oprah shows were actually, could be quite big. There were all sorts of different events that quite often done in the field but also big, big productions were done in house. One of the first things that I win out on strictly as an editor into the field was a second 9 camera field shoot at a high school where they had a couple of mentors intervening into this high school to try and mitigate and help all the different factions of kids. Some kids were you know, being bullied, other kids were the kids who were bullied, there were all sorts of issues with drugs and other things and it was a day long, a 2 day long shoot with 9 cameras that were all ENG, in other words, they weren't apart from, you know, GM sync as well as they could. They weren't coordinated in any way so it was kind of a rouge, rough field setup and I jumped right in started helping as much as I could and I learned a lot from that in regard to how the field and the post can really work symbiotically and help each other. And so I took a lot of those lessons from that particular shoot and started integrating them into how we've done future shoots at Harpo and that was one element that really helped me. A couple of other things that happened at Harpo that were so big they needed somebody just to keep on track of the process and the elements that were within our process was every year we would have this big road trip out to Los Angeles and the morning after the Oscars, Oprah would do a live show, a broadcast from the Kodak theatre which is now the Dolby Theatre and it was a really tight turn around. We couldn't get in there until after the Oscars finished on Sunday night and so it was a mad rush both in acquiring material and processing the material that came from the Oscars itself. So there was a lot of work done prior to the actual road trip out to Los Angeles. There was a lot of work being done in Chicago at Harpo studios while the Oscars were happening and feeding out to Los Angeles and then we literally setup a pop-up post house in the hotel adjacent to the Kodak. And we would bring out, you know, a staff of about 20 editors, assistants and support just to handle the post not including any of the production teams which was obviously exponentially larger. That really required intense focus on workflow because there was no room for any kind of error or mistake. There just wasn't any time. And for such a tight turnaround that it was a live broadcast that it really, it really forced us to hone our workflow in regard to that event and then we would take a lot of what we learned and bring it back into the show itself. I was at Harpo for about 16 years

starting as an editor then moving my way up to eventually the position I had there was supervising technical producer which was kind of one of the those titles or one of those positions you're putting your hand into a lot of areas and you're doing your best to make sure that those areas all work towards the same goal and are working from the same playbook. After the Oprah show ended, I stayed on and I started working at Harpo studios for all the shows that we did there for own. And what's really a learning experience there was everybody or every network has its own needs. Prior to that, we delivered generally to ABC which has its own requirements and then moving on to own which is a part of Discovery which has its own systems and workflows that have been, you know, tested and battle tested and were quite robust. And we had to merge or fold our method of working which was created in a vacuum in Chicago. We've invented our own wheel to make things work for us. We had to figure out how to mold our approach into Discovery's needs because Discovery was a big, big machine with multiple that works and multiple production companies feeding their, their multiple channels of television networks going 24/7. So that was a great learning experience. A couple of years ago I moved out with my family to Los Angeles and we started out the Jeff Probe show which was a day time talk show for CBS television. It allowed me to start from scratch in regard to a workflow and I was very lucky that I worked with some people at CBS, their client services, their technical team that were really top notch and at the cutting edge of technology and willing to utilize and try new workflows that allowed for a lot more flexibility in the production. Specifically working remotely, having multiple avenues of ingest, using a central cloud-based database for all aspects of production whether it was accounting, travel, post, studio, the control room, everybody was working off the same platform which I think in a lot of ways kept our last minute changes and our different types of products coming in all manageable and information was instantly accessible by everyone so we were a fin team where no frills but because we had such a tight way of working and system was so centralized, it kept everybody current and we didn't have nearly as many mistakes and delays that we could have if we, everybody was working in a vacuum or as an island. And then, since then, most recently I have been working in post at iWorks which is a TV production company that does primarily reality television for multiple networks and that's been a great learning experience as well and continues to be because each network has its own needs and depending on how old the network is, some of those needs are legacy needs that you know, the rationale for why they're asking for certain deliverables or certain things done in a certain way is a little different than what you would think it would be in this day in age. Luckily, we're no longer delivering DVDs to every network for approval or for vetting or for screening but still amazingly quite a few networks ask for and expect DVDs as screeners. As you can imagine, some of those, some of those workflows actually slow down the ability to get a production done just because the literal process of shipping a DVD or shipping a tape or whatever it is from point A to point B. That, those literal distances created distance in how long a production takes.

Dave: What did you find around the transition of going from short form to long form? I mean, I've done both in my career and they're kind of different animals and I was just curious how that transition worked for you.

Neil: Well, you know, the short form in regard to the Oprah show was creating a little packages that went within the context of a larger show which really allowed for a lot of flexibility and creativity. And it also allowed for a single person or a very small team to create and execute that product from the very beginning to the very end which from a producer's point of view or from a creator's point of view is terrific because you own that content creatively. But as you start to get into a longer format, there's a lot more cooks in the kitchen both from approval point of view but also from a creative point of view and just a process point of view and in any point in time when different hands are touching that product, things happen to that product that maybe weren't

anticipated or the way that product was created impacts adversely something else further down the line. For example, if you're creating the beginning of that product and you don't include all the mics or all the audio that were there because for your specific area that you're working on, you don't need those elements but then as you get down the road, some other part of the production might have a need for those elements and they're missing that, that step forward that you took requires you to take 2 or 3 steps backward to fix that process. So bigger production definitely requires a more stringent approach in regard to how everybody is contributing.

Dave: Definitely. Especially back in the linear days, I mean it's a little bit of a pain on the Avid right now to go back but at least it's easier, you can just look at source clips but back in the linear days, I imagine if somebody didn't build out the package correctly with the exact audio config that you needed later on in the process, it probably was a nightmare to try to clean it up. And you had this air date that you had to make but still you had to build out, you're mentioning Discovery communications and I've done some work for them in my career and they have very stringent requirements around their deliveries so I can only imagine when you don't have the right elements and you're trying to assemble all this together what it can turn into.

Neil: Absolutely. Back in the day, when it was linear and it was tape, there was a couple of terms that were used on a daily basis that I would imagine most people are unaware of these days. Clone was one term and pre-read was another, and pre-read was the process of the tape playing back and recording back on to itself all at the same time. In other words, the play head was right before the record head and so the tape would record back onto itself. And there were many times where you'd turn around to the producer while editing and say, Are you sure, are you sure this works because once I hit record, there's no going back and so the way to go back was to clone it prior to pre-reading it back on and the clone was basically a dub of your existing material and that was very time consuming but that was the only way you had of hitting the undo when you were in the tape based world. In regard to those formats, yeah, it's really important and even these days it's incredibly important or more so, to have a standardized process for what you're doing and the trick is or the challenge is to create a process that is very rigid and what is being presented but at the same time allows for a lot of flexibility and a lot of variety in regard to the creativity. And I think that's always the challenge when trying to introduce a process or a workflow or however you'd like to describe a method of doing something without infringing on somebody's ability to create but also to get that buy-in from everybody that's participating. I know as an editor creatively, if one of the ways I was working restricted my ability to do something, I would be much less inclined to really buy it full in. I would not be as participatory and it wasn't because I didn't want to be part of a team but it was because ultimately each person in the team, they are judged by the job they do for the position they're in and whether it's a guy making the dubs or it's a producer writing a script or it's the audio tech out the field, they're judged specifically on the work they're doing. And sometimes the workflow can get in the way of how they do their jobs. Great example would be a naming convention or a labeling convention out in the field. That labeling or naming convention might hinder the tech's person or the tech's ability to do their job because they don't have the time or the tools to name everything that you've asked for in the manner that you've asked for it so their choice is to get all of the material and make sure they're covering all of their subjects and make sure all of the mics are working correctly or to name all the files the way you've asked them to name it because they just don't have the tools. The challenge is to introduce a process or a method that gets buy-in from everybody that is needed to participate in that workflow.

Dave: And that is so important getting everyone in the process, all the key stakeholders to buy-in and then sometimes they change their minds which is the other problem.

Neil: Absolutely and sometimes they're changing their mind because they're experiencing what you've asked them to do or what they need to do and it's in conflict with what they view as their primary responsibility or with how they view they will be judged or how they will be rated in how well they do their job.

Dave: Yeah or sometimes you ask them to do something it just helps the next person down the line like you mentioned earlier and they're like well, I don't want to deal with that, that's you know, something else that you're adding on to my workflow, my workload. And so, they don't do it and like you said there's lots of repercussions but their bosses are like hey, this person shouldn't have to worry about that, it's not our problem. So I think that's interesting. One thing I wanted to share with you and some of our listeners is the story about pre-read. So it was this read before write like you mentioned then it was once you initiated the edit that was it. It was burned onto the tape. So I once had an edit session and I built this real, took 8 hours to build and then I had to go back and I just wanted to burn a time code window on it, it was for some documentation. And somebody re-routed the deck, so I couldn't see because it was read before write. I couldn't see the output of the deck and I didn't know and I basically wrote black over the whole tape. So I walked around the building for about 10 minutes kicking some walls, being very upset with myself that I didn't check that, I didn't do a test edit. And most of all, I didn't clone the tape because the client didn't want to pay for the stock. So I had to, I believe on my own time, stayed there the rest of the night, rebuilt the tape, you know, burned the window and I shared the client the next day because it was only fair that they know that the tape was rebuilt without them being there but I had all my DVE settings, I had all my, I had everything in the EDL. It wasn't a huge deal to do and it actually went a lot faster not having a client there and already having the decision being made. But still it was, we all loved pre-read in many ways and we all hated pre-read in many other ways, so.

Neil: Well, you know, it's funny because that story is the perfect anecdote for why failure is so important in moving forward and making sure that what you do is better than it has been and I don't think any of us will be able to be better at our jobs or be better with the tasks that were given if we hadn't failed previously because those are wonderful learning experiences and we've all got them. I've got a story that's similar to yours in many ways except I wasn't the one the one that had to rebuild everything. Along those lines actually before pre-read even, you would work on a video tape machine that had reels on it and it was called the 1 inch or 2 inch machine. And the video tape came on big 60-minute reels and it was very expensive and where I work, we would do commercials and so you wouldn't need 60 minutes obviously because it's a 30-second commercial or 60-second commercial. So the method of calling down just enough tape stock for a spot is you would, as an editor, you would cut the spot or you'd lay the spot down, maybe you'd finish it but it wouldn't have titles and that would be called a clean or a sub master, something like that. And you would fast forward about 30 seconds to a minute after the end of your spot and then you'd literally open the doors of the video tape machine. You would take a pair of scissors and you would cut the video tape. You'd pull the big 60-minute reel off and you'd put on an empty reel, you'd rewind it lay the spot back onto that little, tiny empty reel and that was like a mini-sized pizza box, it would look like these days. But that would be your one spot or your one little commercial and it was very common back then to say okay, I've parked in a safe place to cut. And when you worked at a big facility there, you'd have video tape machine after video tape machine and I was assisting back in the tape room and the editor I was assisting, you know, called back in his intercom okay I parked in a safe place to cut and I opened up the doors of the machine and I cut the tape then I started to put on an empty reel and I hear from an intercom from a different edit bay, hey I lost control of my VTR, what happened? And that was when I realized that I'd cut the tape of a different edit bay and he was not parked in a safe place to cut, he was in the middle of his commercial and so like you, he

was left with nothing because it was not salvageable and so he had to go back to his EDL and re-create it unfortunately with the client in the bay. And those lessons definitely stick with you and there's many things that come from those instances not all of the same way but definitely approaching things from the point of view of safe, redundancies and safety in regard to failure and what it also helped me and taught me was that no matter how good you are, no matter how smart you are, no matter how well and how many times you've done your job, you're going to make a mistake and it's not just you who's going to make a mistake, it's also the people that you work with and the people you work for and the people that work for you. And if I hadn't made so many mistakes throughout my career and I'm sure will continue to make mistakes, I don't know that I would have been able to be so aware of how a mistake doesn't mean somebody's not good at their job, it just means that they made a mistake. And in a lot of ways, it gives you and them an opportunity to, to utilize that mistake both as a lesson for how to do something perhaps a little differently but also you know that they're going to try extra hard as you are, to ensure that that mistake doesn't happen again.

Dave: And I think that's a huge point for people to keep in mind that we all make mistakes. It's the, you know, nature of being a human being and it's what you learn from that like what I learned from the pre-read mistake was always go and check the routing and also always do the test edit. And the other thing is, even if the client doesn't want to pay for the stock, I had a piece of junk stock that I would always dub it off to so at least, because it was digital, you really didn't lose anything. You could get into the theory of that type of digital. And yes there's some generational loss but still it would have been great to have known that I have the master somewhere else instead of that I had nothing. And the other thing that I learned in my career which I'm sure you've seen as well is how can I build systems so I can check things moldable ways? And that's the one thing I think is so important for people to realize in this work especially all the live work you've done in the past is you have to come up with ways to check yourself every way possible even if it takes an extra minute or two. In the long run, that minute is going to save you hours on the backside.

Neil: The dilemma that I always face when I'm trying to come with a solution for an existing opportunity is that my experience is limited to my experience and so the things that I've learned just like the things that you've learned over the years is really only based on A) the mistakes you've made and learned to adapt and overcome so that those mistakes don't happen again and B) the experiences that other people have taught you. Apart from that, that's a pretty limiting window and path to take and so my struggle is always to solicit information from everybody else because I'm pretty certain when I'm doing something new, I'm not going to make the same mistake that I've made on previous productions or previous experiences because I've learned from those and I know to watch out for those. But it's the mistakes that I don't know about that really frustrate me because its man, I had everything covered except for that one thing. Why didn't I figure, why didn't I see that one thing but next time I'm going to have it down. And there's always a next time and there's always one thing that you don't know and so it really is so important to make sure that when you are trying to prepare a new method or a new process that you're soliciting as much information as you can from all the people that are going to be involved in it, A) So that you have as much information as you can to make the correct decisions when you go ahead and implement this but also so that the people that are engaged in the process are aware that you're doing it and also feel like they're participating and that they were heard which really does increase the odds that they are going to accept this new change in the methods, you know. It's doubly productive but not everybody really embraces it so I always find, you know, the approach of how can you help me because I've never done what you do before. I don't do it the way you do it and it'll be great to learn from you. It's always a very useful tool.

Dave: I think that's very key. I once was tasked in building a system and the data entry screen when I asked the editors who are using it they said they wanted it a certain way. It's very confusing and there was a lot of stuff on the screen, I wanted to simplify it. And one of the guys said, look this is what we've been using for years, this layout, we know this. We do it so fast with tabbing through all this which we've also want build in but we want it laid out. We want date in this position not in that position. If you put it in the position that you're telling us you want to put it in, it will look nicer but it won't work for us. The key to all that is I followed their advice. I built the system exactly the way they wanted. New people would come in and say, you know, what is this? Why is it all, you know, why is it all over the place? The people that I worked with were very, very happy that it was laid out that way and therefore the system was considered a success.

Neil: Not only that but for new people they would probably defend it to those new people.

Dave: Exactly and I think that helped a lot. So what are you seeing now in your current position? What things are really frustrating you about some of the workflows you're seeing each day?

Neil: Well, you know, what's so interesting is some of the workflows are created to meet specific needs of people or corks of networks. And because we deliver to so many different networks, subsequently those workflows differ from show to show. The other thing that's kind of interesting about it is it's a very transient business. No matter if you are a producer, a line producer, a show runner, an editor and a system editor, even a post sup, a post coordinator, you are going to be hired on for that specific production. And when that production wraps, you may move on to another production within the company itself or you may move on to a production that is in some other company. And so the ebb and flow of people working within the context of your, our environment changes if not daily, definitely weekly and that is definitely a situation that I have to figure out a way I get a handle on so that it's a very simple introduction and entry into the place but also keeps everything moving in the same direction so we're all, what we're all going to expect is going to happen and we're not going to get different products out of every person walking in the door. Because when you've been in the business for awhile and you've come to a place where you have a certain way of doing things and sometimes the way you do things and the way that that production or the way that business needs you to do them are a conflict and so it'd be great to figure out a way that allows people to work within their comfort zone but then also meets the needs of the bigger picture.

Dave: And what do you think the workflow industry should be doing different to make things better, or things you'd like to see manufacturers introduce or ideas that you have that you'd love to see them incorporate?

Neil: Well, you know, one of the specific buzz words for the last, I don't want to say a specific timeframe, but within the last few years is a cloud-based workflows and I think for somebody who is not already embraced in within that world, that's just a word, it's just a buzz word and not everybody fully understands what it means but it has different applications for different people. A cloud can be within a specific department. A cloud could be within a specific company or a cloud could be within the larger context of out on, you know, Amazon web servers and really out there. And I think really defining it based on the needs of the individual, the department, the production, the network, whatever it is really need to be clarified because cloud is such a generic buzz word but yet it really is a great way to work and an exciting way to get a lot more efficiency out of the current process of what you do. And then the other thing that I think could be a lot easier to integrate into anybody's world is working with interfaces that are simple as possible and I think to take an obvious example, Apple came up with an interface for their

iPhone or their iPad that really is, I don't know it could get any simpler than it is for how complicated of a function it executes within its domain, within its world. It allows for, you know, infants that are very young and not even talking to be able to use it as a tool and it allows for senior citizens and people well past the edge of technical expertise to embrace it and really use it in a manner that works for them. And I think the way Apple has come up with that interface it has hidden all the complex processes that are involved in it and I think the problem with our industry as a whole is quite often those interfaces are incredibly complicated and require a certain level of knowledge and expertise to even begin using it and it'd be great if some of what, were introducing to the, our customers, our clients, our own teams were a little more simplified in how its presented it but yet just as robust and multi faceted and flexible in how it executes.

Dave: The other side of it though is, these interfaces that Apple builds because of the scale that they're building this for millions of people, they can invest with very high-end programmers, spend the time they need to do studies, UX studies, all that and I think sometimes people in our business get caught up in that, I want it to be easier to use. Okay, well, you realize, the easier it is on the front-end, the harder it is on the back-end, the more expensive it is on the back-end, especially things like SOAs, services oriented architecture where everybody goes into systems that they like but everything's tied together in the back-end. They can add a lot of complexity and often times I think the reason why these systems aren't built especially if they're developed internally is the cost just doesn't make sense. I agree with you, things can be simplified; screens can look better that doesn't generally cost a lot.

Neil: Yeah I agree and I think, you know, what Apple does is they solved a lot of problems for a lot of people and I think in some ways, some of the tools that have been introduced in our industry have tried to do that as well. They've tried to solve a lot of problems or serve a lot of needs simultaneously were perhaps, it was simplified a bit and solved a select few problems; it would be easier to embrace and then add on additional services incrementally as your product evolves and grows. I've been at many demos, many NABs, many events where the product has so many wiz bang features but none of them are really tight. None of them are really executed efficiently. They're all a little kludgy, a little kind of inelegant and so it's hard to embrace something like that and it's also hard to get people behind it that are going to be using that material and so I definitely think there's a middle ground. And I totally understand scale. I totally understand that you know, from a sales point of view, from a profit point of view you want to have the largest customer base you could have and so if you tack on this function then you're going to create a larger market for yourself, I totally get that but when I'm overwhelmed by something at a demo, it really is telling for me because I'm not an engineer, certainly not an engineer and a lot of ways have more technical knowledge than a lot of people but there's plenty of people smarter than me and if they've created something that I can't figure out then certainly most of the people I work with and definitely the clients that I'm trying to serve won't be able to figure it out.

Dave: I definitely agree. And I think it is funny, people sometimes throw all these features at products. Oh, we're going to add this, we're going to add that, it will help sell the product but you're right, the basic functionality of the product is difficult to say the least for a lot of these and they're not addressing that at all and they would actually get more sales if they can make it a little bit more user friendly and cut down on training cost, cut down on support cost and all those things that really make some of these systems out there so expensive to run day to day, that's the other thing people don't factor it. You can buy for example, digital asset management systems. You can buy systems that's started hundreds of dollars all the way up to hundreds of thousands of dollars if not millions of dollars but you also have to look at, will this work for the team that I'm using it for. And there's some great solutions out there, we have an interview with

Sam from Axle video which I think is a great alternative. It's very reasonable. So I think that's really a great point for people to think about especially the manufacturers out there is keep it simple yet try to be as powerful as you can or maybe have a skinning process where the power users can go into a mode and they can see additional functionality that maybe the averages doesn't see just to kind of make those screens not so, not so scary to people because a lot of people get really intimidated when they open up any of these programs or some of the editing programs now has so much packed into them that people don't even know where to start.

Neil: Absolutely. You know, a great example, I recently came across 2 different methods that were being used for approval and for screening. They're both cloud based and they're both very similar. They both, they cover slightly different markets and customer bases but they have a lot of similarities. And one specific client absolutely hated one and embraced the other and ironically, for their needs, the opposite should have been true but they didn't and I really didn't understand why and it wasn't until one day when I got an email from a client asking if I would upload the material that was presented then with the system that they didn't want to use and re-upload it to the system that they did like to use so that they can screen it the way they want it to and I realized then what the problem was and why they weren't embracing the system that is really more functional for them and it was because with most systems there's different types of users, there's super users, there's administrative users, there's client users, and each has their own set of uses within a system permission within a systems notification within a system. And when this client was initially setup with this approval and screening tool, they were given a notification rights until anytime, anything was uploaded to this cloud based approval system, they received a notification and what wasn't realized in house and what they interpreted incorrectly was that they thought all of those emails were actually the links they were to screen and so they would try to screen those emails or try and navigate to asset to screen and it was very difficult and cumbersome for them and it was because those emails should have never been going to them. They were merely, a box was checked on their user setup or their user profile that shouldn't have been so I was able to and still in the process of resolving that issue so that they can begin to use the approval system and screening system that was intended for them, in a method that they're going to embrace because it is really as simple as it should be. And quite often it takes a little bit of detective work and understanding of the individual to really see what their interpretation of your system is. And I think it goes hand in hand with what we're talking about. Something that can be overwhelming for me might be very simple and basic for somebody else with different intuitive set of analytical process rather than you know, the way I interpret something, they might be a little more visual or a little less visual and they might be about to embrace it so it really depends on the individual who truly is the end user. And I think that's something that should be considered for sure when you're creating a tool in the industry. Who is that end user and what is their skill set and what are the basic thresholds they need to meet to be able to operate this effectively and successfully?

Dave: And most of all following up with them too. So you put a system in place, get everybody trained and then you follow up a week or two later. Hey, how's this working out for you? By the way, I get these emails and I hate it because I can't screen anything off of them. Oh, let me check, oh it was a misconfiguration, now is that better, oh yes, and you know, they wouldn't know. They don't understand the system, they're not an expert on it and yeah I think it's the key to have that follow up phase which a lot of people don't put into their budgets. They'll hire a consultant, they bring them in, they give them advice, they build a system, the system's now running, bring that consultant back a month later. If you don't have the in house labor to do these follow ups and see how are the users using the system? Are there some little tweaks you can do? And sometimes, like I said, that guy who wanted the screen laid out a certain way, sometimes little things like that will now have somebody who's so against the system become a

huge proponent of the system and that's really what you need. You want to have as many people in house saying, this thing is great, oh you have this problem, well call Jim our consultant and he will just fix it for you versus the system thinks and I don't want to use it because most people don't want to use a new system anyway.

Neil: Exactly. It's overwhelming and you know, somebody who brings in or helps to design or designs a workflow or a system, what I found that is incredibly helpful is that I become a, I wouldn't say an expert user but certainly an experienced user on whatever I'm bringing in so that I can sit there and go through the process when there isn't an issue or a question and not be completely in the dark in how something's going. Now that being said, I'm not an accountant but I certainly understand and know how a piece of software should work so if an accountant is being introduced to a new system, I need to understand how they use and why they use it. I need to know what a PO is. I need to know what a capital budget is. I need to know what a return on investment is. Not in the sense of how an accountant or an operating officer would use it but just understand what function and serves within the context of their using it in so that I can respond to their needs in a manner that at least has an understanding of what they're asking.

Dave: Or at the least just get sample reports so say to them, what do you want it to look like, oh I want it to look like this report we've been using or I don't know, okay, well, can we work together to come up with something, let's sketch it out versus building something and they go well, no I need the ROI here not over there or you didn't even put the ROI on there. And you know, reporting's relatively simple example because it's pretty easy to fix but with some of this asset management systems and editorial systems and like you said, cloud based workflows people are building, you really don't want to get too far down the road of building it and then find out you built kind of an Achilles heel right into the main part of the system that everybody's using.

Neil: Yeah and that's the type of thing that definitely comes with failure, you know, whether it's a failure you've experienced as an end user or a failure you've experienced as an integrator or somebody who's managing it, it definitely helps to have those positive and negative experiences to make sure that you're, what you're bringing to the table has embedded both based on what's happened in the past but also based on real world experiences.

Dave: Yeah and it's also very important to really kind of trace where is the failure so when a system deemed to have failed and I actually, back to my personal story, I actually built a system once and the system itself I thought was very elegant, I thought worked great and there was one person who hated it and this guy complained to his boss and you know, we would, meeting after meeting and he hates it and he hates it and finally one day, I'm like, what don't you like about it, what's not working for you because he wouldn't give specifics. He would just go on and on how he hates the system, he was very emotional and he's like you know, I have to do this one thing and I have to do, used to be one keystroke and now it's ten and it drives me crazy. And I said to him, I go, what if we could fix that? There were some other things he didn't like but that was the main thing. I said, what if we could fix that and we can't get it down to one but what if we got it down to two. And he said, that would be huge for me. So we got it down to two and he still had this other issues that we fixed overtime but all of a sudden, as you mentioned earlier, he felt heard, he felt seen so he was now on board and actually became one from being the biggest opponent of the system to the biggest proponent and now the system is a very crucial workflow piece in a major studio but there was a possibility that we would have had just to shut the whole system down because that's how emotional this became with him and he was the guy who was doing most of the work on the system so they trusted him and they were really going by his input. And it's funny though because when you looked back at how he did it before the system

even the one keystroke, he still had 15 steps that the system totally automates so even with the two keystrokes solution, he is still way ahead but he was so used to his other steps that he never factor them in to this process that he was looking at.

Neil: Nothing's better than somebody who fought for the introduction of this process or workflow or was one of the biggest, loudest opponents of it to come back to and say, I really like this better, thank you for doing this and be one of the biggest proponents, nothing's better than that. Nothing's worse than getting the call or the email about something you've designed, you've implemented and you've introduced that isn't working. Nothing is a butt clencher like that, that's for sure.

Dave: It's really hard to kind of take the emotion out, step back and say, okay what's going on, what's not working, taking that input and the input may not even be something you agree with but you have to in some way address it. So even this thing with the keystrokes, I don't know if I totally agreed with what he felt, I mean, definitely ten keystrokes was a little excessive but I also felt there were some other ways he could have been putting the date in the system that would have been more efficient. Maybe it wouldn't have had to have been ten keystrokes, maybe there was a more of a, just a process thing that we could have come up with but I also looked at the numbers and felt to spend the money that we need to spend which was minimal to give him what he wanted was a bigger win and was just a lot easier than trying to fight and say, no, well you just need to do it this way because sometimes that's the nail on the coffin when you start saying to somebody who's upset with the system structure, hey if you only do it this way that'll fix it. If you have some control over the design of the system, sometimes it's just easier to take their input, change the system even if you disagree.

Neil: Well, certainly because like you said, it's hard not to take it personally because that's how you're judged. You're judged at the product that you're implementing whether it's a workflow or an actual hard piece of hardware, you're being judged on that so it's certainly hard not to take that personally when somebody is impacting negatively what you're trying to accomplish for sure.

Dave: So, to wrap things up for today, what's your definition of an elegant workflow?

Neil: You know, that's a great question and I think for me when I try and create something from scratch, something that's elegant is something that the end users doesn't have to write down but becomes intuitive based on the task at hand. Nothing's more defeating for someone when they have to write down a series of steps or processes in order to accomplish what, the task that you've given them. I particularly think, I feel strongly that a visual example of a workflow or visual instructions really make a big difference in regard to something being successfully executed and I definitely think that a visual method of working and a limited amount of a written instruction really make for an elegant workflow.