

Small But Mighty Agency Podcast

Episode 73: How the Curse of Expertise is Holding You Back

Speakers: Audrey Joy Kwan

Audrey Joy Kwan

What if I told you that your expertise can get in the way of growing your business? It sounds counterintuitive, but it's a real barrier.

The phenomenon is called the curse of the expert. It can play out in different ways on your journey from being a solo service-based business owner to an agency owner. But wait, isn't being an expert an advantage? Yes and no. When your expertise becomes a barrier to training your team or scaling your business, it's more of a curse than a blessing.

In this episode, I share how your expertise becomes a barrier to growing your business and what you can do to overcome the 'curse of the expert.'

Tune in.

Audrey Joy Kwan

Welcome to the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you're a marketer or consultant, or a creative on a journey of growth from solopreneur to agency owner, follow along because I pull back the curtains on the realities of growing and running a scalable, service-based business and building lean team. I'm your host, Audrey Joy Kwan, I know what it takes to build an agency, whether it's from solo to three, five or twenty. I've done it, including supporting an agency owner to sell and exit. I've coached and consulted over 120 marketers, creatives, and consultants. And I've been behind the scenes of seven figure businesses. I also have a master's degree in communications specializing in organizational development. All this to say, I know what it takes to grow lead and operate a multiple six, and seven figure small but mighty agency. And here on this podcast is where we'll dive right in.

Audrey Joy Kwan

Hi Friends, welcome back to the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. What's been coming up lately for the marketers, consultants and creatives I work with is this phenomenon called the curse of the expert that impacts the growth of service-based business owners going solo to agency owner.

So, what exactly is this 'Curse of the Expert'? Well, if you're a seasoned professional, you might resonate with this. Imagine a marketer, consultant or creative who has spent years, maybe decades, perfecting their craft. They have deep knowledge and skills. But here's the twist: the deeper their understanding, the harder it becomes for them to convey it to someone else. It's like a master chess player trying to explain their moves to a novice player. The master sees patterns and strategies clear as day, while the novice gets the basics but needs a play-by-play breakdown to see the bigger picture.

"Now, you might be thinking, 'Well, that sounds like a good problem to have as a business owner; it sounds like an advantage. But that advantage becomes a disadvantage when you want to grow a lean team and get stuck believing nobody can do you what you can because you can't transfer the knowledge. Having natural operational strengths in systems and processes doesn't solve the expert's curse. It's a curse because you're so close to doing the work, and when you're that close, it's hard to step outside yourself to see what is too much or too little as you pass down knowledge or create intellectual property in your business.

So, let's break it down. Here's how the 'Curse of the Expert' plays out in a business environment:

When documenting processes, you – as the expert – might skip steps that seem obvious to you. For someone who isn't a master at the craft, what might feel like common sense to you isn't for others; these steps are critical for understanding. Think about training. An expert like you might breeze through concepts, assuming certain knowledge is common knowledge, and that leads to longer learning curves for your team members.

And here's a big one: If your business relies too heavily on the expertise of a select few in your business – there's a real risk that the knowledge might leave your business when they leave."

"Sounds challenging, right? But there's a solution. Recognizing this curse is half the battle. So, how do we counteract its effects?"

Structured knowledge sharing is key. It's not just about having knowledge; it's about sharing and structuring it to be easily accessed, understood, and implemented. At its core, structured knowledge sharing is a process of organizing and distributing information to make it easily accessible and understandable to all team members. It's why having processes, templates, resources, and dedicated software for company wikis can ensure no stone is left unturned. Knowledge is captured.

"Next, consider the power of having an external perspective., A fresh pair of eyes can spot gaps that you overlook."

If you find someone experienced in your niche, they can see your blindspots and provide high strategic value by bringing their years of knowledge to your business. In the words of one of my clients, what makes my team and I effective is our uncanny ability to tease knowledge and expertise out of your brain and translate that expertise

for your team so that the value you bring to clients in this lifetime does not live or die with you— your team inherits it.”

That’s our superpower, and we combine it with our years of expertise in growing small but mighty agencies.

So external expertise can help you distill what knowledge to capture, discern what you overlook and streamline the knowledge transfer. All of this can be hard to do when you have the curse of the expert and you are trying to look inside your own brain.

Another feature to think about and something we really encourage is establishing feedback loops. Feedback loops are a must. As you build your team, encourage those at the receiving end of training or knowledge transfer to provide feedback. Their insights can highlight areas that might need more depth or clarity.”

And lastly, let's remember the importance of creating a culture of continuous learning. An environment where questions are welcomed and clarifications are sought can bridge knowledge gaps and help you improve your intellectual property.

In summary, the root of the curse is this: the more you know, the more challenging it gets to convey your knowledge in a way your team can action consistently. And when you can't systematically share that knowledge, doubts creep in. You begin to question if the business will survive without you?”

And it will survive without you if you decide to get unstuck and take the steps we discussed today. That reminds me of the analogy about how buffalo react in storms.

When storms come, cows run away — which ultimately means they spend more time in the worst of the storm. Buffalo, on the other hand, moves directly into the storm. By running straight through it, they actually minimize the time they spend in the storm.

Going through the curse of the expert to grow your business can look like a storm when you’re seeing it from the inside. From the outside perspective, the way through isn’t as stormy as you might think.

If you feel stalled in the expert's curse, let’s get you unstuck. You know where to find me; click the link in the show notes.

As always thanks for hanging out with me, and I’ll see you in the next one.

Audrey Joy Kwan

Hey, there. Thanks for hanging out with me at the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, it would mean the world to me if you hit the follow or subscribe button in your podcast app and share it with a friend and I'll see you in the next one.