

Small But Mighty Agency Podcast

Episode 78: 3 Communication Challenges to Master for a High-Performing Team

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Did you know it requires more than systems and processes to get you out of client delivery, increase efficiency and scale your business?

It's a common misconception that detailed systems alone lead to success. In today's episode, I'm sharing why systems are merely a starting point and not the finish line because the crucial factor often overlooked is leadership.

Leadership is how you create a scaleable business where people hold one another accountable, encouraging a bottom-up approach to accountability.

The engine that makes leadership work, in other words, the heart of leadership, is communication.

In this episode, we'll explore the three key communication challenges that leaders must excel at navigating to create a business that doesn't require constant "top-down" management or accountability; instead, it creates "bottom-up" accountability.

And I'll reveal the one communication skill that can help you get there faster.

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

Hello friends, welcome back to the small but mighty agency podcast. I had a big month hosting TEDxSFU, one of Canada's largest TEDx, and then I caught the r flu, so my voice sounds a little raspy, but I'm on the mend, and I'm excited to get into today's topic all about one misconception that deserves a lot more attention.

It's the misconception that having detailed systems in a business is enough for flawless team execution. The truth is systems are a starting point.

All the systems and processes in your businesses won't lead to a scale-bale business without this one factor — leadership.

Effective teams and high performance are more than just policies, processes, structure and systems. I'm not saying you don't need these; yes, you do, but all of it doesn't run without leadership.

That's why I'm starting a new series called Equipping Leaders— you'll see more content on leadership in this podcast throughout the new year because your team is your greatest asset. When you're building your business— your team is the resource that allows you to scale, and leadership is how teams thrive.

Despite what some might have you believe, growth and scale in a service business isn't all about implementing more processes or new processes; there's more to it – it requires getting people to hold each other accountable to processes and that requires leadership.

What is leadership? It's feels like such an elusive term; it's a sum of a several things like:

1. Communication
2. Emotional Intelligence
3. Decision-Making
4. Vision and Strategy
5. Adaptability
6. Problem-Solving
7. Delegation and Empowerment
8. Conflict Resolution
9. Cultural Awareness

It feels like a lot...

But communication is at the heart of leadership because to do all of the above, you must be able to ...clearly and effectively listen, dialogue and connect with others to

support the team's success. You always hear it: Good leaders are good communicators, but what defines a good communicator?

There are three consistent communication challenges that I help my agency owners master to help their teams work more effectively.

And here's the thing: managing these three challenges comes down to doing one thing well — yup, one thing, we'll get to that one thing here.

Working on that one thing with my clients inevitably helps them become better communicators and leaders.

But what are the top three communication challenges they bump up against consistently:

1. It's the ability to transform challenges into powerful dialogue instead of jumping the gun to give the fix.
2. Second, it's the ability to make it safe to talk about almost anything. Why? Because you can't sweep things under the rug, eventually, the pile becomes a tripping hazard.
3. Third, it's being more persuasive instead of order-giving.

If you're wondering when or how these apply to you. Examples of when these communication challenges play out include when something fails, and there is a need to move forward together without jeopardizing the trust. Another example is giving feedback to a team member who isn't keeping commitments. These can feel like high-stakes conversations.

As a leader, when you are prepared to manage these conversations effectively, you will have a team that is more accountable to processes and are innovative problem solvers. And that is 100% important because a scalable business doesn't require constant "top-down" management or "top-down" accountability; instead, it creates "bottom-up" accountability.

That's why I address how you communicate with your team in my programs. Your ability to transform challenges into powerful dialogue, your ability to make it safe to talk about almost anything, and your ability to be more persuasive instead of order-giving help you build a team that is accountable and empowered without you being the bottleneck.

So, what is the one strategic skill that supports you in being a better leader in these communication scenarios? Communication itself has different strategies.

The strategy or skill that makes a significant impact is your ability to create shared meaning and find mutual purpose in difficult or challenging conversations.

When two or more people enter a conversation over challenges, your opinions differ - this is almost always certain. Otherwise, it wouldn't be a challenging conversation.

That usually means I think one thing, and you believe another, or I see it from this perspective, and you see it from something I disagree with.

In these scenarios, effective leaders look for mutual purpose — this doesn't mean you agree to everything. No, it doesn't mean you unquestioningly accept.

It means that even if, at first glance, ideas, thoughts or opinions appear controversial, wrong or at odds with your belief, you understand the power of mutual purpose.

To be clear, this is not about manipulation. This is about dialogue.

What is Mutual Purpose? It means that your team member believes you are working toward a common outcome in the conversation and that you care about their goals, interests and values.

It ultimately means finding shared benefits that both of you want to achieve.

Emphasis on both of you.

The convo is doomed if your team member believes your purpose is to tell them they did something wrong. But if they believe you really care about making things better for both of you, you can build a team that eliminates repeat mistakes and can handle difficult challenges independently.

All too often, a leader can skip the mutual purpose and go directly into fixing mode.

Here's an example of jumping to the fix:

Your dialogue sounds like this, you might say:

"I noticed you have this concept in your plan; it's going to be a waste of time; we need to change it."

Here's an example of mutual purpose:

"I've got an idea about what we can add or remove to save us both time on this project. It's going to be a bit of a sensitive conversation — but I think it will help a great deal if we can talk about it."

The mutual purpose is to "save both of us time." In this dialogue, it is clear what success looks like for both of you, and there is an opportunity to self-direct the solution.

Self-directed solutions are powerful because when someone feels they come up with the solution themselves, they take greater ownership of the outcome instead of being told what to do.

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Mutual purpose doesn't take long to establish. You can start doing this right now by simply asking yourself these three questions before you enter into a challenging conversation with a team member:

These three questions have been developed by a team of communication experts in a book called *Crucial Conversations*. While doing my Masters's Degree in Communication years ago, this book was and IS one of my favourites. It's relevant to both personal and professional relationships.

Ask yourself these three questions.

- 1 What do I really want for myself?
- 2 What do I really want for this person?
- 3 What do I really want for the relationship?

Investigate these three questions before entering into a challenging conversation so you can set yourself up for success in finding mutual purpose, and then explore in your dialogue with your team member what mutual purpose is present.

Mutual purpose leads to mutual respect. Both are necessary if you want a scalable business that doesn't require constant "top-down" management or accountability; instead, it encourages "bottom-up" accountability where team members feel heard, trusted and empowered.

To wrap it up, we explored a misconception in business growth: the belief that detailed systems alone can ensure flawless execution. We emphasized that systems are a starting point; the real catalyst for scaling a business is effective leadership.

Leadership transcends productivity and performance metrics, which are often tied to processes, structures, and systems. Yes, these elements are necessary, but systems without leadership is like a compass without a needle: you have the tool, but it provides no direction or guidance on where to go.

With that said, this episode marks the beginning of a new ongoing series for 2024 on "Equipping Leaders" because growing and scaling a service business isn't just about adding more processes; it's about fostering a culture of accountability anchored in leadership. And you'll get insight from this ongoing series that you can apply directly to your Small But Mighty Agency.

That's it for this episode. Thank you for being here, and I'll see you on 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.

