Small But Mighty Agency Podcast

Episode 84: How a project debriefing system helps make better teams

Speakers: Audrey Joy Kwan

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How do you ensure you and your team stay on top of innovations, trends and patterns when your business has a productized service, and it's easy to get caught up in just going through the motions?

Well–productized service businesses – in other words, businesses that have taken its services, created repeatable processes and workflows, and lean heavily on productization for efficiency can bump up against that challenge.

The beauty of a productized service business is that it runs identical, if not almost identical, processes and workflows for projects, making things streamlined.

But streamlined doesn't mean getting so comfortable with your current practices that you resist change and risk stagnation.

That's why having a post-project debrief is powerful, and making the post-project debrief a system leads to highly effective and innovative teams.

The most important systems aren't just about "doing" the work; it's about empowering your team to be problem solvers and make continuous improvements.

Today, we'll dive into the project debriefing system that helps make better teams. 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

What is the definition of insanity in a business?

Doing the *same things* over and over again and expecting a different result.

As a business owner – looking at myself here as well – , I've done it without seeing it.

I get to the end of a major project and want to go forward fast and jump to another project or do something else.

If the project succeeds, I want to move fast and implement again, but if the project misses the mark, I want to jump to a different strategy.

Moving fast has its benefits; it means action-taking. But moving fast can also lead to missing out on details that help me work smarter, not harder.

One of the systems that can help you and your team make better future decisions is a post-project debrief

A post-project debrief looks at the successes, challenges and issues of the project regardless of whether the project hits the goals or not.

Now, if you've been following this series, then you know we're in part four of how to make better decisions.

And making better decisions is about working smarter, not harder.

It wouldn't be complete without sharing the one thing that gets overlooked or doesn't get enough attention; that's the post-project debrief.

In part one, I shared a 12-step framework that I use to support seven-figure agencies to make better decisions.

In part two, I uncovered the top 5 Hidden Biases that sabotage the decision-making of agency owners I work with.

In part three, we looked at implementation and the 4 habits for thriving when motivation disappears.

I'll link those episodes in the show notes.

Another step for making a better decision is the post-project debrief.

Instead of rushing to get to the next thing because I get it – we're all busy –time is well spent doing a post-project debrief.

There are three major reasons why the post-project debrief helps you and your team work smarter instead of harder:

First, it enhances your decision-making process by helping you connect new dots that otherwise would not come to light.

Second, the habit of a post-project debrief is a repeatable system (based on process, not guessing) for continuous improvement.

Third, one of the most significant obstacles to growth is complacency. A debrief can challenge you and your team to get out of their comfort zone, take measured risks and grow faster.

A post-project debrief is best done shortly after project completion while the details are fresh in everyone's minds.

Let's identify the three most familiar steps of a post-project debrief:

1. **Review the Project's Goals and Objectives:**

When you do a post-project analysis, your goal is to evaluate the project's success and identify areas for improvement, and every project has goals that define its success.

Most of us are trained to look at goals and objectives; they're typically the only marker of success.

Dare I say – you can not hit your exact goals and still win. Yes, because every project has things that worked and things that didn't.

2. **Identify successes for future project reference**

Digging in with a debrief can clarify the wins. The wins are what we build on.

What worked during the project?

Start by identifying the achievements and any positive outcomes. Acknowledging and documenting the wins supports the future success of new projects. Going from strength to strength is how we win.

3. **Unpack the challenges and determine what to do differently.**

No project is perfect.

The more we can support the team to be open and honest about the difficulties encountered, the more transparency you have.

When you encourage your team to give voice to what didn't work, you solve root challenges instead of band-aide approaches.

Band-aide approaches cover up what needs to be fixed. You're better off fixing the root so you solve the challenge once and for all.

Of course, the goal is constructive problem-solving to understand why the challenges occurred and solutions to prevent or mitigate the same thing from happening.

A post-project debrief can stop at the first three steps, but I'd like to encourage additional steps to support better problem-solving in your business and increase your team's efficiency. So, what are these other steps.

**4.	Review the project processes for efficiency:**

Every project has a process and workflow.

And unpacking a project isn't only about the strategy, it's about the efficiency.

What processes and workflows worked well and didn't work well?

Don't leave out looking at the steps of your processes and workflow, if things were overcomplicated, it's time to reduce complexity and give your team an opportunity to make it easier.

Overall, digging into project processes and workflows can save you time and money.

5.	**Analyze, summarize and document.**

In other words, connect the dots.

It's good to have a list of things that worked and a list of things that didn't, which ultimately leaves you with to-dos that can feel like progress.

And it is good progress, but great progress is identifying trends, patterns, and key takeaways from the project.

The trends, patterns and key takeaways are what inform a business that works smarter, not harder.

6. Assign responsibility and implement changes.

The post-project analysis isn't complete until the responsibilities for implementing the recommendations are actioned by assignment and deadlines.

It may be the following quarter or even next year when you are running the project again, but to ensure that the changes are integrated into future projects or processes— do what can be done now don't wait for the next time.

7. Review lessons learned

What does that mean, it means Close the loop and Communication is key.

It's easy to believe that everybody is on the same page if things have been documented and responsibilities assigned.

I'm sorry to say, that is not how it always works. Closing the loop with communication is key. A good debrief process always includes a follow-up team meeting to share trends, patterns and key takeaways.

The 'why" behind the change encourages others to participate in change. Sharing the "what" is productive, but ownership and accountability for project change is developed by answering the "why."

The post-project debrief is a system that can be repeated.

In a highly effective team, the most important systems aren't just about "doing" the work; it's about empowering your team to be problem solvers and make continuous improvements.

Continuous improvement leads to innovation and encourages your team to think creatively.

The best systems empower your team to be self-managing critical thinkers, and a post-project debrief can support the development of your high-performing team.

If you have decisions for your agency this year, I'm here for it. Let's take your agency to the next level. You know where to find me; click on the show notes.

Thanks for joining me, friends; I'll see you at 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.