

Small But Mighty Agency Podcast

Episode 88: 5 Key Things Doers Have To Unlearn to Succeed as Leaders

Speakers: Audrey Joy Kwan

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What if the very skills that have made you successful might now be the ones you need to reassess and unlearn to become an effective leader?

We've seen it firsthand with our clients – the satisfaction that comes from executing tasks with precision, solving problems swiftly, and managing time like a pro.

But what happens when those very skills, which once propelled your business or career forward, become obstacles to growth?

As you aim to build a scalable business or lead an agency beyond day-to-day operations, the real work begins not just in acquiring new skills but in letting go of the old ones.

In this episode let's look at how you and your team transition from doer to leader faster by tapping into the 5 Key Things Doers Have To Unlearn to Succeed as Leaders. 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

Hey Friends, welcome back! I just returned from vacation a few days ago, and my husband and I had a wonderful break from routine. I've been working on new projects that are stretching me in a good way this quarter, and it was great to get away and reflect on the wins. When I say, reflect, I mean I basically spent ten days on a beach. It was all sand, sun and ocean.

I'm jumping back in with Part Two of our series on How to Grow the Leaders That Move Your Agency Forward.

Growing you as a leader is how you grow your business.

And developing your rising leaders in your agency is required if you want to build a business that scales.

I've walked the walk, and I know when agencies develop their leaders, they become scaled agencies.

In the last episode, I shared the Hey Achievers framework, which will give you more context to this series; I'll link the episode in the show notes.

In this episode, we're continuing the conversation of growing leaders to help you get out of the day and day and support you in growing your business. I want to share the 5 Key Things Doers Have To Unlearn to Succeed as Leaders.

For many clients I've trained, coached, and consulted, leadership is transitioning from doer to leader. The transition is both a process of unlearning and learning. When you know what you have to unlearn, you grow faster.

Often, the things that need to be unlearned are things you've been doing on autopilot. For example, even though I was away for ten days, my behaviours and muscle memory didn't stop being on autopilot.

I visit my Dad every week. Without fail, I get into my car, turn the engine on, and, like autopilot, I don't have to think about how to get there; my brain muscles instinctively know the route.

When you do something enough times and repeatedly, your brain doesn't even question the action; it just does it as usual. That's why the path for a business owner or a manager transitioning into leading others is a journey.

Your brain has learned a way of being and has to get itself out of autopilot, but it's hard to see what actions (or ways of being) don't serve you anymore because you can't step outside yourself to see the behaviours that keep you stuck. And if you see them, you then need to unlearn them.

I see this all the time with the clients I've coached; they have tremendous satisfaction knowing they can execute tasks accurately, solve problems quickly and manage their

time efficiently. These skills served them well, helping them grow their business as a business owner or propel them through the ranks of an agency as an employee.

However, to build a scalable business with a team, one where the business owner can get out of the day-to-day and the agency leaders can help grow the business – the skills that define your success are now the ones you need to reassess and, in some cases, unlearn.

I call this the journey from being a doer to a leader in your business or agency. The transition is not just about acquiring new skills but also about unlearning to learn.

For my agency owners and agency leaders, our Hey Achievers Framework shares where unlearning happens to become the leader that grows a scalable business. You can go to the show notes to get the Hey Achievers Framework.

Unlearning is integral to building leaders in a fast-paced environment. It sets the stage for you to lead your team effectively and build an environment where you and the team can thrive.

Since doing and leading are contrasting approaches, the path requires a deep understanding of both your old and new approaches.

Setting you up for success is helping you and your team visualize and implement the doer-to-leadership journey. Our contrast method is to help you understand and visualize the five journeys in your transition.

In my experience working with people with strong doer backgrounds, there are five contrasting approaches that every doer transitioning to leader must unlearn and then learn.

What does it mean to unlearn?

Unlearning means letting go of the hard-to-see habits that used to be part of your routine. When you unlearn, you challenge your beliefs and comfort zones with the ultimate goal of growth.

The first step to unlearning is accepting that the old way of being a doer that has worked so far does not serve your new role and responsibility as a leader. You accept that what you once knew and followed is no longer practical to your role.

Second, as you recognize patterns that no longer work, you work through internal resistance and apply the new behaviours.

Sometimes, I hear business owners say they are not cut out to lead others, and that's internal resistance showing up. Nobody is born a leader; leaders are developed, so let's look at the five key things doers have to unlearn to succeed as leaders.

These five contrasting shifts highlight the core path if you want to grow your business with a team and get out of the day-to-day.

1. Growing From Individual Contributor to Team Facilitator

The first major shift is to embrace moving from an individual contributor to a team facilitator.

The transition requires you to step back from the frontline of task execution and instead focus on orchestrating the team's performance.

It means knowing how to create a collaborative environment where each team member feels valued and heard.

You learn how to meet your team where they are so you can support their growth, lean into trusting the capabilities of your team, and prioritize collective success over individual achievements.

A challenge that my clients unlearn is the belief that they are the only person capable of executing tasks to a certain standard. To unlearn, we look at habits, standards and structures. And you can see how it works together, in my Hey Achievers Framework, the link to the diagram is in the show notes.

2. Growing From Problem Solver to Empowerer

As you go from doer to leader, you shift from being a problem solver to an empowerer. You might have taken great pride in your ability to resolve issues quickly.

However, as a leader, you need to step back and allow your team to tackle challenges. One of the hardest things for the hundreds of people I've coached is to strategically refrain from being the person who knows how to answer all the questions or gives the answers away.

The shift is about influencing rather than imposing, guiding your team through problem-solving processes rather than problem-solving for them, and encouraging them to develop their own solutions.

It is about building confidence and independence in others, even if it means letting them struggle a bit along the way.

3. Growing From Time Management to Priority Setting

Your approach to time management will undergo significant transformation.

Before, you planned your days around completing tasks and ticking off to-do lists. Becoming a leader who grows a profitable business by leading a team to success requires you to elevate your focus from managing your own time to setting priorities for your team.

In a 2022 International Study of Hybrid Work from Work Trend Index. The study found that 81% of employees say it's important that their managers help them prioritize their work, and only 31% of employees say their managers give clear guidance.

It isn't just about efficiently organizing your hours anymore; it's about identifying what is most critical for your team in context to the business goals.

This shift requires you to think beyond your workload and consider the broader impact of where and how time is spent.

Instead of being guided by the quest for personal productivity, you learn to navigate by strategic importance and make tough calls on what to delegate, delay, and drop altogether.

Your focus shifts from doing things right to doing the right things.

4. Growing From Risk Aversion to Risk Management:

Suppose you're a business owner leading a team. In that case, you likely take bigger risk than somebody you employ, and you may not see yourself as risk-averse.

Nonetheless, we have to consider that more people are risk-averse than risk-takers.

An example of risk aversion may look like resisting changes in processes and procedures simply because keeping things the same leads to more certainty of personal success.

Another way of looking at it is that if things stay the same, things are less likely to fall through the cracks. And leading team success naturally carries more risks because change involves more people.

But risk aversion as a leader can lead to stalled growth for a business. Leading well demands a more calculated approach to risks. It means strategically considering the potential benefits of change to the team and the company and knowing how to mitigate risks during change.

If you're a business owner, as your team grows, your ship gets bigger, and the bigger the ship, the more there is to steer, which means you have to mitigate more during change. In this case, it isn't about how fast you can pivot but what is required for everybody onboard to pivot effectively.

Going from less risk to more risk means making uncomfortable decisions that require you to think about the impact from a bigger lens.

5. Growing From Receiving Feedback to Giving Constructive Feedback

Your relationship with feedback will change. You go from receiving feedback from clients or colleagues and absorbing it as a means to refine skills and boost your performance to the responsibility of providing constructive feedback to others to grow others.

Constructive feedback is a skill that requires developing your communication. You learn to listen deeply, observe keenly, and communicate in a way that is clear, supportive, and focused on the future.

In this shift, you also go from being a receiver to leaning into the discomfort of having tough conversations. It requires a delicate balance of honesty, empathy and conflict resolution.

It's the journey from receiving guidance to becoming a thoughtful guide for others. In return for stepping out of doing to leading, you build a business that gives you more freedom and, as a leader, get out of the day-to-day to make a bigger impact.

In summary, it's about transforming:

- from an individual contributor to a team facilitator
- from a problem solver to an empowerer
- from managing your own time to setting priorities for your team
- from avoiding risks to managing them wisely
- from simply receiving feedback to giving constructive feedback that nurtures growth.

Like my routine drives to visit my dad, where the directions are deeply rooted in my memory, we often find ourselves on autopilot. Maybe, just like me, there are things on autopilot you're aware of and other things, not so much.

Being a leader with the skills to grow the business with a team requires you to take a detour from autopilot to consciously navigate new paths that challenge your old ways of being.

As you move from doing to leading, the journey is about more than just acquiring new skills; it's about embracing the process of unlearning to make space for new growth.

And wait before you go, we're here to help you grow your leadership and your team's leadership, book a consult with me to get your roadmap

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.