

# Small But Mighty Agency Podcast

## Episode 124: How Small Agencies Grow Without the Grind

### Speakers: Audrey Joy Kwan

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When trust is harder to earn and louder isn't better, how do small agencies win?

The market is more skeptical than ever — and if you're running a small agency, you're probably feeling it too.

In this episode, I'm sharing 5 growth habits that I've seen make a real difference for small but mighty agencies — including from my own experience helping sell and exit a niche agency.

These aren't the typical “work harder” tips. They're strategic moves that help you grow with trust, not tactics.

If you're done with hustle culture and ready to grow smarter, not louder — this episode is for you.

#### Audrey Joy Kwan

Welcome to the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you want to grow an agency to seven figures and beyond without working more hours in your business, you're in the right place. I'm your host, Audrey Joy Kwan. I know what it takes to build an agency, including supporting an agency owner in selling and exiting. I also have a master's degree in communications, specializing in organizational development. My team and I have worked behind the scenes of multiple seven figure agencies and have coached and consulted with over 150 agency owners. All this to say, when you join us on the small but mighty agency podcast, you get real world experience and practical tips that help you work less, earn more, and lead with integrity. So let's go.

#### Audrey Joy Kwan

Hey there, and welcome back to the *Small But Mighty Agency Podcast*. I'm your host, Audrey Joy Kwan — and today, we're digging into something that might flip your growth mindset on its head.

If you've ever thought scaling your agency meant hustling harder, adding more services, or saying yes to every client... this episode is going to challenge that. Because the most successful *small* agencies aren't doing more. They're doing things *differently*.

We're talking about **five surprising growth habits** that set thriving small agencies apart — not the generic advice, but things that are a little counterintuitive and incredibly powerful when done right.

Let's dive in.

## 1. Saying “No” to Grow Faster

This one hits close to home for me.

Before I started my own business, I worked in agencies for years. Eventually, I helped sell and exit a small but mighty agency with a niche in orthodontics. That experience taught me something I now see echoed across the agencies I work with: the power of saying **no** to grow faster.

We didn't grow by offering everything to everyone — we grew by focusing. We said no to work outside our niche, even when it felt risky. And guess what? That focus made us *more* profitable. It brought in *more* clients who saw us as the go-to experts. It helped us stay lean, efficient, and scalable.

People often think “small” means small revenue. It doesn't. In fact, the clarity that comes with a niche — and the willingness to say no — helps you grow smarter and build systems that actually support scale.

## 2. Turn Clients Into a Referral Engine (and Retain Them Longer)

One of the best growth habits I've seen in small agencies — including in my own experience — is doubling down on your **current** clients.

Instead of constantly chasing new leads, the most successful agencies I've worked with focus on *delighting* the clients they already have. And I see this every day inside *Agency Together*, too.

When clients feel genuinely supported — not just “served” — they become your best salespeople. They refer without being asked. They advocate for you. They bring others in the door who are already pre-sold on your value.

But here's something just as powerful — they also **increase their spend with you**.

So what's the habit?

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### **Make the first 30 days count.**

That first stretch of time with a new client is *uber important* — it's when you set the tone for everything that follows. How you communicate expectations, set boundaries, and prevent scope creep early on can shape the entire relationship. And quick wins? They

matter more than we often realize. Ask yourself: *what's one meaningful quick win I can bring to the table early?*

The client experience you create from day one becomes the foundation for long-term retention — and retention leads to sustainable, scalable growth.

It goes without saying: **treat client success like your most important marketing and growth strategy.**

When you focus on keeping and growing your current clients, your agency becomes more stable, more profitable — and way less exhausting to run.

### 3. Collaborate with “Competitors” to Expand

Here's something that surprises a lot of people: some of the most successful small agencies actively collaborate with people they once considered competitors.

When we were running our niche agency, we didn't try to build every service in-house. Instead, we built strong partnerships with specialists who complemented our work. And it worked — we could offer more, pitch bigger projects, and deliver better results without bloating the team.

Now, through *Agency Together*, I see agency owners realizing how powerful this can be. When you're aligned in values but distinct in expertise, you can grow faster by supporting each other's goals — not stepping on each other's toes.

Instead of going it alone, you increase your reach, credibility, and opportunities by connecting with others who are already trusted by the types of clients you want to serve.

The habit? **Stop seeing others in your space as competition and start asking: How can our networks support each other's growth?** When you collaborate intentionally, you build a stronger, more opportunity-rich ecosystem — and everyone wins.

### 4. Give Value Before You Sell

This one's especially close to my heart — because it's how I built so many of the relationships that fuel *Agency Together* today.

Successful small agencies often lead with *generosity*. They teach, they share, they give away insights and tools — not as a gimmick, but because it builds *real* trust.

But here's the shift I'm seeing: **the market is more skeptical than ever.** People don't just want content — they want *proof of perspective*. Writing blogs or posting tips on LinkedIn is no longer enough to stand out as high-value.

What works now? **Building something that gets people talking.**

I call it a **value project** — a strategically crafted asset or initiative that fills a real gap in your industry. It's not fluff. It's not a sales pitch. It's something that adds value, invites people in, and positions you as someone who sees the big picture *and* builds for it.

That could be a diagnostic tool, a benchmark report, a hosted panel, or even a collaborative community — anything that sparks conversation, builds authority, and gets shared organically because it's genuinely useful.

These aren't just "nice-to-have" ideas. They're **growth engines**.

When you create something that hits a nerve or solves a meaningful gap in your industry, people don't just remember it — they *talk about it*, they *share it*, and they *refer you* because of it.

### So what's the habit?

Don't just post more content. **Build a value project that aligns with a narrative that matters — and carries momentum.** It's not about showing off what you know. It's about creating something that positions you as a trusted voice in your niche.

Be the one in your space who builds the thing others want to talk about, share, and invite others into.

That's how trust gets built — and how your agency becomes the one people choose first.

## 5. Stay Lean and Build for Agility

Last but not least — staying lean and agile is one of the most underrated growth habits I've seen.

When we were building our agency, we didn't scale by hiring fast or adding layers of complexity. We stayed lean. We streamlined. We brought in specialized contractors when needed. And we invested in processes and tools that let us work smarter — and as the saying goes, not just harder.

And now, with the agencies I work with, I see the same. The ones who grow sustainably are the ones who *don't* bloat. They build smart systems. They automate the admin. They focus on their zone of genius and outsource the rest.

Sometimes staying "small" in team size is actually the key to scaling up in impact and profitability.

I've seen agencies get stuck thinking they need to grow headcount to grow revenue. But the reality is — adding people without tightening your systems or clarifying your offers can just create more complexity, not more results.

### The habit?

Prioritize **simplicity, systems, and sustainability**. Build with intention. Automate what doesn't need a human. Standardize where possible. Outsource where it makes sense. And create offers that are repeatable — not reinvented every time.

This approach doesn't just keep your operations clean — it keeps you *agile*. And agility is your biggest advantage as a small but mighty agency. It lets you respond faster, deliver better, and scale smarter — without burning out your team or bloating your business.

In a skeptical market, being lean isn't a limitation. It's a power move.

Let's recap the winning growth habits of successful small agencies:

1. **Say no to grow faster**
2. **Retain and grow your current clients**
3. **Collaborate with “competitors” to expand your network**
4. **Build value projects that spark trust and referrals**
5. **Stay lean and build for agility**

These habits aren't about more hustle — they're about *better strategy*. They're about creating clarity, building trust, and growing in a way that actually feels sustainable.

If one of these habits stood out to you, I'd love to hear which one — connect with me on LinkedIn.

And if you want to see what a “value project” looks like in action, check out the **Trust Equity Scorecard**. It's a free tool I created to help small agencies measure how well they're building trust at scale — and it gives you actionable insights across positioning, partnerships, retainment, and referrals.

You'll get your Trust Equity Score and a clear picture of which trust-building systems to strengthen —so you can grow more strategically and become the go-to agency people refer without hesitation.

You'll find the link in the show notes — and while you're there, make sure to subscribe to the *Agency Together* newsletter for more insights like these.

Until next time — keep it small, mighty, and full of purpose.

**Audrey Joy Kwan**

Hey, 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. I'll see you on the next one.