Your Team

A little while ago I had one of the proudest moments that I've ever had in my business. It was a Saturday afternoon. I remember sitting on my couch watching Netflix around 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. And I noticed a bunch of alerts on the Slack app on my phone. Slack is the chat app that our company uses to communicate with each other. And I thought it was unusual on a Saturday to see that. So I clicked in and in one of our channels there was a big discussion going on. Turns out that there was some kind of credit card fraud somebody was trying to do against our company and somebody had caught it, and they had called somebody else, and now we had somebody from our finance team and from our engineering team and our customer service team, and they were all coordinating and trying to figure out what they had to do to make it work.

And I just watched this communication happening, and I remember thinking how incredibly proud I was of my team for stepping in and doing what they needed to do on a Saturday afternoon. I actually didn't even say a word. I closed the app. I went back to what I was doing. And my favorite part of this entire thing is that that team self-assembled. They didn't need to even call a manager, they certainly didn't need to call me, the CEO. One of our team members stayed awake until 4 a.m. fixing it. And it was an absolutely spectacular example of having an all-star team that you could trust and depend on.

I didn't always feel this way. In fact in the early days of IWT I was terrified of creating a real team. And I had a bunch of invisible scripts. I would tell people I just want to keep things small and intimate. Or in my head I would say, "If I hire an employee I'm going to have to make payroll forever. What about management, benefits, H.R. What a headache." But I also knew that if I wanted to keep growing my business in a serious way, these were all script that I had to overcome. And over time I did overcome them. I made the choice to invest in my team and to grow. And it was one of the best business decisions I've ever made.

Eventually you're going to need to make a similar decision in your business. Maybe you will decide that you don't want a team. I have a lot of students who say, "You know what, I don't want any employees. I want to keep things small. And if that means my business won't grow as much, I'm okay with

that." Totally fine.

But what if you do want more than that? At a certain point, there's only so much you can actually achieve by yourself. For me, I realized that I cared more about impact than about rerunning the old stories of keeping things small and intimate. If I'm really honest looking back I realize that story was really fear masquerading as strategy. I decided to rewrite that story and grow my impact by growing my team.

Now, if you decide to do the same thing, you'll need a real team to help you get to the next level. Let's talk about how to do that. Here's what a typical team looks like for an online business owner at the six-figure level. This is from one of my students Sam, who runs an online business in a language learning niche earning $200,000 a year. "Here's my current team: two virtual assistants, graphic designer, copywriter, tech support, social media marketer, customer support, launch manager. All of them are independent contractors working between five to 10 hours a week."

Ok interesting. Take a second and analyze the situation. What do you notice? Here's my take. This is actually pretty typical. Yes there are a couple of things we can probably fix right off the bat. Lose a social media marketer. You don't need two VAs, just pick the best one. And frankly one great person is worth more than two mediocre people. Launch manager, at your level, frankly you are the launch manager. But these are relatively minor fixes. None of these changes is really going to make or break his business. The main thing I notice is that Sam doesn't actually have a real team yet. Sam has a lot of one-off contractors but it doesn't look to me like he has any dedicated team members working alongside him to help him grow his business. And you know what, that's fairly normal at this stage.

Going to start a business, things take off. You start delegating a bunch of things like tech support and graphic design and customer service and eventually you build up this somewhat bloated team of contractors. But things haven't actually grown that much. Anybody here in that situation right now? Nothing wrong with any of this. But if Sam wants to keep growing his business, at some point he's going to need to transition from thinking about what I call his on-demand team to thinking about his core team.

What's the difference? Well, an on-demand team is transactional. You tell them what to do. They do it. End of story. Think of someone you hire because you need a logo design. That's an on-demand hire. A core team is more like a partnership. You guys are in this together. You rely on them. They rely on you. You have each other's back. Think of someone you hire to help you build and run your traffic program. Someone you work with on a daily basis. That's a core hire.

The difference between these two is like night and day. With an on-demand team, you're keeping costs low and you're getting some help, but at the end of the day, you are driving everything. Everything still rests on your shoulders alone. And in some ways, it's even more stressful than doing it all yourself, because now you have all these people to manage.

A core team is more expensive for sure. But when it works, it's like watching a beautiful ballet. Everyone's working together in sync towards a common goal. And instead of you telling everyone what to do, they are often coming up with ideas on their own. They're being proactive and they're talking to each other without you needing to be there. Just like my Saturday credit card fraud story, a situation will come up and you'll just say, "They've got this." Total confidence. That won't happen overnight, but when you get there, it can absolutely be one of the most rewarding parts of being a CEO.

So how do you build this core team? Well if you're in this program, chances are you're in a situation somewhat like Sam's. You might have a couple of contractors, maybe a part time assistant or two, a classic on-demand team. Honestly it doesn't really matter what your on-demand team looks like at this point. After all, you're probably only working with each of them for a few hours a week, and if we're being really honest, you're probably not paying them much more than you really need to. So these are things like your logo designer, your customer support person, tech support, and tax and legal people. It's not that these things aren't important. It's just that right now, they're not capable of truly moving the needle on your business. In other words, they're cost-based hires. You hire them because you need to, you pay them, and then you move on.

When it comes to your core team though, you want to be extremely intentional about who you hire, and you want to keep things as small

and as tight as possible, especially at this stage. Part of the reason is financial. Core hires tend to be more expensive, so you want to be a little bit more deliberate about how many people you bring on at once. But the bigger reason is that your core team members should be viewed as a true investment. You really do want to hire the best and treat them extremely well because you believe that you're actually going to see a return on that investment over the long term. A real return, not just in terms of saving you time in energy but in terms of actual money in the bank being created. This is a very different way of looking at hiring. These are value based hires.

So when you're thinking about building a core team, as much as possible you want to hire for the areas of your business that are capable of adding real value. In other words, areas that actually do move the needle. And there are actually very few of these areas in any given business. In fact if we're talking about online product businesses, there are two critical areas. Any idea what those two areas might be? You guessed it! Product development and lead generation. So if you really want to grow your online business, hire one person to help you build products, and hire another person to help you drive leads.

No surprise. We already know that products and leads are two key areas capable of generating true growth for our businesses. So if we're going to invest anywhere, doesn't it make sense that these are the two places to do it? And yet most entrepreneurs don't think about hiring this way. They hire for convenience, which is fine. We all do this. But they very rarely hire to create value. Smart CEOs first figure out what the growth areas of their businesses are, and then they build a team, a real team, to drive those areas forward.

So let's talk about the two roles. Role #1: product. You can call this a product assistant, course developer, or simply product developer. Basically, they're responsible for all the day to day tasks related to product creation. That means running surveys, doing customer research, pulling data and screenshots for course material, creating PDFs and transcripts, reviewing customer feedback during launches. In other words, everything you need to get done from Module 1, they're there to help you execute.

Role #2, leads. You can call this a marketing assistant or a marketing

associate. And they're there to help you with all the day to day tasks related to lead generation. That could mean things like editing and publishing posts, pulling basic traffic reports, doing keyword research, emailing affiliates on your behalf. They're there to help you execute everything you need to get done from Module 2.

Now, we've provided detailed job descriptions for both of these roles in the resources below, and I would start each at a minimum of $30 an hour and go up from there. Both of these roles when they performed well will carry through directly to revenue growth, now and in the future.

Now, a couple of things not to worry about. I'm not saying you need to go out and hire these people today. What I am saying is if you want to execute on all these long-term projects we talked about in this program, you're probably going to want both of these people on your team at some point. It just lets you get so much more done and grow much faster. Also you don't need to hire both of these roles at the same time. In my experience, most entrepreneurs prefer to start by hiring a marketing person. In the meantime, they themselves take on the product developer role until they're comfortable making a second hire. You also don't need to hire them as full time employees right out of the gate. You can start them as independent contractors, then gradually transition them to part time or even full time employees when you feel you're ready. More details on this a little bit later. And finally, you don't even necessarily need to hire anyone new to fill these roles. Maybe there's a really promising contract you are already working with, and maybe it'd be a great fit for one of these positions. You could basically go to them and ask if they'd be interested in taking on more responsibility.

This is exactly what I did in the early days of my business. I had a book researcher I was working with, classic on-demand hire, and I approached him to take on a more active role as a product developer. He said yes. Boom, done. So don't fast forward out of here and think "oh my god, I have to restructure my whole team right away." Just keep in mind the core ideas. Conceptually there's a difference between an on-demand team and a core team. Your on-demand team is everybody. Your core team is just that, core to the future success of your business. There are two core roles to fill, one

for product, one for leads. You don't need to hire them today. You don't even need to hire them ever if you don't want to. But for those who are serious about growth, these are the roles that will move the needle most.

So that's who to hire. Now let's talk about when. How do you know what's the right time to hire a core team member? What's the trigger point. My rule of thumb for when to hire is when you start losing deals. What does that mean? It means that you not having that team member is actually causing you to miss out on sales or growth. I'll give you an example. Let's say I'm already seeing great results with my SEO program. I know that all I have to do is put more into SEO and my business will grow faster, but I can't because I just don't have any more hours in the day. Time to hire. Or I'm already planning on creating new products. I have ideas that I want to get moving on. I would love to release a new product by January but I just can't hit that timeline doing it all by myself. Time to hire.

I always have some students who are like, "Oh, I've been working on a product for the last nine months. It'll get done when it gets done. We'll see. No big deal." I'm like what? Come on. This is your business. Take it seriously. Start getting aggressive and start thinking in terms of opportunity costs.

The way I think about my business is that every extra month a product gets delayed is essentially a month where we can't help our students. And from a business perspective it's a month of revenue that we've lost. That money could be in our bank account right now, but it's not because we didn't move quickly enough. Those high quality subscribers could be on our email list right now, but they're not because we didn't have the resources to go after them. It starts to add up, and it's a huge motivator for us to move quickly.

So that's my message to the students. If you're serious about growth, yes be disciplined, but get aggressive, get impatient, and learn to move fast. Right around this point, people start to say things like, "Oh but I wouldn't know where to find good people." I know I've heard that, or I heard "recruiting is really hard." Yeah it is. Recruiting is hard for everyone. But every great CEO learns how to do it and do it well. And at the end of the day, it is hard. But it's not that hard. You just have to learn to do it. And you can find great people anywhere. I've actually hired great people off Craigslist.

So we've made this easy for you. We've provided the job descriptions for you. Post them to your site, post them on Craigslist, email them out, share them on social media. Reach out to your friends or your network, and then get on the phone with the ones who look good, and see who you like the best. Yes it's hard, but winners do it anyway.

My general recommendation if you're relatively new to hiring is to start small. 10 hours a week for starters is fine. At $30 an hour, that's $15,000 a year. Very reasonable. Low risk. If they do well and you have the budget, later you can bump that up to 15 hours a week, then 20 hours a week.

Here's another tip. In the beginning, you want to give them work that's basically foolproof.

Come up with a list of recurring relatively low value tasks that you're already doing but you'd rather not be, like looking up data, pasting images, formatting blog posts, uploading things into WordPress. These are the kind of tasks you want to start with. What you don't want to do is delegate entire open ended projects to a new hire. Like here's a bad example. "Can you do some research and come up with an SEO plan? I'm kind of busy right now, so I'll check back with you in 30 days. Thanks." Here's a better approach: "Here's how we currently format our blog posts. Please follow the same process each week. If you run into something you don't understand, leave a comment in the doc and we'll address it on our weekly one on one."

The first example is what we called delusional delegating. You might as well just be lighting your money on fire. Goodbye. The second is a recipe for success. So make your life easier. Set yourself up for success by keeping things as foolproof as possible. And over time, once that team member proves themselves to be trustworthy and competent, you can gradually loosen the reins and give them more hours and more responsibility.

Here's what that might look like. Level 1: I tell you exactly what to do. You do it. Level 2: I still tell you what to do but I trust you enough to make judgment calls when appropriate. Level 3: I'm managing you while you do most of the day to day work. Level 4: I tell you our goal or strategic directive. You come up with a plan and execute it on your own. Level 5: You tell me what the strategy is, what resources you need, and I'll make it happen.

Your Team

Now side note, not everyone is capable of or wants to rise from level 1 to level 5. But this is generally how things evolve as you go from $100k year to $300k year to $500k a year and beyond. You're still the one running the show and you're still doing most of the work. But now you have help, 1 or 2 core team members whom you trust deeply helping you drive the key areas of the business forward. It's not all on your shoulders anymore, and it might take you a long time to get to that point, it may take you several years. And definitely there will be some trial and error along the way.

But just picture, just visualize what this would mean for your business. One person working on new products all day long. Another person driving traffic and leads all day long, while you steer the ship. You're still heavily involved in these areas, but you're not doing all the day to day work anymore. And one day they may even become as good as you are at these tasks. In fact, they might even be better than you. You completely trust them to get the job done. No more constantly checking over their shoulders. No more telling these contractors that their work wasn't up to your standards. You want something done and it gets done, period.

And once in a while they do something brilliant. They present you an idea you never even considered. And you know what you say? "Amazing. Do it." Or they proactively solve a problem without even being asked. Or maybe they come to you and say "I want to take on even more responsibility." And you just smile. That's what it feels like to have a true team.

Key takeaways: Being a CEO is a tough job. There's nothing that makes it better than having a great team at your side. And there are two types of teams. Your on-demand team and your core team. The first is necessary, but the second will push you to the next level. Don't just hire for convenience, hire for value. Remember, there are two core roles to fill: one for product, one for leads. The rule of thumb for when to start hiring is when you start losing deals. So get aggressive, move faster. Managing a team is a learning process. Set yourself up for success by taking things slowly and giving yourself time to grow together. Treat your team well, execute your strategy, and your business will blossom.