



JAMES SCHRAMKO

Creating the Dream Team: Strategies for Building a Winning Team in an Online Business

Tega Diegbe sees eye-to-eye with James on how to build a great team. Discover their best hiring and management practices in this meeting of minds.



Tega Diegbe

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to my podcast. This is episode 991. Today, I'm chatting with Tega. Nice to see you.

Tega: Nice to be seen. Hello, James. Hello, James's listeners.

James: So the reason you're here is, I published an episode about [running a virtual team, especially hiring from the Philippines](#). And I had so many questions from my own community. And I've been doing this for more than 10 years. And I wanted to just get the message out. I also have a business with my wife, of course, which I wanted to talk about as well, because that was the one problem I always had when people kept coming to me saying, How do I get a team like yours?

And for many, many years, I wouldn't tell them the secret, right? I'd say, Well, I got a referral from a friend of mine, and they got us some team members, and we just kept hiring. And every time we found someone good, we would just hire them in our own business till we got to 67 people. But after we sold the businesses off, and we were generating a surplus of referrals, we thought it'd be a good idea to build a business around that.

So finally, I could say, Well, just get them from the same place that I do. And that's [visionfind.com](https://www.visionfind.com). Get that out early in the episode. Now I published this episode, and you commented on the episode, and you shared the episode, which was tremendous. And something you said, Tega, was that you and I have similar values around this concept of bringing in team members.

A similar sort of mindset around team

I'd love you to speak to that topic, and then sort of introduce where you're in this landscape of online teams and helping out online entrepreneurs get this stuff sorted out.

Tega: So I guess that's like a double-barreled question. I got interested in it because for my 18th birthday, my dad gave me the book Rich Dad, Poor Dad, that was where I discovered this whole idea of the Cashflow Quadrant. From then I realized if I wanted to build a business, and have that business operate as a business, it had to have systems and it had to have people. Of course, then I learned about systems and people.

When I thought I learned enough about systems and I implemented like, really in a very rudimentary way, if I sit back and think about it, once I implemented that, the next bit of the puzzle I had to solve was the people bit. And that's when I got started in the journey of thinking that my business could be more than just me, I could bring in people to do things I didn't want to do or things I wasn't good at doing.

Where the values come in as being years of being in "internet marketing", because that's like a little bit of a, it's a very small playing field. But when you're in it, it feels like a very massive playing field. But having been in that field and operated there, I've come to learn about the importance of language, of content, learn about the importance of positioning, and I've come to learn about the importance of framing.

I quickly realized if I was going to build a team, I had to speak differently and had to use different terms, so that I didn't get lumped in with the, let's just say shady characters who've been working in similar - I didn't get tagged with the assumption that I was just an internet marketer. And then, as we were saying, just before we kicked off the call, the whole virtual assistant thing, I don't like using that term, just because in my opinion, it's a term that's overused.

Does the term matter?

And in its overuse, it's kind of become synonymous with a way of thinking that doesn't benefit the people that are being labeled as virtual assistants. I mean, some of degrees that people are using that label virtual assistant, because they're using it, they don't see the breadth and the scope of what, let's just say like a team member can do in the business, because you've called them a virtual assistant.

So because you're operating from that viewpoint, you're bringing somebody in and in your mind, you're already limiting what they can do in your business. Because you're limiting what they can do in your business, you're creating this ouroboros situation, whereby, because you're thinking limitedly about what they can do, you don't give them the room to grow.

And because you're not giving them the room to grow, they're coming in, and in their mind, this is going to be like a six- to 12-month thing, because they need the money, they need to provide for their family. But while they're doing that, they're looking for better opportunities that will help them grow and help them become better. So that's kind of where that came from.

James: And they're no doubt looking for an employer who treats them more like a human, and they'll be out of there. And I guess this is a cycle that perpetuates the person who's not hiring well or looking after people as a real team, and just using them as indispensable cogs or machines, or putting them in the same bucket as something like artificial intelligence tools, are going to cop the wrath of what happens when you're not a great leader, right? So what do you like to call them? What do you call your team?

Tega: I call my girls virtual team members.

James: Right. Do you think the operative word virtual is sort of part of the challenge here with the way people think about it? Because they're not there in the office, and they don't see them every day and discuss things over the water cooler, they're sort of out of sight, out of mind?

Tega: I don't think it's the word, because if it was the word, like the virtual, as you're saying, I wouldn't have used it. Virtual makes sense, because they're not with you. Right? But I guess another replacement word you can use is remote.

James: Well, I've heard other people use terms like distributed team. And I think with that, they're just saying, well, they're in other places, they're all around the place. And we can open up the global workforce now, you know, we can hire from anywhere, other countries. Obviously, I travel the world pretty much every week on my phone calls, and all the other people in my business other than my wife are in another country. And I'm used to that.

But I used to have people in an office, and this is kind of funny. My last job, we were over three physical premises, and we had around 70 something people in the business. And I kind of wanted, I just wanted to be at home by myself. You know, I actually thought, my online business, I love an online business because I'm not going to have stock, I'm not going to have physical premises that I have to drive to away from home. And I'm not going to have staff. I'm just not going to have all the hassles.

But I ended up having staff, I ended up having it. Now even though they might be called contractors, or export labor, etc., depending who you're talking to, whether you're putting information together for the tax person, whether it's for an insurance company, there might be different labels.

Like, an insurance company is going to make sure you have an agreement with people contracting to you and there's some indemnities there against them doing any malicious activities, or stealing data or causing problems if you are, for example, working on customer's websites, which we did for a while there. They'll want written contracts.

Tax department, they're going to say, Well, if they're not in this country - I don't know what it's like for you, but we use pretty much similar law to you - then they're export, you know, we're not going to worry about payroll or superannuation or health benefits and all of that stuff. That's separate.

So it's an interesting classification, but I absolutely hand on heart treat my team as full-on integrated team members, as if we're all working under one roof, but we just have to imagine that that's the case. And for me, [Slack](#) is our office. And the channels in Slack are our areas of the office.

If I used to manage by wandering around, MBWA, which I think I read about in Tom Peters' book, and now I walk around the channels and just have a look at the different channels in our business, and I wander around and talk to the different teams in those areas, whether it's support, or our content producing area, or our website maintenance, etc., and I'm still interacting with them just like they're in a physical place, but they just happen to be in another country.

Tega: Yeah. For me, anyway, a big thing is the mindset, which is why the episode that you did really resonated with me. I saw your post on Facebook asking for questions, people hiring issues that you will talk about. I did something similar, I think it was in 2020 or 2021 where...

James: I promise I didn't copy it. [laughs]

Tega: No, no, it's fine. I'm not accusing you of copying.

James: It's a really great strategy. It's like, why not go out to your own audience, people who follow you or subscribe to your channel or page or whatever, and say, What are your questions? And then you prepare some content that answers the questions as best you possibly can. I answered every single question they asked me.

And then you can go back to that same audience and say, I've just published the episode that answers all your questions. And in this case, it works well because I do have a service that people can go and use, and they did, and it was great. And that's not the prime motivation for it. It's certainly a consideration.

An emotional investment in the people

I like to sponsor myself. I love it when people buy my products. However, I do get very emotional about the way that people treat people in the other country, I do get emotional about poor leadership ability and how that impacts people, because I see the other side of it. When I visit the Philippines, I mean, I just lived there for two months. And I see how the families live, I interact in society there, the burdens they have, and how important that salary is.

That team member will be paying for several family members, they'll be putting them through school, they'll be paying for the parents' medications, they will be responsible for the food on the table. There's a lot of pride involved. But it's a more serious game, it's not just a job. They don't have a choice.



And if they're married to a difficult boss, or a nasty boss, or God help them, if the boss wants to install this spyware on the computer and track them and micromanage them, it's very unpleasant, and I don't like that. And if I can educate people, be a better employer, be a better leader, build a fantastic team, it's the very reason I can have an amazing life.

But at the same time, I want my team to have a great life. I'm pretty strong with them about that, please have a good life. Go and have a meal occasionally, take time off. I'm not cracking the whip, I'm not driving the slaves, you know, I want you to have a good life. We're a team. And we work together. And it's all communicated in the weekly meeting that we have, the cadence of it, the contributions, we all do our bit.

And I'm really proud of the milestones we're able to achieve, especially we just hit one right now, like as of recording, just crossed a brand new record we've ever done in our business. And this won't be impressive to some people. But it's impressive to me. We just reached over 100,000 people in the last 30 days on my Instagram channel.

Tega: Congratulations.

James: Thanks. You know, we used to get a couple of 100 or a few 1000. So we've worked together as a team. But I've said, Okay, team, let's make better content. I'm responsible for coming up with better starting content, and then we have to edit it, and we have to publish it regularly. And we have to keep a minimum standard. And we have to figure out how to get in front of the right people. And we have to put a call to action to bring people to our website and to take an action, like we have to work together on this.

And we have worked together. And we did great stuff. And I know when I post it to our Wins channel, I can feel the pride, I can feel the smiles, I can feel the celebration that we did this together. And it makes me emotional talking about it, because you can't do this game by yourself. When I hear people say they're a solopreneur, I think, well, what you're really saying to me is you're probably going to be stuck at a couple 100 grand a year. And you're going to be doing most things in your business.

Finding that business sweet spot

I think there's a sweet spot between solopreneur and \$10 million a year revenue baller, which is a beautiful little business that has three to five team members doing all the stuff you don't want to do that they like to do, and they're good at. And you just do the few things you love. And you have a low-stress, high-profit margin, beautiful business. That's what I like. And that's what I've been helping people build.

I'm wondering what your position on that is. Do you see the difference between solopreneur and \$10 million baller?



Tega: I guess, like my viewpoint would be a little bit different. Different in the sense that I'm not really thinking about it in terms of the revenue, maybe I should start thinking about it that way. But I guess my keyword here would kind of be like a lifestyle business. I build the business to the level where it supports my lifestyle.

And then looking at how the business is growing or what I'm doing to grow the business, I'm now looking at it from a point of, does this serve the life that I want to lead or is this taking away from the life that I want to lead?

James: I think we're on the same page. I mean, there's implied things for me when you have a \$10 million, \$15 million, \$20 million revenue business. It implies you're going to have complexity. You're going to have a bigger team. You've got to be more competitive in the market. There'll be more threats, there'll be more challenges to that. There'll be some wear and tear.

And I perceive that, I might be wrong, but I perceive that it might be harder for me to go surfing every day if I have a \$20 million revenue business, because it's probably going to target me and want me in there. And I know because when I had a big team, and we were doing quite several million dollars a year, it was on my mind. Even though it was running, still I'm responsible.

It's like, you might be the captain of the ship, you might be Captain Smith on the Titanic up there in your wheelhouse bridge, or whatever they call it. But you got the whole team doing everything, manning the engines, feeding the crew, like you're not doing all the work yourself. But it's a big responsibility, like, one little iceberg and it can all go pear shaped, right?

And then I see solopreneurs. And what that implies to me is, they've put a filter just like I did when [I quit my job](#), they're not going to build a team. And maybe some people are probably not good enough leaders that they should build a team until they get some training. But it also means you're kind of stuck with some sh*tty jobs.

Like the things I used to hate the most were accounting, I used to hate putting out my paperwork, I put it out in this huge table, and I'd spend a couple of days doing it. And it was like pulling teeth. I used to hate loading up stuff to my website, I used to hate logging into my support desk to answer, how do I change my credit card or whatever, like, please, save me from that. Right?

That's why I think there's a sweet spot for me. And I'm never saying to someone else, well you should have the same goals as me. Everyone's going to be different. But when I use terms like solopreneur or \$10 million revenue, I think that each of those has certain characteristics that are typical. And I seem to navigate a lot in the six- to seven-figure zone for my audience. That's my sweet spot.

If someone comes to me, and they're doing \$300,000 a year, but they're kind of maxed out, it's pretty easy to get them to a million dollars a year and working half as much using the way that I do things, because I'm going to start finding leverage for them. And there'll be several different areas. But what I notice over and over and over again, they don't have a good team, they don't have systems.

People and systems are critical if you want to go from a one-man band to a bigger thing. But then at some point, I think when you start hitting a few million dollars a year, you really need to bring in sort of senior-level help with the people and systems, or that will be your job.

Making the decision to downsize

Tega: So let me turn the tables and ask you a question. This is going to be something that's going to be useful for me. When you had the big business, what was it that made you decide that you wanted to trim things down? Right? Let me rephrase.

How did you go from wanting to be the one-man band and not wanting to have a team just because of your experience working in corporate and having the big team and having big premises? And where was the line for you in deciding, okay, I've said I don't want to have a team, I'm now going to take on the team, and how did you decide how big or how little to keep that team?

James: So it was just me. And I was starting to feel maxed out. So for context, I started my online journey at the end of 2006, I think I registered my first domains through 2007, or no, probably end of 2005. But 2006 and 2007, I went from sort of zero to building up hundreds of dollars a month to thousands of dollars a month.

By the time I got to the beginning of 2008, I was making about \$10,000 a month. And I sort of actually jumped from \$5,000 a month to \$10,000 a month within a month by using a technique that I found in a John Reese DVD series called Traffic Secrets. And so that was good, but I wasn't quite there because my wage at the time was around \$300,000 a year. So that was my trigger. That was the target.

In my mind, I can't quit my job until I at least match my salary. But it was a bit of a gap. And so there was this bunch of things that happened at once. But I bought the Traffic Secrets DVDs on sale, well and truly after the original launch. The original launch happened as I was coming online. John Reese had his first million-dollar day. He was the first internet marketer to do that.

And I think it was about 2005, round about then. But I didn't buy that until later till end of 2007. I bought it on sale. It was like the end of the run. And I watched the DVDs. My family were on holidays. I was down there with them at a beach house. They were at the beach, and I was in a living room, watching DVDs, right, on my one-week holiday from my grinding corporate job, because I just needed to get out of it.

I could see the axe falling. There was a recession looming, there was a financial fallout happening with bad loans, and I'm in this high-paid job, lots of pressure. I had to just put my nose to the grindstone, right? So I'm watching this. All the things he said, I'm like, yep, done it, done it, done it. And then there's one thing I'm like, oh, yeah, that's a good idea.

So I went from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a month. I also went to an internet marketing conference, the first one in Australia from a local guy, John Giaan. And at the conference, I'm like, John, I know most of this stuff. And I actually met Mike Filsaime there. And I went to dinner with him. There's a bit of a story around that one, but I wasn't supposed to go to dinner with him. He was taking out all his Butterfly Marketing clients, the ones who'd paid for the really high-end course.

I'd actually just bought the eBook on ClickBank, like \$30 or something. And he announced from the stage, For all my Butterfly Marketing clients, I'll see you afterwards. And I thought, well, I bought Butterfly Marketing on ClickBank. So I'll go and just wait in the foyer, and I'll meet this guy. And so I met him and he said, Come on, we'll go to the Hilton in Sydney. And so I gave a lift to some other guy, Nikhil Parekh.

And on the way there, I'm like, So what do you do? And he goes, Oh, I just run AdWords, and he had Perry Marshall's Definitive Guide to AdWords. And he told me he was doing like \$100,000 a month in traffic. And I'm like, Whoa, okay. And I'm giving this guy a lift, because, you know, he didn't want to drive his car into the city.

And when we got to dinner, I had a chat to Mike. And he said, Oh mate, if you're in the car industry like I was, and you're already up to whatever you're doing now, he said, You'll make \$100,000 a month in no time. I remember going home just like, feeling 10 feet tall. I thought, this guy believes in me, he thinks I can actually do it.

The two hires that kicked off things for James

And around about this time, in the dealership, there was a lady who was a temporary receptionist. And she was really good. She was normally doing tour guides. And our normal receptionist was always sick and couldn't come. And so we got this temporary one. And just towards the end of her term, she said, Look, I'm finishing up. And I said, Well, before you go, you've just done this role. Could you help me write a job ad to replace a receptionist? Because she's told us she's not coming back.

And so she said, Okay, well tell me what the receptionist's criteria are. So I told her, and then she went away. And then a minute or so later, she came back. And I said, Yeah, is there anything else? She goes, No, no, I finished. I said what? She goes, Yes, I finished. And she came in and she showed me the ad she'd written and printed out. And I'm like, This is amazing. I'm like, You've got so much talent, like, why are you doing temporary reception stuff instead of sitting at home, in your tracksuit pants, writing articles for Americans for \$10 a pop?

And she said, Tell me more. And I said, Well, there's this whole sort of internet marketing thing, you know, back then I was in the Warrior Forum, and I was writing my own articles for the website software I was promoting. And she wanted me to tell her all about it. And she goes, If this is so good, then why aren't you doing that? And I said, Watch this space, like I'm going to be doing this.

And I was close, but not quite there. And I said to her, I'll tell you what, I will pay you, I'll pay you \$100 to write 10 articles about this software that I'm promoting. And she goes, Okay. And she did. And I paid her. And so I basically found myself an article writer in the Mercedes-Benz dealership, and I ordered thousands and thousands of articles from [Kerry](#).

And over the years, she created her own business, Kerry Finch Writing. She lives like two blocks from me here in Noosa. And she built her own team, and she's really successful with it and a great writer. So that was my first writer. So it was one of my first hires.

The other one I got was a support person. Because while I was at work, it was really hard to try and, you know, on my lunch break, or whatever, I have to log in and check my help desk and look for tickets for people who had bought the software and they were claiming a bonus from me. So like five or six times a day or 10 times a day, I'd have to send them the link to the bonus.

I hadn't automated it yet. I was getting a bit of a grind. And through another friend, I got a hold of this guy who'd worked on I think a film called The Secret. And he was doing the support, and he was sort of a geeky guy. And I think he's quite famous now, actually. But back then he wasn't. And he said, Look, I'll set up a support desk for you, and I'll man it. I think it was \$1,000 a month. It was \$500 or \$1000, I'm not quite sure, but I think it was \$1,000 a month.

And I did the numbers in my head, and I thought, well, if I don't have to log in at lunchtime, I'm going to get home. And he does that for me. That would actually pay for itself because I could do other things. I can then ask Kerry for some more articles and then put them up on Ezine and onto the website. And so that was my second. They were the two team members, I had the support person, and the article writer, and so I already went from zero to two. And then that was sort of it.

People and places that stretched James's thinking

But then what happened was, a few years later, a couple of things happened. Like me, as a result of watching those DVDs, I booked a ticket to Yanik Silver's event in America, Underground 4, which was in March 2008. Got on the plane. I used one day of annual leave, the Monday. I flew to America, I didn't know a single person.

I wrote down a lot of notes. I networked with people like Ryan Lee and Mike Hill, and all these super famous, Mike Geary, all these mega people, like Tim Houston.

Tega: Mega gurus.

James: Mega gurus, like Mike Filsaime was there, Brad Fallon was there, they were all there, and I didn't know a soul. I entered a competition and won it. And I got access to Maverick. And that was for million dollar plus online businesses. And that was six weeks later. So I had to go back. This was probably about May or June. And so I had to put in more annual leave, go back to America, first time being there as an adult since I was a kid.

And when I was on that, now I'm doing the Vomit Comet space shuttle. I'm there with Tony Hawk, the skateboarder, Peter Diamandis, the like, billionaire, Eben Pagan was there, like all these absolute legends, and I'm just like, Oh, my God. And I networked with them. And I just helped them.

I found out, a lot of them weren't really good with websites, or SEO or whatever. And I applied some of the paid traffic strategies that someone taught me. There was one guy I sat next to - on the plane there, I sat next to this guy, Tim, and he was making \$100,000 a month as a super affiliate. And I talked to him about his strategy. And it sounded so simple.

And that recalibrated, and he said to me, like, why are you ripping yourself off? Like, why do you take such a low wage in a job when you can be doing this stuff? And it really sort of conflicted me. And then after that, one of the guys I sat next to was making \$100,000 a day. And that just like, whoa, that just blew my mind.

And after this event, I think it was six weeks later, I put a few ideas together and quit my job. But I ended up going out and finding a couple of clients to pay me thousands of dollars per month to do their website and their marketing, PPC, SEO, the rest of it, 2008. Since then, as soon as I reached my threshold, I quit. And so I was making \$100,000 out of the gate from the first month I quit my job, ever since. This is middle of 2008 to now. Never missed it.

And the thing is, at the time, I tried to try and get a couple of people to help me because I realized, whoa, I'm starting to get a bit of extra work. But what I also did was choose business models that were quite leveraged. And so I started my community in the beginning of 2009, because of the affiliate thing that I promoted going broke, and not paying me. And that was a very leveraged model.

And I was doing, affiliate marketing was very leveraged, I used to promote launches and stuff. And I was doing the two main clients that I had, 5500 each, and I was still doing my ebook. Then I started promoting recurring solutions. But the SEO thing was where I really started to need a team.

So a couple of things happened. One is, the software I was promoting started to not be the best solution. And even though it sort of dribbled down about 5000 a month, I just stopped promoting it. Now, if you go into the internet marketing space, most internet marketers would not turn off a \$5,000 per month income stream just because they don't think it's the best product anymore. A lot of them will promote rubbish and keep banking the checks, right?

And so I turned it off. And then I started building websites, and then around this time I read The 4-Hour Workweek.

Sourcing from the Philippines

And a friend of mine, Mark Lindsay, had an SEO business and a link-building service. And I just remarked to him, Hey, Mark, you know, like, I've read The 4-Hour Workweek, they promote this Your Man In India. And I've put in my details in the waiting list, but they've got a big waiting list because the book's really popular.

And he said, Oh, man, you should look at the Philippines. And I said, Ah yeah? He said, Yeah, we've got a team there. I can help you find someone. Like, what are you looking for? And I said, Honestly, I've got no idea. I don't even know what they would do. Right?

At this time, I had an Indian agency supplying all my SEO stuff. They came and pitched me when I was speaking in New Zealand, they said, We can white label, you can sell our stuff on top, I had an army of affiliates selling it, they had the Indian supplier, but the supply was starting to get a bit patchy, and I was concerned about the quality. And so, he arranged two interviews with me for the Philippines, and I hired one, and I said, I'm not sure what we're going to do together. But I'm going to just show you what I do, and just see where we go from here.

And then she was in a call center, and then we got another one. And then I said to my client, right, this Mercedes-Benz client, I said, you should get someone in the Philippines. They're amazing. They can help with putting this stuff on the website. And then I sort of paused, and I'm looking at them. And I'm looking at their sort of glazed eyes, and I realized, oh, this is not going to work. They're not going to be a good boss for these people.

They're not going to know what to tell them. I said, I tell you what, I'll hire someone and have them work on your account most of the time. And then you just pay me. Does that work? They said, Oh, yes, that will be way better. So the third one was kind of my client was paying for, but they worked on the client's business for three days a week and mine for two.

And then I thought, this is a good model. So I did a couple more, and five and six. And I think we got to about nine. And that's when the SEO service was starting to really wobble a bit. So I said to one of the team members, Do you think we could take over the SEO? And she said, Yeah, I think we can. So I gave them one of the products.

So it was her and an assistant in that division. And the first month, they did like \$10,000 or \$20,000 worth of volume. And then within six months, we had 38 people in that SEO team, and we were doing 120,000 a month. So they just scaled like crazy. And then the same with the websites, we started building websites, and went crazy there.

So next thing you know, I had 67 people. I had a team building websites, we built 2000 of our own websites. We had a link network, we were serving ads, we could rank anything. It was a magic era. And that's when I had a lot of people. And the only reason it scaled down, I think, to answer your second question, there were some outside forces at play.

But the short answer is one of our clients was buying so much of our supply that it got to the point where it made sense for him to buy the business. Because he would either replace us, and that would put in jeopardy a large chunk of my team. Or he could buy it and save the profit margin on what he was buying, which made sense.

And he purchased the business from me, paid it off, took over, I think it was 30-something people. And I also sold my website business because I really didn't like the website business. It was such a difficult business. So commoditized. And that left my core team, which I still have now, which is why I've got team members ticking over 13 years.

Taking responsibility for the outcome

Tega: So the key thing there for me is, if you're talking about characteristics of success, even when you didn't know what to do, you trusted yourself to figure it out.

James: Well, I made that promise to myself when I had a job. Just for context, you know, I had a mortgage, so I had a property, I had to make payments, I had four kids. The job was most of my income but then I was able to replace that with the online income. But of course you get this extra money. Now I had two incomes, I was like making a lot more money and then a year or so, a year and a half out of when I quit my job, I had this huge tax bill. It's like, oh my god.

But I made a promise to myself. If I quit my job, I promised to always innovate and be responsible for my own outcome, because I do not want to go back to this place. And the only nightmare I have is that I'm working at the car dealership. And most of my friends who worked in the car dealership have the same nightmare.

Because like you said before, when you're in it, it feels like that's your whole world. It's a frightening environment to be in when you're in, like, this command and conquer, hardcore, competitive environment. And I move away from that. And the funny thing is, I often see little entrepreneurs, these online people, they've maybe come through university or had a low-key job, and they start building a monster like I escaped.

They start building this bureaucracy, they start building rules and regulations, they start building hierarchies, and managers, and stress. And I'm like, I don't know if you're going to be happy with that. And you know one of the most popular episodes I've published of late was the one with [Chris Evans](#), where we're talking about maybe a massive revenue, maybe you can scale too much. And his story is a profound example of why it's not for everyone.

Tega: Yeah. I think, at the core, it comes down to self-awareness, doesn't it? Because you knew what you wanted to get away from, you had an idea what you wanted to build. And I think you've just, you've explored this middle ground beautifully well, staying aware exactly what you are trying to build. And you also had the courage to make decisions and turn off income streams that took away from this idea.

James: And I've done it last year, and I've just done it this week. And part of the thing is, I've got a toolkit. When I was in the Mercedes-Benz dealership, we had the most expensive accountants, benchmarking all the dealers, punching numbers, showing us metrics and indicators, and all the benchmarks that needed to be achieved, and we would pay it accordingly.

So I had a good education in the data analysis and decision making. I like this DDD, right? Get the data, make decisions, and then do it. So often on a regular basis, I'll just put my whole business on a whiteboard, I'll get all the numbers from my team. I'll analyze it by product line, by the softer feelings, emotion, how do I rate these customers? How does this part of the business make me feel?

I look at other factors like, is this a growth market or a declining market? Is there a capital value growing here or is it just cash? Is it defensible, or am I under attack? And based on all of these inputs, then I'll start to form a pretty clear path forward. Most of my customers benefit from this kind of insight, because they struggle with this entirely. They just get bull ringed and led around the paddock by a rope, or they just sit in the corner, shivering, not knowing what to do.



So yes, you absolutely have to be responsible for your own outcomes. And you have to be present of mind. What would you call that, prescient? Anyway, you have to have acuity, you have to know exactly what's going on and then adjust.

Artificial intelligence and the impact on team

I'm seeing the same thing happen right now with artificial intelligence. It's causing people to shiver in the corner in fear, and it's causing people to seek opportunities and move forward. And then there's people like me who observe and gauge what's happening, and just slowly move in a new direction without doing anything crazy.

Tega: Yeah, the whole AI debate, it's more machine learning, right? Yes, it's good. It's more machine learning. It's not sentient, yet. You can't tell it, Write me an article, you have to keep feeding that stuff, and everybody's losing their mind.

James: Well, the thing is, you know, this was my first reaction. I need to go straight to my team, and I need to tell my team, they all have a job, none of them will be replaced. This is not a threat to us. This is a tool in our toolkit we will augment and become more powerful with. And I think a lot of employers maybe have forgotten that step. Maybe they forgot to tell the team that they're safe or that they're not going to lose their job.

And maybe right now, as this podcast goes out, there'll be a business owner listening to it and have an oh sh*t moment. Oh, I wonder which one of my team members has a foot out the door because I've been so enamored with all this artificial intelligence that I forgot to tell them that I'm not going to let them go. Right?

Everyone in my team knows we need all hands on deck. All it means is our output's improved. We can have more leveraged way to serve our clients. We can reach more market. That's why we got more social reach, because we've been able to augment, some of the manual processes we were doing have been able to be sped up in the sort of foundational phases, but we still hand finish all the rest. And it's the hand-finished part where you need the team at this point.

Tega: Yeah, I think I didn't do what you did in letting my team know. When Jarvis came out, Jarvis now called Jasper, there was a spurt of tools that came out along with it. I picked up a few of those, because I wasn't ready for like, a monthly commitment to just Jasper/Jarvis at the time. And when I picked it up, I played with it. I saw, the benefit in my eyes at the time was, it's a productivity enhancer.

So as soon as I picked it up, as soon as I got used to it, I recorded a few videos. And I gave it to our writer Gabby, and just said, like this is a cool little tool, it will help you do your job better. If you need any help, here's how I use it, here's how I envision using it. And from there, I just left it in her hands.

And then with the recent explosion of ChatGPT and everything blowing up on the news, I all of a sudden remembered, hey, I have this tool, maybe I should actually check it out. So I played with ChatGPT. And just this week, I dropped a message to the team, like, exposing new tools and what they do. And Gabby just said, Yeah, I've been keeping an eye on it. And I've been using it on days where I don't feel like my brain is performing like it should. I use it to create prompts. And I use it for ideas.

And I'm like, excellent. So you kind of know that your job is safe, because you're using it in the way that I would use it. We have a junior writer Mae who I think hasn't been as exposed as Gabby has been because like I said, I forgot about it. So she's seen me and Gabby talk about it in Slack. And she's putting out all this mind blown emojis. I'm like, You know you can ask for access to it to use it as well. So I've just shared access with Mae.

And I think what's kind of telling there is the fact that I found it, I played around with it. I have no real use for it because I don't create the content, the team do, obviously do with my guidance, I just give them the tools that they need. So I forgot about it and gave it to Gabby, and Gabby has been using it. Maybe where I dropped the ball was not letting Mae in on the secret. But now she knows about it. It'll be good to see how it improves the output that she has and how it helps her basically do her job better.

James's policy around tools

James: It sounds like a great relationship you have with your team there. When we got a hold of Jarvis, which was a stupid name to call it, obviously trademark issues straight out of the gate. It's never a good idea to take a brand someone else's got. I say that cheekily, because it turns out the name that I got suggested for my book ended up already having a book of the same name, we discovered the day we were publishing it, which sucked.

I didn't name it. So that's something I should just point out, someone will say, Hey, but you did that. Anyway, we use the tool. We're using it, and what we're noticing is the outputs weren't good enough, they weren't to the level that we could get. I said to my team, I think your results are actually better than what the tool is producing.

So we actually unsubscribed from that tool last year. And I've said to my team, Now, like there's so many tools coming, I will screen out and filter through our own community. Thankfully, we have a community who just alerts us when there's a great tool. It ends up in my forum, my community. And I say, Here's a tool, this is what it's supposed to do, you're welcome to try it.

They usually go and check the knowledge base, they try a demo on it, they decide if they want to commit to paying for it. But we only pay on a monthly basis now, because I believe in a year from now, a chunk of these tools won't exist. There's so many people racing, this is a space race, it's an arms race for all these AI tools. And they can get confused with it. And I keep my team focused on [tool rules](#).

Remember, with the tool rules, if we have a tool, it's because we really need it, we can't survive without it. If we're going to have a tool, then we want to make sure we get the best in class. So before we commit to something, let's see what the top two or three tools in the market are for this category. And the third one is, make sure we use it properly, like learn how to use it. So they go through the training or whatever.

And we often do reviews. I get a monthly P&L, Profit and Loss statement by line item of every product, every cost, including labor. And one of our costs in this kind of business we have is tools. And I look through the tools list. And I'll bring it to the meeting. And I'll say, I'm just going to read out some of the tools here. I'll paste them into the chat here. Could you please let me know, who's using this? And they'll say, me.

And we might find a couple of tools here and there that we've stopped using. And we just delete. I want to delete all tools if possible, and then add back in the ones that we actually critically need. And by doing this over time, a lot of the names of the tools have changed. Some in, some out. We find the limitations.

This is the extraordinary thing, when a lot of my clients are raving about a tool and they ask about it, I'll say to the team, We used to use this tool, and they'll say, Yeah, but it doesn't allow you to do this, or what happens is it doesn't integrate that. And they always find the limitation or where it's not effective and replace it with something else or nothing.

And there was this classic one, we used to have these plugins. And I said, This license is up for renewal, do we need to renew it? And they said, No. I said, Okay, what, we don't like the tool anymore? And they said, Oh, no, we made our own plugin to do that. And I'm like, Okay. [laughs] Thank you?

Tega: Thanks for letting me know, guys.

James: Yeah, they just learned how to code their own plugins and replace the tools. I think one was a social widget that goes after the post, and they just made their own because they were sick of trying to make it integrate or fix this one line of code that it was throwing errors for, or whatever.

Letting people grow by allowing mistakes

Tega: This is kind of like, whenever I listened to that episode, is when I thought that our line of thinking was kind of like on the same path. I'd rather hire good people, so long as they'd fit the criteria that I'm looking for, and then give them the freedom to either grow into or grow out of the role that I'm bringing them in for.

There's a story by a guy called John Jonas, he owns and runs onlinejobs.ph, very similar to what you just said, wherein you hire the people, so long as they're the right people, you give them the task, you tell them, like, go make all the mistakes that you need to make, right? I trust you to go make all the mistakes that you need to make. So long as you're doing it and learning from it, the business, aka everybody is going to benefit from that.

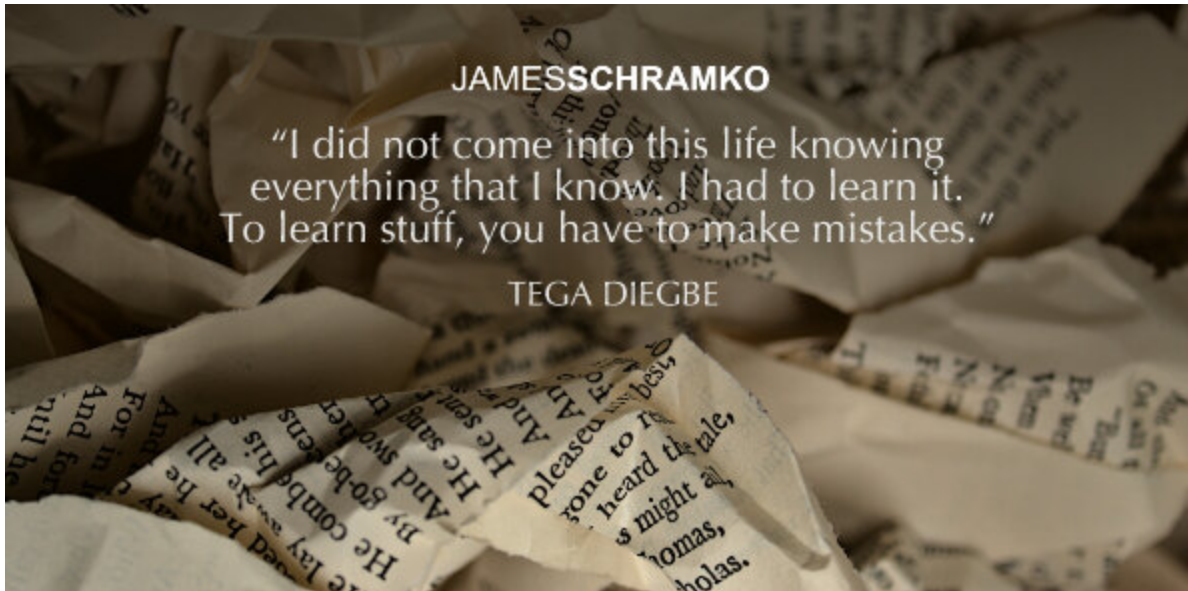
So I took that to heart. And that's how I run my team, and I got the feeling that that was how you run your team as well. Obviously, there needs to be guardrails to make sure that the mistakes they make don't bankrupt the business or don't create issues for your clients.

James: Well, we had two examples of that this week. One team member made a mistake. But it was an easy mistake to make because we shut down a program. And then someone tried to order it. And we said, This program is no longer available. And then I saw a payment come through. And I asked the team, like, Hey, what happened? And they said, Yeah, look, he followed the link in an email and found an old page with the thing, like this guy was determined to join no matter what.

And they're like, Should we refund it? What do we do? I'm like, Oh, this is hilarious. Like this guy's desperately trying to buy our product that we're trying to stop him from buying, like this is the opposite problem most businesses have. So we all had a laugh about it. And the thing is I said, Look, obviously we'll update our SOP if we change a program to go and find, you know, old pages or email links, which chase some of the old email links.

So it's such an easy situation to have happened, I would have made the same situation happen. There's no way I would have remembered to do it. And they just put this sort of sigh of relief emoticon. And then I made a mistake this week, too. I looked for a post and I thought there was something there, and it seemed to have gone, and I'm like, Hey, what happened to this post?

And they're like, Oh, it's still showing for me. And then I looked, and I've got the slightly different URL. So I was like, Okay, my bad, I'm looking at the wrong page. But lucky I'm not running an online business or anything. And then we all laugh about that. So you will make errors, they'll make errors. The way you handle the error, I think, is going to determine whether that person is still in your organization a year from now.



JAMES SCHRAMKO

"I did not come into this life knowing everything that I know. I had to learn it. To learn stuff, you have to make mistakes."

TEGA DIEGBE

Tega: I just let my girls know that generally mistakes are learning opportunities. I did not come into this life knowing everything that I know. I had to learn it. To learn stuff, you have to make mistakes. So you're going to make mistakes, just don't hide it. Tell me about it as soon as it happens. So if I need to do damage control, I can do damage control. And then once we fix it, we can have a laugh about it.

And I think it creates a very nice working environment, because people are not worried about stepping foot wrong. People are not worried about, oh my goodness, I can't make a mistake. They know they're not going to make a mistake because we do everything off the processes and SOPs, but when they do make mistakes, personally, I look at it as it starts with me, because there was a call, or there was something I wasn't aware of in the process.

I can't start berating them for that without having given them the resources to do the job effectively. And going back to what I said earlier, whenever I had the interview with my guys, that was something that they really appreciated because they said it's not something that every business owner that they've worked with has done. They've said it, but their actions have betrayed the words that they spoke.

James: It's so rare. I can tell from just talking to you, Tega, you'd be a great boss to work for. I hope I'd be a good boss to work for.

Tega: From everything that you're saying, it sounds like you will be a great boss to work for as well.

James: When they say I'm the best boss ever, it makes me feel good, because they've had other bosses. But they're all still there. That's the ultimate evidence. If they're still there 10 years later, you know something's working. I love my team, I'm really proud of their achievements. We move forward together. I've told them they can work with me for as long as we're doing stuff. I'm planning to do this for a long time.

We keep making adjustments, our business has always been healthy and thriving. Thankfully, we haven't been under major pressure ever, which is because of what they're doing and how they reinforce all the initiatives. And no matter what I throw their way, they just deal with it.

I'd say, I'd like to rename this product, which means we will have to change it on our website, any carts, email references, etc. And I'm sure there'd be a whole bunch of other things that I haven't considered, but I'm sure you will put some thought to. And they just go and, Yes, on it. And I notice it all changed through the system. I love that.

The last time we spoke was many, many years ago when you came on, I think we had a private chat, it wasn't recorded. I think we were just talking about setting up memberships. And I remember back then, you were such a nice person and inquisitive and a great implementer. And you went away and did the things we talked about. And so that's why I follow you on social. I'm going to drop your website here for other people who want to follow you. So it's tegadiegbe.com?

Tega: Close enough, tegadiegbe.com.

James: That's pretty fancy.

Tega: It's very Nigerian.

James: Is it? T-E-G-A-D-I-E-G-B-E.com. We'll put it in the show notes, Episode 991. Who do you work with, just out of curiosity, like if someone's listening to this, and you think they'd be someone that you should be talking to?

Tega: That's a great question. It's a question I've been trying to answer for like five years.

James: [laughs] I know you've been helping other people. And you're like an incredible supporter. And they've got like a loyalty to you. And that's why I rate you.

Tega: Thank you. Primarily I work with online business owners. I would say one-man bands that are looking to put in foundation systems, one-man bands that are aware of the scope of what they have to do. And they may not want to build a team themselves, or they may not want to do it themselves. And that's kind of where I come in.

We have a chat about what they want to do, then I go away, and I build things, like my team and I build things. Luckily, I've been doing this for so long that I have a stack of processes that now we don't really have to build, it's just a case of transplanting it into a business. And if they need help, then they can speak to me about helping them find help, like hiring people, virtual team members and things like that.

James: Love it. And thank you for sharing my other episode, that was very generous of you. And, you know, it's good when community supports community. And I'm glad we could have a chat about team members and go in a bit deep and you know, peeling back a bit of the history on how my team got to where it is and what it is.

Tega: It's all good.

James: It's such a fun game, though, isn't it?

Tega: It is. I appreciate listening to that episode. And like I said, I picked up a few things from it. And even speaking with you, there are a few things that I've picked up that personally, I think, my communication with my team needs to be a little bit better. And I'm saying that just because I play with the tools, I think, this is a cool thing, I forget about things that I've seen, maybe pass it on to the team so they can actually get the benefit from it as well. So yeah, it's been a great conversation. Thank you for having me.

James: My pleasure. And I'm sure we'll bump into each other again, Tega. Thank you.

Tega: I'm sure we will. Thanks for having me, James.

James: All right.

JAMES SCHRAMKO



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