Teaching Your Team to Think for Themselves

Is thinking for yourself and for your team stressing you out? VirtualDOO's Lloyd Thompson has advice for business owners wanting an autonomous team.

James Schramko and Lloyd Thompson

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to my show. This is episode 982. Today, I've brought along my special guest, friend, fellow surfer, Lloyd Thompson. Welcome.

Lloyd: Thanks for having me back, James.

James: I hope the surf is good down there, you're representing in my absence.

Lloyd: Pretty heavy out there this morning.

James: Good. That's what we like to hear. So you survived, which is wonderful. I'm sure you're full of adrenaline. It always feels good when you come back to land, and you think, I made it.

Lloyd: I'm pumped. Yeah.

James: So Lloyd, you're running virtualdoo.com. You're helping visionaries get their visions enacted, actually, to roll out. And as part of that, you're really strong on people and systems. I wanted to sort of layer on top of an episode that I've recorded before, our listeners might remember Episode 976, which was a solo episode of mine. And I went through the FAQs and little known things for hiring, recruiting and leading a team from the Philippines.

Do I have to show them everything?

And one of the questions that I answered in that, that I got from my socials was, how do you get your team to think for themselves? This is something I've heard over and over and over again. That's what we're going to tackle today. We're going to go deeper on it.

We're going to help someone who's listening to this podcast to actually get a handle on this and open up the performance available to team members, especially if they're sitting there thinking, Why doesn't my team do this? Why doesn't my team do that? Like, surely this is obvious, you know, do I have to show them everything?

And of course, they don't want to have to end up being a micromanager because they might as well just do it themselves, which is what a lot of leaders actually end up saying to me. I don't know why I've got this team and paying all this money when they don't actually think for themselves and do it anyway. So I might as well just do it myself. I want to go back to that time in the past when it was just me and it was so easy. Do you get this stuff too, Lloyd?

Lloyd: This is such a common problem. I have founders coming to me. And they're always asking, Why am I the person always driving and deciding? And they ask me, Is this common sense? Like, why are they asking me common sense questions? And is it a problem with the people? And why am I coming up with all the answers?

So yeah, I see this often. And the impact of that is they can't let go of the reins, whoever they employ. And it feels like the solutions are always coming from them. And as a result, they then find themselves stuck in the daily operations, and their business is just then, they're scatter-gunning their team with tasks all the time. And then that has a real impact that they don't have a sellable business, because their business is them. And as a result, they can't get into things like strategy and shaking the tree for new business.

James: I mean, that still sounds like fantasy to these people, doesn't it? Imagine your team actually doing stuff. I remember when I started with the online virtual assistant thing. The first hire I had was a person in the USA who managed my support desk. And that was great. His name was Matt. It's a legacy we've continued to this day.

And he could think for himself. He was working on a project called The Secret back in the day. And he actually said, Listen, I can install the software for you and then just answer all the tickets. I'm like, That's amazing. Go for it. And then I hired an article writer, and she was actually working in the dealership that I worked at. She was a temporary receptionist, Kerry, she was amazing.

And I remember recruiting her to this online world. And she started writing my articles. And of course, you know, she used to run tour operations to other countries. She was a high-level thinker, and she was completely autonomous. So that was great.

From India to the Philippines

Then I was reading about Tim Ferriss's 4-Hour Workweek, and he was talking about Your Man In India. I remember logging on to try and hire someone, but they had this massive waiting list. The Tim Ferriss effect was in full play, it just melted their waiting list forever. So I was lamenting about this to my friend, Mark Lindsay. And I said Mark, I've applied for a VA in India. I know you've got a team, where did you get them from?

He goes, Oh, my team are in the Philippines. I said, Oh really? He goes, Yeah, look, if you want, I can help you find someone. And I said, Well, that would be amazing. He said, What do you want? What kind of person do you want? I said, I don't know. I don't even know what I'd have them do. Like, I do everything in my business at the moment except for support and articles.

And he goes, Okay, well we'll just find you someone who's got good English and you could train up. And I said, Let's go. So we did that. And over the years, I've learned so much about how this works. So the thing that really surprised me though, this is the point I want to make, I'm getting there, with Mark, I said, What do you have your team doing?
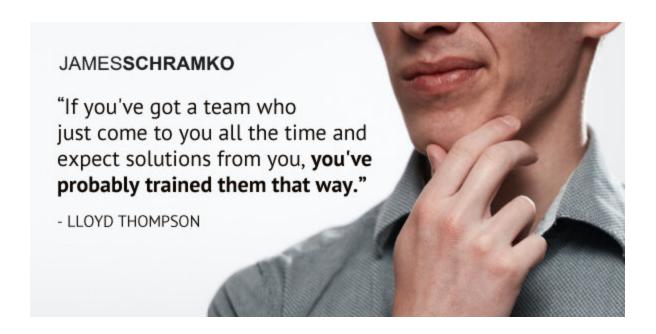
And this is where I had to suspend my disbelief for a moment. He said, Well, my team just put together a new product for me. And I said, What do you mean? He goes, Well, they researched the market, they created the sales copy, they built the website, they hooked up all the emails and the cart, and they've started the marketing promotions.

I'm like, Sorry, what? And he said, Yeah, well, that's what they do. I said, And these are people in the Philippines? He goes, Yeah. I said, That's amazing. Because at that time, I was doing all of those things. And unless someone had told me that this is possible, I would not have believed it. And so there's a skeptic listening to this podcast right now, Lloyd, saying, Bullsh*t. There's no way someone in the Philippines could do these things.

And I'm here to say, They will blow your mind if you can unlock them. And that's what we're going to do today. We're going to give the user manual on how to get out of this. Because I've seen these people you're talking about Lloyd, it's like, they're like walking up a snow mountain without snow shoes, they're like two steps forward, one step back, two steps forward, they're like, they hire, try and give up the tasks. And then they end up taking it back. And then they get rid of the person and they get someone else. Like it is a broken way of doing things.

So if you're stuck in the day-to-day operations, if you've even tried to hire people and hand off the tasks like this magical wizard, unicorn, rocking horse poop, special Swiss army knife VA, that one person who will do absolutely everything in your business that you've been told is possible, firstly, that is not possible.

You need a team, you need multiple players to achieve these things, and you need time. But most importantly, you need knowledge, you need to understand exactly what to do. So you're going to need to learn about coaching. A lot of people listening to this show, Lloyd, are coaches, and they're so busy coaching their clients, they forget about their own team. Let's talk about that for a minute.

JAMES**SCHRAMKO**

"If you've got a team who just come to you all the time and expect solutions from you, **you've probably trained them that way.**"

- LLOYD THOMPSON

Lloyd: Yeah. You've given me a lot of things to talk about here. Firstly, I'll say you can't just hire people and expect them to run exactly how you want. And if you've got a team who just come to you all the time and expect solutions from you, you've probably trained them that way. So you might actually be the problem. It's highly likely.

And so that's why I was saying earlier, some of these founders find no matter who they employ, they still can't let go of the reins. And it's because they shine in that.

So I would say there are two types of coaching, conscious coaching and subconscious coaching. The conscious coaching is the most obvious one.

And that's about, well, if someone comes to you with a problem, don't give them the answer. Even if it's so fresh and hot in your mind as what you think the answer is, ask them questions. You might be leading them to what you think your answer is. But don't give them the answer, because you're training them to think.

A team that challenges you

And you might find, and this happens often, they have a better answer than you do. And so it's a really valuable exercise, ask them questions. Also, I want to talk about Philippines. It's really interesting. I now have a team in the Philippines, but in my previous corporate world experience, I had a huge team in the Philippines. And when I first grew a large team, one thing that I became aware of is that there's a cultural thing there not to challenge a hierarchy.

James: Yep. A subservience of some kind, you could call it politeness.

Lloyd: Very polite culture.

James: In the episode that I mentioned before, 976, I was talking to my team about that episode before I recorded it. And I said, you know, someone's asked a question here, why won't they challenge the boss or whatever? And they said, Look, it's really a cultural situation where people are trained to follow instructions, they're trained to go to university, and then to get a job and to do what the boss says, and to step outside that is considered bad behavior.

Lloyd: And so, when I understood this, I had to break it, because I really need a team to challenge me. And so what I would do is, I would come up with ridiculous ideas that I knew wouldn't work. And I'll put them out there and see if they'd challenge me. In the beginning, Oh, yes, boss. Yes. And then I said, Look, I'm going to be more upset if you let me do something stupid. Don't let me do something stupid.

James: This is such a good point, right? For that episode 976, when I gave it to the team, I said, I've recorded the episode, right? It started off, the raw was one hour and eight minutes long. And I said, Please, and I put this in caps, right, and I don't use caps very often. I said, Please edit me, anything I say you don't agree with or sounds silly, just cut it. Right. Because I want to be ultra-aware of their culture, I don't want to publish anything that would allow them to lose face or be embarrassed, or that they would consider inaccurate.

So we have that kind of trust relationship, like I want them. And they do. Man, they edit me a lot when I say something stupid, or I say something that could get me into trouble, they just pull it back a bit, you know, they just prune the edges off my barbs. I sometimes say dumb things when I'm recording a podcast, just because I'm trying to get into the flow.

It's not because I'm trying to censor myself from being canceled, well, maybe a little bit, but more so that I want to deliver the best experience for the end user. And some of the things I say don't make sense if they're taken out of context, or they could be taken out of context and used against me.

So having that relationship where you can say, Please, pull me up if I'm out of line, or let me know if something sounds ridiculous, we should have that conversation. That's really a big takeaway, already in this episode. If you have a team, and they're scared to talk to you openly and honestly about your actions or your intentions, then that's something to start the correction process on.

Lloyd: They've got to feel safe, as well, that they can make mistakes, because if they don't feel safe, they're not going to do it. So if you're the kind of boss that says, Hey, you know, you stuffed this up, you know, they're going to close up. They're not going to come back to you.

If you take what they did, and ask them about it and say, how could it have been done better? What do you think the options are? How do we stop this ever happening again? But let them know it's safe to fail, then you've created an environment where people can be creative, and they can come up with ideas.

James: Well, this is point number two, really, the big point is, there will be mistakes, there will be things that happen, in every business. It's that moment that it happens, what you say next will shape the relationship with your team from then on. So many people get this wrong.

Like, typical example, anyone who's been online for a while has blown up a webpage, right? Or made an error where the page doesn't load, or it doesn't render, or it's set to no index or whatever. If you're the typical bad boss, you might say, What happened here? Which idiot did this? How did my page get offline? Do you realize how much this is costing me? And having a bit of a rant. You're just pushing that team member into a little lead box they will never come out of.

Lloyd: Yeah. And then all they're going to expect from that point on is, Do this, do this, do this. And they'll say yes, yes, boss, yes, boss, yes, boss. And that's not the kind of staff you want. And you created that.

James: No. So I remind them, you know, Hey, listen, I've blown up the website before. It looks like our site's not loading. Maybe someone should have a look at this. And after we get it back, let's just have a look at what caused it. Maybe we need to up our server, you know, capability. Maybe we've turned a button on or off that we can learn from, or update our standard operating procedures around maintenance, etc.

If you take a good approach about it, they'll be like, wow, you know, he's taking it pretty well. And this sounds pretty fair and reasonable. It means they're still going to progress. Imagine next time they go to update the website, if last time it crashed, and they just got melted by their boss. This time, they're like, Yeah, I'm going to update it. But I'll also check the standard operating procedures. And I'll make sure we've got enough bandwidth on our server allocation or whatever. And then they'll actually have a go at it.

Team coaching and GROW

Lloyd: I'm so glad you brought up this example, because it leads nicely into another thing that I wanted to talk about, which is team coaching. The server meltdown is an absolutely great example. So let's say there's some kind of a problem. It could be technical or people-related.

But this is a scenario we're going to need to bring the band together, you need to get people together in a room or a virtual room and solve it together. And you want people to come up, you want the team to come up with the solutions. So what I do in this situation, I use a thing called GROW framework. And GROW stands for Goal, Reality, Options, Wrap-up. It's very simple. I'll go through this.

James: Where did you get it from?

Lloyd: Corporate worlds. It's just a coaching framework. I can't remember where I learned it, but it's just very simple. You can use it in so many things, particularly coaching conversations. And you can use this one on one, or you can use it in teams.

James: Nice.

Lloyd: So, for this scenario, let's say, there's been a server meltdown, your website, something's gone wrong. I love that example. And so what you do, you get the team together. And the first thing you will do, start with the goal. The goal is figure out why there was a server meltdown, and then figure out what we need to do to prevent it ever happening again. So that's the goal. Next thing is the reality.

James: So hang on, the goal isn't to find out who did it and sh*t on them? [laughs]

Lloyd: No, that might be what happens in corporate world.

James: Like, a lot of people are quick to go for the blame part before they even solve the problem. Have you noticed that?

Lloyd: I've seen that in corporate world a lot.

James: Who did this? Who's responsible for this?

Lloyd: Who can we blame? When this gets reported upwards, who's going to get their head chopped off?

James: Yeah, I want to know, who was the last person in the car dealership? Who was the last person to drive that car, right? You know, like, it's parked badly, or there's a dent in the door. Like, the hunt starts, the cameras are rewound, the logbooks are checked.

Lloyd: They call these retrospectives. And I love a retrospective, or I've heard it called a post-incident review. And these are really, really valuable things. But I've been to post-incident reviews where people are taking it down that direction of who's to blame? That's what they're trying. No, no, no, no, no, no, this is a creative, happy, put your weapons down.

This is a place where we're going to come together. And we're going to figure out why it happened. And what we can do to prevent it happening again. Let's all brainstorm and be in a happy, warm, fuzzy place where we're going to kill this problem so it never happens again. That's what we're here to do. We're not here to allocate blame.

So great example. That's where we are. So dialing back to GROW. We've set the goal. Now what we do is draw the reality. So it doesn't matter if you're in a physical room, you've got a whiteboard, or you're going to be in a virtual place, and you've got a whiteboard in Zoom. I draw out the reality, nothing Flash, boxes and arrows. What do I think the problem is?

Now the top tip I have here is, don't try too hard to make it accurate. You just need to draw in enough fact. Especially if you're dealing with technical people, they cannot stand things being inaccurate. That's where you suck in those quiet technical people who have been sitting there. They see you drawing the box to the wrong arrow, connecting the wrong, that really annoys them.

And so use that, pull them in. Actually, yeah, it's wrong, please jump in, get involved, because what you want to do is draw them in, get them involved, get them to draw the reality for you. Now, this is the point where you can switch from being the person who's driving the session to now the person who's asking questions. So they're going to start drawing up what the reality is.

And once everyone's agreed, now we get to the options. So you're not coming up with the options, you're asking the team. You might have options in your mind. But you're asking the team all of the things that you had in your mind that you might have thought the options, but ask them the questions to lead them there. And hopefully, they're going to be more proactive enough to come out of options themselves. So that's how you drive that.

And then finally, when you've got an option that you've all agreed on, then you wrap up and conclude. Now reason why it's important to have the team involved is also because if they're coming up with the options, they're also buying in.

And that's really, otherwise, they'll just say, Oh, the boss come up with this solution, it's never going to work, it's ridiculous. If it goes wrong, well, it's all his fault, you know, it's just a bad thing. You want it to be a team-run business, you want the team to come up with the ideas, and you want the team to weigh out the pros and cons and buy in.

James: Yeah, and the boss could be a lady as well. I'm just thinking, you know, it could be her. Her, she, etc. I just want to put that out there. You know what happens in my business, this sort of GROW thing seems to happen automatically now. So I might see a Slack alert saying website down, right? Because we've tied some piece of software in, probably as a result of a previous grow.

And then it'll say website's back up. And then there'll be a comment from my person who seems to lean towards the web technical stuff, saying, I checked with the hosting company, they were doing an unscheduled backup. They've apologized, and it's all back up and running, and there's no further action. And so I just smile, thinking, I love this. This problem happens, it gets fixed automatically. And they already know to go and check why it happened to see what we can do about it, see if there's anything - this is an automatic thought process.

This happens with a lot of things. I might see someone post in a daily update. I noticed the chart on this page was the old pricing or the old product name, so I've updated it. Like I didn't actually see it or find out about it, I would never have known about it, unless someone has done it. So how we get there is a systematic discussion of thinking.

So, one simple technique that I use is I think out loud. So when we have a meeting, I might talk about what I've been up to. And I might say, I've been looking at the socials. And I've noticed that some types of posts get a lot of reactions, and other ones get no reaction. So I'm kind of thinking that this type of post is not really working on this platform. What do you think about that? And have you seen these sorts of trends across this platform or any other platforms?

We might have a discussion around that. And then I'll say, I'm thinking from now as we're posting content to each platform, maybe we should just have a look at it and in a day or two after and see, how did it go. And then retrospectively make a choice. And perhaps when we come back next week, let's have a chat about what we've noticed.

Rewarding positive behavior

And so, now I've sort of set them up for the week to start going off and doing their independent thought analysis and research. It's very informal. Then the next week, I just put a line note in my meeting notes, discuss social findings. What will usually happen, Lloyd, this is the classic thing. I'll usually get shared a spreadsheet in Google, which will be like all of the posts, how they ranked with the social shares, the comments, what type of posts seem to go well or not across each platform, this will just pretty much automatically happen before we get to the meeting.

It's kind of like the homework is due, and they've made it more formal than I even discussed or required. And I give them praise then. I say, this is amazing. And I'll give them a mind blown emoticon. I'll say, you know, You've really taken this to heart, I love it. This is so good. Thank you, this is exactly what I'm looking for. Amazing.

And so I share this praise, and now, what's going on in the mind of my team, they're saying, this is good behavior. This is the kind of thing that is good for the business. This is making me feel like I'm doing good work. And it's very positive.

Lloyd: It reminds me of the One Minute Manager where he talks about one-minute praisings. And I can't remember what he calls the other, but one-minute feedbacks.

James: Right, and that little book is on my shelf there behind me, it's one of the very first books I read as a manager. It's possibly a little out of date now. But anyone who hasn't read this and has a team should definitely get your hands on it.

Lloyd: Yeah, it's a great book. So simple.

James: But the idea is, most people are hearing negatives and nos and getting picked up on all the things they do wrong. And they're very often not getting a lot of praise or good feedback when they do something right. I think the line is something like, catch people doing something right. That was the thing that stuck in my mind forever.

And if you can catch someone doing something right, this applies to children, and it applies to team, it applies to partners, it applies to friends, even, like pretty much in any instance, even a tradesperson working on your property. I had someone in my backyard today fixing a broken pipe that they'd damaged when they're working next door. And, you know, I gave them a praise.

And I could tell he's felt good. You know why he felt good? Because I think the person in charge of their project over there is just riding them hard to get the job done. You know, moving the target on them, changing the budgets, and they look a bit stressed. And I'm just a nice guy next door whose fence they've knocked down by accident, who's been very patient and good about it.

But I know when they're repairing it, they've got a choice. They can either just phone it in and do a reasonable job, or just stick it up. Or they can think, you know, I'm going to make this really nice because this guy appreciates it and he's a good guy. And I want to show him how good we can craft this amazing fence. That's what I'm hoping for.

"The **timing of the feedback** is important."
- LLOYD THOMPSON

JAMES**SCHRAMKO**

Lloyd: I think the timing of the feedback is important too. Because if it's something that needs to be said, Say it right away, don't sit on it for ages, like they've done a good job. Let them go, Hey, this is fantastic. And these are the reasons why.

James: They teach that with animals. If you ever train a dog, for example. Like, say an owner comes home and finds a poop on the floor, and they get really angry with the dog, but the dog did it like within 10 minutes of the owner leaving and that's so long ago, they can't even remember, why is this guy getting so upset with me? What could this be about? Right?

So apparently, the sooner you can offer praise or feedback after a situation, the better it is for behavior. And some behavioral psychologist or expert on this topic is probably going to make a comment about that. Something I'm actually interested in having a guest on, there's someone who wants to go deep on that. Or if you've got a recommendation, go for it.

So, so far, just a quick recap, chatting with Lloyd here from virtualdoo.com, episode 982. We're talking about how to teach your team to think. We've talked about the need to coach your team, we've talked about the idea that you can actually have your team thinking by themselves, it is possible. We've talked about some specifics for the Philippines-based team members, we've talked about the GROW framework, we've talked about, now, I think adaptive coaching, right?

The idea of situational leadership

Lloyd: Yeah, that's where I want to go now. So in corporate world, they call this situational leadership. And so it's just giving you some guidance of what level of coaching or direction you should be applying. So while you've got a team now that takes the initiative and gets that you can't immediately go to that normally, if it's a beginner, someone new in a particular skill, it might be Java programming, it doesn't matter what the skill is.

When they're starting as a beginner, they're going to need high direction. You can't expect to coach them straightaway. So again, it's probably SOP-like steps. Hey mate, when you're doing this, this is step one, and step two, and step three, follow these steps. And after a while, then you want to get into coaching, then you can start moving more and more back into a coaching style. But in the beginning, they definitely need that high direction.

And eventually they're going to hit some kind of a problem, they make a mistake. And that's when you let them know it's safe to fail. And then you start going with the coaching scenario. And you say, Hey, look, what do you think happened? Why did it happen? What do you need to do? And that's when you move to coaching.

And over time, when they get more and more experienced, you're moving further away from providing high-directional steps, and much more into that coaching. And eventually, when they're an expert, they're an expert Java programmer, you need to back off, you know? You'll get to a point where, Okay, how can I support you now? What new skills do you want to learn?

You don't want to be getting into them about asking them how they do their job in terms of job programming, it's more, how can I support you going forward? Now, what's interesting, if you do this the wrong way around, you are going to put people off, you might even get a resignation. So for example, if I went to an expert and said, Hey, how I want you to do this is, do this, then do this, then do this, step one, two, three, they're probably going to resign.

James: Yep. And this happens a lot, doesn't it?

Lloyd: Yeah.

Think 10-pin bowling

James: You know, I'm thinking, the perfect sort of metaphor for this, I think, is probably 10-pin bowling, and the bumper rails, or even their little ramp, you know, if it's your first time bowling and you're a kid, they use that little ramp that you just put the ball on and it rolls down and you can knock over some pins.

And as you get a little more advanced, they'll let you use the bumper rails. So now the ramp goes. Now you can toss the ball down the alley, and it can't go in the gutter. It's like, it's protected from going in the gutter. So you're possibly going to knock a pin down. And then when you get good enough, you take the bumpers out.

And now, you've got to get that ball down to the end without falling in the gutter. That's expert level, right? If you bring an expert 10 pin bowler, a world champion into the thing and you say, Here's your ramp, right? I want you to use the ramp first. That's how we do things here. I can imagine he's going to be upset about that.

Lloyd: And the flipside is true, too, right? If you went to the beginner and said right, safety guard's down. Go for it, go nuts. What are you going to do? Show us.

James: Go for it. Yeah, no ramp, no bumpers, like everything's going in the gutter.

Lloyd: It's like saying, Hey, the server's melted down. Can you sort it out?

James: That's right. And these employers, they're like, Oh, every single ball is in the gutter. I'm like, Well, so, what was your training process like? How did you build people up? You know, did you interview them and find out if they've ever bowled before? Like, do they have the right equipment? You know, how are they going to do it with a ping pong ball? They need a bowling ball, right?

So there's so many things that translate for this metaphor. And I think we've got to look at each member in our team and have a look at what kind of output and result we're trying to achieve here and just get a calibration. Where are they up to? Are they ramp? Are they bumpers? Are they free bowlers? Have they got the right equipment?

Have you given them a good training schedule? Are you over restricting people who are actually good? I remember this one clearly, because at Mercedes-Benz, they had a sales standard they wanted to roll out. And what I learned is that anyone who's a super high achiever does not like to be brought down to a standard level. That's just putting the brakes on. The handbrakes.

So eagles do not like to be tethered to a leash. The turkeys, they could care less, you know, like they can lift them up to the level of a seagull, they'd be happy. But an eagle doesn't want to downgrade.

Lloyd: The eagle doesn't want to be tethered.

James: They do not.

Lloyd: Turkeys don't mind.

"If you've gotten high performers, let them high perform, get the hell out of their way."

— JAMES SCHRAMKO

James: So if you've gotten high performers, let them high perform, get the hell out of their way. I'd say the majority of my team are high performers. And I just get out of the way.

Lloyd: If someone wants to know more about this, I would say look up situational leadership. And the last framework that I saw on this was called SLII. So this exactly describes this framework, it's a really good one. But it's describing exactly what we're talking about. So something people can take away there and look at later.

Who is Lloyd?

James: I thought you were going to say, go and get Lloyd's book, nine ways to...

Lloyd: No. Well, look, you could absolutely get my book.

James: Look at that. 9 Ways to Leave Your Day-to-Day Operations, it's at virtualdoo.com or on Amazon. Congratulations on that book, by the way.

Lloyd: Thank you very much.

James: Actually, once I asked you to describe yourself, and you didn't have an answer for me, and you said you'd get back to me, I'm going to put you on the spot. I'm getting back to you.

Lloyd: Okay, okay. Well, I would say I'm persistent. You know, I think you need to - if you're running a business...

James: I will vouch for that. [laughs]

Lloyd: Why obviously. I am persistent. Yep. I am persistent. Reliable.

James: Yeah, I'd vouch for that too.

Lloyd: I'd say if I say I'm going to do something, I'm going to get it done.

I would like to say fun. I think that's important. I mean, actually fun is one of my company core values because I want it to set the tone of how we engage with each other. We want to be with humor and connection. And that's also how I like to engage with my clients, too. So I would say that's my three words to describe myself. Thanks for bringing that up. I dodged that bullet before. [laughs]

James: Yeah. I mean, in the spirit of fun, I thought it'd be good to put you on the spot. I would say you're definitely persistent. But reliability is incredible. I feel like if there was one thing that most of the highest level visionaries possess, it's usually inconsistency, because they usually have highs and lows. They can be more moody, they can feel pressured and stressed sometimes and just duck or avoid.

The trouble with visionary behavior

I've noticed actually, the more and more successful some of my clients get, the more likely they are to start missing calls or rescheduling or some other hype, because they'll just reprioritize things on the fly. So that's where a role like yours brings that steady train track-like stability to the locomotive.

"What's the priority, what's going to move the needle the most? Let's get those top three down."

LLOYD THOMPSON

JAMES**SCHRAMKO**

Lloyd: Yeah, thank you. I mean, what I see with founders and business owners, is that they are these high visionaries who want to spin 100 plates. They get a bazillion ideas, they want to spin all of them. But guess what, you can only cook three at a time. So we have to say, Hey, what's the priority, what's going to move the needle the most? Let's get those top three down. Let's cook them, let's get them done. And then we'll move to the next, and the next, and the next.

James: It's obvious to see why they're having trouble with team members. The most conservative, safety-oriented structure-desiring team member is going to be completely confused by that behavior. They don't understand erratic, they don't understand swinging, oscillating themes, trying to take on more. It's very stressful, it can create anxiety.

That's why you need that middle medium. A lot of people, I think they just need to plug in an operator. This probably would solve a lot of their problems, and then have the operator go through this episode and understand how to deal with the team. So they're just dealing with the operator.

Leading your team by example

Lloyd: I completely agree. And I'll come back to that. But what you've done there is you gave me a nice segue there to talk about the second type of coaching. So we've talked about conscious coaching. The second thing I would call it, subconscious coaching. And so this is about leading by example.

And for example, if your team come to you with a problem, and you keep giving them the answer, you're training them to do that. And so what can they do? Like, you need to change. And if for example, you've got your company core values, and you're not adhering to those core values yourself, then guess what, like the boss isn't doing it, like he doesn't believe it, or she doesn't believe in them. How do you expect them to? And that reminds me of - I worked with this business and they had 10 core values. And 10 is too many in my opinion.

James: So probably about five or six too many.

Lloyd: Yeah. Three to five, I think, is great. But if I asked that founder like, Hey, can you recite the 10 core values of your business? I actually doubt they could, so is an employee going to? Absolutely no chance. And so, if you're going to say you've got three to five core values, you've got to stick by them yourself, you've got to be practicing what you preach.

And on this topic, if you're having a problem where people aren't coming to you with solutions, well maybe you need a core value in there about having batteries included, or initiative or ownership. I've got one in there around ownership, and that's where I'm advising people, this is something we really want, we really want people to own it, take it away to the end, drive the solutions, and we're there to support you. So that's really important.

Anyway, what I'm talking about is I want to talk about this guy who had 10 core values. And they had a core value, humans first organization. And while I was there, there was one thing that came up. And they were using this tool to track time. Okay, it's important to track time, I actually don't track time, I actually just ask people to give me updates on what the outputs are, because that's what I'm interested in. But they were using a tool to track time. And that's quite common. I don't have an issue with that. But this was doing screen recording of what people were doing at their computers.

James: That is very common. It's one of the first questions we get in our recruitment agency, which is visionfind.com, is what tool do you recommend for screen capture time logging? That evokes a strong emotion in me, a negative emotion, because I'm like, What the hell? You know, like, how do you expect someone to want to enjoy working for you? I would hate working for you.

Lloyd: I remember this founder said, Hey, I saw on the video, this guy was watching Netflix. What do you think of that? And I said, Okay, but what was this person's outputs like? Were the outputs good? The output is good. Yeah, but I don't feel like I want to pay this guy good money when he's watching Netflix. I'm like, If they're watching Netflix, and the output is good, carry on. Like I don't know, you know, the output is what I'm interested in.

James: Yeah, it's like people are worried about the wrong thing. I break it down even more simply than that. It's, how much do I bring in, in revenue? And how much do I pay out in team costs? Right? And if there's a surplus, that's step one. If the team cost amount seems about right, and we're able to generate that revenue off it, then I just don't want to mess with that too much. I don't want to save 10 percent or 20 percent by being an asshole, right? I don't care.

You know what, I'll even break it even simpler. We know what people do. You don't have to put screen software onto the computer to know that people are doing banking, or checking a Netflix video here or there, or posting to social media. It would be really weird if they didn't.

Lloyd: Well, it's just going to lead to a really demotivated team. If you've got a really demotivated team, how do you expect them to be, Oh, hey, I've got these great ideas. They're just going to be watching the clock, like, when will this end? It's going to absolutely kill batteries included or whatever we're calling taking the initiative. So from my side, don't do that. And in that case, it was definitely not a human's first organization, if you're then screen recording what people are doing.

James: I know a lot of people game in the Philippines, it's quite a cultural thing. There are some advantages though. Like if a website crashes at like, 11 at night on a weekend, the gamer is probably sitting on their computer right then and there, and they get a little alert. That's why I don't care about what time of the day they work or recording screens. That's ridiculous. It really is outrageous that the same person would then complain about the people not thinking themselves, you're not encouraging them to want to.

When the coaching doesn't work…

Lloyd: Well, let's say that if it's still not working, like if all of this coaching, conscious coaching, subconscious coaching has all been done, what can you do next? And so first of all, I'd really question yourself. You know, are you really the problem? Have you done the coaching, have you really been leading by example? Because if you haven't, then the problem is probably still you.

If you really have been doing that, then the second thing I would be doing is you could list down your team. If you really got those three to five core values you really live by, list out your team, put the core values against their names, and go through and see who is living by those core values which you've set. And if you're finding that they're not following most of those, then you really need to question your team and think, are these the right people for my business?

James: Yeah, you should hire by core values, lead by core values, review by core values.

Lloyd: Feedback by core values.

James: Exit by core values. I've had people exit based on failing a core value. One of the very last people to leave my organization was many years ago, it fell under the core value of integrity. And I didn't need to know what they were doing on their screen to know that they weren't doing the work, because it wasn't forthcoming. It just, it didn't appear.

And when I dug deeper, I found out there was a personal situation that was interfering with the capacity to work, which was taking a priority over my work, and it kind of breached our fair day's work for a fair day's pay mandate. That's all I ask, a fair day's work for a fair day pay. And in this case, the discussion we had was, Look, I feel like the work that we're paying for is taking a backseat to this personal situation.

And they said, Yes, I know, that's true. And I feel bad about it. And I said, But it's something that I can't continue to sponsor, right? I'm not sponsoring your personal situation, it's something you'll need to deal with. But I also, you know, I need to get the work done that I'm paying for, you know, just on a macro level, on a big picture view. I'm not just sending money for nothing, because that's taking an opportunity for someone who would be prepared to do that work. I need the work done, right?

So if there's a massive hole in the bucket, I'm not going to keep tipping water in it. So we came to the conclusion that it's not going to work.

Where a DOO comes in

Lloyd: And none of this is easy. I mean, I've just talked you through a lot of coaching. And if you the founder doesn't have the time to spend that time with the team and get that right, then guess what, maybe you need someone else to do it. That's what a Director of Operations is for.

James: Well, I see that. It is easy, just hire VirtualDOO. Now, I should point out this point, there's a couple of ways you can go about that. One is you hire VirtualDOO to just do it forever. The other way is you hire VirtualDOO with a plan to bridge across to building your own infrastructure, and them not being needed anymore. I think that's pretty cool how you do that.

Lloyd: We are month to month. We're not there to entrench ourselves in the business. We're actually there to enable the team. So we can be there as a place where you need to put in some decent structure, get the teams running smoothly, help enable the team.

And then if you want to bring in a full time DOO, that's it, we're there to help. We can support them in that transition. So that's another option. And also, we still do audits. So if you need someone to have a look and do an assessment of your business and see where the gaps are, that's something also we can offer.

James: That's a valuable thing, it's one of the most popular things that service providers who I recommend supply. It's like, let me tell you what it looks like, pay a little bit of money. And then what you do after that is up to you. You can get help.

Lloyd: Yeah, you can do it yourself.

James: Or do it yourself, it's fine. I believe in that. I've had audits in many formats. You know, even when I hired a surf coach, just to tell me which areas I should focus on to improve. And even the process, that was cool, because when I first hired him, I wasn't fit enough to last as long as the lesson. [laughs] We're talking a long time ago here.

And so that was like, Hey, I need to get fitter before I get the rest of my lessons going. So it was such a growth curve. If you're prepared to face reality, if you're prepared to get the truth, there are people out there who will deliver it for you. I mean, it's what I do for my clients on a regular basis. I just, I'd reveal to them reality. And then they get to decide what they do after that.

Lloyd, been an absolute pleasure. Thank you for coming along and sharing today. Hopefully, there's some really useful tips there, how to get your team to think, or how to hire someone who can help you get your team to think.

Lloyd: Yeah, I mean if you get this all happening, then the results are great, you can get out of the business, and you can shake the tree for new business, and you can be working on your strategy and your passions, and then now you have a sellable business because it's not you.

James: Yeah, or a great lifestyle business like me. I've managed to carve out a good life for myself with the help of my team. I cannot do it without my team. And I've built that team, the relationship with the team, the trust with the team, developed the skills with that team. And when I say team, we are a team.

We each do our bit. I do the podcasts and the coaching and the mentoring. And I go and find the deals that we put together, our partnerships or whatever, or affiliate promotions. And they help me get it all going on the other side of it. So as a combination, you know, we have a symbiotic relationship. I bring in the money and everyone gets paid, and I deliver the fulfillment, and they just glue everything else together behind the scenes in their own time, in their own way.

Lloyd: That's a perfect scenario.

James: Yeah, I love it. It's sustainable. Alright, thanks, Lloyd. This is episode 982. We'll put up some show notes at JamesSchramko.com. See you next time.

Lloyd: Thanks a lot, James. See yah.

Build the team you and your business need