



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

Are You Giving Your Team Permission?

Shannon Waller: Would you like your team to take more initiative and to be more self-managing? But, are they a little nervous on how to do that because they don't want to make mistakes? Stay tuned for our conversation about giving your team permission and how to set up some really great ground rules so that both you and they are really confident about taking action. Stay tuned.

Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success. Today, what I want to talk about is really giving your teams permission to take action and how to do that in a way that empowers them, and also doesn't scare the pants off you. There can be a lot of trepidation, let me put it this way, when you say, "Oh, just go to it." Then, your team does things that you did not expect, which clearly steps outside the boundaries of what you were thinking. How do you possibly make this work?

Now, there are really two parts to this. One is we want our teams to be self-managing, I'm hoping. That means you're freed up to do new things, create new value, find new ways of moving the business ahead. Otherwise, you're stuck making every single decision, in which case, why do you actually have a team? So, there's that.

That's one part of it. That's why you want people able to make really good, clear decisions that are kind of in alignment with what needs to happen. But sometimes you might be wondering, "Why aren't people taking more initiative? Why aren't they stepping ahead?" This is part of having an entrepreneurial attitude. One of the things that I've realized is that for a lot of leaders, especially owners, entrepreneurs, visionaries, is that we tend to ask for forgiveness, not permission. We can forget that other people on our team need that permission. So if that's not your orientation, you can feel weird. You can feel awkward to have to go and tell someone, "Well, this is your job. You're supposed to be doing this." They're like, "Oh, okay. Just wanted to make sure." Sometimes they'll ask you 2, 3, 4, or 5 times. They need to be reassured that it is okay for them to take this action, and this is what is really important for us to understand, because they don't want to screw up.

They don't want to make a mistake. They don't want to do harm. We appreciate where they're coming from. It's not that they don't want to take responsibility, it's that they actually don't want to mess up. That's important. It's important for them. They don't want to screw up anything with the business. They don't want to do harm to one of your clients, or customers. They really want to do it right, and that's where this drive comes from. Really understanding that that is your team's desire, to be correct, to not screw something up, that some of them are not natural risk takers. They're going to assess and weigh all the different considerations, that I know I would not, before taking action. It can look like things are slow because they're doing that. Now, I actually appreciate that because sometimes I'm going to jump off the bridge and not check what's beneath me, or whether or not the parachute's working.



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So having someone check out those risky endeavors, go "Yes, this is a great risk," or "Hmm, there's something unforeseen here. Let's talk about it," can be super, super helpful. There can be this really big dichotomy between the two different ways of operating.

Forgiveness/permission is one way to talk about it.

So, what I want to share with you is some new thoughts, things I've learned, things I've done, that have really gotten more solid in my thinking about how to do this in a way that works for you and works for your team. Part of the inspiration is from the latest book that I've been recording with Dan, which is called *The Geometry for Staying Cool and Calm in the Age of Rage*. That's part of the subtitle. I'm excited about this because he really comes up with three things, the second of which is relevant to our conversation today.

So, number one guideline, or precept I think it's called, is "Everything's Made Up." Number two, "Nobody's in Charge," and number three, "Life's Not Fair." So, that's provocative enough. Go read the book. It's phenomenal, but the one that really struck me is that nobody's in charge. Out of our conversation, what emerged... Well, Dan says, "No one person's in charge, but the rules are in charge." He was talking like an umpire in a baseball game. So in a baseball game, it's not the ump that's in charge. He's not making up the rules as he goes. He's enforcing the rules. He's applying the rules. He's making sure people adhere to the rules. It's the rules that are in charge. For me, who's not a natural rule follower or lover, this was a really fun thought. I was thinking about, "Okay. Traffic lights, those are rules of the road so we don't crash into each other and harm one another."

And then the other one that got me particularly excited was our company guidelines, our core values. We actually have called them ground rules before, and this is the way that we will operate. And then, why, I already know this, core values are so critical because they tell people what to do and how to behave when you're not there. So, I already knew that. That's what rules are for. That's what guidelines are for.

Another management example came up last week on our team. It was like, "Oh, okay. Well, what are the guidelines that people know when they're successful, and when they're not?" If the rules are not clear, then everyone's milling around, and decision making goes down to the levels of opinion. That is not particularly helpful. My opinion on what makes a good whatever could be different than someone else's, could be different than someone else's. There's no guideline there. There's no structure.

Someone said, "Well, I did all of these things that we have aligned on, and therefore, this is good to go." Now, "Can it be improved?" "Yes." At least we can get out the door and test it on the marketplace and see what works. Otherwise, it just devolves into this opinion. Then, the person with the most power in the situation tends to win, which is not always the best idea. So I'm like, "Hmm, this might put me in favor of rules."



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Now, the other thing I'm very clear on, I'm totally fine with rules that I've been a part of making up. They're my rules. Completely cool with that. So this is why I like to get everyone involved, who's partaking in the decision making, to be a part of the conversation about the rules.

I do not accept rules blindly. I question them all the time. I've been a rebel since grade school so this is not new behavior for me. But I need to know why. I need to know, "Okay. How does this apply in this situation? Is it a smart rule? Was it designed for circumstances that have changed, that aren't true anymore?" So, we need to keep them current. Getting everyone aligned and involved, who needs to pay attention to those critical rules, is absolutely vital. This is not something that just a few people make up, and then impose to the rest of the organization. No. Let's get the key stakeholders, the people who are actually implementing these, to be in on it. I guarantee they're going to come up with some creativity in ways of doing things that you had not thought of. So, please do not shut down the creativity of your team. Let them contribute to that.

When you actually do figure out your guidelines, and I'm going to recommend a tool to help you do this, it's kind of amazing what happens. First of all, you empower your team. They get better. They get smarter. They understand the full scope of the situation. So, say it's a project management situation, "What are your standards in terms of timing and delivery and quality of work?" If you're doing something in social media, "What makes a good social media post?" "If we check these off, 'Great.' Then something can go out the door." "Can it be improved?" "Yes," again, but at least you've got something that can go. If you've got a piece of writing or content that you're publishing, again, "What are the guidelines?" For me, it's always, "What voice does it have to be in? What's Dan's voice? What's my voice?" If it checks these boxes, if it's direct, with love, if it gives clear, concrete information, if it provides a great story and example, and it provides some kind of a "Go forward, take action" message, it does all those things, those are my checkboxes. Right?

It could be long or short. It doesn't really matter. Well, I love Joe Polish's line. He said, "A piece can never be too long. It can only be too boring." So, as long as it's not boring, we're good. Then you kind of really have a way to mitigate those personality conflicts. Power struggles in a company, I'm sorry, that leads to politics. That's for bigger companies, that's for corporations. Let's keep our entrepreneurial spirit by having clear guidelines for how we want to take action. Check off those boxes, get alignment on those, and then go. That will be how you speed up your productivity by how you get more things out there.

I was reading a great article yesterday on how much faster ChatGPT makes things. It does the first 80% for you, and then you can finalize the rest of it. The whole point is you can double your content output, but it still has to follow those guidelines. If you have those guidelines, you'll be confident, your team will be confident about what it's putting out.



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So, "How in Lord's name do you set the guidelines? Is this like a two-hour meeting where you hash over every piece of everything that you create?" "Mm, no." That's not my favorite way of doing it. What I would do is for every type of thing that you're doing, and by the way, a lot of this stuff will be transferable, especially in writing, copy, content, that sort of thing, is that you pull out an Impact Filter. This is a Strategic Coach tool downloadable from strategiccoach.com, just give us your contact info, let us know whether or not you're an entrepreneur.

You can use this tool, and it is brilliant. We do have what we call a Fast Filter, which is basically, "What's the purpose of this particular project? What's the best outcome if it goes well?" So again, think of project management process that you have, or content, then, "What's the risk result if it doesn't?" Then, "What are the five success criteria?" So, it has to do this, this, this, and this. This is what it has to look like. This is the graphic, this is the tone, this is the punchiness of it, this is the type of picture we like to use, these are the colors, whatever your success criteria are, and then that's what you use as your checklist.

I have to say, checklists give incredible confidence to people. If you've not read the short, short book by Atul Gawande, you can look that up. A-T-U-L G-A-W-A-N-D-E, I believe. It's called The Checklist Manifesto. Brilliant book, brilliant book about the importance of checklists, in the hospital, pilots flying airplanes, for getting your stuff out the door properly. You know, what I love about it, when I was reading the book, I'm like, "Oh, my gosh. The Impact Filter helps you figure that out." It includes context. It includes your "Why?"

The full Impact Filter is purpose, importance, ideal outcome, best and worst, and then eight success criteria. So, if you want to do the full version or the Fast Filter, both are phenomenal. Getting together in a group to figure out, with again, the key players, which are usually three to four if you have an effective team, is really figuring out, "Okay. What does success look like for us? What does failure look like?" That's your worst case scenario. "Why is this important? What are our success criteria? How do we know when something's been successful, or not?"

When you get on the same page, all of a sudden you've got knowledge transfer, you've got wisdom transfer, and you've got context not just content. That is key for actually creating that Self-Managing Team, having people be empowered, helping people learn and grow. Then, when everyone moves up, or shifts over, to whatever new opportunities your expanding company is providing, then you've trained them that that's what they need to do with their team as well. You've trained them that to really get on the same page, "Set the ground rules," aka success criteria, and "Take action to make progress."

So, this is a very powerful, clear way to give permission to set the ground rules. Then, watch your team fly because I think you'll have a lot of fun seeing what they come up with. It'll be certainly different than what you did, but it can be better. You'll be confident that, because you are part of the making up the ground rules, it still sticks. They're not violating anything. You will



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not devolve to that level of simply personality, "Well, it has to be this because it's my way, and I'm in charge," which is not a great way to lead, certainly not a great way to manage.

So, this was my insight, lately, that I was so excited to share with you. Who knew that I'd be so excited about rules? I think it's totally fun, but also just respecting that other people need permission. This is a very powerful, empowering way to help do that. So, love to hear your thoughts on this particular conversation. Please let me know at questions@strategiccoach.com. And as always, here's to your team success.