

Effective Teamwork Transcript

Episode 7 – Startup Survival Podcast

By Peter Harrington

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Speaker 1 ([00:05](#)):

Hi and welcome to this startup survival podcast. All about effective teamwork. My name's Peter Harrington. And in this episode, I am joined by two startup entrepreneurs who will be sharing their recent experience of managing a team through this challenging crisis. Prepare yourself for some invaluable teamworking takeaways, lessons and insights.

Speaker 1 ([00:34](#)):

For startups who want to grow or scale, building an effective team is a critical part of the challenge. Whether employees or contractors, people must be recruited, selected, trained, managed, and placed within a team where they can hopefully maximize that promise and potential. It all sounds quite simple. Unfortunately, in practice, the simple can quickly turn complex, and that's why a dose of easy to digest theory is a welcome tonic. Grounded theory helps to straighten out the tangled threads that can often strangle effective teamwork. Meaningful theory makes the complex, simpler and shines a much needed light on key issues.

Speaker 1 ([01:22](#)):

Back in the early nineties, my first startup was growing and I remember asking a teamwork trainer to come and help us make sense of our brave new evolving world. Our team was made up of different people with different backgrounds and different personalities. Greetings over, the trainer Margaret, sat us in a circle and immediately introduced a four stage theoretical process for team productivity, namely forming, storming, norming, and performing. If you are unfamiliar with this process, let me shed some light because these catchy words are particularly pertinent at this moment in time. And I'll come back to them later. So, forming is when a new team of people develop emotional connections with one another. Storming signals the end of the honeymoon 'Nice to get to know you' period. Prepare for the rise of confidence. Prepare for the rise of conflict. Strong leadership is typically needed to get through the storm, especially if big personalities have to be harmonized, but storming is also when people generate authentic relationships with one another.

Speaker 1 ([02:31](#)):

As long as the team finds and recognizes a common positive intent, the storming settles and the norming starts. And when this happens, progress results. And if that progress is positive so norming turns to performing. That's the place you want your start-up team to be, if you seek to grow or scale. This four stage model first proposed by Bruce Tuckman in 1965 has always stayed with me because it has worked over three decades. And having employed over a thousand people in different companies, I've witnessed its successful application many times. And that said, when it comes to teams, I've made many mis-judgments and mistakes. And so my measured dose of theory is also

accompanied by several sizable slugs of hard lesson medicine. And for the past 15 years, I've also led a growing ed tech global team. And everyone involved has worked remotely from their own day one. In many ways, this team has been very well prepared for this crisis.

Speaker 1 ([03:40](#)):

To demonstrate what effective teamwork means my plan for this episode is to listen and learn from my special guests and mix their recent practical experience with a few more grains of theory before adding a spice of personal understanding. So very shortly, I'll be talking with company directors, Joey Tate, and Kevin Hammond from Ampersand Consulting. Ampersand is an IT and technical recruitment company based in central London. But before we journey there, I must once again, thank even more flag wavers or rooftop shouters and trumpet blowers. Without your heart-warming podcast promotion this production makes little sound or sense at all. So grateful recognition goes to the Tasmanian wanderer and unreasonable adventure. Colin Jones. Willard Kitchen, Laura Good, John Nogrady, Nigel Adams, Kadeza Begum, Simon Krystman, Jake Shaw, Michael Clouser, Greg Monterrosa, Andrew Hirst, Tom Bowden, Lesley Scott, Vikas Goel, Sunil Samarth. Guillaume De Smedt and Sandra Taylor. Like previous interviews, neither Kevin nor Joey joined me in the studio and Duncan, the producer, was distant again. Interviewing Joey and Kevin was particularly important for this series because of that distinctive startup circumstances. Not long before lockdown, this entrepreneurial duo had taken the bold step of moving their disruptive recruitment business into the very heart of London. Their team got bigger, their costs got bigger, their risks got bigger and suddenly business stopped. So I started by asking Kevin to describe how lockdown events unfolded at ampersand.

Speaker 2 ([05:31](#)):

We remember it well, it was first of March, and it's likely to be a date I'll never forget. So we called a business, a business wide meeting. We explained that as of tomorrow, we'd all be working from home, which at the time for us was a huge call because we'd never done it before. As a business leader, you're expected to know the answers to all the questions that you're asked, but the reality of that was that we just didn't.

Speaker 2 ([05:58](#)):

We had a pretty good idea that we might be aware from your office for a long time, but the reality was that we didn't know whether we'd ever actually return to the office. Initially that's a frightening thought because we'd worked extremely hard to create a busy, fun sales environment, but ultimately we were about to leave it behind. We also quickly found that there isn't a manual or a script for dealing with a global pandemic. So it doesn't matter whether you're a global PLC turning over 4 billion pounds a year or a disruptive technology startup, everyone has to deal with uncertainty

Speaker 1 ([06:33](#)):

When you are running any size of business, uncertainty is rarely your friend, even if the business is just you. Not knowing whether you can pay yourself and pay the bills can be very unsettling. But when you have a team, the stress and anxiety of uncertainty is multiplied because your thoughts naturally turn to the impact on your colleagues, your employees, and your contractors. Their financial and personal welfare depend on the income you provide. So I asked Joey about the impact of lockdown on the team.

Speaker 3 ([07:07](#)):

It immediately led to some really tough situations for, for all parties. For example, we had to let down multiple candidates who'd been offered and accepted quarter of a million pound salaries and handed in their notice that, with previous employers. To give you some context to how we were impacted straight away that month, our pipeline dropped 80% as a result of, of the uncertainty in the market.

Speaker 1 ([07:31](#)):

And I imagine difficult decisions were inevitable.

Speaker 2 ([07:35](#)):

Unfortunately, as business leaders, we had to make some tough decisions very quickly. So we did let some junior staff go. And then, when the government announced the funding scheme, we took advantage of that and we placed a number of staff on Furlough as well.

Speaker 1 ([07:49](#)):

So tell me about your team and the office life you were all suddenly leaving behind.

Speaker 3 ([07:56](#)):

Yeah, of course we we actually just moved into a brand new office that we had carried out bespoke in central London. So we're in central London, just around the corner from Tower Bridge and Monument. So a great location for what is a really fresh, vibrant workforce. So the office, as you'd expect is filled with everything that you could want to make it comfortable: Pool table, drinks, fridge, which gets used, PlayStation. And, and we also had an artist come in to put up some bespoke artwork to really make it feel like, like ours. Because we want people to enjoy being there and enjoy the downtime that they, that they have with us. Luckily as part of an exercise to grow the business up, if you like over the, over the past 12 months, we had upgraded all of our tech, all of our phone systems and databases and moved everything into the cloud. So when it came to shutting the office, it was a case of plug and in play, making that transition from office to home work and seamless.

Speaker 1 ([09:02](#)):

So you sound like you were well set up for lockdown. Were there any purchases or changes you made once team members had to isolate and work from home?

Speaker 3 ([09:12](#)):

As a business? We were already using video platforms for a number of years, but we felt that it was crucial to buy into so invest in a number of different collaboration tools. So we immediately, bought a business wide Slack account, which proved invaluable as well as a business Zoom account, which has been really beneficial for us as well.

Speaker 1 ([09:34](#)):

And with all the technical and communication systems set up and working well, what team management issues did you find yourself prioritizing?

Speaker 2 ([09:42](#)):

As a startup business you work, you work long hours. Officially our staff work from half eight, to half, half five, but as most people know in recruitment, the culture is one whereby you get out what you put in. So structure became so important. We actually did a really exciting webinar with a chap called Ash Dykes, who is a, an extreme athlete and explorer. And he gave us a great quote. He said, you can't always be motivated, but you can always be disciplined, which all of a sudden became hugely significant when working from home, especially when a number of our employees are living in a one bedroom flat or in house shares in London, which that can be, become really, really difficult to manage on your own. We also immediately empowered the staff, give them accountability for driving daily, hourly, and sessions and sprints, which is ultimately how we work as a business.

Speaker 1 ([10:41](#)):

I was fascinated to hear Kevin highlight the same quote about motivation and discipline that John Lo had referenced in the leadership episode. And for me to learn about the application of issues, such as structure, empowerment and accountability suggested high levels of leadership and trust within the organization. But I was keen to understand how the changes Joey and Kevin made impacted on teamworking.

Speaker 3 ([11:09](#)):

Absolutely fundamentally collaboration has improved no end the ability that we have to train as in as increased, we can still listen into calls. We can still coach and train our staff. And also because of the reduced numbers, the structure became even flatter with massively increased accountability, which we'll be honest, it, it took a little while for that to catch fire and we found it quite difficult to drive initially because of it being so fundamentally different to the office culture that we created and that we were used to what has evolved. It's increased our inputs with the view that in a flat market like this you'll need to do twice as much work to often get the same result as you were previously doing it in a buoyant economy. So we we openly told all of the guys that we work with, that we wanted to become better leaders coming out of this than we were going in.

Speaker 2 ([12:06](#)):

And we pushed them to, to want the same. Essentially our view is that tough times don't last tough people do. And that was the, the message that we drove and it's, and it's been received really well. And coming back to inputs, this is what we've focused on massively, and we've fundamentally challenged people to do more and expect more of themselves. I mentioned Slack earlier in the conversation and it's a platform that we use every single day from a trading perspective. We've also returned the services of our external trainer, a chap called Trevor Pinder, who is a fantastic recruitment trainer. And we also run three video calls at the same time every single day. So we would have a business wide call at half eight in the morning at one o'clock at lunch. And then at five o'clock at the end of the day. And on these calls, we talk about accountability. So we want to set out the objectives there and then to review achievements of each sprint or each session that we've done.

Speaker 1 ([13:07](#)):

Making tough decisions in business is rarely easy. Ambitious entrepreneurs always like to see their ventures growing rather than moving backwards, but decisions that lead to the departure of

colleagues and lots of sales rarely do feel like backwards steps and they take their toll emotionally. And after I asked my remaining questions of Joey and Kevin, I'll be sharing how our feelings affect team working in ways we don't often appreciate. So let's get back to the guys and find out what teamworking lessons were learned. And resultant changes made as a consequence of the crisis.

Speaker 3 ([13:45](#)):

Firstly, we were closer to the business than we ever have been before. We completely dissected it top to bottom. Finances, client revenue analysis the right individual core activities, cash flow, and forecasting, even, even the brand itself. So we're much, much closer to understanding the nuances and the intricacies of, of how our business actually operates. We've given the business much more accountability as well. So the team with accountability has absolutely found a different gear without allowing distractions within a higher level of focus. And I've really embraced that, enjoyed it. And it's worked. Also a really key one for us has been resilience. Our promise to everyone at the beginning of this, this pandemic was that we would come out a better business, better recruiters, better leaders, and the mental strength taken to continue a fast paced job like this in a flat market has been remarkable. And everyone that we've had at the coal face, if you like as, as really showing their true colours and their true character.

Speaker 2 ([14:57](#)):

And being able, being able to bring to life what it is we sell. So recruitment solutions to the, a diverse portfolio of clients in different senses, different industries has been hugely important as well. That could be in pure sales ability and getting your market and correct, or an offering a new product suite, all of which are things that we've done during this pandemic.

Speaker 3 ([15:20](#)):

It showed us the importance of having people that want to be on our journey and be proud of it and understand that part of it. I think in this situation people are grateful that they are in work and that they're part of something. And when we've built something that we're proud of, you can see people also building in pride and, and having a real desire to take that to market.

Speaker 1 ([15:52](#)):

As he speaks, you can almost hear the turnaround pride in Joey's voice. Bear in mind, this business is run by two young directors who have no previous startup experience. Through hard work they've built their venture, taken a risk and committed to a lease in the most expensive place in Europe. According to Statista research, the average annual rent in London for prime office space is close to 500 pounds per square foot. To put that in perspective, just to rent an office, the size of an old red telephone box would set you back about 5,000 pounds a year. But back to Joey and Kevin, what did they learn about themselves as team leaders?

Speaker 3 ([16:37](#)):

The first place my mind went when you asked that question was, was tough decisions, tough decisions are necessary. As a, as a business leader and entrepreneur they're, they're not always easy. They're not always nice to make. And it's not, they're not the decisions you imagine yourself making when you start a business because the, the impact of people's lives and that's off, but they're necessary to drive a business forward and to, to make sure you survive as a business from a personal

point of view, I've learned the we can, we can get through anything. I think Kevin and myself have driven the business really well. And I think a large part of that is the support network that I've got personally behind me, my family and my friends that give me a really solid platform to go and make those tough decisions, knowing that I come home to a really solid environment.

Speaker 1 ([17:29](#)):

And what about you Kev?

Speaker 2 ([17:32](#)):

I think the fact that we've worked from home now for a period of time, I'm 36 years of age. I've never worked from home previously. I was scared of the fact that I'd miss out on the lively buzz of a sales floor, because I'm still very much a sales person at heart, but the pandemic has shown that we can work from home, but, but also everybody has been in a very similar position and it's, it's meant that we've had the opportunity to get even closer to the customers that we work with than we ever have been previously. And we've always understood the importance of building rapport and ensuring that the people that we work with trust what we do and trust that we do it well for them. Going back to episode three of, of your, your podcast series, Pete, but that's been a really big learn for me during, during what has been naturally a very difficult period.

Speaker 1 ([18:25](#)):

Kevin, Joey, listening to your adventure through this crisis has been so insightful and I wish you the best of luck going forward. I am certain your team is in very good, very capable hands. Thanks, ever so much, Pete. We really enjoyed that. Thanks for inviting us on and all the best to everyone out there.

Speaker 2 ([18:43](#)):

Thank you so much for inviting us on. We have fully enjoyed it and wish you the best of luck moving forward.

Speaker 1 ([18:54](#)):

Kev and Joey's story provides an invaluable practical backdrop for analyzing how teams work effectively. Let's go back to the forming storming norming and performing process. I mentioned earlier. A planned relocation of any business involves change, but moving an office team to a remote online team without notice is a storming process that has the potential for conflict upset and disharmony. Storming requires leaders to have processes in place that help to identify new problems quickly and then know what to do about them. And we know if the storming part of the journey is handled well, fresh, authentic relationships are generated. And this is exactly what Kevin and Joe reported and then new online office world, but working through the storm is only one part of effective teamwork management to be highly effective. Team leaders need to anticipate the problems, which means knowing their origins. So ready yourself for another dose of theory. Patrick Lencioni used the popular triangle shape to identify in impact order the five key dysfunctional areas of a team. At the apex at the top of the triangle, Lencioni highlights inattention to results and why people who don't focus on results often prioritize personal achievement over group success and moving down the tier triangle.

Speaker 1 ([20:19](#)):

He identifies lack of accountability, lack of commitment and fear of conflict as being the three other areas. But the main issue I want to go to the issue aligning the base of Lencioni's triangle is the big one. And that's lack of trust. Without trust people don't ask questions. People don't open up and people don't share. As I've learned over the past 15 years, when people all work remotely, you have no choice, but to trust what your colleagues are doing, and then let them get on with it. For many people, trusting isn't easy or natural, it may be an easy word to use, but team leaders can fall into the trap of micromanaging, especially in a virtual office world. People micromanage because they want to know what people in that team are doing all the time, because they struggle to adjust to an environment where colleagues are not sat close by and micromanagement can easily spiral out of control in very little time.

Speaker 1 ([21:20](#)):

Let me share this true story from a virtual team, despite repeated attempts, a manager, let's call him Simon. Simon couldn't get hold of an online coworker. Lack of information, led Simon to create emotionally charged stories in his own head that impacted negatively on the person who wouldn't answer his calls. Unchecked. These stories quickly became fact in Simon's head and he soon built a rock solid case, adrenaline pumping and unable to manage the gestalt and certainty Simon zooms and Skypes. Once more for belt and braces Simon even reverts to the traditional phone call and left a message, but still no answer. Simon's rock solid case meant the physical frustration was fast becoming anger. Then two minutes later, the coworker called. Calmly she apologizes because the lengthy sales call she had highlighted on Slack at the beginning of the day had only just finished and good news for Simon, the client she was meeting, had just placed a large recurring order.

Speaker 1 ([22:21](#)):

It sounds crazy, but trust me, it happens and I've been Simon. If you've read the excellent and highly readable Chimp Paradox by professor Steve Peters. This example is a classic Chimp hijack situation. Reading Chimp Paradox gives you a better insight into the systems in the brain and how to control them, understanding how to control ourselves makes us better leaders and team players. Joey and Kevin talked about regular communication, shared goals, training, accountability, the significance of their flattening hierarchy and continuously working on rapport. All of these things build trust and helped the organization shift from office to online with relative ease. Covered in episode three trust is that all important invisible emotion that is the glue of life. And as I learned through an episode of the Simpsons, perhaps the most amazing theory source ever, trust is the key to motivation. And the goal oriented motivated group of people makes for a highly effective team.

Speaker 1 ([23:35](#)):

Moving on to the final learning point in this episode, in addition to trust, Joey and Kevin referred to other emotions they experienced: being scared, the importance of a caring home environment and building rapport are all quoted examples. Managing our own emotional state and the emotional state of others is a function of high performing teams. When the business storms, there are a range of hidden emotions that need to be continually monitored and managed in order to maintain team cohesiveness and effectiveness. This crisis, and specifically remote working have made effective teamworking, more challenging for some the opportunity to work independently, maybe attractive, but as Joey and Kevin said, they have colleagues living on their own in smaller apartments. As such the novelty of lockdown wears off. And the challenges associated with isolation and loneliness can

kick in. Crises often lead to working harder. But as Martin Summerfield said in episode two, it is okay. In fact, it's important to check in and ask about people's wellbeing.

Speaker 1 ([24:38](#)):

The challenge is the fact that our physical separation makes it more difficult to detect or appreciate how someone is truly feeling. We see people much less and many people prefer to keep their emotions in check and invisible. Anyway, as we heard from Joey and Kevin, keeping a good team together, that means communicating regularly, being open and honest about the stress issues associated with our circumstances is very important, but skills and knowledge are needed to handle sensitive conversations, building trust and rapport. So for men especially, opening up about their feelings also takes time. It's almost as difficult to have a conversation about feelings as it is to discipline someone. So to gain an insight into this complex subject and to learn tactics and strategies for managing people in difficult situations. I recommend you get vital conversations by Alec Grimsley.

Speaker 1 ([25:40](#)):

Joey said that making and communicating tough decisions was a key learning point for him. I recommend you buy this book and learn how amongst other things to address poor performance, be sensitive, handle difficult people and remain calm when delivering bad news vital conversations. It is a powerful read, but if you are still hungry for more insight and text material suggestions, let me share the book recommendation for this episode. At the heart of all effective teamwork and team management is the issue of emotional intelligence. And for me, the godfather of this subject is Daniel Goleman, hugely insightful and easy to digest. Daniel Goleman has written a whole library of material, but the book I suggest you get to help you apply his thinking with your team is working with emotional intelligence. It's a cracker that you can dip in and out of. And I guarantee you will always learn something new.

Speaker 2 ([26:45](#)):

Well, that's just about it for teamwork. The next episode, which is published on Monday, the 20th of July focuses on money management. And after that, I move on to international matters. Through all this mayhem your feedback is not just welcomed, it's needed. This is the first time I've ever dealt with a pandemic whilst in business. So please let me know your thoughts and questions via the Hitchhiker's guide to entrepreneurship blog. Or LinkedIn. I love to hear your views, whether it's good or get better. And finally, before we close, let's hear it for Kevin Hammond and Joey Tate, whose details are referenced on the blog page. Guys, thank you so much for sharing your experience. My name is Peter Harrington, and this has been your Startup Survival Podcast. Go well, stay safe and thank you.