



How To Improve The Performance Of Your Small Team



Kat Jarman takes project and team management tasks away from busy business owners so that they can do what they do best - be CEOs.



Kat Jarman

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to SuperFastBusiness.com. This is Episode 655. We'll be talking about how to get the most out of your team and free up your time, get yourself away from that burden of overload, overwhelm and chaos that inevitably comes as a business owner, especially as you're scaling. I've brought along a friend of mine, Kat Jarman. Welcome.

Kat: Thank you, I am a very long-time listener, so it's kind of weird and surreal being here, but I'm glad to be here.

James: Well, we do catch up fairly often these days, which is terrific. I remember meeting you at [Chris Ducker's](#) event in the Philippines several years ago. And we had a chat then about what you're up to. And I saw that you've been doing really good work behind the scenes with a few other clients of mine, helping them get out of their own way and optimize the teams that they had. And you and I've had a chance to work together recently, as your business is growing at a nice organic rate. It's called [YourOnlineTeam.com](#). Why don't you tell us a bit about what your business does and who it does it for?

When things become a hot mess...

Kat: Okay, so basically, we are an online business management. I guess you could call it an agency for entrepreneurs. So we help entrepreneurs that are probably, they might have been going for a few years now, they're earning some really good money. But everything's starting to become a little bit of a, we call it a hot mess. So perhaps their team has grown, maybe they have three, four, five, six virtual assistants that they are managing themselves on a daily basis. They've also got projects that they're trying to push along. Some of them have clients that they're trying to fulfill, and everything's just getting a little bit chaotic. So we come in on a retainer basis, I guess, every month, and help people untangle that. We like to say that we manage the nuts and bolts of someone's business so that they can focus on what they do best, which is being CEO.

James: Nice. And you started out just doing it yourself, and then over time, found some capable operators to come and join your team, and you turned it into an actual business.

Kat: I did, yes. So I started doing this business in 2016, just out of, it was an accident. I up until then had been running my own membership site, which you had something to do with teaching me how to do. And then I had my daughter, and being everything in my own business suddenly felt like a big deal. And I shut everything down and just started working for a couple of friends of mine in a project management slash operations management capacity. And I very quickly realized that there's only so many hours in a day, in a week, and I could be a lot more effective if I had people working with me. And one of my friends, Candace, she's been a virtual assistant for five or six years, she and I joined forces, and it's kind of just escalated from there. We have a lot of help and guidance from you along the way.

James: Oh, that's great. I love watching that from the sidelines and seeing the growth. Would you say that it's been helpful to be able to chat to me from time to time and ask questions as you scale?

Kat: Definitely. I think, with this business, I've gone through stages of imagining what it could actually be. And the first stage, it was just something to keep some income rolling in while I managed having a baby. And then talking to you, I realized, okay, hang on, I could have a small team that would help me serve my clients. And then the next stage after that was you telling me, "Well, you don't actually have to do the client work at all, if you choose not to. You could actually grow this another step further, turn it into an agency, train up an amazing team," who, they project manage better than I ever could, or did. And we have some really happy clients. So it was just having you along the way help me, like, move on to each step and then be able to see what the vision could be beyond that.

James: Perfect. I mean, I always see the vision of where someone can go sometimes before they do, because I recognize the patterns. And I spot good talent.

And I've got customers who sometimes find themselves in a hot mess, and it's been very helpful for me to be able to recommend you. They go along and get some help. Because quite often they have a little team or they're assembling a team. Sometimes even [my wife's business](#) comes into play there, we find the team members.

It's also good to have someone who can operate the team members and to set up systems with them, because the business owner's very busy doing what the business owner does, often that's being the expert at something. And sometimes they don't have strong leadership experience, and they may not want to do that.

So it's kind of like we get the whole formula. We've got the team members, we've got the person operating the team, and then we have the business owner freeing up to do the business-owning stuff.

So let's talk about, what kind of things do you observe on a frequent basis when you go in to help a client? What's the typical starting scenario?

Where it typically starts

Kat: Okay, I actually just want to say quickly that I love your wife's business. It has helped me find amazing virtual assistants for many of my clients, and they think it's my best kept secret, but it's not. I think it's your best kept secret. So she is amazing.

What we find most of the time is that the entrepreneur has the skills they need to be entrepreneurs – they are creative, they're big picture, they see the vision. And that type of mindset doesn't lend itself very well to actually managing the day-to-day operations of the business. So I even see it with my own team, I have more of the entrepreneur mindset and my team are more, just get in, get it done. We call them type A personalities, that they just see a list and they have to get it completed.

And so it's very rare to have an entrepreneur that has those skills as well. And so that's where eventually, they just get stuck. They're answering a billion questions from their team members every day. They're probably starting to get frustrated at their team needlessly, because they just constantly, the team starts to feel like a drain on you. And that is definitely a big warning sign that something needs to change, and that is usually the point where someone like us can come in and just take the stress off, the day-to-day stress of managing a growing business.

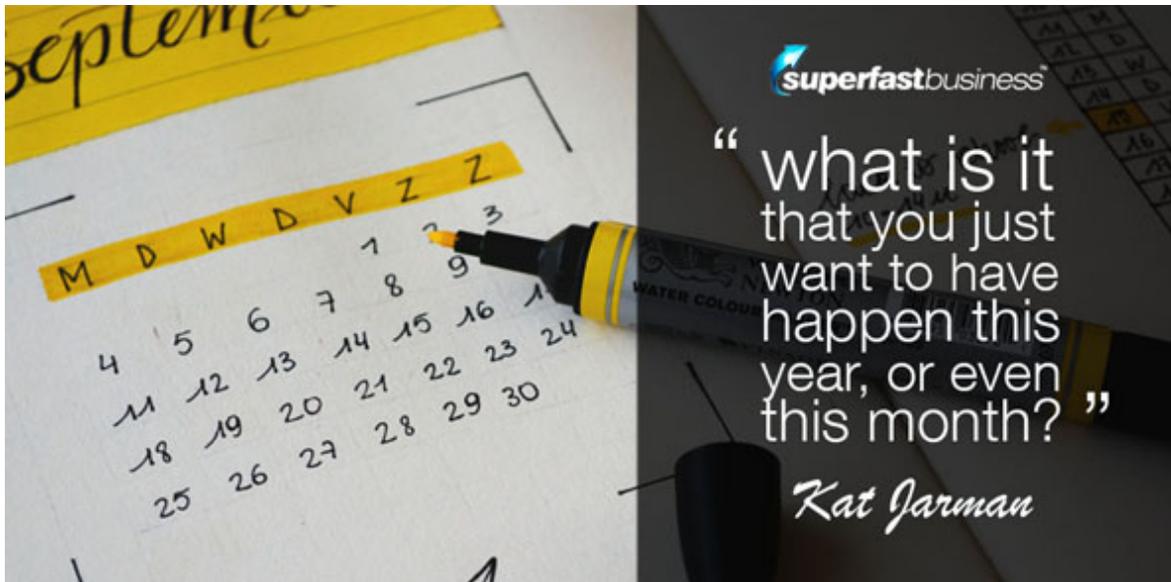
James: You hear things like, "Why can't they think about this for themselves?" "Why don't they just know what to do?" And then when you dig deeper, often you'll find there's not really any project management system, there's not necessarily standard operating procedures. The team may not even know what the objective is, in some cases. This is not to be overly critical on the owner, it's just not something they would know to do, in some cases, because they grew quickly, quite often, they scaled fast. And this just gets out of control.



And managing humans does take special skills. You've assembled a team of people with good follow-through and who can integrate things, whereas the visionary often has great ideas and vision and confidence. But yeah, like you said, sometimes they don't follow up so well.

It's interesting, I get to work with a lot of these people. It's such a joy when I work with someone who does follow up and implements, and it's rarer rather than more common, which is why you need a team to support you. Even in my own team, and I have pretty good follow-through, is I've got them charged with, you know, letting me know when they need something from me. And I give them full permission to requisition things from me, as if I'm just one of the members of the team, if it's going to help them perform towards the mission that we have set.

So that's really good. You've described the starting scenario quite well. When you assign someone in your team to go in, what sort of things are on their checklist? Like, how could we, if we're listening to this, and we're in a bit of chaos, how could we write down a couple of bullets of things that we might want to pay attention to? And I probably gave a few clues just before.



The things that need attention

Kat: Yeah, definitely. So when we go into a client's business, first of all, we just sit them down and we say what is it that you're actually trying to achieve here? What is the end goal? And not, you know, the five or 10-year plan, but what is it that you just want to have happen this year, or even this month? And also with the team, what is it that they are working towards as well? And quite often, our clients, they'll have to sort of sit down and think about that for a little while, because they've been so busy with their head in the day-to-day of the business that they haven't been able to step outside and go big picture for a little while.

So quite often, just doing that, write down three things that are your main priorities for the next month or two months or six months, and then just figure out from there, how you can make that happen. That is probably, like, if everybody did that once a month, everybody's businesses would be so much better off.

James: Yeah, so just getting clear on the overall objective, what's the mission we're on? Like, what are we trying to achieve here?

Kat: Yeah.

James: And then I suppose you would take stock of what they've got at their disposal, whether they have any kind of systems in particular, and what kind of tools they're using. And I imagine you've seen a vast array of ways that people approach this.

After taking stock

Kat: A massive, massive difference in how everybody approaches it. But most of the time, what happens is the CEO, they do sit down and say, “Okay, I want these three things to happen.” And that’s when their head starts to get a bit fuzzy, and they say, “But I have no idea what to do next. I don’t know how to get from the starting point to the finish point.”

And so yes, we will have a look at what systems they’re using, how their team is being managed. Are they being managed? Are they being assigned tasks? Do they know how to do those tasks? Is there any back end procedures, or that sort of thing? Do they have everything they need in order for somebody to be able to put a bit of a project plan in front of them, and for them to be able to run with that? And most of the time, it’s a no. So that’s definitely where we add a lot of value.

James: Perfect.

And have you found particular tools that become your favorites? Like, if someone had a blank canvas, where would you recommend they’d start for the typical kind of operation that you’re working within? Just for clarity, you’re working with a lot of the same sort of clients I’m working with at the higher end – generally, they have a multimillion-dollar business and a team of several people on board, you know, two, three, five, six. What sort of tools are your sweet spots, your favorites?

The tools of the trade

Kat: Okay, so it can be as simple or as complicated as you want it to be. And James, I know that you keep your systems very simple. You use [Slack](#), I think, for almost everything.

James: Because we don't have service customers. So that's kind of cheating. We're just the publishing business who does some coaching. So even though we have quite a few team members – I think we have six members now – we're working on our own projects. And we also have massive experience, aside from our newest person who started a month or two ago, the others have been there between five and 10 years, so everyone knows exactly what they're doing. I think if we were dealing with customers, we would need an extra tool in the mix. So when we had our SEO business and our website development business, we needed project management tools, because we had literally about 500 active customers at once. So we needed more infrastructure. And a lot more people – we had an extra 60 people as well.

Kat: Yeah, so it does start to get a bit crazy, then. My right hand lady, Candace, that works with me, she swears by Asana, and we generally find that most of our clients either use it to some degree of success or are definitely open to using it, because it is a mostly free tool that is super simple for anyone to jump in and usually get started with it right away. If we had to pick three things that would be integral to almost every business, it would be Asana, [Slack](#), and then the G Suite, so Google Drive, that sort of thing. And that's basically it, really, it doesn't have to be super complicated.

James: We're using two of those three anyway. G suite and Slack does it for us – we can share our SOPs in the Google documents, we have spreadsheets and surveys and things, we can share the SOPs via the company email. And Slack is really, it's our online office. It's the place where we can communicate, and we segment that into channels as to types of activities. We've got RSS feeds coming in for certain things, for intel and market research. And we've trained on some of this inside [SuperFastBusiness membership](#). It's a strong weapon.

In fact, one of my [SilverCircle](#) clients recently came to a call with his project lead, and we had a chat about their business, and I suggested they have a look at Slack. And it completely revolutionized the business. I will say this: if you have Slack, and you have a team in the Philippines, you make sure you install all the available emoticons and GIPHY-type modules. They love that. That is the language of the Philippines. It's not just text, it's got to be pictures and images, they love that.

Kat: It's not just the language of the Philippines. We have a water cooler channel in our Slack. And last night, there was about 62 notifications that came through, and when I had a look, the team were emojis and GIFs and all sorts of things. It's a really nice way to see them to come together and be able to connect in a way that people that work virtually normally can't. And if I was going to give a team-building tip, let them talk. And Slack is a really good way to do that.

James: Fantastic. Other things that would be on your sort of go-to list that you train your team members to look for and to pay attention to in the business?

Other go-to items

Kat: Oh, so many things, so many things. Where are you going with that?

James: I see a lot of them. Like, for example, communication frequency between the team and the owner. I imagine you have to sometimes assist in that.

Kat: Yes, so much so.

James: You know, I even see some fundamental things, like employers paying their team. You'd think that's a basic, right? But I've seen evidence that it's not. Quite often, employers are late on the payroll and making it difficult for their team to get paid. And it's like the number one way to turn off a team member. If you want to shut them down, put them in a box and switch off all available optimization, just don't pay them.

Kat: Yeah.

James: How could this even be a thing? I didn't realize it's so prolific until I got behind the scenes. You absolutely have to pay people. I pay them early, and I have done for, you know, the last 10 years straight. Never missed a payday. It's just a cardinal sin.

Let's talk about the other one. I mean, that's too obvious. But what about communication frequency and styles? What sort of things have you found effective for your team communicating with the business owner and the business owner's level of interaction with the rest of the team?

Kat: Yes. So, just going back to paying the staff, we actually just had a client that did have an issue with this. They weren't doing it on purpose, but payroll would come around too quickly, they would totally forget to hit that PayPal button. And we just implemented a way that the team can get automatically paid. So their Filipino VAs now are using a software called Hubstaff that you can set up to automatically pay the VAs, everybody's happy.

Communication frequency and styles

There is a fine balance as far as communication goes with the team, and how we manage all of the communication that can come in systems like Asana and Slack. And a lot of people now will use Voxer as well, which is a voice messaging app. And the owner of the business, if they don't set some boundaries around that communication, they will log on, and they'll see 20 notifications in Slack, five people want something from in Asana, and everything just gets a little bit insane. And they start to avoid going in there, which means that projects never get moved forward.



So what we try and do is put some systems in place around, first of all, the team not always having to go to the business owner for everything. So maybe there is a team leader that can help out with some of those questions. Maybe the team leader is in charge of going to the business owner once a day and saying, "Hey, I have these five questions for you. Can you please answer them now?" And that way, the last thing we want is for the business owner to start to avoid the team because everything is getting too complicated. So it's just a common trap to fall into with all of these communication tools. There just needs to be a little bit of structure around how and when people communicate.

James: Yeah, that's great. I know a lot of the communications in my business happen direct message to message and I'm not a part of it. I think over 75% of communications on our Slack are from team member to team member. And I do have protocols where people can just push the work through, and it's pre-approved, unless I change something.

We do have a weekly call, about 15 minutes, just to synchronize on our mission and see where we're up to. And it's a great opportunity to ask questions and to hold stuff for that call. They know it's coming, so they don't have to interrupt during the day. There's definitely a fine art to it.

I love what you're doing, Kat. I think your service is very valuable, that's why I recommend it to people who are feeling like they're resonating with what you're saying. If you want some help with your team, and you'd rather just pay an agency a very humble rate to take care of your project management and to get your team working to their best potential, YourOnlineTeam.com is the place to go.

I've been speaking with Kat Jarman. I'm so glad I met you at [Chris Ducker's](#) event in that we've been able to stay in touch since then. And I love working with you and watching you grow this business, because you're really helping people at a high level. And just keep doing what you're doing.

Kat: Thank you. That's very lovely of you. And yeah, we get a kick out of helping people push their projects forward, keep their team happy and make sure that they have some really useful systems and processes in place in their business. So it makes me really happy to wake up and go to work every day.

James: Thank you so much, Kat.

Kat: Thanks, James.



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