

FOR SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS



PRIORITISE YOUR PEOPLE.

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO GROW YOU, GROW YOUR TEAM, GROW A SMALL BUSINESS.



LET'S GET INTO IT.

We believe people are the hardest thing in small business, and it's greatest value!

You cannot grow your business with ease without leveraging the power of people. And not just any people, the right people. As Jim Collins coined in his best-selling book "Good to Great":

"First Who ... then What. We expected that good-to-great leaders would begin by setting a new vision and strategy. We found instead that they first got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats - and then they figured out where to drive it. The old adage "People are your most important asset" turns out to be wrong. People are not your most important asset. The right people are."

How do you build and retain a team of A-Players? We know you need to excel at all things 'people' including:

- Recruitment
- Onboarding
- Training and development
- Leading, and
- Managing.

The secret to small business success is the owner becoming an Effective Leader, and all the Managers in the business becoming Kick-Ass Managers.

That's why this guide is filled with practical insights, templates, and tools that you can immediately put into practice to drive your business forward.

We'll explore why the right people make all the difference, the cost of a mis-hire and getting B-Players, C-Players (or worse, toxic assholes), on your bus and guide you to upping your people game.

Enjoy!

Troy, Mick, Rob & AJ

Grow A Small Business

www.growasmallbusiness.com



5 common pain points that relate to people: how many resonate with you?

1

Small business owners and managers say they can't find A-Players. In our experience, this is because they rush recruitment. They don't invest time to study the art and science of hiring and don't spend anywhere near enough time actually screening, interviewing, testing and reference checking candidates.

2

We hear a lot of owners and managers say they don't understand why good people leave their business. High churn of A-Players makes their job, and the teams' workload, worse. Keeping the best talent is almost as hard as finding them in the first place.

3

Many say their team is not engaged or motivated, with few prepared to go the extra mile and jump in when it's really needed. Lack of collaboration and conversation on tough problems and good opportunities are often left to the management team, or only a few star team members with the right attitude.

4

You wouldn't be a battle-scarred small business owner if you didn't complain about the poor productivity of your team! The funny thing is, it's your fault. It's usually a result of a poor culture, the wrong priorities (or communicated poorly), optimal systems not implemented and / or lack of training - supporting the team in getting more of the *right* things done, in less time.

5

Most managers in small businesses feel they don't know how to manage people. With poor manager training material out there, and most owners not investing in developing their managers, people promoted into a management role often lack the confidence in this crucial skill.

“**Recruitment is the most important thing a manager does.**

— *Mark Hortsman, Manager Tools*

Wait! What is an A-Player?

The term "A-Players" was coined by Brad Smart who is a management consultant, author, and entrepreneur. Smart introduced the concept of A-Players in his book *"Topgrading: How Leading Companies Win by Hiring, Coaching, and Keeping the Best People."*

Smart emphasises the significance of hiring and retaining top-tier talent (A-Players) to drive success and competitiveness. His insights have had a significant impact on talent management strategies across various industries, influencing how businesses identify, recruit, and develop high-performing individuals.

Here are some key characteristics that define A-Players:

- **Exceptional Skills and Expertise:** A-Players possess exceptional skills and expertise relevant to their roles. Whether it's technical proficiency, creative prowess, or leadership abilities, they excel in their respective domains.
- **Drive and Ambition:** A-Players are inherently driven individuals. They are ambitious, motivated by challenges, and constantly seek opportunities for growth and advancement.
- **Results-Oriented:** A-Players are focused on results. They set high standards for themselves and consistently deliver outstanding outcomes, often exceeding expectations.
- **Team Players:** Despite their individual excellence, A-Players understand the importance of collaboration. They are team players who actively contribute to the collective success of the organisation.
- **Adaptability and Resilience:** A-Players thrive in dynamic environments. They are adaptable, resilient, and adept at navigating challenges and uncertainties.
- **Continuous Learners:** A-Players are lifelong learners. They are curious, open to feedback, and committed to personal and professional development.



Check out this table: it will help you plan to overcome common pain points.

Pain Point	Context	Challenges and Obstacles	Potential Benefits
Can't find A-Players	<i>Rarely see high-calibre candidates apply, and when you do, most don't accept our offer.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need an effective recruitment procedure. • Create a stand-out job ad. • Use the internal Net Promoter Score (NPS) from the quarterly team survey to show how much the team loves working in your business. 	When you have a team full of A-Players, more gets done, no one leaves, it's more fun and the business is more profitable. Studies show a mis-hire can cost between 1 and 27 times that roles' annual salary.
Good people leave	<i>Knowing what to do to keep A-Players is challenging.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become an Effective Leader and a Kick-Ass Manager (70% of people quit due to their manager). • Improve communication with the team. • Rid the business of B-Players (or worse). 	Higher retention improves profitability and the customer experience.
Team is not engaged or motivated	<i>Apathy is rife, the lack of enthusiasm to go above-and-beyond without prompting doesn't exist.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use One Page Job Descriptions and a Simple Quarterly Strategic Plan so each team and team member has interesting and challenging work, and knows what success looks like for their role. • Measure the teams' happiness with a Quarterly Anonymous Team Survey. • Have a clear 'why', vision and core values then live them and only recruit those who are aligned. 	Productivity increases, more of the right things get done and team retention increases.
Poor productivity	<i>Everyone seems to work so slow, or the quality of their work is low at times - creating re-work and frustration for customers.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers should provide coaching and feedback. • Develop each team member in one area of Professional Development every quarter. • Have a clear, yet simple, strategic plan the team works every quarter. • Invest in systems and training. 	Increased profits, as the team gets more done in less time, and fewer team members are needed as the business grows.
Don't know how to manage people	<i>No formal, or high-quality, training in how to manage people effectively not only affects profitability but also stresses the Managers, who feel out of their depth with this work skill.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask, then test, a potential Manager before putting them in the role - to make sure they want to manage people. • Enrol a new manager in the best management training, and encourage their Professional Development continues this learning. • As a Kick-Ass Manager yourself, coach them on how to be a Kick-Ass Manager. 	The team is happier and more productive, and stays with the business longer - all of which increases profitability and the value of the business.

Grow A Small Business Story: Mary and Pete's goal was to build a team, so they had the choice to work IN the business or not.



Two co-founders we guided in recent years have a great professional services business. They do the bookkeeping, tax returns and guide the founders of tech businesses with \$1m - \$5m in annual sales. A big part of their offer is helping the owners make better decisions around money - not just doing their books and tax returns for them.

Grinding away on their own for a few years, Mary and Pete grew the business nicely, until they hit the ceiling most businesses selling time do - they maxed out the billable hours they could give each week.

Stepping slowly into the next growth chapter, they hired an experienced remote bookkeeper, living in another part of Australia. Like many small business owners before them, they rushed the hire, didn't follow a solid recruitment process - including using a test project and even reference checking - and they paid for all these mistakes.

The new team member was a nice person, and OK at the work, but that was the problem - they were just OK, not an A-Player that would help them unlock more time, so they could focus on the next hire and getting more clients to keep that hires' billables full.

Instead, this B-Player sapped their time and attention, needing a lot of coaching and reviewing of their work, while also showing little autonomy or initiative. The time they thought they would save by having someone doing almost 20 hours a week in billables, was costing the pair almost that amount of time to manage them.

Challenges and Obstacles:

- They didn't know what they didn't know - that the right people are your greatest asset, and recruitment is the most important thing a manager does.
- Being so busy balancing a full book of billables, they rushed their first hire.
- Neither had managed people before.



Why would you wait any longer? Business Transformation Program

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Actions Taken:

- **Got better at recruitment:** Mary took it on to overhaul their recruitment procedure. After understanding “the right people are your greatest asset”, and “recruitment is the most important thing a manager does”, she knew they first had to only let A-Players on the bus. Mary found the best resources on recruitment and hiring, and consumed them with gusto.
- **Became Kick-Ass Managers:** Pete took it from the hire. He studied up on how to be a better manager. Once they had an A-Player, they not only wanted to support their success, but keep them in the business. He read up on how to onboard new people, then invested in training for the both of them to become better managers.
- **Promoted and trained Managers:** They were able to identify some team members as potentially great managers. They interviewed and tested them for this elevated role, and put each new manager through the same management training the co-founders had undertaken.

Results and Benefits:

- **More sales and profits:** Now with a larger team, and some other managers between them and the billing resources, Mary and Pete have seen both sales and profits grow. The business is no longer capped at the billable hours they can do week in, week out.
- **Less time needed IN the business:** As they hired more-and-more A-Players, and put managers in place, Mary and Pete needed to do less-and-less billables - which freed up their time to not only work less total hours in a week, but those work hours now go to higher-value activities, like management and marketing.
- **No team turnover:** Since getting the right people on their bus AND becoming better managers, they have not seen a single team member leave the business since they took on their first full-time team member. The engagement and happiness of the team is borne out in the Quarterly Anonymous Team Survey they run. They have held a steady +100 Net Promoter Score every quarter since running the survey, and not one team member answered ‘yes’ to the question “In the last three months, have you seriously considered working somewhere else?” A hidden benefit of no team members leaving is the saving in recruitment and training time, and costs to replace them. Studies show it can cost between 1 and 27 times a roles’ annual salary when you mis-hire. That saved time and focus now goes into finding more clients, then find the next A-Player to service those clients.



Conclusion

Mary and Pete’s approach to growing the business by adding more team members was the right strategy, so they could choose when and if they worked. But, like most small business owners, they firstly didn’t understand the value of being great recruiters. And secondly, they didn’t think they had to spend any time managing and developing their people, or the culture of the business.

Their initial thinking was “hire people and they should just do the work”.

Thankfully, they identified these mistakes in their thinking early in their growth journey - with that first part-time hire - paused and got educated, then took the right action on the recruitment and management fronts.

Now, they have a super-happy and productive team, a very profitable business and take months of the year off travelling the world.



Resources we recommend for professional development and to prioritise your people:



Mike Denehey recommends the book ‘Onboarded: How to bring new hires to the point where they are effective, faster’ by Brad Giles. *“This hidden gem not only outlines the costs of not implementing a solid onboarding process over 90 days, but how to go about it. It will increase team member retention, and boost engagement and therefore productivity.”*



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Rob Cameron suggests you undertake the Grow A Small Business ‘Ultimate Recruitment Toolkit’ online course. *“At the end of the two week course, make a copy of the Playbook included and tailor the recruitment procedures, scripts and other templates for your business.”* The course also recommends the top five books to read on hiring for your own professional development.



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Troy Trewin highly recommends the Manager Tools podcast. Launched in 2005, it is the best resource he has found to develop yourself as a Manager. Start with their “Basics” casts. Their two books and conferences are also excellent.



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People management lingo. Check out these common terms.



LEADER

In a small business, the Leader is the owner of the business, who is working in the business. Sure, larger businesses, say 30+ team members, may have a “leadership team”. These are usually made up of the owner (if they are still working in the business), and some of the management team. But, if you have less than 30 full-time equivalent team members, we see the Leader of the business as you - the owner. This is an important distinction from the Managers, as you set the tone for growth and lead the culture your business needs to grow with less stress.

MANAGER

A Manager has one or more Direct Reports. They need to guide, support and influence the behaviour of one or more people in the corner of the business they manage. As the Leader will have their own Direct Reports (all the other Managers), they are also a Manager.

DIRECT REPORT

Someone who reports to a Manager, also referred to as their “Line Manager”.

A-PLAYER

You can probably work out the quality difference between something labelled A, and something B or C. An A-Player is a stand out team member, usually at least twice as productive and valuable to the business as a B-Player. They have the right attitude, gets on with their work and usually has great initiative. They are a team player, with no shitty attitude or undermining plays. You want a bus full of A-Players.

People management lingo. Check out these common terms.



JOB DESCRIPTION OR JD

This is a clear document (we recommend one page) which outlines the ongoing responsibilities of a role in the business, with a focus on the current quarter. On it should also be some projects and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that role needs to hit, as well as one Professional Development focus for the Direct. It helps the person in the role understand what success looks like at the end of a 90 day growth sprint. And, it helps the Manager support the Direct - by pulling it out every or second weekly One-On-One, the Manager has a clear scope to ask how the Direct is going with aspects of the role, and how the Manager can better support them in being successful that quarter.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OR PD

Professional Development or PD: This is one area in a Directs' role that they and their Manager agree at the start of the quarter, they need to improve on. We recommend finding only one thing, so you don't overload the Direct. Once you agree on what that one thing is, you discuss what resources the Direct will need to consume, to get to the new level in that skill or knowledge. Resources could be internal or external coaching, an online course, conferences, some podcasts or books.

ONE-ON-ONE'S

This is a 30 minute meeting a Manager has with each of their Direct Reports, each week. It's not a Work In Progress (WIP) meeting "how are you going with this project or client?". It's all about the Direct - supporting their success, as well as their professional growth and development. And it's a powerful management tool to not only help the Manager communicate better and more frequently with their Directs, but it's the best way a Manager can improve the professional relationship they have with everyone in their team.



Are you ready to take your leadership skills to the next level?

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Simple, focused, action-orientated one page example of a kick-ass people communication plan.

In most of our meetings, and the weekly One-On-One's we do with the small business owners in our 'Business Transformation Program', we use the SFA acronym (we made this up!) - Simple. Focus. Action.

Or expanded, "Keep it simple", "Be laser-focused", and "Take the right action". It's a good reminder and beats the drum of fast-growth in all the businesses we guide.

As we believe "communication is the key to any relationship", and most Leaders and Managers think they communicate enough - when in reality, they are nowhere near the right cadence or quality - one big thing you can do is communicate better.

So here's the action we recommend Leaders and Managers take to communicate more effectively with their team - implement this communications timetable across the business:

WEEKLY

Communication Tool	Description	Recipients or Attendees
One-On-One	The Manager invests 30 minutes a week with each direct to check in on them, their progress and what other support they can provide.	Manager and a Direct
Management Meeting	A 30 minute meeting to review key data, communicate across the business and review one piece of the Simple Quarterly Strategic Plan.	Leader and all Managers
Manager's Team Meeting	Each Manager meets with their team for up to 30 minutes, and runs through the KPIs this team needs to hit this quarter, and discusses any issues in this corner.	Manager and all their Directs
Team Email	The Leader of the business sits down for 30 minutes at the end of the week and pens a short email to everyone. News and wins from the week - including highlighting at least one great thing a team member did, or example of a core value they lived - and the focus for next week.	The entire team

For Small Business Owners: Prioritise Your People

MONTHLY

Communication Tool	Description	Recipients or Attendees
Management Meeting	In up to an hour, the Management Team reviews monthly data and goes through the Simple Quarterly Strategic Plan in detail.	Leader and all Managers
First Friday Event	Each team member takes it in turns to organise a fun event, and celebrate the success of the previous month. This can be around two hours, in work hours on the first Friday of each month.	The entire team

QUARTERLY

Strategy Day	Chaired by the Leader, the team reviews the current quarters' Simple Quarterly Strategic Plan, sets the next quarters' Plan and goes through the results of the Quarterly Anonymous Team Survey. Depending on the size of your business, this can take half a day to a full day.	The entire team
Quarterly Anonymous Team Survey	The Leader sends the Quarterly Anonymous Team Survey. This helps the team feel valued and listened to, and provides the Management Team with intel on the culture, manager performance and garner suggestions for changes around the business.	The entire team

ANNUALLY

Strategy Day	Chaired by the Leader, the team sets the budget and strategic plan for the next financial year, reviews and refines the 3 and 10 year targets / BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals). Depending on the size of your business, and stage of growth, this can take 1 or 2 days, and we recommend this is away from the office.	The entire team
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The top 3 mindsets to master leadership and management.



People are your greatest asset.

If you stop and think about it for a moment, do you agree with this statement?

Even if your business is a product-based one (you make and sell widgets), you still need people.

Could you grow without people, especially the right ones?

As Jim Collins' outlines in his two classic books "Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies" and "Good to Great", their comprehensive studies showed that the chasm between the great companies and merely 'good' ones was not due to:

- An amazing product
- A brilliant strategy, or
- A charismatic leader.

It was the right people, in the right seats.



Recruitment is the most important thing a manager does.

So, if people are your greatest asset, it follows that finding and hiring them is the most important thing a manager does.

Don't rush the hiring process. Instead, place high-value on this management responsibility, and invest time to become a better recruiter or hiring manager.

The top 3 mindsets to master leadership and management.

3

People are the hardest thing in small business.

People are the most challenging part of any growing small business, because we're all weird and different!!

We like to use Jim Morrison, from The Doors, famous words in one of his songs to drive home a key point on this mindset:

“People are strange, when you're a stranger.”

So if people are strange, and our greatest asset, then the Leader and Managers in the business mustn't be strangers to their Direct Reports.

You need to get to know them better, and build a stronger professional relationship with each Direct.

That way, you get to understand them, their mindsets, behaviours and rationale for doing something a certain way, so you can better support and guide them.

As the owner of the business, you must become an Effective Leader, and a Kick-Ass Manager - so you get the most out of your greatest asset, people.

And, you must lead by example, so the other Managers in your business grow into Kick-Ass Managers.

The big mindset you need to shift here is from “I don't have time to manage or communicate with my team, let alone to learn how to be a more effective manager!”, to “this small investment of time leading and managing well, will be returned many times over with greater productivity, lower team turnover and happier team members”.

3 habits to hike your Return on Investment (ROI) on people.



Give (unbalanced) feedback - don't manage by exception.

It's human nature to manage by exception - only raising something with a Direct when they've made a mistake. This is immensely demotivating for your team, and destroys value in the short-term with lower productivity and long-term with increased team turnover.

A great habit to build is to give unbalanced feedback. For every 10 pieces of feedback you give a Direct, nine should be positive and only one negative or adjusting feedback.

Feedback is not praise, they are very different and in our 'Kick-Ass Manager' course within the 'Business Transformation Program', we teach the four simple steps to giving effective feedback.



Up your own Professional Development - become an Effective Leader and a Kick-Ass Manager.

Invest 30 minutes a day, less than three hours a week, becoming a better Leader and Manager by reading or listening to the best podcast, books and doing courses in this tragically under-resourced role in the business.

If people are your greatest asset, why wouldn't you want to develop yourself to be able to lead and manage them better?



FREE Practical Guide to Recruitment Marketing.

[CLICK HERE](#) 

3 habits to hike your Return on Investment (ROI) on people.

3

Lead a “no morning meetings” culture.

This simple policy change will unlock more “Deep Work” time for your team, so they move the big things forward, faster. The Managers in your business should be advocates for this rule, and lead by example.

Most people have their greatest energy and focus in the mornings, so why not leave them alone to do the heavy thinking on the really valuable work.

Of course, some meetings (mainly external ones) will have to be taken in the mornings now-and-then, but a shift to this as a standard way of meeting in your business will have a dramatic impact on productivity.



3 tools to power your people.

We have a shitload of tools we recommend Leaders and Managers use to be more effective. We've picked out three you can start quickly, with the first one the most powerful (and one that needs the most practice).



Weekly One-On-Ones.

A simple way to build a stronger professional relationship with each Direct, and support them to success in their role, is to meet with them regularly.

We believe “*communication is the key to any relationship*” and a 30 minute One-On-One with each Direct forces you to do your job as a Manager, and manage.

The meeting is squarely focused on the Direct, not you, the Manager.

The first 10 minutes should be for the Direct to raise anything, ask questions or for support. The next 10 minutes is for the Manager to provide any feedback, pull out the Directs' One Page Job Description and ask how they are going with some responsibilities and / or projects and KPIs.

There is detailed training on how to run effective One-on-One's in our 'Kick-Ass Manager' course within the 'Business Transformation Program'.



3 tools to power your people.



Quarterly Anonymous Team Survey.

Asking the team a few questions every 90 days doesn't take much of yours or their time, but it provides a rich source of intel (and makes the team feel heard).

From small things that could be improved in the business, to measuring how the culture and managers are performing in the eyes of the entire team.

Make these surveys anonymous, so the team feels more comfortable providing bad news or negative feedback on the culture, business or even a specific manager. It's a great way to quickly identify an asshole manager, and do something about it.

Watch our **[3 minute video](#)** explaining the benefits and how to roll this out, then below the video click to grab a copy of the survey we use, and tailor the email template.

After you have watched the video it'll take you all of 14 minutes to get the first quarterly survey out, measure your culture and management performance, and make your team feel more valued and listened to.



3 tools to power your people.



90 day Onboarding.

Do you have an onboarding program for new team members, or do you just throw them a login to their accounts and expect them to perform at excellence from day one?

Most small businesses don't onboard, or if they do, nowhere near long enough.

We recommend a 90 day onboarding program the Manager runs with a new team member.

Earlier, on the Resources page you read about the awesome **“Onboarded: How to bring new hires to the point where they are effective, faster”** book Mick recommends Managers read. That is a great place to start.



Are you getting serious about people? Check out these tools:



MANAGER TOOLS: Manager Tools was created to serve a need, the need for there to be better managers and leaders in this world! Managers are rarely given actionable guidance about how to succeed and what they can actually DO to be an effective manager.

[CLICK HERE](#) 



EMPLOYMENT HERO: This is an end-to-end human resources management system that covers every aspect of the employee lifecycle, from recruitment and onboarding to engagement, productivity, and success. Check out their FREE resources section.

[CLICK HERE](#) 



BAMBOO HR: One easy-to-use platform for everything HR. Simplify HR with award-winning solutions for everything from hire to retire.

[CLICK HERE](#) 



SURVEY MONKEY: Get started with ready-made templates. Build surveys and forms in minutes with pre-made templates you can easily customise for better response rates. Check out their FREE options!

[CLICK HERE](#) 



TYPEFORM: Switch out some face-to-face experiences for digital HR forms and surveys, they can save a lot of time. Looking to recruit employees online using CV submission forms and job application forms? Or, want to collect interview feedback? These HR templates could be a perfect fit for your recruitment strategy.

[CLICK HERE](#) 

Resources from the Grow A Small Business Team:

We understand the unique challenges faced by small business owners like you, and we're here to equip you with the knowledge and tools you need to thrive and grow your small business.



Blog Posts: We write about marketing, strategy, people, systems and funding

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Weekly Leadership Email

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