

Business bootcamp #7: make HR count

Want to start a business? The internet is full of advice for entrepreneurs, whether that's detailing the lifecycle of a startup, how to raise investment, how to manifest success and which 'meal in a can' is best for those on the go. Here is part 7 of 10 in your business's 10-day bootcamp.

Temps de lecture : minute

7 February 2023

Those first few hires are real milestones for any business. It's wise to understand the considerations across the entire employee journey before you make that first job offer. The people function and your business: Reader, let's begin.

As a new startup founder, you may feel it's a bit early to think about appointing an HR function. Michelle Zappala-Wood, Head of People at Birdie, the B-Corp certified, home healthcare tech startup, says - worry not - you can afford to bootstrap the process using external resources before you make a permanent hire.

'An outsourced legal team is a great place to start to get templates for employment contracts and minimum statutory policies in the UK (for example, discipline & dismissal, grievance, and Health & Safety policy) prepped for your future need.

'Choosing a good tech stack is also something you can do yourself', she adds.

‘In the early stages, your best bet is an all-in-one that includes an HRIS [a Human Resources information system, which helps store, manage and track all employee information, HR policies and procedures], an engagement element and a reporting dashboard.’

She adds that as you grow it’ll become important to introduce a dedicated internal talent person who can work across multiple teams.

‘The ideal time to introduce them is four to five months before you expect a large growth period (for example, following an investment round) to help create a growth strategy and handbook of best practices to learn from.’

‘Ideally this individual has experience in your sector so they can embed themselves as quickly as possible with the technical knowledge of your day-to-day.’

‘The key element to consider when hiring a recruiter is their versatility, as no day in a startup is ever the same.’

That’s good for keeping your house in order, but a strong HR team is also one of your best assets in helping to define a good company culture, too. Something it pays to focus on, even in the early days: what kind of company do you want to become?

Michelle says that it’s essential to ‘learn, listen and adapt,’ in order to create a futureproof culture: ‘No one is perfect and a good leader is prepared to make mistakes and learn from their team.’

‘Early culture deterioration signs will be visible, so it is important you create an environment where your team can talk to you and communicate their concerns,’ she says.

‘Creating clear values also helps to cement a culture. When you’re

creating your beliefs and values as a business, make sure you prioritise diversity, inclusion, mental health & wellbeing and bake them into every stage in your hiring process. This ensures that each new team member has the same understanding of these core values and will be a champion as you grow.

'Focus on values, the rest is secondary.'

Sounds easy, but leaders don't always get it right. In fact, a staggering 42% of UK workers claim that toxic workplace culture has affected their mental health, the same percentage claim they've left a job as a result and, even before it gets as serious as that, 41% say that toxic culture has affected their productivity.

'The biggest mistake you see amongst leaders,' Michelle explains, 'is expecting people to think the same way and having fixed beliefs.'

'A good leader is one that is flexible and curious, yet we often see individuals sticking with one approach and not asking their team how they want to work and improve.'

'Hire the right people, trust them to do their job and ask them what they need in order to thrive. Then, give them what they need and do it regularly.'

And the opposite is true, too. Michelle advises against being pressured into hiring the wrong person because they can do what you need in the short term: 'the damage they can do to the growth and success of a company (especially in those early days) is huge.'

Leadership demands growth - at first *and* throughout the process. There'll be confronting times with hires at every stage of their tenure with you,

and while it's your job to present a consistently solid leadership profile, Michelle says the best thing you can do when things start to go wrong is recognise that you can't fix it all by yourself.

'It's really important that you come together and use your peers within the team. We have a wealth of knowledge in the leadership team at Birdie where individual's different experiences guide us all to making the right decisions for the company.

'Communication is non-negotiable – you should always keep HR in the loop, preparing them for the potential outcomes to ensure you have up-to-date advice and legal input.'

Useful links:

- [*How to access and hire international talent post-Brexit \(Maddyness\)*](#)
- [*Why hiring freelancers will help your tech business grow \(Maddyness\)*](#)
- [*How to scale a startup to 50 employees without losing its culture \(Maddyness\)*](#)
- [*Employee communication factsheet \(CIPD\)*](#)

Next time we'll look at how to approach spending company money.

Want to read on right away? We've put the whole bootcamp together for you [here](#).

Ella Bowman has a career spanning PR, public affairs and business consulting. Happiest helping progressive companies deliver the right message to improve audience behaviours, she currently splits her time between freelance copywriting and as a strategist for Safety In Design, Ltd.



Read also
[The ten commandments for launching a startup](#)

Article by Ella Bowman