

How can startup leaders empower their teams so they can take a break this summer?

Running a startup is notoriously fast-paced, highly stressful and time consuming, with heavy workloads throughout the year for both you and your team. As chief decision-maker and captain of the ship, it's difficult for startup leaders to fully step back from their responsibilities and hand over the reins to their teams so they can take a proper break over the summer months.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Many entrepreneurs fall into the trap of adopting a 'command-and-control' style of leadership, where they find themselves constantly fixing and firefighting the plethora of problems brought to them by their employees. This inevitably triggers teams to be reliant on your input and approval, running every issue past you before taking action. Not only that, it prevents your team from growing their independent problem-solving abilities, ultimately stunting their own career progression and capacity to bring new ideas to the table. So, when the time comes for you to take a break, they lack the confidence and initiative to handle the day-to-day while you're away.

For you to truly de-stress and recharge this summer, you must cultivate the internal resilience of your team, nurturing their confidence to become solution-driven, independent problem solvers. Here are three steps to follow to achieve this:

1. Learn to STOP and bite your lip

In the moment when an employee brings you a problem that they're facing, it might seem easier to impart your knowledge and do the solving for them based on your own experience. Learning how to STOP and bite your lip is the critical first step to shake this habit. Without it, nothing changes; your team will continue to rely on you. Learning to STOP is about firstly recognising the situations with your team where you have a habitual (or unhelpful) response, and then learning how you can interrupt that response before it happens and replace it with a new *and conscious* response.

2. Learn to ask more powerful questions

Once you have learnt to bite your lip when an employee comes to you with a problem, you need to cultivate and practice using more of an *enquiry-led approach* by learning *how* to ask more powerful and stimulating questions that generate a positive outcome, rather than just 'telling' them what to do. Questions are key not only to increasing performance and engagement, but also for fostering staff confidence and resilience, stimulating their thinking to work through issues and find solutions themselves. Stop asking 'why?' questions all the time and instead start asking more 'what?' questions. *Why*-based questions can feel personal, like the employee is to blame somehow or that they're being criticised, which can lead to defensiveness. Replacing *why...?* with *what...?* removes the (unintended) *personal* inference from a question and focuses on the situation itself. The employee is then more likely to be open to exploring specifics rather than feeling that they need to justify or defend their actions. This provides the opportunity for continual personal and professional development that benefits the employee, in turn making them more efficient in the face of change and more driven in their role, even while you're away.

3. Learn to give appreciative feedback

Many leaders dread giving feedback to teams, as it is typically associated with challenging conversations that focus on what an employee can improve on. Consequently, it's the one form of conversation that most leaders typically try to avoid. However, looking out for opportunities to give *appreciative* feedback flips the whole approach on its head. Instead of focusing on what you want staff to fix about their behaviour, deliberately looking for where someone has utilised a particular behaviour or strength that you'd like to see more of can offer a perfect opportunity for you to draw their attention to what went well in a particular situation. Giving appreciative feedback reinforces positive behaviour. Pointing out the behaviours that people are using that are making the difference to the outcomes being achieved, and even celebrating those, is a great way to build or strengthen new habits in others and see faster improvements. And it requires a lot less energy than trying to fix people's perceived weaknesses.

Learning to let go of some of your control can be the hardest first step to take. But by learning to adopt an *enquiry-led approach* with team members, rather than exercising your typical command-and-control style, will transform the way they handle any challenge. Staff will start to come to you consistently with solutions instead of just problems, allowing you to set off for summer with greater peace of mind that your team will continue to flourish while you're away. In the long term, you'll get valuable time back when you return, spending less time firefighting and more time focusing on the higher-value aspects of your role - extending that holiday feeling.

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