

Waggle, the AI co-pilot for automated actions, real-time coaching and zero-effort agendas

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Sarah Touzani, CEO of Waggle about creating an AI-powered co-pilot for managers of remote and hybrid teams, why coaching is not lecturing and the constant need to improve the work-life balance.

Temps de lecture : minute

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Waggle is the AI Co-Pilot helping managers build high-performing, happy teams. It coaches managers to develop the skills they need as they work, streamlines meeting prep for better conversations, and tells them what needs to be done when so that they're reliable and effective.

What was the catalyst for launching the product?

Everyone's experienced a bad boss and felt the repercussions. As founders of this product, we're no exception.

We've also been on the manager's side, promoted for being good at your role into a management position only to realise you have no idea what you're doing and the skills that got you the job aren't the skills you need to be good at it.

At the same time, they're unfairly burdened with blame when something goes wrong despite not being given the right tools to develop the skills,

behaviours, and knowledge they need to lead their teams to high-performance.

These managers are set up to fail. And if your people managers fail, you're risking failure as a business.

Managers have a huge impact on people's mental health in addition to their productivity and performance. There are also human biases managers need to fight to be effective and fair (such as how women are 1.4x more likely to receive critical subjective feedback than men) and Waggle's AI is designed to make that fight easier.

Tell me about the product - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers, USP and so on?

Waggle is an AI Co-Pilot for managers of remote and hybrid teams. It helps them develop the skills they need to lead as they work, streamlines meeting prep for more impactful and supportive conversations with their team, tells them what needs to be done when, and uses behavioral science to drive real change in how they manage their workload, their people, and themselves.

The goal is high performing happy teams overseen by a manager who is equally high-performing and happy in their role.

We work with post-series A startups and scaleups of about 50-250 people. They're experiencing growth and with that comes growing pains—namely that the management systems and structures they built for 10-15 people aren't the systems they need now that they're 50 or more. They're trying to scale with something that can't.

We reach them two ways.

One way is through the manager who is feeling the pain of the problem everyday. This is our product led approach where managers find our product through free content we push out that helps them solve the problems they're facing with their team. They'll see how Waggle can help and use their Learning and Development budget to add Waggle to their tech stack.

The second way is a top-down sales approach where a leader (COO or CPO) brings Waggle in to help all of their people managers lead.

Our USP: With Waggle, you're being coached, not lectured. And that coaching comes at the exact moment of need, in the flow of work, not in a weekly call with a mentor or coach.

Managers never need to take time off work to learn or use their personal time to improve because the tool is embedded into their workflow and integrated into other software they need to do their jobs.

It also delivers highly customised feedback in response to your actions as opposed to generic one-size-fits-none content from courses.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

For the past 9 months we've had a beta launch of the product for 150 managers. And, oh boy, have we learnt a lot. It's helped us learn what our users, the managers, really care about and what they're struggling with most. That's then let us adapt and tweak the product and our product vision so that we're providing them the most value possible and genuinely making their working life easier.

And as a result, we went from being purely leadership development to a tool that also helps managers plan and run their day because we've taken

away some of that management admin and mental workload that slows them down.

What is your favourite thing about being a founder?

My cofounder is my best friend. We met in high school when we were 15 and we've been friends ever since. Running a business with him is by far my favourite thing. Every day I'm amazed at how he thinks, which is different to how I think. I love the way we handle the issues and challenges that we face without friction and without ego. We both want to find the fastest way to the truth and it doesn't really matter who was right or wrong in the process as long as we get there.

Being a founder has also presented challenges I've never faced before even though I've scale a company from 4 to 80 people before.

I love a fresh challenge. It's scary but very exciting for the type of person I am. I love learning and I love learning from people who are doing it better than I know how to currently.

Which founders or businesses do you see as being the most inspirational?

I often find myself looking to Dan Murray-Serter from Heights. His vulnerability and willingness to share his journey on LinkedIn and on his podcast inspires me. And not just that but the success he's had with Heights too.

His willingness to share his journey to help others is selfless and because I know him personally, I also know that sharing that openly and publicly isn't something that comes natural to him. He's pushing his boundaries

and putting himself out there and I think an introvert, which I definitely am, would find that inspirational.

Which other figures in your life inspire you?

There's two. My cofounder, Saad. And my husband, Guillaume.

Saad inspires me with his capacity to stay focused and unphased by the small annoyances that pop up. He helps me let go of that stuff too, big and small, and move on from it faster so that I can get back to the grind.

My husband is the grittiest, most disciplined person I know. And that inspires me everyday. If he starts something, no matter what happens, he's going to do it. When he ran his marathon, he always stuck to his training plan and ran every mile it said he was supposed to run that day no matter the weather. Even if we went to a party the night before, he would stick to the plan the next morning. I'm not very good at that so he inspires me to stick to the promises I've made myself.

What has been your biggest business fail?

My definition of failure is when you stop trying something. Everything else is learning.

But I will say that a few weeks ago, we messed up our product soft launch, quite badly. And it was a VC who pointed it out to us.

So when a user gets started with Waggle, the product requires you to connect your calendar to the app. That's so the tool can sit in on meetings and provide you feedback in real time.

We'd been chasing Google to approve the app for months now so that it could connect seamlessly. They approved it two days before launch but

they approved the wrong app, which meant that one of our favourite VCs signed up to the app, she saw a scary screen from Google that said the Waggle app wasn't safe to install.

There were a few other issues that piled on top of that to make the onboarding journey really difficult. It really wasn't the first impression we hoped to make. But we've since fixed it, we're still in close contact with that VC, and as I said, it's all a learning.

What are the things you're really good at as a leader?

I'd say managing people. By nature, I'm a challenging person. I say the truth and I really want to help people break out of the limitations they have for themselves. If you know me and trust me, you'll know that this is because I care about you. But this can really push people out of their comfort zone and help them become better at what they do.

That also makes me receptive to straightforward, even somewhat harsh feedback which is a skill a founder needs. Otherwise, it's really hard to survive because your product, your company, even yourself is going to be bad at many things when you get started and taking that feedback on is what will transform you into something better.

Which areas do you need to improve on?

Improving my work-life balance is definitely on my to-do list. Right now, things are pretty full-on at Waggle. We're a tight-knit team, which is great, but it also means there's a lot on my plate. I used to be pretty good at delegating when I had a bigger team, but these days, there aren't as many hands to pass things off to.

This has led to me feeling constantly on the go, and honestly, it's tough.

It's as if I'm always in work mode, and finding time for personal stuff, like hitting the gym or just unwinding, is harder than it should be. I know striking a balance is key, not just for me but for setting the right example for my team too. So, yeah, getting better at juggling work and life is something I'm really trying to focus on.

What's in store for the future of the business?

We're in the launch phase now so we're looking forward to a lot of progress commercially as well as developmentally. The user feedback we collect will help us build an improved version of the product and hopefully Waggle becomes a name managers know to turn to for help.

What advice would you give to other founders or future founders?

I'd tell them how hard it is and that they should expect to be thrown out of their comfort zone every day. From the outside looking in, it seems like everyone knows what they're doing but that's simply not true. We don't know what we're doing, we're just figuring it out step by step as we go.

The best thing you can do is to build a network of other founders around you that can support you and who you can learn from.

And finally, a more personal question! We like to ask everyone we interview about their daily routine and the rules they live by. Is it up at 4am for yoga, or something a little

more traditional?

Every night I plug my phone in outside of the bedroom. And every morning I wake up to a light alarm that mimics the natural rising of the sun. I find it really important to get away from blue light in the hours surrounding sleep and tap into a natural circadian rhythm. Once I'm awake, I get coffee and breakfast. I start work quite early and I'll save my workout as my last task of the day, usually around 7pm just after work. That workout switches my brain off. I do weightlifting because if you don't after 30 years old, you'll quickly start to lose muscle mass. I try to make healthy food choices.

I used to be a potter and make ceramics but since launching Waggle, I had to put that on pause. Hopefully, I can pick that up again soon.

Sarah Touzani is the CEO of Waggle.

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