

Carve, training the next generation of AI-powered assistants

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Fiona Young, founder of Carve about progression opportunities for executive assistants, becoming an expert at AI for everyday work productivity and getting on the the road to owning your destiny.

Temps de lecture : minute

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We train assistants to the world's top leaders how to use AI for everyday work productivity. AI takes on dull admin and creates capacity for more of the powerful work only humans are capable of. The result? More meaningful work, more career growth.

What was the catalyst for launching the product?

I started my career as an executive assistant, and saw firsthand the glass ceiling in this profession — it's rare that assistants get growth and progression opportunities (I was one of the lucky ones). I subsequently spent 12 years in corporate learning, almost exclusively working on leadership development — and I began to question why assistants to the world's top leaders are routinely left behind. These people are power players in their own right, with massive untapped potential. After months of discovery and 100s of conversations with execs and assistants in early 2023, I heard loud and clear the ambition is there but the demands of the

day-to-day role stopped execs from offering their EAs stretch projects or formal learning opps. It struck me that AI was the key to unlock this — because if you can outsource some of the routine admin to AI, you create capacity to take on more of the strategic, project-based, value-add work. The work that gets you noticed and gets you promoted.

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?

Our main product is Carve AI — this is a live 7-week cohort-based course that takes assistants on a journey of deeply understanding gen AI to building AI skills and uncovering their ideal AI + automation tools stack for work. It aims to give assistants the confidence and skills to use AI every day, and see a significant uptick in their capacity. Our clients include assistants to high-profile leaders in AI, tech, VC and more, including assistants to Tony Blair, Reid Hoffman, Clara Shih and Sarah Guo. We find assistants mainly through referrals, our newsletter The Carve Edge, by sharing top tips on LinkedIn, and collaborating with other industry folks/speaking at industry events.

We also design bespoke AI workshops and offsite events for assistant teams. These are often more experiential and focused on winning hearts and minds, and creating "holy sh*t!" moments with AI to encourage people to lean in.

Our USP is our approach. I have a very strong view on what makes for impactful digital learning from my 12+ years in this field — in short, it's peer learning focused, it's little + often, it's immediately actionable, it has rigour in how its built and measured, and it's constantly evolving. I've also used an advisory board to help me build my course to fill in for my own blind spots. I'm hugely passionate about diversity and deeply believe the

best products are build with many different voices and perspectives.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

When I started out in late 2022, I thought I was building programs to help EAs build leadership skills and become more strategic assistants to create their own career progression. Then it struck me that AI could make this possible so in 2023 I pivoted to building the first AI program dedicated to assistants, Carve AI. Carve AI has evolved significantly with every cohort we've run over the past year, based on feedback, assessment metrics, and the evolving AI landscape. In late 2023 I started getting a lot of requests for bespoke corporate training so I began building out an offering for assistant teams. In early 2024 I recognised the Carve AI course was simply too much of a time/££ commitment and too advanced for many, so I launched a lighter touch 30 day AI Challenge to get people started using AI chatbots, uncovering use cases, building an AI mindset and daily habit of using AI — all in a supportive digital community with assistants just like them. In 2024 I've delivered AI training and workshops to broader teams beyond assistants, and am recognising just how expert I am at AI for everyday work productivity, which is super relevant to all functions.

What is your favourite thing about being a founder?

The freedom to work how and where I'd like to, and to be in control of my destiny (though the latter is really a double-edged sword.. it's also an incredible amount of pressure!). I also really love working with clients, building products I'm proud of, and seeing firsthand the impact I'm making with them. Sometimes that gets lost when you're working in bigger organisations.

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

In the learning space specifically, I'm really inspired by the work and writings of Wes Kao (ex-Maven, ex-altMBA), Sarah Stockdale (Growclass) and Ashley Sinclair (MAAS Marketing).

It may be silly but there are a number of consumer brand founders I admire because I'm obsessed with their products and have a deep respect for their craft and their uncompromising pursuit of being the absolute best: Rachel Vosper (a chandler in London), Bernard Schobbens (a chocolatier in Belgium), Melissa Morris (of Métier handbags in London).

And I'm also a huge fan of Emmie Faust, an exited founder who created the Female Founders Rise community that I'm a part of — she is so humble and generous in sharing her learnings and I can't tell you how much I've gotten out of the community!

What's been your biggest business fail?

I moved too slowly to make the call that AI was the right focus, and to dive in and build Carve AI. I realised after ~4 months of discovery that it was becoming a crutch. Several people in my network encouraged me to create a MVP, just get something out there, "pretotype" to test demand. So I did.. eventually. But I should have trusted my instincts and been bolder in moving quickly on it!

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

- Leading and growing people.
- Churning out work at startup pace.
- Connecting people, collaborating and building partnerships.

- Public speaking and facilitation.

What areas do you need to improve on?

- Being less perfectionist.
- Saying no to stuff that's not aligned with my priorities.
- Giving less f*cks about what other people think.
- Funding and forecasting.

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

We're just getting started ☐ We'll continue to support assistants with more learning products that go deeper into AI and automation, and beyond into the leadership skills that are so critical to career progression. And we'll continue to explore other corporate verticals beyond EAs and potentially broaden our audience. Right now scalability is a big theme so we'll also be making our first 1-2 hires this year, and training and building a team of associates for program delivery.

What advice would you give other founders?

Plunge in! Founding a business isn't for the faint of heart and it will stretch you. But the sooner the start, the sooner you'll get on the road to owning your destiny. And no matter where you end up, you'll never regret having tried.

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?

I'm a lifelong gym rat, I flit between high-octane spin, slow burn Pilates, weight training and fun classes every week — or TRX when I'm travelling.

I'm also obsessed with coffee, matcha and pickles/fermented stuff. Mornings start with a giant Monmouth filter coffee I make in my V60. I make myself an iced matcha cooler when the mid-afternoon slump hits (I import this from a company called Asha in the SF bay area where I'm originally from, it's the best I've found yet). Around 5pm is "pickle-o'clock" (!!) and I'll usually have a small bowl of kimchi, kraut or pickles before finishing my work day.

And no matter how busy I am, I have a couple work routines I live by:

1. Saturday morning I plan the next week's key themes and deliverables over a nice coffee after my Saturday workout using pen and paper (controversially given my love for AI tools for work productivity.. !)
2. I always take one day off per week, even if I'm working the weekend - better to work a 12h day on a Saturday and get the Sunday off than work 6h days each day (I got this tip from my life partner, who's a 3X founder)

Fiona Young is the founder of Carve.



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