Daniel Hall Presents

Episode 85

Best Practices for Building and Working with a Remote Team

with Gavin Zuchlinski

Welcome to this episode of the Real Fast Results podcast! Today, you're going to learn about building a team because, let's face it, you're only one person, and you can't pull the plow forever. You are going to need help, and it's advised that you look into building a team sooner, rather than later. The special guest in this episode is Gavin Zuchlinski, who is the founder of [Acuity Scheduling](#). This service is currently one of slickest ways to automate your business and manage appointments online.

Gavin is a self-professed tech geek and espresso maniac. He also wholeheartedly believes that business should be fun, as does the team at Real Fast Results! Otherwise, why do it? Welcome to the show Gavin!

Promise: Working Successfully with a Remote Team

Thanks for having me on. I'm excited to chat about this. I just wanted to talk about working with a remote team, so hopefully, you can get some of the best talent out there and be the most successful.

The reason why we do it is to find the best talent out there. Above all, I'm trying to find, for us, the best personalities and the right people, who actually have the

drive to do what they are looking for, and to make everyone who is working with me, and our company, happy too. **Remote working helps to solve all of that. The best people in the world aren't within 25 miles of you**. The best people are spread out everywhere, and the best people have the luxury to define where they are going to be working and what they are going to be doing. And, we find more and more that they are using that power to go to companies that give them that flexibility, and honor them as a person, and don't require them to do an hour commute each way.

It's almost a benefit on top of that, too, to attract those folks. One of our fantastic people normally lives in Maryland, but she's in London for a month and is about to go Bali for a couple of months to work. She left her last job, where she was a star employee, to work with us. So, we are a relatively small company compared to the behemoth that she worked for before, but she came to work for us because she loved our values, and also because we let her do those types of things. As a result, we're getting better work out of her, and she's happier too.

You can find people, and you can find people who are uniquely talented in different areas, and that's because you can be a lot more selective. The pool of candidates is a lot bigger, so obviously, you'll get a lot better people. You also get a lot more diversity. Since we have people who are, like, in Scotland and then Seattle, they bring wildly different perspectives to how we work and how we communicate. This is especially true for us because we deal with people all over the globe, nearly every country at Acuity Scheduling. We just get a better understanding and empathy with everyone because, say, the person in Scotland can help us understand what the climate is really like for normal people in Europe versus anywhere else. I think that we have a very unique voice because of this.

How to Build a Remote Team

[Acuity Scheduling](#) is a company that helps small businesses offer and manage appointments. I built it on my own, but for many years, it was just me running it. Then, eventually, it got to the point where I had to get someone else just help with the number of support emails. So, when I did that first hire, I needed to find someone that I could trust and someone with a good personality. That turned out to be the key of the first hire because a lot of the technical things you can teach, but especially when you are working remotely, you don't run into them in the water cooler, or that type of thing.

To me, personality is the #1 thing when you're searching for that first hire. You have to have someone that you really jive with because communication, once you are starting to work remotely, is super-important. Being able to have that personality fit helps you to communicate. Just someone who you are on the same wavelength with will totally help simplify things.

Finding the Right Personalities

Yeah, I would check out our job application. We hire, mostly, from one website, which is WeWorkRemotely.com. It has been a fantastic job board for us, and the job posting is in the form of a personal ad from the company itself. It's awesome. It's so different than those stale old ones that are like, "We are looking for someone who can do 60 words per minute and is familiar with this type of software…" We are looking for personality, so that is first and foremost.

Everything should feel for the person and identify with that person that you're looking for. So, when we put those out, the website gets a spinoff to a lot of other remote working sites too, and we get thousands of applicants. W**e ask them to write a love letter for us, instead of writing a cover letter or anything else.** That's because we are looking for how well they can write and seeing how their personality comes through. We don't just look at whether or not they are funny and articulate, but that they have a combination of these and that they write in a really cool way. Our tool set for how we communicate between everyone, and for most people what their job is, really revolves around being fantastic writers and able to be very clear.

So, You Try to Show that Your Company is Different through the Application?

Exactly. So we're trying to set the narrative the whole way through. For the company, most of the people who we are hiring are meant to help me get my voice out there, dealing with customers, and providing support. Personality is one of the #1 things when it comes to those tasks, and it's also vital for remote work. The job posting hits on that, just in the way that it's written. What we're looking for is not really in the requirements that we state, but also what we don't say in there, which is specific software and things like that. Hopefully, we'll attract someone who is driven, in talking about some of those benefits, and then if follows through with the application for a love letter instead of a cover letter.

As we go through, too, we use Acuity Scheduling to help manage it because everybody is in all different time zones everywhere. So we eat our own dog food with that, but then eventually, as the next step, if they do have a good application, we'll send them to an interview with us. That interview will be scheduled through Acuity, which handles all of the time zones, and reminders, and everything. We follow through the narrative, and it's sort of like dating too. Our initial interview is the first date. We ask them questions like, "What's the best experience you had in your last year?" We try to leak out more of that, and it follows through all the way. By then, we have people who have the personalities so that when they come to the job, they live it, and it helps the company culture too.

When to Start Hiring

I always recommend hiring when you feel like you have a need and someone can actually help. As soon as you have to hire the first person, hire remote immediately. Don't hire someone locally and have your second chair be remote, or anything like that. **To be a successful remote company, you have to make sure that you hire for personality, make sure that you enable everything through clear communication, and that means being 100% remote and on equal footing everywhere.**

For that first hire, after you feel yourself going a little bit nuts, start writing and trying to attract somebody. Post it on the job board, or whatever, and find your first hire, and then go remote immediately. Then, after you have that person, and you've hired them on, and they're remote, the next thing is to make sure that you have the technical tools in place to make communication successful. **With remote working, communication is really a key driver of success.**

I definitely have hired well after I should have. I think that's a good thing too, because it means that you are very stable and you can afford some luxuries with training and everything else as well. I'm particularly financially conservative, so I don't ever hire without regular income coming in that can support all of that. At the same time, you don't want to be driving yourself nuts because, yes, you technically could be answering all the phone calls and all of those admin types of things. **However, you're going to end up working 14 hours a day, and you don't get your best creative work done when you are bogged down in all these nitty-gritty details.**

For me personally, I only have my remote employees work six hours a day. When you are working remotely, you already get less commute time. I want people to be very focused at work, and then I bring that to myself too, that I don't follow the six hour rule, but I work hard to keep it at eight hours. When I work any more than that, I'm not as creative. I'm bogged down. I get tired. So that's when I know when it's time to hire, and hopefully, by then, the finances will start to support it.

You do have to hire a little bit after you need it because you want someone to come in and they are actually tasked up with work, but you don't want to be working 18 hour days for months on end because at that point it is too late. You're going to be like, "Here. Just take all this work and don't contact me at all." That's easy to do when you're working remotely. So you definitely need to find that balance, and know that it's coming a little bit beforehand so that you can prepare for it.

How to Manage a Team Remotely

Like I said, we hire for personality because communication is so important remotely. I think that now we are at a point where remote work makes so much sense because we've just gotten the technical tools to support it, which have worked phenomenally over the last 5-10 years. What we do, generally, is we use [Slack](#) for chat and then use text-based chat. We use Google hangouts for video, and there are tons of other tools out there. I just love these tools because they integrate together. We have

daily meetings where we talk and get face to face every day. Having that face to face, and being able to chat is really important.

Being able to kick on video chats, like Google Hangouts, instead of doing text base is also really good, so that you can get the back and forth conversations in. That's a lot easier than always typing things out, but we still love the typing because it lets you focus on your work instead of having someone, you know, sitting on your screen in front of you. That way you get the balance that you need to be able to control interruptions. Those two are probably the lifeblood of what we do.

Then, just little things too, like asking everybody, every day, just to say, "Good morning," when they come on and, "Goodnight," when they are leaving. **You don't realize it at first, but with remote working, things can be very invisible.** You don't know when people are there and when they aren't, and you don't know when to contact them. It's just a little thing, but it can lead to a lot of uncertainty. Try to make that communication as clear as possible. Little habits throughout the day, such as saying hello and goodbye, and you might have meetings to have that face to face whenever you need it during the day. If someone has a personality that you really connect with, that makes you successful.

How Do I Find People that I Don't Have to Micromanage?

Going back to that very first hire, I actually ended up hiring my sister. I had been looking around for people, and I realized that for my very first hire, I would have to get someone who I really could connect with personally, but also that I trusted. It ended up being her. I did look into a lot of other candidates, and she turned out to be the perfect one. It took me a while to realize that the right person was someone that I was close to. We got along great, even when we were kids, so she was perfect. It's important that you are able to divide the work very clearly, and coming into that, even from the very beginning, with well-defined boundaries on who does what and where you are working.

Should I Hire Someone Full-Time, Part-Time, or by the Project?

We work with all of those, really. We have some contractors that do some regular part-time work for our specialties, and we have people who are full-time. In fact, we have more full-time people than anything else, and we have a few project-based contractors as well. It generally comes down to the nature of how you are dividing your work. Some things, like helping to answer emails every day, require a person to regularly take care of them, and things like that are tasks that people will get better at over time as well. When that happens, it makes sense for the person to do it full-time, on a long-term basis.

It all has to do with the nature of the work. Like, our copywriting is something that we need to take care of on a regular basis, but it's not enough that someone would feel satisfied to do this full-time. That's why we have that as a part-time position. Other times we are looking for project-based contractors and we're looking for some outside creativity. We do this a lot on design projects, when we need to get a website or some other type of media things done, and they don't need a lot of the in-house background knowledge. So, you don't need to keep them on payroll, and it's also something that spikes and then drops. We get a lot of value by having outside people, and by actually varying who we use now and again. That way, you get new perspectives all the time too.

First Position You Should Hire

My first hire was for customer support, which was really answering emails all day. It was really obvious that this was what I needed to hire for because that was the single biggest thing that I was spending my time on, and at the same time, it was what took the least amount of brain power. So, it wasn't something unique that I can do. **Since it was taking up quite a bit of my time, and it wasn't, really, uniquely for me, it was pretty clear that this was the first thing to hire for.**

Set a Narrative when You are Hiring

Hopefully, at this point, you would have set a narrative when you are hiring. T**his way, you can find that "right" personality that fits, and when they come on, you are able to communicate clearly.** You should also have all the tools in place so that you can communicate clearly as well. Every day, you should put more things in place so that you add more structure to it, so that you know when you can talk to them and when you can't.

On top of that, as you try to keep it all going, the final thing is (especially for full-time employees), occasionally we will step back and meet in person too. So, for all the full-time employees, we do regular get-togethers. There's nothing that beats that, you know, that personal bonding. Those are things that you can't get when you are remote and totally work-focused. In July, we're headed to Puerto Rico and renting out a big place.

It just revitalizes you, and it makes us connect as a company. **Again, with a company, probably the biggest thing that keeps people around isn't the nature of the work, but the people that they work with.** So, making sure that the people they work with are people they enjoy, it helps to do that too.

If I Hire Someone to Handle My Customer Support, What Should I Expect to Pay?

Especially for remote employees, there's a ton of different thoughts on this. You can set a standard and pay a certain amount, no matter where an employee is

located, or you can divide things up depending on their location. You might even do something in between with that. What we do is set a standard, and it's based on what's fair for someone in the United States, generally. When it comes to customer support, I'm really passionate about that, so I try to find great folks for a little higher than average pay. At the very low end, it's $45,000 a year, and at the high end it is probably around $65,000 a year, and that's the same pay whether they are living in New York City or, I don't know, Bangladesh.

It's interesting because the choice of where to live when you are a remote employee is so much more open. That means their purchasing power can change, depending on what they want. A fixed amount of money can mean totally different things to different people, but we set a standard for everyone, no matter where they live, since it's their choice.

How Can I Ease Into This, Without Breaking the Bank?

It doesn't have to be like that because [Acuity](#) is very stable and profitable, and I'm trying to make everyone as happy as possible. That's why we do that. The other approach is to find people in slightly cheaper locales. Even if you wanted someone that resides in the United States, you might choose someone from Texas because it's so much cheaper to live there. People are much happier with a lower rate there versus someone in New York. **So, defining where you are hiring from can drastically changes things.**

If you are taking the opposite approach and changing the rate you pay by where the person lives, the Philippines is also a great option, and there are great websites you can use to try to find someone like this too. [Upwork](#) is a good example. You can start them out on a project-by-project basis very inexpensively, and you can find contractors from all around the world on this platform, many of which are willing to work for much lower rates and still be happy where they are. So, this might be a great way for you to get started as well.

Final Tips

Make sure that the communication is clear. That's the biggest thing with remote work. If you have that, you'll be more successful and your employees will be happier. Then, hopefully, you'll be happier too, and with lower costs as well.

Connecting with Gavin

To reach out to me directly, feel free to reach out on LinkedIn, Galvin Zuchlinski. My name is very distinct on there. If you want to check out Acuity Scheduling, feel free to go to [AcuityScheduling.com/RealFast](#) for an extended 45-day trial, and you can use the

same tools that we do to hire and interview our remote employees all around the world without thinking about time zones.

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