

ABSOLUTE
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Leadership

IS NOT ABOUT

You

Lessons from GoDaddy's Steve Aldrich
on how to grow your team

KELLY HATFIELD

Introduction



Steven Aldrich is a mentor of mine. He's someone who I have learned a lot from and whose lessons have impacted me and my business in many ways. I am confident the lessons Steven shared with me during our recent interview for our Absolute Advantage podcast episode will impact you in a similar way.

In case you are not already familiar with Steven — he is Chief Product Officer at GoDaddy. It's Steven's job to set and execute GoDaddy's vision of providing elegant, end-to-end technology solutions for their more than 14.5 million small business customers. He also heads up the Online Bookkeeping and WorkSpace teams.

During our time together, Steven shared his insights and experience regarding leadership, how to spend your invaluable time as a leader, what startups can learn from big businesses (and vice versa), how to get your business' story straight, how to eliminate hiring biases, and much more.

This eBook encapsulates the highlights from our interview. But, you can listen to the interview in its entirety here.

I look forward to your feedback. You can reach me at kelly@engenuityadvantage.com.

To your success,



Leadership is Not About You

Kelly: If you could gift all of your knowledge on one lesson of leadership to somebody who is starting a business, what would that one lesson of leadership be that you would give them?

Steven: There's a concept around servant leadership that I believe is quite core to building a business and building a followership.

When you're starting a business, it's not about you.

If you do the right thing for your team, your team will do the right thing for your customers, and then you will wind up with a successful business.

Lessons of Leadership

Kelly: Do you have mentors who have taught and inspired you to be a better leader? And in what way did they do that?

Steven: I worked very closely with Scott Cook. Scott spent time with me and with my team bringing best practices in from the outside and showing how you start from the customer's point of view.

He liked to say a few things that I think are worthwhile. One is, "Before you walk in someone else's shoes, take your own off."

Another is, "You have two ears and one mouth. Please use them in that ratio."

It was always about listening and learning from others. How do you bring in the perspective that others have? That's what being a great customer and employee empathetic leader is about — listening and then responding after you understand.

Bill Campbell was CEO at Intuit for a long time. He was an unbelievable leader and a coach first for the team. I'll always remember the lesson he impressed on me.

You always play for the team first

I worked with another woman at Intuit, Lorrie Norrington who had also come from GE. She brought a tremendous amount of empathy, and what I would call a "bringing your whole self to work" concept.

There's so much we have to do every day in making the workplace great. If you have to put on a false front, it's not worth it.

Here at GoDaddy, I've had a chance to work with Blake Irving. He's a longtime tech veteran, who was at Microsoft and Yahoo.

Blake has showed me the importance of having a story for the company that you work with and a personal story that intertwine.

Being able to bring your individual experiences and connect them to, "Why am I here? Why am I doing what I'm doing?" is memorable and critical to attracting more talent and keeping talent at your company.

Spend Your Time Wisely

Kelly: What are some of the key questions you ask yourself as a leader?

Steven: I often ask, “Am I spending my time in the right way?”

We can't manufacture more time.

Pay close attention to what you spend your time doing. Is it aligned with what you think your priorities are?

I also ask myself if I have the right people on my team and if I am spending enough time with them helping them get accomplished what they need.

A third question I ask myself is, **“Am I bringing enough new ideas to the table?”**

I try to spend that time appropriately balanced with customers, employees, and people who can bring new ideas to me from the outside world.

Kelly: Do you have a process around that? How do you review that so you stay on track?

Steven: I have time built into my schedule to review priorities that I call “think time.”

I step back and ensure that I have my priorities on a single piece of paper with objectives that are clear. I update them on a quarterly basis, both personally and then with members of my team.

I also look at my calendar and make sure I've got chunks of time open for breakfasts and lunches and coffees with folks both inside and outside the firm.

I use my calendar to control those particular actions and work weekly with my assistant to figure out if I'm spending my time on the right things.



Help Your Team Grow

Kelly: What about key questions you ask of team members to help foster their growth. Do you have some key questions in that arena?

Steven: Yes. Interestingly, they're similar to the questions I ask myself.

We usually start with "What's the most important objective on your plate right now? What are you trying to accomplish?"

These aren't one on one conversations that we only have once in awhile.

These are regular discussions, either every week or every other week so that we have a grounding in what we're trying to accomplish.

I want to find out where they are finding success and where they are finding difficulty and then figure out how to solve their challenges.

Finally, there's a discussion about whether they're learning what they need to learn and whether they're on a trajectory that they're excited about.

If I don't ask that question of them, and if they're not asking it of themselves, they're going to wake up one day and probably be disappointed. I just don't want to be in that position.

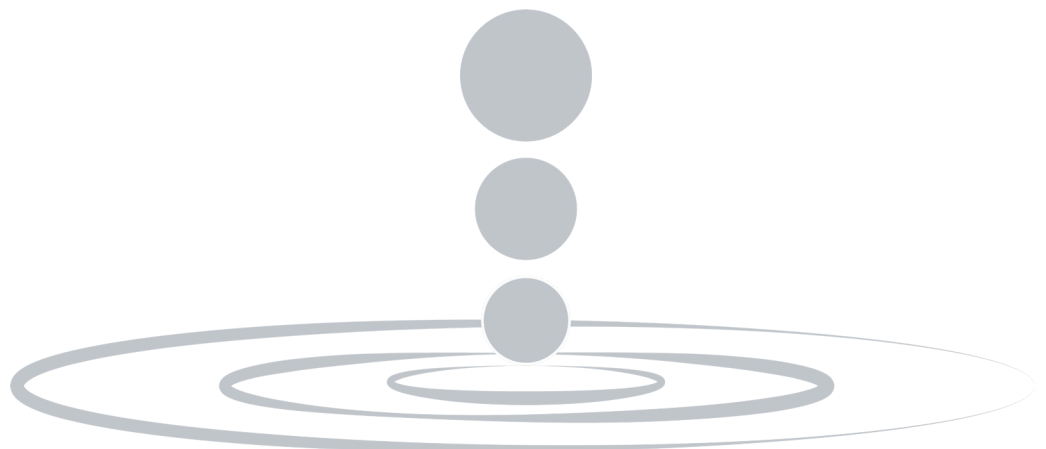
I'd much rather have someone that develops great talent and is doing spectacularly well and leaves to go someplace else because then we've got a friend of the firm outside of the company.

The alternative is they wake up one day and are really disappointed and wind up leaving without having a great relationship built with me and our company.

I often ask myself, "If I'm going to try to hire this person again in the future, would they be willing to work for me? And will they be better then, than they are now?"

You should be investing in your team in a way that when you meet people who have left your company a few years from now, they say, "That was the most incredible period of my life. I really learned a ton. Thank you."

Then they'll come back and work for you again.



Focus on Your Objectives

Kelly: What can you share about going from entrepreneurship to working for a large corporation back to being an entrepreneur again and then back to a large corporation? Can you share some of those lessons you learned?

Steven: There's an urgency and pace to small business where you literally have to find a way to make the next payroll. I've been in that situation a couple of times. That gives you a pressure that makes the creative juices flow and makes execution really honed to the most important thing today.

That scarcity of resource and that urgency can get lost as you get to bigger and bigger companies where roles get divided and when there are competing priorities.

I think as a leader who has moved from a startup back to a big company, I tried to bring that level of urgency with me because it's important to remember that while we are fine as a business right now, there are always smaller firms looking to unseat us.

There are also customers who need our help. There are employees who could be doing their jobs more effectively and be more motivated if we solve some more problems today. Not tomorrow, not in a month, but today.

On the flip-side, when I thought about the experiences I had at larger firms and applying them into startups, there's a lot of urgency in startups, but sometimes you're pointed in the wrong direction.

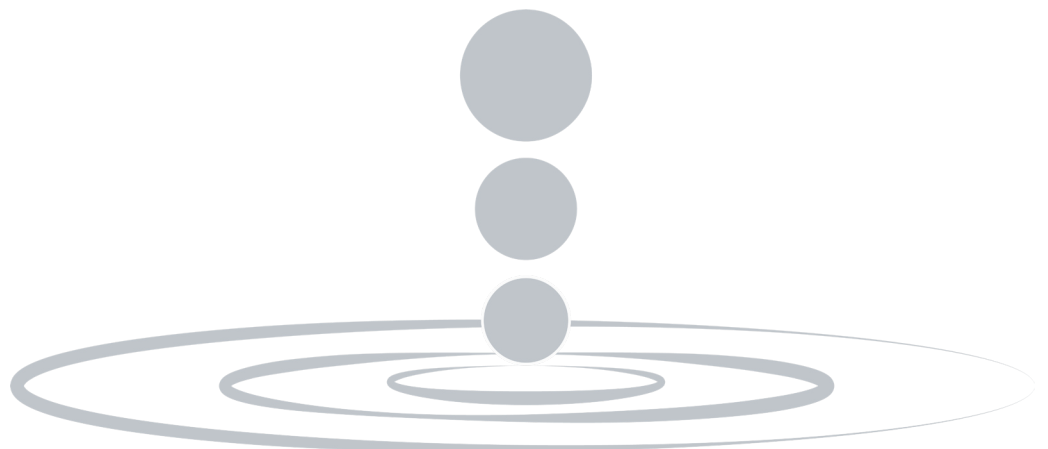
So, I try to ask the question, what's the objective?

At the most basic level, what are we trying to accomplish? And how will we measure success?

The ability to be proactive instead of reactive can dramatically boost the effectiveness of the huge passion that many smaller firms wind up unleashing in a direction that doesn't get them towards their ultimate goal.

There's a very simple way to describe that if you're trying to work on it with your teams, which is "What's the outcome we're trying to achieve? Can you describe it in English? Then how are we going to measure this success? And what exact metrics will we use?"

If I can describe that objective, then I can tell somebody how I'm doing, because I have the metrics in front of me.



Get Your Story Right

Kelly: One of the most common struggles with growing a business is often finding the right people to help facilitate that growth. What are some of the challenges you've faced specifically related to hiring and growing your team?

Steven: When I came to GoDaddy in 2012, the firm had only ever hired from within. If you were not in Arizona or in Cedar Rapids at the time, you couldn't join the firm.

There was no office elsewhere that could bring talent in, so we set up an outpost in Silicon Valley to add to the richness of talent that we could acquire.

GoDaddy was already a billion dollar company at that point, but it really didn't have the reputation at the time that was going to bring in the best technologists and the best product folks. We had great, controversial marketing at the time and great customer care, but products were not the story that GoDaddy was telling.

We had to define what we were going to tell people that would give them a reason for coming to GoDaddy.

So when I think about recruiting and bringing people to our team, I first think about why would they come? What can you do that will attract people to first show up and talk to you and then come and take a role?

You need to get very explicit about the story that you want to tell.

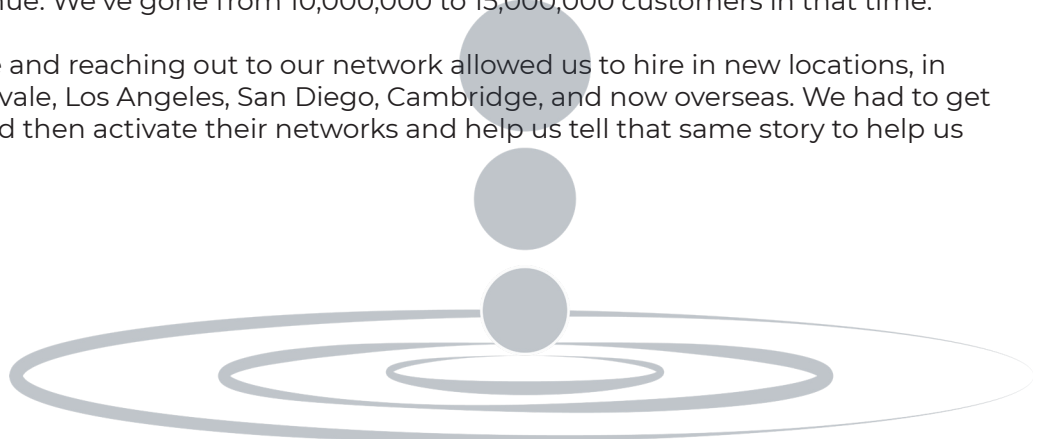
For us, that was helping individuals around the world create successful independent ventures. There are 465,000,000 small businesses worldwide, and very few of them are online today. We know that getting found on the web or on social media helps small businesses acquire customers. Our goal is to move folks from the old world to the new world and make them more successful.

We honed that story, and then we used our personal networks. We built relationships with people so that when we called them later, they'd come work with us again. We had a small group of folks who began reaching out to our networks and asking people to come and join us on this mission.

Then we also said, "We're going to build the company with a mindset towards growth in our people, growth in our customers, and that you can help make that happen."

Many of the folks that joined us are still here and have taken on broader and broader roles because the company has doubled in revenue. We've gone from 10,000,000 to 15,000,000 customers in that time.

Getting the right story in place and reaching out to our network allowed us to hire in new locations, in Kirkland, San Francisco, Sunnyvale, Los Angeles, San Diego, Cambridge, and now overseas. We had to get the right first people who could then activate their networks and help us tell that same story to help us keep growing.



How to Eliminate Biases

Kelly: Steven, your success is something we can all learn from. I loved your example of how getting the right story in place allowed you to hire employees in so many locations to get the absolute best talent on your team.

How from a diversity standpoint are you making sure that you're getting what you need from an innovation standpoint with that diversity on your team?

Steven: Even if you're not aware, there is bias in your hiring process. There's bias in your promotion process. There's bias probably in the way that you pay people.

We partnered with some folks at Stanford called the Clayman Institute to try to root out what's known as unconscious bias.

We're now tracking metrics. We're very focused at the moment on gender diversity, but you could apply this to any type of skillset or ethnicity.

You need to look closely at what questions you ask in the interview process. Are you getting a diverse set of candidates before you give an offer? Are you setting a specific understanding towards what it means to have a rating on both what you accomplished and how you accomplished it?

Take your values and make them very concrete.

If someone's demonstrating that they're working well within a team, what does that mean?

We have some very specific questions we ask.

What's remarkable is the research shows that when you're explicit and making other people be explicit about the logic around hiring decisions, promotion decisions, and pay decisions, you quickly remove bias by bringing the logic out into the light of day versus letting your minds tell stories without exposing that thinking.

As soon as you expose biased thinking, you eliminate the bias.

We're really excited about the work that we're doing to make processes tighter, more rigorous, and stamping out the bias to the fact where that now half of our incoming engineering interns, for example, are women. We've been able to move the percentage of women up in both the senior leadership team, and the engineering team by digits.

In the name of transparency, we led with publishing all this data out so it's public. So we're saying, "Here's our pay data. Here's our data on hiring. Here's our data on promotion."

We're nowhere near where we want to be, but it's holding our feet to the fire, making sure that we're accountable to the goals we set ourselves.



About Kelly Hatfield & April Taylor



We are leaders and entrepreneurs at heart. We believe FULLY in the power of the ripple effect and the opportunity that each of us has to create meaningful, positive and long-lasting impact in the lives of our teams, our clients and all who we serve. We consistently focus on ensuring that this amazing opportunity is realized and have built several successful companies directly connected to helping others live into their opportunity to make a greater impact.

We have been in the Recruiting and HR field for over 25 years. Along with our amazing teams, we have created 4 successful businesses aimed at matching exceptional talent with top organizations. Through our passion for service and helping people, our reach has organically expanded into the area of coaching and consulting. With a focus on high-performance, we partner directly with leaders and with companies to support and develop their leadership teams and design recruiting and retention strategies. Additionally, our work as hosts of Absolute Advantage Podcast offers a conduit to deep discussions with successful entrepreneurs, executives, and thought leaders across a variety of industries. This has provided us with a unique perspective and deep connection to leadership, people, entrepreneurship and high-achieving practices from all viewpoints.

As successful entrepreneurs and certified High-Performance Institute Coaches, we couldn't be more excited about helping you take your personal and professional life to the next level. We've had a lifelong passion for helping others succeed and are committed to making a positive impact in the lives of the people we touch. With over 25 years in leadership, we know from experience what it takes to build a happy life, successful business, high-performance mindset and high achieving teams. We are certain that one of the keys to our success as leaders and entrepreneurs has been the support we've received along the way from coaches, mentors and subject matter experts in their respective fields. Any time we've needed to level-up, we've sought the advice and support from those who have been where we want to go.

If it's YOUR time for a dramatic transformation and rapid advancement in your personal and professional life, we'd love to help you break through your barriers and reach your highest potential so you can go out and make YOUR impact in the world.

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