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Building a Team That Performs Under Pressure

The Four Essentials for a Strong Team

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Teams aren't tested when everything is running smoothly. The real test comes when a key client suddenly needs more than expected, sales targets need to be hit, a major project lands, or growth starts happening faster than anticipated.

Pressure doesn't create problems. More often than not, it reveals what's already there.

Unclear priorities, poor communication, lack of accountability and gaps in leadership tend to show up very quickly when expectations rise and deadlines get tighter.

That's why busy periods can actually be useful. They show you what's working, what's not, and where your next hire could make a real difference.

In my experience, most growing businesses don't need a complete overhaul. They need the right people in the right roles, clear expectations, and leaders who can keep everyone focused when things get busy.

This article looks at what separates businesses that keep moving forward under pressure from those that struggle, the leadership qualities that make a difference during challenging periods, and five practical things you can do over the next month to strengthen your business.

What You'll Learn:

- Why busy periods often expose existing weaknesses, and what to look out for before they become bigger issues
- The four things successful businesses tend to have in place before pressure hits, and what that means when you're hiring
- The leadership behaviours that help people stay focused and productive during periods of growth, change and uncertainty
- Five practical steps you can take in the next 30 days to strengthen your business, including how to improve your hiring brief

The Four Things That Matter Most Under Pressure

When a business performs well during a difficult period, there are usually four things happening behind the scenes. Take one away and cracks often start to appear.

These are the qualities worth looking for when hiring and developing your people:

Trust and communication

Trust isn't a fluffy concept. It's what allows people to speak up early, ask for help and solve problems before they become expensive mistakes.

Where trust is lacking, people tend to keep quiet, become defensive or look for someone else to blame when things go wrong. The strongest working environments encourage open conversations, especially when there is pressure to deliver.

Clear priorities and responsibilities

When things get busy, confusion becomes costly.

People need to understand what matters most, what can wait and who is responsible for what. The best leaders simplify. They make decisions, set priorities and communicate them clearly so everyone knows where to focus their efforts.

Problem-solvers rather than problem-watchers

Every growing business faces setbacks. What separates successful organisations is how people respond.

The strongest employees don't spend their time explaining why something can't be done. They focus on finding solutions. That's something I always look for when recruiting.

Accountability

High-performing businesses have people who do what they say they're going to do.

Responsibilities are clear. Deadlines are agreed. Expectations are understood. That consistency becomes incredibly valuable when workloads increase and priorities start competing for attention.

What Good Leaders Do When Things Get Tough

Leadership has a huge influence on how people respond when the pressure is on. I've worked with enough growing businesses over the years to know that when leaders stay calm, communicate clearly and make sensible decisions, everyone else tends to follow suit.

A few qualities stand out time and again:

Stay calm and self-aware

People take their cues from those around them.

If a leader appears stressed, reactive or overwhelmed, it quickly affects everyone else.

The best leaders don't pretend everything is perfect. They acknowledge challenges, stay focused on solutions and avoid creating unnecessary panic. That calm approach helps others stay productive when workloads increase.

Communicate little and often

One of the quickest ways to create uncertainty is to leave people guessing. When information is limited, people tend to fill in the gaps themselves, and rarely with positive assumptions.

Regular updates, short check-ins and honest conversations help everyone stay focused on what's important. You don't need lengthy meetings. In fact, during busy periods, a quick daily catch-up is often far more effective.

Focus on what matters most

Not everything can be a priority. Strong leaders understand this and aren't afraid to make decisions about what gets done now, what gets delayed and what can wait.

That clarity helps people focus their energy where it will have the biggest impact.

Build strength around you

The most effective business leaders don't try to carry everything themselves. They surround themselves with capable people they trust.

This is where the quality of your senior hires really matters.

A strong Head of Sales, Commercial Manager or Operations Director can help steady the business during demanding periods and take pressure away from the leadership team.

The Best Businesses Prepare Before They Need To

One thing I've noticed over the years is that successful businesses don't wait until they're under pressure before making improvements. The groundwork is done well before things get busy.

Create a culture where people keep learning

Mistakes happen in every business. The important thing is whether people learn from them.

Businesses that encourage learning, reflection and continuous improvement tend to cope far better when challenges arise.

Rather than asking "who got this wrong?", they're asking "what can we do better next time?" That mindset makes a huge difference.

Don't ignore wellbeing

There is a fine line between being busy and being overwhelmed. Most people can handle pressure for short periods. What causes problems is when high workloads become the norm.

Simple things make a difference.

Encouraging people to take holidays. Respecting personal time. Managing workloads properly. Checking in when someone appears stretched.

These aren't nice-to-haves. They're part of building a sustainable business.

Agree how you'll work together

When expectations are clear, businesses run more smoothly. Everyone should understand how communication works, how decisions are made, who owns what and how issues are raised.

Having those conversations before problems arise saves a huge amount of time and frustration later on.

Five Things You Can Do In The Next 30 Days

The good news is you don't need a major transformation project to strengthen your business. Small changes often have the biggest impact.

1. Identify where pressure shows up

Get your leadership group together and look at where challenges tend to arise.

- Is it when sales activity spikes?
- During a major client project?
- When key people are away?

Understanding where pressure points exist helps you prepare for them.

2. Introduce regular check-ins

During busy periods, a short daily update can make a huge difference.

It keeps everyone aligned, highlights issues early and allows support to be offered where it's needed most.

A quick end-of-week review is equally valuable.

Ask what's working well and what could be improved.

3. Make sure work is allocated properly

Not everyone has the same strengths.

Look at who's doing what and whether responsibilities are being shared effectively. Sometimes a simple adjustment can improve performance and reduce stress almost immediately.

4. Set boundaries before you need them

It's much easier to agree expectations before things get hectic.

Whether that's limiting out-of-hours emails, agreeing cover arrangements or planning time off, setting boundaries early helps protect both performance and wellbeing.

5. Review your hiring brief

When you're recruiting, don't focus solely on technical skills:

- Think about how someone works under pressure.
- Can they communicate effectively when things get busy?
- Do they solve problems?
- Can they build relationships and support others?

Those qualities often make the difference between someone who strengthens a growing business and someone who creates additional challenges.

Building A Team That Performs When It Matters Most

Businesses that perform well under pressure aren't built by accident. They're built through good hiring decisions, clear leadership and people who understand how to work together when things get busy.

The strongest organisations aren't the ones that avoid challenges altogether. They're the ones that know how to respond when challenges arrive.

They have the right people in the right roles, clear priorities and leaders who create confidence rather than confusion.

That's where working with a specialist recruiter can make a real difference.

Finding someone with the right experience is important. Finding someone who can thrive in a growing business, communicate well and add value when the pressure is on is even more important.

That's exactly what we help our clients do.

If you're planning your next hire and want to make sure you're bringing in someone who will strengthen your business, I'd be delighted to have a chat. Feel free to get in touch at [**sarah@recruitrecruit.co.uk**](mailto:sarah@recruitrecruit.co.uk) or call **01902 763006**.

A little about Sarah Bishop and Recruit Recruit Ltd



Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- **Recruitment:** finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- **Sales & Leadership Training:** developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- **Speaking & EmCeeing:** energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- **Coaching:** supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

So, let's talk if:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect - let's build something brilliant together.

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Scale Up!: The Founders' Guide to Accelerating Growth by Building Dream Teams by Sarah Bishop

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