

On Your Terms Episode 66:
Hiring, Leadership & Team Building 101
Interview with Kira La Forgia of Paradigm Consulting

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:00:10] Hey there, and welcome back to On Your Terms. I'm your host, Sam Vander Wielen. I am so excited to chat with you this week with one of my friends and also one of my colleagues, who I actually have hired in my own business to help my own business with HR, Kira La Forgia of Paradigm Consulting.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:00:27] I'm so excited. I brought in Kira today because I wanted to talk with you about the HR perspective, so hiring contractors, hiring employees, what are some of these compliance issues we need to know about, how do we grow a team. Like, I've heard Kira, for example, talk so much about how growing a team actually helps you to grow your business and become more profitable. And I really want to dig into how that actually works in theory.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:00:50] Because we can hear people say this kind of stuff, but I really wanted to share with you today how building a team is one way that you can scale your business. But more importantly, to me I would say, is that hiring people in my business has made me feel so supported and has made me definitely have a different lifestyle approach to my business than I would have. So, you know, maybe even hiring brings down your profit margins but your life gets better, and that's pretty darn important if you ask me. It's not always about profit, in my opinion.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:01:23] So, I wanted to bring in an expert. Kira has worked in HR. Now, she helps online businesses and HR. I just really wanted to bring in someone who knows her

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stuff like Kira does. And I'm so excited for you to listen to this conversation between the two of us.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:01:38] If you like our conversation today, please go ahead and leave a review or give us however many stars you want to give us. Wherever you listen to your podcast, please go ahead and text this episode to a friend if you think that they would find it helpful or post on that group that you're in or whatever it is. It's so helpful in helping us to spread the word about On Your Terms.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:01:56] With that, I want to introduce to you Kira La Forgia. So, after hiring, managing, and leading hundreds of employees in the small business space for over a decade, Kira began helping other women with remote teams prepare for growth and team support.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:02:10] Paradigm Consulting and HR and People Operations Consultancy is on a mission to empower women to lead lean teams while building authentic relationships and staying compliant along the way. We believe female business owners can impact, not only the lives of their teams, but at the landscape of work for all women creating a more equal playing field and earning more women a seat at the table once and for all.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:02:34] So, that is Paradigm. That is a little bit about Kira. With that, let's hop into our conversation. I would definitely get a little something ready to write with. Otherwise, enjoy this on your walk, take notes

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later. I hope you enjoy this episode. And I'll see you on the other side.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:02:52] Hey, Kira. Welcome to On Your Terms.

Kira La Forgia: [00:02:52] Hey. Thank you. I'm so excited to be here with you.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:02:57] I am so excited to have you. So, will you let everybody know a little bit about who you are and what you do before we hop in?

Kira La Forgia: [00:03:06] Yeah. Well, I'm Kira. And I founded Paradigm People Operations Consulting - it just goes by Paradigm for short - a couple of years ago as a response to the need for online-based business or small businesses to be able to develop multi-state teams to kind of help educate people on what it's like to be a true manager and leader up teams, especially in the online spaces, everyone's businesses are growing super fast. And most importantly, to keep people compliant so that we can continue to have businesses and keep more women in the position of being bosses and making money, so we can make real change in the world.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:03:44] I love that. I love what you do. And, you know, it's so similar to what we do here, too, because you're helping people to understand - like, we were talking before we started recording - about how, in case everyone's not aware, there are sense of loss, and there are things that apply to all of us no matter where you live and what kind of business

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have, and whether you have a bakery or an online business, or whatever, there's all those things.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:04:06] But for some reason, it does seem like there's this weird myth about online business that we can somehow treat things differently, like hire people differently or fall under certain laws.

Kira La Forgia: [00:04:20] Yeah. I mean, I think that that comes a lot in conversations, especially with business owners that have been super creative or have created businesses that maybe have worked as employees but in more of an agency setting or a very creative and free flowing, or even business owners that have been freelancing for a long time and maybe are just connected from the employer-employee space.

Kira La Forgia: [00:04:44] And so, a lot of online businesses identify as creative businesses, so then why would they have gone to get their Master's in Organizational Management or HR or go to law school or whatever. So, I think we always want to move away from the demonization of traditional education or anything like that because we do need people like you and I to kind of set up that foundation for everyone else that's super creative and fun to go and do their thing.

Kira La Forgia: [00:05:10] Well, creative is hard, too, but - and I think that that's where it gets kind of stuck, is that people get a little bit ashamed of what they don't know. And there's no reason for that. Like, I learn new stuff every single day. But I think the big thing is we just want people to

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understand that they're not supposed to know and that's why we're here to really help them.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:05:27] Exactly. Yeah. Exactly. Like I always say, there's no reason that you should not write a contract if you didn't go to law school. Like, I wouldn't have known that before I did. So, no shame. It's totally fine.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:05:39] But I think even just everyone knowing, too, that a lot of my job is just bringing awareness to the legal stuff about online business. And like, yes, this stuff applies too. Yes, you have to be aware of it. You're not falling under some weird exception that doesn't exist. And the same goes for Kira and what she does.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:05:57] And so, I think that today we're going to talk about both from the contractor's perspective and employee's perspective because a lot of our people are more in the beginning of their business building journey and they might be thinking they have to hire a contractor first, so that's what they can swing.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:06:11] So, I thought it would be so helpful if you kick things off where if everybody listened to Episode 64 of my podcast that I just had an episode about the legal difference between a contractor and an employee, which is super important for you to know. But can you give us your breakdown on the differences, and I just think it's so helpful for them to hear it from another perspective.

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Kira La Forgia: [00:06:31] Yeah. I mean, of course, this conversation can go on forever because there are definitely states that have more regulations and more laws, which I'm sure you dug into in your podcast episode. But I think that the big thing is that when it comes to figuring out what your business means, whether it's a contractor or an employee, it really is about you as a leader and a manager and what your business actually needs.

Kira La Forgia: [00:06:56] So, sometimes people find a little bit of relief in knowing that their business is going to tell them. Their business and what the business is having gaps in or where they're missing things or where they're not excelling in the best ways, that's going to tell you what type of position you need to fill, meaning the job description, the duties, or maybe there's two different jobs going on in the same thing or that can be combined or whatever. But it's going to tell you whether it's an employee or contractor. It's not necessarily going to be something you get to decide.

Kira La Forgia: [00:07:25] But to your point, if you're just first starting out and you're thinking that you might need a contractor, there are cases when you skip over that all together. So, especially, when you're in really specialized fields and you know that you need somebody to come in that's not just doing admin work but they're actually adding value to whatever area that you're providing.

Kira La Forgia: [00:07:42] Like, for example, for me, my first employee had to be an employee because they're an HR specialist. So, it's very unlikely that I would be able to bring someone in,

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train them, have them be on the day-to-day operations of the business and not find any situation, which they would be an employee they always had to be. So, I think that that's one thing that people get confused with is that laws are just laws, and Sam and I didn't make them up.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:08:07] No. We cannot do laws.

Kira La Forgia: [00:08:09] If you really want to do what's right for you and your business, then you have to let your business tell you what it needs. And then, you can go and figure out how it should be classified. If it gets to the point where you have to write a job description for it, and it's not just a list of administrative tasks, but it's an employee. We don't provide job descriptions for contractors. They tell us what they can do and then we pay them. So, we don't have to be as responsible for their day-to-day activities or their schedules or anything like that.

Kira La Forgia: [00:08:37] It's less of I don't get to be responsible for when they work, and more of I don't want to manage all of that in somebody right now. I just need some extra task help or some administrative stuff done or something super specialized, like an accountant or something like that that's not in the day-to-day. But I think people get confused that they think they get to choose. You know, like I think this will be a contractor, that sounds a little easier. Like, "No. Not really."

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:09:03] That's a really good point. I do think people are thinking about it as a choice from a budget perspective or time perspective. But, I mean, I talk about in

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Episode 64 about so many different factors, like, obviously, the control factor is huge because, also, I've had friends who have been like, "Well, I need to have somebody who is butt in seat from 9:00 to noon everyday," or something like this. And it's like, "Well, then, that's going to be an issue," when it comes to contractor.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:09:25] So, that's again another thing where it's like you don't get to decide do I want to hire this person and have them work that way and call them a contractor. I think that's just where so many people in the online space get this stuff confused. Just like everything that I do, there's so much bad advice out there about this.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:09:44] Just something you mentioned reminded me of something I talked about in that episode where I was like, maybe the person is so specialized. The whole point with the contractor in my mind is that I can't control them because I don't know how to do their job.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:09:44] Like, if I hire someone to do my website, for example, the whole point is that I'm hiring them and I'm being like, "Kira, I need a new website." Like, if I know how to do it myself, I would do it. But the whole point is that they're the expert and they're just doing one specific task. And they're in and they're out and they do that for other businesses. They have their own business. All those things helped to support the contractor role.

Kira La Forgia: [00:10:18] Yeah. For sure. And I think that that's one of the bigger things, too, is that I think in our

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industry that it's really for us to be like, yeah, we are almost always going to be considered a contractor hired for one-on-one work because that's the way our businesses are built as consultants. It is possible to have employees within your business where their title is a consultant, where that's the way that we structure our scaling opportunities or whatever. But, realistically, consulting, all of that stuff should generally be someone that you're hiring as a contractor.

Kira La Forgia: [00:10:51] So, my clients are not going to hop into our meetings and think that they can tell me when our deadlines are or whenever they want to be available or whatever the case may be, I have other ten other businesses we're working with.

Kira La Forgia: [00:11:02] And we make commitments through our contracts, through legal contracts, about what our expectations are. So, the contracts or the relationships really do come back to the contract. So, it comes back to the legal side of things. So, not only as a freelancer or business owner or somebody who is starting out, but one of the things I always say is let the freelancers be free. You have to treat your contractors the way that you want to be treated as a business owner.

Kira La Forgia: [00:11:26] You don't want people to be acting like we're they're employees when we don't expect our contractors to act that way. You know, it's not necessarily going to work. And being able to set those expectations is a really important component of just having boundaries in general, but also to the understanding of what these roles should look like on a day to day.

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Sam Vander Wielen: [00:11:46] Totally. And I'm glad you brought up the contract piece because it reminds of something I say a lot of times about disclaimers, when people will say like, "But I have in my contract that it says that they understand I'm not their doctor, their lawyer, their HR, or whatever." But then, they go out and give that advice out of scope.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:12:05] And so, it's very similar from the HR perspective that people would often say to me, "Well, I'm treating them like an employee, but don't worry I had them sign a contractor agreement." And it's like, "That's not going to matter at all." That's not going to help you. If you're treating them like an employee, you're still going to get nailed. So, I'm glad that you brought that up. That was really important.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:12:25] I think that it would be really helpful to dive in a little bit of, like, who is often the first hire that someone with our kinds of businesses needs to make and how they can go about figuring out their first hire, whether it's a contractor or an employee.

Kira La Forgia: [00:12:40] I mean, I think generally, administrative tasks, like client service, customer service, depending on if you have courses or if you have programs or whatever, those things are always great to get off your plate because they might look like a quick five minute thing for you. But if you're able to actually have that be something that's not taking up any brain space. It saves you a lot of room and it gives you a little bit more white space and be an actual leader.

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And it also gives a sense of professionalism when you have someone on your team that can help you with administrative work.

Kira La Forgia: [00:13:10] I think that one big mistake people make is that they misconstrue what operations is with customer service or admin work. So, I would say, just be cognizant of that because there may be situations where, I think, probably the most common first employee hire is some sort of operations or marketing assistant or coordinator, kind of dipping your toe into being able to rely on someone. Usually, there's lots of growth opportunity.

Kira La Forgia: [00:13:36] But you have to really, really clear on what that job description is and making sure that you're paying them fairly. Because if the job description just has a bunch of administrative tasks that are just kind of checked off on a weekly basis, then why would you need to hire an operations person that's going to have a little bit more strategic experience and upward growth mobility? You can probably save yourself a lot of money by just having a VA.

Kira La Forgia: [00:13:55] So, I think a big misconstruing of things is usually when people are thinking I'm just telling everyone to hire an employee, when I'm really like, "No." Every answer is always it depends. And, also, I have four more follow up questions. And, also, I'm actually going to give you the advice that's going to save you money. Because at the end of the day, this is a business. Like, we're trying to be strategic about your business and your margin, and things like that.

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Kira La Forgia: [00:14:18] So, it's really hard to say what each business might have their first person look like. But it's usually in the realm of getting tasks off your hands. Usually, it's something entry level that can grow. And if you've never delegated anything before, I would go with something, like, super low key. Like, something that you're not super committed to so you can start to practice actually delegating those tasks and putting together those SOPs that you really need. And not feeling like you have to jump in full swing right off the bat or stuff like that.

Kira La Forgia: [00:14:48] But you never know. Because I know sometimes your first employee is much more high level because you've already been kind of doing a lot of the delegation and you needed to bring something more high level. So, I never want to give super blanket advice but also just to say don't be afraid to - I don't want to waste money, but don't be afraid of wasting a few hundred dollars to practice on the delegating side of things, and figure out where you really need help, and actually putting some money where your mouth is, I guess.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:15:12] Yeah. Totally. That makes a lot of sense. I do feel like most people end up hiring what they call a VA. But I would love for you to speak to, like, a common - I don't want to say mistake, but trend that I see that people will hire a VA and they'd be like, "My VA is great. She does my Pinterest strategy, all of my social comments. She answers my emails. She books my things." I'm like, "Oh, my goodness. What does this person not do?" So, can you talk a little bit about that and maybe how does somebody get very clear on what exactly they're hiring for.

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Kira La Forgia: [00:15:47] Yeah. I mean, of course, it takes a lot. Like, I would generally say that the first thing you want to do is look at what you're offering and how you're making money. And look at a position that's actually going to create ROI, either with a freedom of time on your end or actually somebody that's bringing in money by doing outreach or PR or something along those lines.

Kira La Forgia: [00:16:08] When it comes to VAs, I feel like I'm just constantly advocating for the rights of VAs because they're so mistreated. And so, I love looking for ops people or marketing assistants that were once VAs, because they're likely going to have a really high level overview of a lot of different things in business because they've probably been mistreated for many years based on whatever businesses they've worked for, especially in the online space.

Kira La Forgia: [00:16:32] But I think the biggest difference between a VA and an employee in an assistant role is that, when it comes to having a VA, you can't really have them be on a deadline or a time crunch.

Kira La Forgia: [00:16:44] So, you could say something along the lines of, "Oh, I need all my customer service emails answered on Friday, and so, hopefully, you can have an auto-responder or something that's like, 'We respond to everything by Friday afternoon. If there's not a real huge emergency, if your business doesn't have huge emergencies, then you can definitely wait until Friday.'"

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Kira La Forgia: [00:17:02] Then, you can kind of stretch that job description a little bit to get a little bit more for your money that there's something that goes away because you're not providing this exceptional customer service experience that's on demand, reply right away, that kind of a thing.

Kira La Forgia: [00:17:02] We can actually give pretty good customer service even if there is a little bit of a delay as long as we're setting those expectations. So, your VA can go along way and you won't be exploiting them and you'll be able to work with whatever schedule they are doing. If you feel like you have deadlines that are less than two weeks, then it's probably not going to be a good fit for a VA.

Kira La Forgia: [00:17:38] But, especially if there's a lot of replicable things coming up over and over and over again, or you hire a really specialized VA, like a tech VA, for example, we love those, they'll have access to a few things but they're not really going to be a risk to hire because they're not going to be taking all of your content and running with it. Or you're not going to have to worry too much about intellectual property because they're in all of your systems that are super complicated.

Kira La Forgia: [00:18:04] And a lot of times those really, really specialized VAs can go a really long way. But if you're looking for something that's more entry level, like you're like, "Oh, I only really need five hours a week or so," then try starting with somebody that you are building your systems around giving them their own schedule. So, there isn't going to be that crossover of like, "I control your time." But instead, "Here's a

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list of tasks that I need done biweekly or weekly. Make sure they all get done." And then, reverse engineer that with your clients or your products so that they have their expectation set.

Kira La Forgia: [00:18:04] Now, some people are going to have, like, 400, 500, 600, 700 people in their programs and maybe their clients are not going to be super happy with waiting a week to get a response or whatever, in which case, I mean, if you have that many clients, you probably should have an employee anyways because customer service does matter. But it's not the same thing as operation, so just keeping that in mind. They're two totally different fields.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:18:56] Yeah. Those are such good tips. And that was something I invested in very early with Lianne - shoutout to Lianne. I love her dearly and she's amazing - she was my actual first hire as a VA. I actually treated her like a VA. And she was providing customer service when, at that time, I don't know, we probably had, like you said, 400 to 600 or 700 people in my main product, the Bundle, and it was a lot of customer service stuff to answer.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:19:24] But I just wanted to say that because I didn't realize, and I think a lot of people could probably relate to this like if you're a coach or something, we think of the services like answering the legal question, answering the business question, answering the HR thing.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:19:38] But, first of all, people in my community love Lianne. They all know her now. But they love

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feeling so taken care of. She really takes care of people. And for somebody also to provide great service of like, "Here's this resource I found for you." Or, "You can log in. You're having access." People make suggestions on feature request that we could improve on the bundle. And Lianne sends them a Starbucks gift card.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:20:01] It's just these little cute ways where we can add to someone's day. And I just had never thought about that until I had Lianne. And I'm glad that I'm invested in that early. So, I wanted to share that in case it's helpful to anybody.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:20:15] I think that it would so helpful, too, I think a lot of people get stuck on the timing of when to hire this person, whatever it's going to be, and how do you know who you need to hire when, and how does timing play into this, and how budget is a part of that too.

Kira La Forgia: [00:20:33] Yeah. I mean, I think that the first thing is that there is a huge misconception about how much employees actually cost. So, you can actually get a position filled for 20 hours a week for someone that you might be spending a little bit of time training. They're not going to come in with, like, eight certifications and a legal degree or whatever. But somebody that's going to be a little bit more entry level that might grow with you for a really great salary of, like, \$20 or 25 an hour for 20 hours a week.

Kira La Forgia: [00:21:01] And you're looking at paying somebody way less than you would actually think. I mean, realistically 20

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hours a week at 20 bucks an hour is \$400. So, for many of us, of course, we add on payroll and taxes and stuff like that, compliance issues, whatever. But those are usually one and done. You just kind of get it sorted and then accumulate that or kind of roll it all in with your taxes.

Kira La Forgia: [00:21:22] But it's not like you're hire an employee that's fulltime that's \$80,000 a year. Like, you can hire part-time employees that are going to get means to an end, especially if you have a business that requires a quick turn around on things or, like you mentioned, the client experience and the customer experience is super high priority for you. Or you know that you are maybe a content creator so you're coming out with a vlog every single day and you always need graphics to be turned around. Or you have boundaries against social media, so you need people to be in there engaging for you.

Kira La Forgia: [00:21:54] Whatever your situation is, it's not like it's ridiculously \$100,000 a year expense to hire somebody. Of course, you do get what you paid for, so whether you're paying them in time or money, you can develop people into a role, you can offer lots of tasks, you can set a budget for yourself and then stay within that and have an employee.

Kira La Forgia: [00:22:13] So, I do think that there is a misconception between people saying, "Well, I can't afford an employee right now" versus "I'm going to go pay for a contractor," where contractors are highly specialized and often will cost you a lot more. So, realistically, understanding that, I think, VAs are an exception, but a lot of amazing VAs cost significantly more than a part-time employee. And for some

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businesses, that's going to be totally fine because that's what the business needs them to do, whatever is within the confines of the legal structure of their contract.

Kira La Forgia: [00:22:44] But there is going to be a case where you're like, "Oh, well." Perhaps you're really busy or you have a second job. Or there are deadlines that you need to hit because of the nature of your business. Those are all going to be things that an employee will help you do and help you meet. So, sacrificing some of those needs because you have a misconception and it's going to be so much more money or whatever the case may be isn't really serving your business at all.

Kira La Forgia: [00:23:06] You're actually just kind of putting yourself into a situation that is usually not sustainable and it's probably wasting time. Like, it's usually a better fit to be like, "I already know what I need. I'm a really busy mom. I work everyday from 9:00 to 1:00. And I want my person to be on the computer at the same time as me or I want them to be local so that I can check in with them in my time zone."

Kira La Forgia: [00:23:27] You know, whatever this situations may be, that is all going to be based on who are as a business owner and what your business needs. But what your business needs is usually a reflection of what you need. So, this is when we want to, like, really center the CEO into what they wanted to look like everyday in their business.

Kira La Forgia: [00:23:43] So, if your day to day life - in direct answer to your question - is not what you want it to look

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like as CEO, and you know that you have growth and you know that you have big goals for your business, and you're not just in maintenance mode, then it's time to start thinking about bringing in some type of human resource to help you to get to those goals or to get you some free time. Or maybe you just really like to collaborate with people and it would be really nice to be able to bounce ideas off of somebody that is within the structure of your business. I know that means a lot to me. I know that means a lot to you.

Kira La Forgia: [00:24:17] And you just kind of get to a point where you're like, "I'm not enjoying this work anymore. But I would be if I could do it in this way." And then, you can actually take control of that. And that's worked so much. I mean, it makes it more sustainable, it gives you the opportunity to be able to show up the way that you want to show up. And so, the quality of work will go up on every side. And, usually, if you find the right person, they your team will respond to it, and they'll be in a great zone for them. And then, it just kind of puts a lot more positivity out there in the world in general, which is great, because we are tired.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:24:48] Yeah. Everybody is tired.

Kira La Forgia: [00:24:48] And the growth comes really fast. I would say, most of the time when we have people that come in on our services, normally we do a 90-day contract, they'll generally get their first person hired, which is who they come to us for. And then, almost always before the end of the 90 days, they realize how attainable it was and how using this strategy to find the right person and create the right job leads

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to that next hire being so attainable and so exciting. And then, you start see them build a culture.

Kira La Forgia: [00:25:17] And it's just really satisfying to see, because almost all of them have at least two people on their team when they were like, "I just need the one and I want to do it right." And I'm not here to pressure you for it, but it is so exciting to see how their mind starts to expand and they start to see the potential for your business, and your life, and your balance, and your health. Like, all these things starts to really fall into play when you allow yourself to get the help that you deserve.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:25:38] Totally. And you guys were so helpful for me with that when I worked with you, and now continue to work with you. But, I mean, when I started, it was to find Lindsey - shoutout to Lindsey. Lindsey is forced to listen to this, which she can listen because she's a fulltime employee. So, hey, Lindsey.

Kira La Forgia: [00:25:54] A big fan. A big fan of Lindsey.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:25:55] I know. Yeah, we're all big fans of Lindsey. I don't shut up about it. I'm like, "Have I told you about Lindsey yet?" I always tell her like, "All you have to do is listen to my stuff to hear me talk about you all the time." She's amazing. But that was my first employee hire.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:26:09] But I know when we started out, it was important to me, like you were talking about, what was going on for the CEO and kind of the culture, the feeling more than I

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was going for. And I know for me, probably maybe anybody else has ever had a sports background or something, I was really missing this kind of team aspect of it. Like, I didn't want to call on my business with anyone but I wanted to feel like I was in it with other people. And the buy-in that I've gotten from having employees has been a very interesting, surprising, I guess, side effect of it that I didn't expect. And it just feels really good, so I could imagine a lot of other people thinking about that part.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:26:48] But, also, when you were talking about the cost of people have this misconception of the cost and all this good stuff, I think what you're talking about is the fact that you can hire employees either as hourly which makes them nonexempt or as a fulltime employee which they can either be exempt or nonexempt which means that they get overtime pay and all this good stuff. So, I think just breaking that down so people understand that there are two different ways to hire an employee, like you were saying.

Kira La Forgia: [00:27:14] Yeah. And we have a blog post on this, too, because they can get a little nitty gritty, so I can share that as well. Because it's one of the biggest questions that we get, a lot of times people hold themselves back because they just assume that an employee is fulltime salary, they have the same thing every month, whatever. And that is crazy overwhelming and also expensive at times, especially for a first kind of go at it.

Kira La Forgia: [00:27:14] But nonexempt and exempt is the legal term between if somebody is allowed to receive overtime or not

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getting overtime. But there is a couple of other layers to that too. So, part-time and fulltime is really more of an internal classification that we use in order to dictate what type of internal benefit somebody gets or perks that they might get or access that they might get.

Kira La Forgia: [00:28:02] So, employees have different levels of kind of - I don't want to say consumption, but for some reason that's the word that I'm coming to, this consumption of the business. So, what we're offering to our team, and what they have access to, and what they're available to have and what we're paying for.

Kira La Forgia: [00:28:16] There are a few benefits that are never going to be able to be different for each person. One, being retirement account or 401K. The FTC or the FEC or the FCC or one of the Cs, doesn't allow for us to, like, actually choose, "Well, you're more valuable so I'm going to give you a bigger match," or whatever the case may be.

Kira La Forgia: [00:28:37] But almost - I mean, maybe. Although, I can't think of one right now that isn't - every single other benefit or perk can be based on the employee. So, realistically, we want to create a situation where everybody feels like everyone is being treated equally and fairly. And there's a lot of attention towards making sure that people feel like it's equitable. And that we're allowing the first employees to get the same benefits as others and things like that.

Kira La Forgia: [00:29:00] But, realistically, the job is going to be able to tell you whether it's part-time or fulltime. And

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then, you're going to be able to dictate that back out into the world for what you need from your team member. So, we have the part-time, we have the fulltime, but we get to decide what that looks like and what comes as the result of being one of those statuses within our company culture and our company policies.

Kira La Forgia: [00:29:22] We have the nonexempt versus exempt, which the biggest difference with that is going to be more of a salaried versus a non-salaried or hourly employee. Because salaried employees will have a minimum amount of money that they have to make based on where they live.

Kira La Forgia: [00:29:35] So, in some states, it's as low as \$684, which is the Federal minimum salary requirement, which essentially means that we can have them working any number of hours, even over 40, for this pay legally. We're allowed to ask that of them. However, in some states like New York and California, they're going to be really different. So, our minimum salary requirement is twice that. It's almost \$1,200 here in California per week.

Kira La Forgia: [00:30:04] So, you're not going to be able to just tell someone, "Oh, I'm going to pay you a salary of \$500 per week." In every single state, that's going to be illegal. It doesn't even meet minimum wage for salary requirements.

Kira La Forgia: [00:30:14] So, most of the time, what we're going to have to do is figure out how many hours of work that they need to be doing, what your budget is. And then, kind of reverse engineer that job description to make sure that it makes sense for the title. And then, take the title and go do a

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compensation analysis for what's competitive in the market place.

Kira La Forgia: [00:30:29] So, this is where we will see a lot of areas where, on one hand, it's like we can be creative and do whatever we want. We can create a job that is within your budget, that it's paying them what they need to paid, all that good stuff. If you can only afford \$500 a week, that's what we're going to build. We're going to build a position that will allow you to hire somebody that's going to cost you no more than \$500 a week or \$400 a week or whatever your budget happens to be. But we can't call it a salary or we can't call it an exempt employee. And then, even down to the county, there's compliance issues with how much people are getting paid.

Kira La Forgia: [00:30:14] So, I don't want to freak anyone out, but just keep in mind that that's why you need HR, so someone is paying attention to that.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:31:05] Yeah. Support.

Kira La Forgia: [00:31:09] And then, taking it one step further is, whatever standard that you are setting within your company for that job title or that job description is, essentially, setting a precedent for what the person that replaces them is going to be paid as well.

Kira La Forgia: [00:31:22] So, realistically, it can be very problematic to have somebody on your team that is mistitled. So, essentially, if they're going through and doing their job but then you're not necessarily doing a lot of checking in with them

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or doing performance metrics reviews. And their job title is staying the same but their job duties are getting really, really, really long and it's a total mismatch.

Kira La Forgia: [00:31:43] Or what I see a lot in online space is an inflation of titles. So, you'll have somebody that's really doing ops coordination work where they're called the director of operation. So, now, you go and try to replace that person because it's totally fine to replace people. Employee turnover is normal. If you don't have employee turnover, great job for you. But that doesn't always mean that you're a great boss. Sometimes it just means that you paid people a lot of money to be mistreated, I'm just saying.

Kira La Forgia: [00:32:08] But, realistically, you could have a situation where you bring somebody in and they are applying for a director of operations position and then they're going to demand a much higher salary, because those are the applicants that you're getting. So, it's really important to make sure that your job title and your job duties kind of work really well together.

Kira La Forgia: [00:32:26] Because, let's say for example, the opposite case happens and you're undervaluing the position and then somebody comes onboard. And the job is way out of scope for anything that they understand or it should be higher priced, or whatever the case may be, then you're going to end up with really unhappy employees that are completely mismatched for what they went through the application period for.

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Kira La Forgia: [00:32:47] So, I know that we throw around, like, there's a trend for people to do weird titles, like cheap fund officer, crap like that. And it's like, "Okay. Cool. But can you tell me what the actual job title is?" Because it could end up being a really weird situation if you're offering the cheap fund officer that used to be a White man making a \$150,000 a year to now a Black woman comes in and you're like, "Well, there is no common out there, so I'm going to offer you \$60,000 a year." You're going to have a much bigger issue than a lawsuit. You're likely going to be written about in all the journals and newsletters I read.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:33:23] Yeah. Not in a good way.

Kira La Forgia: [00:33:24] Yeah. And this is all hypothetical, of course. You know, I'll never say anything real. But, realistically, we want to make sure that there is a solid alignment that starts with your budget. And from there, you kind of have to go back and forth with the job description but prioritizing what your budget is. Because if you don't stick with your budget, then you aren't going to have a business model that's sustainable.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:33:47] Yeah. How far out should they budget for when thinking about this?

Kira La Forgia: [00:33:53] This is a tricky question, because I know that there are some business owners, like you, who are super cautious and want to make sure that you are like, "I don't care if our business goes under. You'll be paid forever." And then, there are business owners that are like, "I've been doing

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pretty well for a few months, I feel like I'm plateauing. I need some support." But maybe only have a couple of extra months of savings in the bank or something like that.

Kira La Forgia: [00:34:18] I think it's a really important balance in integrity and honesty with the people that you're bringing on your team regarding what they can expect.

Kira La Forgia: [00:34:25] So, for example, if you have a business that's blowing up with growth and you're bringing someone on your team, I think it's okay to say, "Hey, listen. These are the goals for the company and this is how long we've been kind of hitting these numbers. And we have retainer clients that are looked out for two years, so I know that I'm going to need your support during that time." And bringing that in and making sure that they understand, because it is up to the employee the risk that they want to take and how risk averse they want to take when coming into a new field or a new industry.

Kira La Forgia: [00:34:55] However, on the backend of things, we have seen some really problematic behavior with employees getting hired in businesses that don't necessarily understand the risk that they're taking or there's been a lot of conflation of success because that's a marketing tactic people use. And so, they don't understand that it could be a little bit unstable. In which case, I think in those situations where maybe you don't work off a retainer or something along those lines, it's better to have more money saved up.

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Kira La Forgia: [00:35:21] But I don't want to hold you back. Like, don't be afraid to put yourself out there and take a risk, but just be really honest with who you're bringing on your team. So, maybe you're not hiring a single mom with five kids because they need something that's for sure going to be stable for the next few years, but that's her choice. That's not our choice to decide what's good for that candidate. So, just being clear and honest is really the way to go.

Kira La Forgia: [00:35:42] I mean, every business has risks. And every job has risks. I mean, there was a pandemic, I let go of 45 people in a day. Like, there's nothing that could have protected anybody from that. And there's nothing we could have done to prevent it. And, now, the business is back up and running, and it's running functionally, and it's great, and it's serving the communities that it was meant to serve. But we have to make sacrifices in order to make sure that we could be here for the long run.

Kira La Forgia: [00:36:07] And that's kind of hard to tell people what's going to be right for you, I don't know. But I would say, don't lie. You'd think that people would know that.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:36:07] Yeah. By the way, just so everyone knows, Kira is talking about an in-person business near her in San Diego that couldn't function during COVID because of it's in-person nature and just how close contact it is. But that's what she's talking about, not HR.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:36:36] Have you ever felt lost about where to begin with the legal side of protecting your online

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business? Some people say you can just wing it at the beginning and get officially set up later. Not a good idea, by the way. Whether you're afraid to even start working with clients because you don't want to do something wrong legally and then get in trouble or your business is growing and you sort of forgot to take care of the legal pieces, I've got you.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:36:58] I don't want you to live in fear of the internet police coming after you and your business. But you do have to do certain things and get certain things in place in order to legally and safely run your business online. As much as it just feels like an unregulated Wild Wild West online, that is very much not the case.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:37:15] As an attorney turned entrepreneur and former corporate litigator, I can assure you that there are rules. There are real steps that everybody who runs or starts an online business needs to take. And you're not behind at all. We can get you set up and following the rules right away. In fact, we can even do it today.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:37:32] I want to teach you the five very simple steps to take to legally protect and grow your online business. You don't need an MBA to be a successful entrepreneur and stay out of legal hot water. But you do need to dot your legal i's and cross your t's in a few key areas that can't be skipped. That's exactly what I'll teach you in my free one hour legal workshop called Five Steps to Legally Protect and Grow Your Online Business. Just head to mylegalworkshop.com, drop in your email address, pick the time, and I'll send you a link to watch the workshop video whenever you have time.

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Sam Vander Wielen: [00:38:01] This is the best place to begin if you're just getting started legally legitimizing your business, so head on over to mylegalworkshop.com and sign up to watch Five Steps to Legally Protect and Grow Your Online Business now.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:38:15] You know, it's such a good point, too, and I've never even thought about it, how online businesses and everyone here knows how much I've talked about how so much what you see online isn't true or completely transparent, at the very least. And then, I could see how that would lead to such a weird hiring situation, which I never thought about, was if you're projecting to the world I'm making \$88 kabillion on every launch and they don't understand what revenue is versus net and all this kind of stuff that I could see that creating a problem.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:38:45] And like you said, we all take responsibility for taking the job and all of that, so I could see that being very much true. But I also feel like as CEOs, we have to be responsible not to be like, "I'm having a moment. Things are blowing up temporarily and I'm just going to fill this with a bunch of people."

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:39:03] But I would be curious with your take on it. I feel like another mistake I see often, too, is people think that by hiring all these people without training, without the proper systems, without the proper strategy and plan, that the people themselves are going to somehow catapult their business forward and then they end up firing everyone when that doesn't work out, right?

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Kira La Forgia: [00:39:23] Yeah. I mean, it happens in every industry. It's really tough and sometimes you just can't do anything about it. But I think the really cool thing about having businesses like ours that are online based that have no in-person overhead for the most part, besides software which is apparently super expensive, you never would have thought. But it's not \$90,000 for rent or something a month.

Kira La Forgia: [00:39:47] So, at the end of the day, I think that it's really interesting to give ourselves some grace to understand that even though there's all these business that have these issues and whatever, we have to still be able to take risks. But it's about taking them responsibly and not driving people through the mud. And don't be afraid to take a little bit more of a risk than you normally would, because we don't have overhead.

Kira La Forgia: [00:40:10] So, if the key to unlocking a new income level or a new way to serve your clients or to get you more creativity or to lend itself to you having a better life or whatever your reasoning is, all of which are equally valid. Not all reasons to hire have to do with making more money. Then, I think it's really cool to kind of think about how we don't have to worry about paying that rent every month. And these businesses are inherently going to require a little bit less overhead and we're going to be able to keep them going with a little bit more of a lean team than other businesses are often forced to do.

Kira La Forgia: [00:40:43] And so, taking a little risk in hiring somebody and trying to make the most out of the situation

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to put all of your effort into it is totally worth it, in my opinion. Because truly, I mean, whatever you hear, like most of the crap I hear online is usually a lie. The poor people are like, "I don't even have a team." And like, "Yeah. You do." Or, "My team is 80 people."

Kira La Forgia: [00:41:05] Like, the number of people on a team somehow became a vanity metric. While I'm looking at that and I'm like, "Really? Because I think that the smartest businesses have a very lean team." Most of the businesses that I look up to in the online space have an extremely lean team and it's built very strategically. So, I think at the end of the day, that's what builds that longevity. And the number of people you have does not correlate with the amount of income that you're making. Just like your number of Instagram followers doesn't either, unfortunately for some of us.

Kira La Forgia: [00:41:35] It's kind of weird. Like, I think it sucks because we have this really cool opportunity to build these amazing communities and we don't have to worry about that overhead, so we can use it to affect other people in a really positive way. And real businesses can't be built on the back of one person and a bunch of contractors. That's just the way it is.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:41:55] Yeah. It's so true. I think that's a really cool way to look at it. Like, we have this opportunity to pivot much faster and easier than an in-person business. And this is one of the areas that we can take advantage.

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Sam Vander Wielen: [00:42:07] I know one thing you've talked about, too, is the kinds of policies and documents that you have to have in place as a business owner before you would take on a contractor or an employee. So, can you talk about some of those things that people should be getting organized now as they're planning for this.

Kira La Forgia: [00:42:23] Yeah. You know, I'm going to kind of spin this a little bit because I think people are going to assume that I'm going to say they need an employee handbook, but I'm not.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:42:32] Spoiler alert.

Kira La Forgia: [00:42:32] Because when you go online, I'd rather you not have when it's not legally required. And instead just have really solid contracts in place that you can get from someone like Sam. Like, you're protecting your intellectual property and getting your trademark situated. And all of that stuff is going to be a little bit more important, in my opinion, than getting an employee handbook.

Kira La Forgia: [00:42:53] Because if you download - well, unless we make it for you - one online or go and get a template - like, we don't actually sell employee handbook templates as much as we've tried to. They just never work. Because when you put out something that is like what we build for an employee handbook, which is very specific and it's very strategic and it's very about culture, and it's also legally binding in a lot of cases, then you can't just download it and then have people sign it without understanding what's in it. Because you're not

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only holding them to a certain standard but you're holding yourself to a standard.

Kira La Forgia: [00:43:30] So, if you don't know what it even means then don't do that. You know, you don't have to have one so don't do it until you're ready to really have it be a thoughtful process that you understand and that you can speak to, that you can stand behind that's driving more purpose than just "here are some policies you have to follow," that's really not that effective. It's not good to do that.

Kira La Forgia: [00:43:51] So, I think generally protecting the intellectual property on the legal side and all the things that you teach us, really the first thing, first and foremost. And then, from there, of course, there's some pretty basic stuff in getting a really solid payroll company that you can trust is going to help to make sure that you're getting the right pieces of paper into an employee file. However, there are a lot of gaps in that too.

Kira La Forgia: [00:43:51] So, just make sure that if you are trying to DIY your HR, then you can use all these resources that you have available to you, but you will still need to make sure that you're getting some extra support. Because every state actually requires you to do different things when it comes to even where you store people stuff or how long you keep it.

Kira La Forgia: [00:44:35] Like, I had a client that came to us - we do a yearly audit with all of our clients - and then a couple of their employee files were gone. And I was like, "Where are they?" And they're like, "Oh, they quit." And I'm like, "We

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have to hold on to those for six years and 31 days. You live in this state, that means we have these compliance requirements."

Kira La Forgia: [00:44:57] So, it's really hard to say what exactly somebody need. So, I'd rather somebody just be really thoughtful and strategic about the person that they're bringing on their team and make sure that they're not skimping on making sure that they're providing what they need to make sure that their team is engaged, including their own time and energy and training.

Kira La Forgia: [00:45:13] And, first and foremost, protecting your business. Protect your business first so that no matter what happens with your team member, you're able to still have a business afterwards because there's a lot of employment lawsuits and there are a lot of penalties paid that you don't hear online business owners talk about. But we know them all because they have to come and find us, eventually.

Kira La Forgia: [00:45:36] I mean, I don't want that. I want to help people before they have those penalties. And the fun part, like we did, with the strategy in finding the person having the success stories. Like, cleaning up messes is not what we're trying to do here either.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:45:46] Yeah. This is why I'm not a lawyer anymore. Very similar. Yeah. That's super helpful. And so, someone is taking on their first contract or, say, the VA role that we were just talking about, then they need to send them a W-9 that they need signed and sent back. And the independent contractor contract something like I'd sell for it.

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Kira La Forgia: [00:46:05] And I don't know, I'd be interested in your thoughts on this, because I've heard that we're supposed to always use the contractor's contract, but sometimes they don't have them. Is that why we have our own, too, that comes into play?

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:46:17] It's kind of up in the air. So, when I was a practicing attorney, we would always like, "Oh, it's always better to force the other person to send you the contract because you're forcing them to pay for the lawyer to draft the contract." That was kind of the thought process behind it.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:46:33] For me, at least just my two cents, there's no right or wrong. If your contractor has it, then great. But then my issue would be like, "Do you know how to review it to make sure that that contract actually protects you?" Because I think at the crux of this whole conversation is the fact that some people know that contracts are written from one person's perspective. It's advantageous, usually, to the sender. And so, if you're relying on your contractor to send you a contract, it's probably going to advantage them.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:46:58] And contracts are also up for negotiation. You can say like, "Hey, I want to change this figure, this number, whatever, this length of time." And so, if you feel comfortable doing that, great. If not, and what I came for me at least, was, depending on the contractor role, I was like, if they're seeing any of my content or trade secrets, things behind the scenes of how the nuts and bolts of how things

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work, I want to make sure that intellectual property stuff is tight. I want to make sure the password protection clause is in there. So many different things, right?

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:47:30] I guess the way I also thought about it was, as a business owner, the liability is really on you to making sure that they're properly classified as a contractor and that they understand, like, you're not paying their taxes, you're not controlling their time, that they understand that, blah, blah, blah. And I didn't want to rely on them and, probably, their crappy contract they were going to send me because they tend to be really, really bad.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:47:52] Every time we hire a contractor, they send us their contract. And they're like, "Please don't yell at me." And we look at it and then we're just like, "Sign ours. This is terrible. It just is." So, that's kind of the framework that I will look through is like, if you feel comfortable reviewing it, though, you got to review it to make sure it protects you. I also like you sending yours. No, I do not recommend sending both.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:48:15] So, a lot of times people will write to us and ask, "Can I sign theirs and then send them mine too?" And it's like, "Oh, gosh. No. Because that's just like a nightmare scenario where now we have two contracts and what happens if they say different things?" And we can't. So, we just do one and it's really up to you to choose. You'll find that a lot of contractors don't really have very good ones if they have one at all.

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Kira La Forgia: [00:48:37] I think it's tough because we can't - I'm not a lawyer so I'm not going to try to step into that field, I guess. So, that's one of the things that we always like to refer. Like, a lot of our referral partners are lawyers because, "Here you go. But now Kira will help you with all that other stuff we don't want to do." And the same as accountants do because we're kind of snugly right in the middle of both of you guys.

Kira La Forgia: [00:49:02] But it's really interesting because when it comes to the contracts, there's been times when I've been in programs and they've had an independent contractor agreement that was licensed to the program that you could just take and use or things like that. And it's always been really weird because we don't really know how to review them. I just feel like it's really good to have a lawyer that you can contact at any given time.

Kira La Forgia: [00:49:26] I mean, I think when it comes to contractors, I generally would lean more towards your lawyer will help you with that versus HR will help you with that. And then, when you're starting to get to that point where you're like how do I classify this person that doesn't feel like it falls within the contractor realm of things, then that's when you have to start looking at things through an HR lens.

Kira La Forgia: [00:49:44] And we don't really do contracts as much as we do agreements, because there's actually laws about us not being able to have people under our contract, like at will employment and things like that. So, it can be about what people are signing but it's really more about making sure everyone is

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educated. And that the team feels comfortable and knows that they have a neutral resource. And the employer is taking care of them and their rights as an employee. And that they are confident that their new boss understands the jurisdiction in which they live under and the right that they're allowed, and little things like that.

Kira La Forgia: [00:50:20] Because if you start to show holes in your knowledge of what's actually required, depending on where you have employees - and I'm not saying most employees will do this or even a huge percentage of them - things can go bad, especially when it comes to people's jobs and their livelihoods. And you would never think it.

Kira La Forgia: [00:50:40] Like, in one month, you might be in a drag show doing a team building with your team. And the next month, they could be threatening to sue you because you didn't send them their final pay in time because now they're out of a job and it's a totally different mindset than I'm having such a great time working for this person.

Kira La Forgia: [00:50:52] And I've just had it go bad so many times, and so sometimes it can be hard to be really positive because I think that most of the time having an employee is such a positive experience and it fills so many gaps and so many areas and all that good stuff. But, I mean, it is a responsibility and you have to take it seriously. And you have to show your team that you are taking it seriously. You didn't just download something.

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Kira La Forgia: [00:51:13] I think somebody sent me a contract that was fully from England. And I was like, "I don't think so."

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:51:22] Can we all just agree to stop downloading [inaudible] for my sake, I swear.

Kira La Forgia: [00:51:27] And did you read it? Because it has some other business name in it. They fully took it from somebody else. It's like, "That's not my company too." [Inaudible].

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:51:36] That sounds about right. Or we find my website policies on other people's websites and they have my name still in it, which is one of my favorite things ever. That was a very special form of love. Oh, my goodness. But, yeah, Kira and I can have our own show dedicated to HR bloopers, legal bloopers. We can have all situations here.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:52:02] You've mentioned a couple times today, and I feel like I wouldn't have fully understood this before, but you've mentioned a few times about how much hiring helps to grow our businesses. And I was reading - I'll link to it below for you guys - one of the blog posts on your site - which you guys have such great resources on the site - about not hiring for the hemorrhage, which I thought was so helpful. And I said thinking about long term strategy and growth and making sure you have enough to keep this person, not only busy, but growing in the role during the business. Can you talk a little bit about how hiring the right people helps us to grow our businesses?

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Kira La Forgia: [00:52:40] Yeah. I mean, I think I have so many examples of this just within our clients or even my own experience. So, just to keep it safe I'll just talk about my own experience. But for example, I was in a really weird spot. I put off hiring an employee for my own business way too long. I understand all the fear and all the anxiety and everything that comes with it.

Kira La Forgia: [00:53:03] I had a contractor working for me. There was a whole bunch of deadlines that were missed. And it was just month-long deadlines. Like, we were, of course, legal and everything. But we were just not compatible anymore. And it was a totally fine situation. Like, she just recently got married. Anytime I'm featured in anything, she's so supportive. You know, it's a great relationship.

Kira La Forgia: [00:53:26] And I think that at the end of the day, when you're able to create a situation where you're focused on growth, you're actually able to put contractors and employees in a position to really have that camaraderie that comes with that relationship.

Kira La Forgia: [00:53:40] So, my contractor went away and then I had to find somebody to help me fill those holes because our business was rapidly expanding. And I put out an ad. It was a very basic thing. And I had 200 applicants. And I put a lot of very abrasive opinions in there because I just want people to agree with me sometimes.

Kira La Forgia: [00:54:04] And I just wanted to make sure that I had something set up that was going to show what it's really

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like to work in a business that is women forward and that we do lean a certain way politically. And the huge thing in our company culture and we're always going to support LGBTQ people, and things like that. Like, Black Lives Matter was in the first couple lines of the ad.

Kira La Forgia: [00:54:28] And it repels people that are not going to be interested in the job right away. But it also brings people in that are. And that's how I found Kylie, so you know Kylie.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:54:36] Yes. I love Kylie.

Kira La Forgia: [00:54:37] She was great. She started out as a marketing and office assistant. And I was basically like, "Okay. I just need you to do all this stuff so I can focus fully on client work." But I had so many applicants that came in and the reason that Kylie stood out was that she has a masters in HR and it was more about the trajectory of her growth within the business.

Kira La Forgia: [00:54:58] And the thing that she sent me was literally, "I'm not even looking for a job. I'm on vacation. I can't even send you my resume or application right now, but please don't fill this position until I can apply officially." That was her first communication with me. I had it screenshot of it and saved. It's in my happy folder. And that was exactly a year ago this Friday, so we're at the end of September, so cool.

Kira La Forgia: [00:55:19] And now she has been promoted twice and is definitely not an assistant anymore. She's our lead HR

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and ops strategist. And the reason that we took those steps was not because I had to teach everything within the process. But she was hired because of her dedication to our mission and our company as a whole. And so, she was ready to grow with a company.

Kira La Forgia: [00:55:38] And that was something that I knew was going to happen. I just needed to make sure that I was filling up some of the tasks that needed to be done so I could better serve my clients at the time. But at the end of the day, when it came down to the final five candidates, going with the person that was going to grow in the way that I thought would most benefit the business was the decision that I decided to make. Not to mention we just totally hit it off. I mean, it's like kind of creepy how similar we are even though we live on totally different sides of the company, it's wild.

Kira La Forgia: [00:56:03] So, I'd like to say that I got lucky. And I also wanted to pat myself on the back a little bit for the strategy because it's very rare that you would find a situation where you have somebody that jumps out of you and doesn't apply correctly to the job but is the exact right person for the position. And I have seen people that will kind of cut people out because of things like that.

Kira La Forgia: [00:56:26] Or there's this funny thing that people do where they hide a secret word in a job ad and be like, "Oh, if you tell me what the secret word is then I'll interview you." But that's not really great for people that have dyslexia or with alternative abilities or ADHD or stuff like that. So, those little things, like when you start to consider what you

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really want in an employee, and especially if you want them to grow, at the end of the day, who cares if they didn't see the word pineapple or Shih Tzu or something was in the middle of the job ad.

Kira La Forgia: [00:56:58] That's not what I have Kylie for. But if I was looking for somebody to do proofreading and copywriting, then that would be totally relevant. So, I think that that's one of the big things is that, you can put out the job posting for exactly what you need. But then, you can fill it with a candidate that lends itself to where you see your business going.

Kira La Forgia: [00:57:15] And I think for your first employee, it can be so cool because you'll start to see these possibilities as you start to take these steps. And then, when you start to meet the people, it can be a really empowering and kind of like this bumpy feeling to be like, "Oh, my gosh. My business is going to do everything I ever want it to and I'm going to be able to go to bed earlier and have dinner with my kids or my husband or take weekends off or eat," whatever the situation might have been.

Kira La Forgia: [00:57:41] And I just thought that it was such a good example of choosing a candidate, not only because she could check the things off the list with very little to no training, but also because of her growth trajectory and where she's going. And I think it's worked up great. Knock on wood. This podcast is going to come out, she's going to be like, "I've been offered a multi-six figure position because of Sam's podcast. They're taking me away."

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Sam Vander Wielen: [00:57:41] Kylie, you stay right where you are. Do not leave. You're not being sponsored for this. I love her, Kira. Lindsey knows that. I've told her that many times. She knows the deal. I've put an enforcement already. I love you and you're not going anywhere.

Kira La Forgia: [00:58:20] Yeah. And I think there's this analogy I heard that I think comes up a lot when people are hiring for the first time because we are actually engrained with all these super harmful corporate trips and stuff that we have to kind of unlearn and get rid off. We don't even realize that they're not necessary.

Kira La Forgia: [00:58:36] So, I heard this analogy, I use it for almost every problem I have in my life. Like, if you have a handful of sand and you try to hold on to it as tightly as you can, it's going to slip through your fingers. But if you're able to be flexible and have it loose and just kind of carrying around a handful of sand for whatever reason, then the sand is going to last a lot longer. You may not keep every single piece of it, but you're also going to be able to kind of adapt and let people be who they really are and adapt to the position.

Kira La Forgia: [00:59:01] And Kylie grew that position more than I ever thought was possible. And then, it totally snowballs into the rest of the team. We had an intern that's now an employee. That position was replaced by an employee when Maleri's contract ended. I mean, interns, that's the thing, they're so young, wild, and free.

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Sam Vander Wielen: [00:59:19] Their whole lives at them. We're just old ladies that are washed up.

Kira La Forgia: [00:59:26] Yes. Yes. That's a cultural thing, too, where you're like, "I can really be who I am and Kylie is there to back me up in any decision we make." And she interviewed all of our team members and we hired again. Like, you just - I don't know - kind of lean into it a little bit and be okay with their being changes. And don't attach yourself to permanence, because people don't want that. They want to grow even if they don't say it.

Sam Vander Wielen: [00:59:47] Yeah. That's true. We can't control what other people do. All we can do is shop and be the best and try to make it. And I don't want to recreate my corporate experience. That's something I think about a lot is that, like, I think there's in sync to one series of professional or whatever. And I'm like I left that shit behind. I'm not going back to that. I don't want to create that kind of environment for them or for myself. So, I think that's good.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:00:12] Speaking of environment by the way, preparing for us chatting today, I was thinking about is it ever too early to be creating a company culture or thinking about a company culture. Is that something that somebody should be working on when it's just them?

Kira La Forgia: [01:00:29] That's a good question. We actually talked about this in our management foundations course this last week, because I think that it all kind of stems from boundaries in a way. Because our boundaries are usually going to be the

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thing that's keeping us healthy, and so it also can be translated over to our business.

Kira La Forgia: [01:00:45] And our culture, we want to set it up so that it lends itself to having healthy boundaries and a healthy business model. And, you know, we're always capitalizing on our strengths and things like that. But there is a part of a company culture that is going to be ever evolving.

Kira La Forgia: [01:01:01] So, what you might think as a solopreneur or a business just starting out or however you see yourself, a freelancer or whatever, it what you want your company culture to feel like. It is supposed to change because it's based on you. And within small businesses, especially with our business is less than ten employees, it is so indicative of what the CEO is driving.

Kira La Forgia: [01:01:25] So, I've seen cultures that are really built on constant and kind of overwhelming change. And so, there's a certain type of team member that that attracts. And I've seen other cultures that are very stable and stagnant and they might not even talk to the CEO that often. Like, their experience is going to be a little bit more dictated by their task that they're doing and the clients that they're serving. And neither is wrong, but there's going to be different times in your life that your business is going to call for different needs from you and the culture has to be able to evolve and change. But our values and our mission and who we really are probably won't.

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Kira La Forgia: [01:01:59] So, when I teach this leadership and management course, it's not about how to talk to other people. It's how to understand ourselves. Because we are going to need to be as authentic as possible when we're showing up for other people and leading them. And if we can't know who that really is and we're just putting on a front or absorbing what other people are saying to us or whatever the case may be, then we're not going to have an authentic culture and it's going to feel like you're constantly acting to keep it up.

Kira La Forgia: [01:02:25] And I think there is no reason that you can't have a culture that swears. Or that you can't have a culture that is super flexible. Or you can't have a culture that's kind of always running a little late. Or, you know, like there's no reason that you can't have all that. But I think being honest with yourself about it is going to attract the people that are going to complement it, and that's really hard to know.

Kira La Forgia: [01:02:46] But as a business owner, I've never learned more about myself than I have in the last two-and-a-half years versus working in corporate for 13. So, if I would have said, "Yeah, my company culture is this," like back when I first started this business, all my experience is working for someone else, and making the culture as great as it can be within the confines of what their mission was. So, it's totally different. And being able to take some time to think about it and think how you like to work and who you are is really what's going to drive the culture.

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Kira La Forgia: [01:03:16] So, working on yourself, I mean, you can plan for it, you can write stuff down, you can have a mission and vision and values to jump off from. And all that is really important but it's really if somebody would ask you what you do and you're able to tell them, and then they're going to say why do you do it, that's your real mission and your vision. It's not really what sounds pretty on paper, you know, that kind of a thing. I think that's really hard because it's hard to know yourself from an outside perspective until you actually have the team in place. I don't know, when did you start thinking about it?

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:03:49] In hearing you describe it, I think that what I did, like I wasn't doing this on purpose, but the end is like most things in my life, it ended being off for me but I didn't know I was doing it at the time, was that I got really clear on the company's values. Which I think like I would encourage people to treat their business like a business entity outside of yourself, both legally and then literally. That is not a personal brand unless you're a blogger or influencer kind of thing.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:04:21] And so, within that, I did spend a lot of time. And like you said, though, Kira, I was like really flexible to it, too, because I was open to the fact that I was learning as I was going. But for me, the company itself had such, like, I was so clear on the fact that I wanted to make legal accessible. I wanted it to be more fun. And I wanted it to be smart and all these things.

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Sam Vander Wielen: [01:04:46] But it was just me for four plus years, so how does that translate? So, for me, it was like creating content and the products and yada, yada. But then, I see now how when Lindsey came in or other contractors even came in, I was like, "Hey, by the way, this is what we stand for. Anything kind of thing that you put out there, you're responsible for carrying the ball and a video of some sort that we're getting out there. You better damn make sure that that video has closed captions because accessibility means this, this, and this to us. It's not just about my products being accessible, it's also about the content being accessible," these kinds of things.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:05:18] And so, I've seen how much that has really paid off of this is who we are. And then, that translated into company culture when other people came onboard.

Kira La Forgia: [01:05:32] Yeah. I don't know, I feel like there's so much language about what people's values are and what they should be doing. And, you know, it's really hard sometimes to sort through it in your own mind, like how do I want to be seen versus how do I want my team to act.

Kira La Forgia: [01:05:50] And we have this thing in our process - which you obviously went through - where you have your internal values that are going to be a little more specific to a code of conduct or how somebody behaves day-to-day in a job and the external value. So, what the client see may not look exactly like what is internal, but they usually have a pretty big overlap. And it helps a lot because you can always make sure and fallback on those if they're really clear and straightforward.

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Kira La Forgia: [01:06:15] They don't have to be this sonnet or whatever like sometimes we'll see. It can just be something as simple as I started this business because I wanted people to have access to legal and have real business that's going to be successful. And that no matter what their background is, if they have learning disabilities, whatever the case may be, that is what we're always going to act on.

Kira La Forgia: [01:06:38] And I think we have to know ourselves in order to know what those things are that are really important. Because people can tell if you're faking it. And building trust with your team is so important. And we don't do it by saying words, we do it by our actions, so being able to back that up is super important.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:06:51] Yeah. I would encourage any of you who are right now not in the position where you have a team or you're not ready to hire quite yet, but start working on this internally for, like, the client facing experience. I know I even started just as simply as thinking what did I wanted to feel like to land on my website. Like, what emotions did I want to invoke and I would really dream that up and think that up.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:07:11] And I created my website from the start down to the colors, the clothes that I was wearing in the photos, the fonts I was using. I wanted them to be a little softer and not so harsh to not convey this stress about legal. And then, it started translating into how I delivered my content and how people experience my products and how they experience the customer service, and it kept going.

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Sam Vander Wielen: [01:07:34] I had this idea that I wanted everybody to feel like we were just sitting having a cup of coffee and I was just being like, "Oh, hey. Kira, here's what you need to know about doing this." And that's still rings through to me today. And then, now I see the team has picked that up of like, "Hey, we don't do things like that." Like, chill vibes, this is what we do. And, "Sam is not going to like that." Or, "This isn't going to go at all. That's not our kind of sponsor that we want," or whatever, and it really helps.

Kira La Forgia: [01:07:59] Yeah. It's so hard to, like, define it.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:08:01] It is, yeah.

Kira La Forgia: [01:08:02] I feel like there's a lot of content we create about how to create a company culture and stuff like that, and it's kind of counterintuitive. Because, honestly, every single time we talk about it, it's just like, "Well, tell me who you are. Do you like to work at night? Do you like to be available only in the morning? Is your priority your family?"

Kira La Forgia: [01:08:21] I had a client that has a chronic illness, and so part of her culture is that they show up when they can and they hold each other to that standard to do their absolute best when they're able to show up. And then, when they can't, that's okay. But the business can adopt and change. Whereas, that wouldn't work in my culture because I have to, like, push stuff out there. That's the way I like to work.

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Kira La Forgia: [01:08:42] So, it's really interesting because sometimes it takes looking at the icky parts of ourselves or the things that other people look down on, or even if we gotten feedback as bosses before or whatever. It takes looking at that to say, "Yeah. I can take that feedback and use that to reinforce that I want my culture to look like this." Like, if I have gotten feedback in the past, that's like, "Oh, I just never know if you're being funny or not." And I'm like, "I'm always being funny."

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:09:08] "This is me."

Kira La Forgia: [01:09:10] Like, when in doubt, I'm being hilarious. But it's like those little moments of that person, if I were able to bring them into a culture that I built, then I wouldn't get that feedback. They would be excited about being in an environment that's a little bit more lighthearted. Or even just fast pace, like if you're a person that really enjoys working at a really fast pace, that's not necessarily something that is super toxic.

Kira La Forgia: [01:09:36] It can just mean like I'm going to get the people that are really drawn to that. And they're going to be like, "I love working on a bunch of things at once. I love having new ideas. I love being able to have a voice." Those are not bad things. It's just that some people are not going to align with them and that's totally fine. So, be honest and real about it, and it will be so great. I love my company culture.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:09:56] Yes. Exactly. I think this is probably been so helpful for people, I hope. And this, for me,

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has the year to declaring I'm going to stop apologizing. Like, you've talked so much about the things like not being wrong or bad. Just different and being clear and upfront about who you are so you attract the people who are attracted to that vibe. And I feel, for me, it's the year of stop apologizing for being hyper ambitious and also for having a commitment to excellence.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:10:22] I was just telling you this the other day, that I had realized with the business to careful, it's a fine line between I don't want the team to be like, "We can't mistakes. Things have to be perfect." Which is not what I mean. But we do have a commitment to excellence. Everything should be top of our game. And I expect everything is getting reviewed and quality control. And we're doing the best we can all the time and learning from mistakes. And I'm not apologizing for that anymore.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:10:50] I decided recently, I was like, "That's just how I am." I want to be really, really good at this. And I want to be super valuable to other people. And I'm not going to apologize for that anymore. And there's a healthy way, I think, to create that culture. So, I'm definitely learning too.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:11:06] I think this has been so helpful. I am very excited to ask you if you're up for a little fun round of Would you rather questions before we go to the --

Kira La Forgia: [01:11:13] As long as it's not going to get me in trouble.

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Sam Vander Wielen: [01:11:15] No. There will be no HR issues from this. Your HR department will not be calling you about this. Don't worry. Okay. Drum roll please. Would you rather, I think I know the answers to most of this. Would you rather read fiction or nonfiction?

Kira La Forgia: [01:11:31] Fiction.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:11:33] Well, have you read anything lately that you loved?

Kira La Forgia: [01:11:37] Nonfiction or fiction?

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:11:39] For fiction, have you read --

Kira La Forgia: [01:11:39] Because I do try to read, like, you know, hard stuff.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:11:41] Business --

Kira La Forgia: [01:11:45] Okay. So, this is really weird, so I started reading this book, it's called A Court of Thorns and Roses. And it was with a couple of my coworkers. And it's very dorky and there's five of them in a series, and it's very smutty. And so, then we decided to have this book club for the other series called Throne of Glass, and the author's name is Sarah J. Maas. And not quite as smutty, but it's seven books.

Kira La Forgia: [01:12:09] We were going to have a book club meeting. My friend lives in Seattle, she was going to come down to San Diego to just visit in general. Her family lives here,

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all that good stuff. She started looking up flights and realized that the flights were more expensive than even if we went to New York, where she's never been. So, some of our book club meeting got me going to New York this weekend.

Kira La Forgia: [01:12:27] So, it's a seven book series, very fantasy, and not my normal style of things. But I really feel like it's such a good escape. And it's about all these dorky things that I never knew about, like weird dragons and stuff. And my husband walks in and I'm like it's either something weird about fairies or some smutty scene, I'm listening to it and I'm like, "Whoa." I've been loving those. I've been obsessed with those books for months now. But I just felt a lot of pressure because of the book club.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:12:27] I hear it. Well, that's what book clubs are good for. It gets you motivated. It holds you accountable. That's awesome. All right. Cool. I think it's fun to read stuff outside of what you would normally read. It [inaudible]. What about, would you rather live at the beach, the mountains, or the desert?

Kira La Forgia: [01:13:17] The beach.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:13:19] Obviously. Come on, you're not a monster. Would you rather order coffee or tea?

Kira La Forgia: [01:13:24] Coffee.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:13:26] Would you rather clean up as you go or clean up at the end when it comes to cooking?

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Kira La Forgia: [01:13:32] Well, I mean I would rather be the person that cleans up as you go, but I am the person that cleans up at the end. And by that, I mean, my husband does it.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:13:44] That's a perfect answer. Okay. Well, the last one is a good one to ask you before you to New York, would you rather hit up a fancy restaurant or the best food truck?

Kira La Forgia: [01:13:56] That is so hard. Oh, my god. That is literally the hardest question I've ever heard in my life.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:14:01] You're going to have to answer this before you go to New York because you're going to have options.

Kira La Forgia: [01:14:05] I know. Well, for this case, I think I have to say a fancy restaurant, just because that's where my mind is at because we're going to Carbone and Butter and stuff. So, if I said food truck, that would be a huge betrayal of all my plans in three days.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:14:19] This is true. Yeah, there's a lot of food in New York. And there's just something to the experience of restaurants. I mean, I love food trucks too. I'm so torn about the whole thing but that's a tough one.

Kira La Forgia: [01:14:28] Yeah. It's hard. But I don't know, maybe I'm just been eating too much taco shop. I mean, in San Diego, I just basically eat, like, once a week. Maybe I've been

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just eating too much of that lately so I'm just really in the mood for somebody to give me a piece of pear on a plate with some mercato cheese and a slice of pepper or something, and maybe like, "Oh, my god. It's the best I ever tasted."

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:14:47] Yeah. Well, get ready for New York. You'll have plenty of little things dotted on the plate. You'll be all good to go. Don't worry.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:14:55] Kira, this has been so much fun chatting with you today. Will you let everyone know where to find you more online, how they can work with you, all those kinds of things.

Kira La Forgia: [01:15:04] Yeah. So, Instagram is obviously the place that I hang out the most. And that is @theparadigmm, with two M's at the end. And our website, the-paradigm.com. It has so many resources. I get a lot of messages from people that are like, "I downloaded everything for free on your website, where do I pay for things?" So, I think those are all really good resources, and our blog too, which you can just get to from the home page.

Kira La Forgia: [01:15:29] And then, of course, we have our workshop that came out. So, I'm sure you'll share a link to that, too, which is essentially 90 minutes and me telling you exactly what to do to make sure that you don't mess up when you hire your first person.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:15:39] Yeah. I think that's a pretty important workshop that you should all go watch. So, Kira has a

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new workshop called How To Start a Team. It's a free workshop that I'll link to below so you guys can go watch that. I think it's going to be so helpful for so many people. And, personally, I would suggest watching it on the early end. Like, if you think you're not ready for it yet, I'd rather you watch it now and then have to rewatch it later to get those things in place. So, just like with legal, you don't want to do stuff first then have to undo it or do things wrong. So, it's just better off that way, trust me.

Kira La Forgia: [01:16:09] Agreed, 100 percent.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:16:10] Thank you so much for being here. This was so fun.

Kira La Forgia: [01:16:14] Yeah. Thanks for having me.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:16:18] Thanks so much for listening to the On Your Terms podcast. Make sure to follow on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you like to listen to podcasts. You can also check out all of our podcast episodes, show notes, links, and more at samvanderwielen.com/podcast.

Sam Vander Wielen: [01:16:32] You can learn more about legally protecting your business and take my free legal workshop, Five Steps to Legally Protect and Grow Your Online Business, at samvanderwielen.com. And to stay connected and follow along, follow me on Instagram, @samvanderwielen, and send me a DM to say hi.

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