namecheap

Expert Summit

MASTERCLASS TRANSCRIPT

Namecheap Expert Summit

Experiences of building a remote working team| Jonathan Cann

- Hi, and we've got Jonathan Cann here talking to us about experiences of building a remote working team. Jonathan is the director of CRM here at Namecheap. I'm Emily Jacob and I actually work in Jonathan's team as well as being responsible for bringing you the Expert Summit.

But I'm really, really interested to hear from Jonathan about how he has built a remote working team because it is a great remote working team. And in my solopreneur business, I'm actually starting to build out and have people working with me and I really want to understand how best to do that.

So, Jonathan, first of all, would you like to introduce yourself and your background a little bit more?

- Okay, thank you, Emily and good morning, good afternoon everybody. Yes, so I've been working for Namecheap probably about five and a half, nearly six years now. I was brought in to build a CRM team from scratch, which was exciting. It's very exciting.

For those who don't know, Namecheap is very different to many companies out there because predominantly, we are remote workers as a whole. I think now obviously with lots of lockdowns all over the world, everybody's remote working, but even before that, there was at least 40 to 50% of the team who were remote working. The attitude is more to actually recruit based on skillset and attitude rather than driven by where the office is and people traveling to the office which I think is really interesting, When talking to lots of people about it, it's very rare. Obviously now with slightly different in the world today, I think that's going to be more and more prevalent around.

I've worked for big companies and very small agencies, but often with a lot of remote working flexibility within that. So I've got a little bit of experience from that side of things. And so I've been lucky enough to build that team from

scratch. So that's really, I wouldn't say my life story to date, but that's where I am.

- What would you say are the key things you've learnt in building the remote team?

- Firstly, hire the right person. I think it's quite a standard answer. You get a job description, you send it out there and you want to hire the right person. That's great because that's based on skillset. That's based on what you want. But I think the key to it is really how they work because what you need to do is you need to provide them with the trust and you need to have the trust back to deliver. So I think this is how they work. Can they deliver more than the job description? Can they deliver without keep asking you? 'cause you can't micromanage in the remote working world. It's very difficult to micromanage and in fact, it's probably a very good thing you can't micromanage, but also you have to allow people to do the work.

I firstly looked back on this and I think, I firstly thought it was based on maturity and experience. I used to say that actually remote working for juniors is really, really hard. I've had two people in the same role. One was, actually the guy did the job, but had issues about actually doing the next piece of work. He had to be told what to do. He was always struggling. When he had a problem he'd wait for an answer rather than seeking the answer.

Sadly he left and then we recruited somebody who was in similar age, similar experience. This person not only didn't ask questions, they went and found answers and then they went and did the work. And then their job description, they did more than the job description. And that's based on attitude. That's based on desire.

And I think that's the key is not necessarily just the job description, it's about how they work. So when you go and start to recruit, whether it is for a team, or looking for people to help you build your idea or your role or your business, look for those people who can give you plus one. Give you that little bit more.

- It's absolutely what I'm discovering. I've had, I've currently got three people who are working with me on my other business and I found that they need

quite a lot of help to tell them what to do and how to do it. But there's one of them who is really sort of just saying, oh, I can take this blog and I can create these different social media assets from it and she's taking the lead on doing that and that takes so much stress away from me. So yeah, it's definitely on the attitude, not just on the skillset of what they're doing.

- Yeah. I think the key to this though is there's two points. Firstly, get the right person, okay. But then you also got to set clear objectives.

- Yes.

- I think I'll go back to my consultancy days which I loved and I hated at the same time 'cause you learn an awful lot about yourself, but also you learn a lot about how other people work. And there are two clients I worked for. One we went and got the brief which is fine. Everybody needs a brief. And then we went off and did the work. Three weeks later we came back and provided and went tadaa, look at this. And they went, oh, that's not what we asked for. And the critical point about this is you communicate what you want. The brief is great, but also, you need to understand what's the deliverable. So what do you expect?

- Yeah.

- How does it look? How does it feel? Is it a PowerPoint? Is it a document? Is it a quote? What are you actually looking for? And then get that detailed, get that in detail. My second example is when we did it right. And this was a big Irish financial house and we sat down, we discussed the brief, which every consultant should do, but also you go and talk about what's it going to look like? How is it going to be? What do you want at the end of it?

- Yeah.

- And the other point is you then communicate and touch base every structured, in a structured manner. And by doing this, we not only delivered, but we delivered more because we talked and communicated. So there are areas this how to build a remote working. Get the right person, set the objectives, communicate. Probably over communicate and chat and get that relationship. But make sure that you're touching base every five, won't say five minutes, but every other day to make sure how you getting on. Ask how they are first. Don't keep going where is my work? But keep moving forward.

- I'm very good at just pushing where's my work?

- Yes, how are they first and then go and say, right how do we do? And so you check in all the time.

- Yeah

- So I think those are the key elements.

- And how would you say things have changed during lockdown?

- Yeah, in Namecheap we were obviously slightly luckier than some organizations 'cause we were set up for remote working. Yeah, set up for remote working so we had the infrastructure in place. Other companies haven't had it and had to create that infrastructure. So we had the technology in place. So that was a good thing. So some people might say we're lucky, but each, no in let's just say in UK, we've had three lockdowns. I know it changes around the world, but the difference here has been the pressure on the individual.

Obviously we're used to remote working, but the pressure on the individual changes dramatically and each, and this is the key, again, is treating people as humans and treating people as individuals Not everybody's the same.

So in my team, we've had at least, and it's a small team, but we've had, we've got one single mother working from home with COVID. Her child got COVID. I've had a small family in a two bedroom flat in North London, again, got COVID, everybody in the same house. Couldn't get out. The pressures was unbelievable on these people. And yes, they could work from home, but that didn't really matter because in this environment you have to understand that these people have different pressures on.

And I think this is a good thing that again, Namecheap, and I'm not just talking about Namecheap all the time, but there is an attitude that the person comes first, your health comes first and that's the key. The presentation can wait, the quote could wait if people understand. And I think that's what's I think is really important is that you have to treat everybody exactly the same, or not exactly the same, but you have to learn from each individual and understand what pressures they're under and then you can change and alter your attitude and alter how you work with them.

The other point about how things are when people, suddenly everybody's doing Zoom calls, everybody's on conference calls, is accept there are going to be interruptions. I'm surprised actually I haven't had an interruption yet in the last 10 minutes 'cause normally it happens. You set up a call, the doorbell rings, the delivery happens, your supermarket delivery happens exactly the time that you meant on a very important call, or your children interrupt. I think again, the best environment and I've seen it done and we do it here is if your child comes and interrupts, get them on your knee, get them to talk to people. Not only because it provides a level of humanity into a technical world that we live in, but it actually reduces the stress level that you're under because people get interrupted. And I think that's just accept it and move on. The worry about, oh my God, my child is going to come in. I'll push them away. We've all seen the BBC YouTube video of the the reporter trying to manage their three year old running around at the same time, doesn't work. So just accept it and embrace it.

- That takes a lot of the stress away of fear thinking, fearing that somebody's going to come and interrupt if you know that it's going to be okay if they do.

- Yes, totally. And I've seen one of individual walked away from their presentation in the middle of a Collab call or a big conference call to pick up a delivery. And it was like, everyone went, oh! And it was just accepted.

- I think that was me.

- It might have been.

- So what do you think are the key elements to this, to successful remote working?

- I think the first point is a bit of structure. I'm lucky enough to be very structured. I think my wife would probably complain about that, but I structure and get your day sorted out. Make sure you start at a certain day and you finish. I think the critical element is you finish at a certain time. Again, for those who are building their own company, sometimes they want to work all day, every day, but that's not necessarily good for your soul. That's not good for your mental health in my opinion. So actually understand when you're going to stop. Take regular breaks.

I think there's a really interesting example. I was speaking to some of the guys at Vodafone in UK and they found the whole team, I think at the beginning of the year, the whole team went remote working and suddenly their productivity went through the roof for about three weeks 'cause everyone wanted to prove that I can work from home and I'm really, really efficient, fantastic. Three weeks later that went down. The productivity fell off the cliff 'cause they burnt out.

- Yeah.

- Then they came back to normality. So you have to take regular breaks. So I try to take regular breaks every 40 minutes. It's not always happens, but it's like, can I take a break? I took a break before this 'cause I wanted to be fresh in my

mind. You cannot work constantly. I think the concentration level is 40 minutes max then the concentration--

- That's like the Pomodoro Technique thinking, isn't it? I think that's about, I think that's 35 minutes and take a break.

- It is 35 minutes, yeah.

- Yeah.

- Yeah, better than me.

- You can't take, you can't focus as a human being for that long. Okay, the other, another element is to actually make sure you get outside. Specifically in lockdown, sometimes the walls get closer and closer because you're working every day. You live every day and in certain times in a one bedroom flat. So get outside.

We have a lot of technology allows us to make phone calls outside. So, and I've seen a variety of clips of people walking miles while taking calls and I think that's really, really important. You don't necessarily have to have a face-to-face video conference call, but also speak, walk outside, take breaks outside, breathe the fresh air. I think that's really important.

Another area that I lucky enough is to create a structure or place where you can work that you can come back in to. You know there's a difference between when you sit down in one chair and then when you walk outside. It's because you know this is work and this is home life. And I think this is one of the big points that people have struggled with is they found that your work life is starting to drift into your home life.

And I think that is driven to predominantly because people aren't commuting. So that natural break between when you get on a train, when you get in a car, when you cycle or walk is actually lost. And so people get up, get on their technology straight away, answer questions over breakfast, into work, answer

questions at night, answer questions when they're at home. So another, and some people will feel incredibly frightened. I know my team don't like it when I say, turn your technology off, actually turn it off. It'll frighten people, but actually it will give you a tiny bit of leeway. I think no one wins a medal for 24/7 working. You can't do that.

- It's because as a solopreneur as well I know that I get pulled into it 'cause you're so, you want to work on your business. You really want it to happen, but it's so important to have, to make the boundaries of time and place so that you work in a certain place in your home and you relax in another part of your home. I am terrible with bringing the phone what part of work with me into the breaks and you've told me off several times for being around when I'm not supposed to be around.

- Yeah.

- But it's something that you really, I think you really do have to learn especially as a solopreneur and for everyone who's now working at home is to have the clear boundaries of when you're working and when you're not working and also where you're working and where you're relaxing in your home.

- I think you're exactly right. Your performance will increase as well because you will have that space. because you will know that, I mean, again, I'm lucky enough to have that structured thinking that I take my kids to school. So that is great because it gets me out of the house. It gives me that natural break. As soon as I get back, have an expresso and then work. So I've had that natural break and you can build that into your work life. Is you could go for a run, watch breakfast TV if you wanted to, all of that side of things. Read the papers, why not.

- It could be on technology.

- Yeah.

- But again, you're having that natural break between what you do. I think also as a team leader, you've also got to understand is your behavior drives the behavior of your team. And again, another example is that I think one of my senior managers used to ask questions on a Sunday night. It was the, I think it was a marketing manager ask questions on a Sunday night. And what happened then is the the manager would ask questions then her direct reports would answer the questions on a Sunday night. And the direct reports would find out the information from their team on a Sunday night causing the whole department to be online on a Sunday night.

- On a Sunday night.

- And it was, it started to creep in. So you actually had one day when you weren't online because your team, your head of department was asking questions on a Sunday. Now, being a solopreneur or an entrepreneur sometimes you feel you have to be. If you're managing a team, I would question what you're doing because you say actually your behavior is driving the behavior of everybody else and it drives the culture. There's will be an expectation, I've got to check my phone.

- Yeah.

- I'm trying to stop checking my phone even when on holiday. Everybody does it, but it's one of those things. Can you put your phone down?

Can you not answer that message? Because actually you should have the trust in your team, specifically when you have a team, to be able to answer that for you when you're away. From a solopreneur side of things, it's slightly more difficult, but again, is that keep technology off when you can because there is expectation. It's there to build. It's there to attract you.

- I've certainly been very impressed. I've just started working with someone and they sent me their terms of business and in it, they were very specific of their hours of business and when they would be available for me to contact them. They're working for me but freelancing, but they're very specific. I was very impressed. It felt like I was very clear on what their boundaries were, which meant that I could be much clearer on my boundaries too.

- I think that's a really good point. That's a great, great example of, again, not only setting the boundaries for who you work for, but also how you, on your day. And you can do that as long as the expectation is managed both ways. I think because my team is global, so I've got people from Ukraine, I've got people from Canada, America, UK, Romania, variety of I think there's one in Dubai, variety of other places.

- Yeah.

- I think the critical element is to understand those timeframes and where people are crossing over, but allowing them to have the flexibility to work how they can and best they can. Again, it goes back to trust. And I think that's really important. I keep going about it, but you're employing somebody to do the job, you should trust them because if you don't trust them, why are you employing them?

- Absolutely.

- So I think that is an element, but also allow them to work how they, and how they best perform. And if this individual who's provided you with a contract saying, okay, I only work between these two times, fantastic. 'Cause that says, it manages your expectation.

- Yeah.

- And you're not expecting any more right from the start.

- Absolutely, absolutely. I did send them an email on the weekend, but I started it with, I know that you won't be reading this until Monday morning.

- It's a good point.

- Yeah, what do you think is the biggest challenge with remote working?

- I think it's the individual. It goes back to the individual. The biggest, let's not go remote working, the biggest challenge for management is people. The biggest challenge is also the most interesting thing, is everybody's very, very different. Every, you will not get a person who's exactly the same. Therefore, you have to listen probably more than you've ever, I think there's a progressive listening or assertive listening. There's a probably a phrase for it, but you have to listen.

And somebody said long time ago, you got two ears, one mouth, use it in that proportion. If you find yourself talking too much, you need to have a word with yourself because it's your team or your clients or your suppliers, listen to what they're saying. Listen to how they are, ask them how they are, but also listen exactly and then be, ask questions because then you can get information out.

I think that's the hardest part is remote working. and it's probably taken me a while as a human, as a manager to go and say, right, I've actually got to really, really really listen to this because it's very tiring, but also will give you more information. And if you listen to a person, they're going to trust you more because you can actually answer their question rather than you drive your agenda. That's not going to drive a level of trust between two parties and I think that is the critical side of things.

- As a coach, you're always taught as well to listen for what's not being said.

- Yeah.

- It's really critical.

- Those quiet pauses.

- Yeah.

- Just don't say anything, let them speak because--

- Yeah.

- Yeah, let them speak because I know I'm talking a lot now but--

- That's the purpose of this.

- I know but that's, it's a strange one because often you have managers who like the sound of their own voice. Who like to talk about people, to people, not actually have a conversation and that's where remote working you have to have a conversation.

- Yeah, absolutely. And is there anything else you'd like to say around the specific leadership style that needs to be adopted for remote working?

- I don't think there's one way of doing it. I think leadership style, again, between an office, between a football pitch, on a office, remote working, doesn't really matter. You can read as many books as you actually like about

leadership and they'll all be subtly different. It's based on who you are and as individual and what you've learnt.

I think the biggest phrase I, which I hang on to is every individual has learned from somebody, but also, you know the managers that you didn't like. I've had managers throw chairs in offices before. I've had managers too tell me they didn't like me. I've had managers who said they're not happy and therefore they don't let people speak. Well, don't be them.

- Yeah.

- Because I think that's really, really important. It's like you've learned from other people. Use the bits that you're the people you love. The people who you love to work for. Those are the ones you want to work for. Those are the ones that you want to emulate rather than the ones who created the fear. Now, there are styles, different styles of management, Style that works for me is, again, listening, conversation, understanding. If you can do that, then you create empathy. You create that understanding how that person works. How they need to, where you need to praise them. Where you need to create the feedback. Where you need to devise, okay, we need to stretch you a bit here, we need to push you a bit here, or the ones you just say go for it.

- Yeah.

- Actually learn and I think that's the other bit that you've got to learn, they've got to learn. The team is an illustration of you. It is set by your rules. It's set by your culture. It's set by your guidelines, but you've got to understand they're humans and often we forget because everybody's got a different journey. Everybody's going in different directions. No one's going in the same place at the same time. So how can you help them to help you at the same time? And it goes back to an entrepreneur, solopreneur is actually you're helping, can you help an individual to help you at the same time, then it's a win-win situation.

- Yeah, absolutely. Jonathan It's been fascinating and wonderful to talk to you and chat to you about this today. Thank you so much for your time.

- Thank you.