

Expert Interview I with Amanda Thompson, COO at SetUp.

Including | thoughts on focusing on what you can control and not on what you can't control.

>> *Amanda Thompson guest curated Strands on March 9, 2023. [Read it here.](#)*

Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?

I am the COO at Setup, where we match Brands and Agencies together. I love living in the space in between Brands and Agencies, helping them find their perfect match. In my career, I started out more on the Operations side of things as a Project Manager, then as a Traffic Manager, then VP of Production, and VP of Operations. Then I left agency life for a little while and worked at various providers, consultancies, and then brand-side at Coca-Cola, then back to agency life, all with more of a Marketing angle. In my role now at Setup, I incorporate all that Operations knowledge and all that Marketing knowledge and bring it together to help run the business and provide Marketers with the people and resources they need to thrive. I feel I can instantly relate to and connect with Brand marketers who have gaps in their Marketing and need to find just the right agency, as well as with Agency folks who are looking to grow their business and find new Clients.

What excites you most about what you do?

I truly love helping people - in my personal and professional lives. So nothing excites me more than talking to a Marketer to understand where they're struggling, and to be able to connect them with just the right person they need to talk to so they can move forward in a positive way. I love that part of my job is simply to stay connected with all the smart people I've met throughout my career, and to meet more smart, talented people. I love that we aren't "selling" anything or anyone - we truly aim to make valuable connections that will help people thrive in their careers.

What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?

I believe in several values that happen to align directly with those of the company where I work, including being Honorable and Approachable. I believe in always



Helping others. I would define my leadership style as being a Democratic or Coaching leader. I can quickly recognize a team member's strengths, weaknesses and motivations and aim to help them improve. I'm supportive and motivational. I deliver feedback with a lot of care and thoughtfulness. I take inputs from the team, and work towards the best solution.

What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on and why?

I still think my most rewarding project was creating the Digital IQ marketing education program at The Coca-Cola Company. The goal of the program was to help Coca-Cola global marketers level up in their digital marketing skills, so we aimed to help them get smarter in their jobs and use the best strategies and tactics to engage with consumers and sell the beverages. My team and I concepted the program, the name, the logo and visual identity system. We brought in experts to help facilitate the workshops. And we had the tall task of "selling" a marketing program to Coca-Cola marketers. We had surveys the participants would take before, right after, and ~3 months after our workshops, and it was incredible to see their skills and confidence grow in the various areas of digital marketing. I made lifelong friends and was inspired by so many smart Coca-Cola marketers from all over the world.

We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?

Diversity and inclusion are important to me personally, and thankfully, they're also important to the team of people that I work with every day. We produce a lot of content, and we thoughtfully curate any contributors to that content to ensure we have good representation of all genders and ethnicities. We hire team members and

interns with that same mentality. We talk to our clients about their goals in this space, so that we might incorporate their thinking into the matches that we make.

Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?

I do try to truly be at work mentally during work hours, and then turn it off when I'm done each day. I am not the type who typically goes back to work after a break for family time and dinner - I much prefer to work straight through until I finish what I need to finish, then truly turn off the laptop/phone for the rest of the day and evening. I fit in any exercise (yoga, bicycle, swimming) early in the morning before work, and I like to make that break between work and the evening with a good dog walk in the park or the neighborhood. Especially now that I work from home three days a week, I like creating that distance between my laptop and my brain after work, and I think a (dog) walk is the perfect way to do it. I do believe that work/life balance is possible, but I have to be honest with myself that sometimes, work takes priority. I don't love spending weekend time or late evenings doing work, but I know that in the cycle of work/life balance, sometimes that's how it has to be! I also try to pick one day of the weekend to never turn on a laptop - that's usually Saturday for me, and I find it a really necessary and rejuvenating break from the grind.

What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?

I read a lot of newsletters that point me to interesting articles. Some include: Strands of Genius (of course!), Adweek Daily, Marketing Brew, Shelly Palmer, Gamestorming, and AMA. At work, we have a Slack channel dedicated to articles, and the team has some amazing finds sometimes! I also read a lot of books. I love all different sorts of genres - novels, memoirs, historical fiction, biographies, business books, etc. It's awesome how a seemingly random novel will be so relevant to something I'm struggling with or experiencing in my own life. I also find inspiration from friends and colleagues - I spend a lot of time staying connected to old work colleagues, new



work colleagues, and friends that have nothing to do with work. Everyone has something they can teach me!

As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?

Focus on what you CAN do, not on what you CAN'T. I got this advice from a coworker at Coca-Cola, Katy Lebet. Working at a massive corporation like that, you aren't always in control of how your projects run or who might suddenly be put in charge of your team. Rather than getting frustrated at all the things we were waiting on or the requests to re-do something for no apparent reason, we would repeat that mantra. And it works! You get things done! You are productive! And you wouldn't have been able to change the things you aren't in control of anyway, so you might as well focus on the things you can control. This advice has helped me in my work life and in my personal life many times over the years. In fact, I found myself sharing it with a team member yesterday.

Is there anything we should ask you that we didn't? If so, write your own question and then answer it below.

What is your superpower? - I believe my superpower is my empathy. Though I've been literally berated for it at times in my career, I have come to understand that my empathy for others and my emotional intelligence are in fact strengths and helpful in the business world. I treat others how I'd like to be treated. I'm thoughtful, kind and helpful. I can pretty easily put myself in another person's shoes, and I ALWAYS want to do my best to make that person more comfortable and ensure they know that I understand them and I will do everything in my power to help them. I believe that leaders and businesses who do not understand this concept will ultimately hurt their own companies and be stifled by their outdated ideas and approaches to life and work.