ELEVEN ROCKET-SHIP TEAM LISTS

Hiring, leading, and keeping the crew that can handle the pressure.

- Defining Your Ideal Team
- Writing Great Job Posts
- Interview Questions That Reveal More
- Red Flags to Watch For
- Managing Smart People
- Building Team Camaraderie
- Leading Through Change
- Staying Calm Under Pressure
- Understanding Personality Styles
- Keeping Top People
- Letting Someone Go With Grace

The Lists

Everything in here was earned in the arena: a hundred hires, a thousand pitches, and the teams in between.

1	**Ten Best Strategies for Hiring a Rocket-Ship Team**	THE HIRE
2	**Ten Best Interview Questions, and What Answers to Look For**	THE INTERVIEW
3	**Ten Red Flags to Watch for When Interviewing**	THE INTERVIEW
4	**Ten Biggest Hiring Mistakes**	THE HIRE
5	**Ten Tips for Managing Really Smart People Who Disagree**	THE TEAM
6	**Ten Ways to Resolve Team Conflict**	THE TEAM
7	**Ten Ways to Build Team Camaraderie**	THE TEAM
8	**Ten Ways to Stay Calm Amidst Chaos and Regulate Your Nervous System**	THE LEADER
9	**Ten Ways to Manage to Personality Styles**	THE LEADER
10	**Ten Ways to Keep Your Best People**	THE LONG GAME
11	**Ten Ways to Let Someone Go with Grace**	THE LONG GAME

I hired one hundred people in my first year as a CEO, coached hundreds of founders on three continents, and have now screened a thousand startups from the investor's chair. These eleven lists are what all of it taught me about the only machine that matters: the team. Use them this week.

THE HIRE · LIST 1 OF 11

Ten Best Strategies for Hiring a Rocket-Ship Team

"The best people are employed and not searching. Reach out yourself."

1 **Write the mission of the role before you write the job description.**
Before you post anything, write one paragraph: what must be different at this company in twelve months because this person joined? Hiring is casting, and you cannot cast a part you haven't defined. Vague roles attract vague people.

2 **The founder does the recruiting. Personally.**
You give the best pitch and you are the most effective close, so never outsource your early hires to a job board. Sit down with your team, go through everyone's networks, and ask "who's good," not "who's looking," because the best people are employed and not searching. Then reach out yourself.

3 **Hire for the pressure, not the résumé.**
A résumé shows what someone did with support, structure, and a working company around them. None of those will be reliably present at yours. Look for people who have survived something, who move toward ambiguity, and who can hold conviction and bad news at the same time.

4 **Raise the average of the room with every single hire.**
Every person you add raises or lowers the standard of what your team notices, cares about, and refuses to ship. I hired the top thirty finance writers in the country and the standard walked in the door with them. Talent density is the game: strong people want to work with strong people, and average hides behind growth until it's too late.

5 **Balance proven experts with high-slope talent.**
Buy experience where you need immediate capability, and bet on fast learners everywhere else. The rate at which your people grow matters as much as where they start, because the company's bar rises every quarter and your team has to rise with it. Reward growth as well as output.

6 **Test with real work, and pay for it.**
Talk is a weak signal. Give serious candidates a small piece of a real current project and watch how they think, communicate, and finish. Pay them for their time. One afternoon of real work tells you more than five interviews.

7 **Recruit beyond your own mirror.**
Your network is your fastest source of hires and your fastest route to a monoculture. If everyone comes from your circle, you get one answer four times, and the fourth answer is usually the one that saves you. Deliberately source a meaningful share of hires from outside your network, and build a team with a mix of genders, backgrounds, and experience. Diverse teams outperform. That's not charity; that's math.

8 **Tell the truth in the pitch. Sell with your eyes open.**
Never win a hire with a story you cannot keep. The recruit shows up Monday and checks your story against the building, and an oversold dream is a scheduled resignation. Tell them the odds, the chaos, and the mission; the ones who join anyway are pre-tested for the pressure to come.

9 **Pay in the currencies where a startup is rich.**
You will lose every bidding war on salary, so stop fighting there. You are rich in purpose, learning, ownership, and story: mission they can take personally, growth they can't get at a big company, equity and real decisions, and a sentence they'll tell for the rest of their careers. Find out which currency each person values, and pay in that.

10 **Move fast, decide fast, and keep every door open.**
Speed is a startup's biggest hiring advantage; great candidates are gone in days, not weeks. Tighten your process so you can go from first call to offer while the big companies are still scheduling round three. And when someone says no, or you can't afford them yet, part warmly and stay in touch, because the pipeline you keep warm today is the executive team you hire next year.

Ten Best Interview Questions, and What Answers to Look For

"Ask the question, then go quiet. The silence after your question is where the real answer lives."

1 **"Tell me a number you moved. And how you knew it was you who moved it."**
My favorite question, and it has never failed me. Listen for whether they think in numbers at all, and then for the deeper thing: do they know the difference between being near a result and causing one? The hire is the person who lights up with a specific chain: the problem, their theory, their action, and the number that changed because of it.

2 **"Walk me through the hardest thing you've ever pushed through. What kept you going?"**
You're hiring for pressure, so ask about pressure. Listen for real adversity, professional or personal, and for what their engine is made of. Vague answers about "staying positive" are a warning; specific answers about a system, a person, or a purpose tell you they've been tested and know their own machinery.

3 **"Why a startup? You could be advancing at a bigger, safer company right now."**
The best answers connect their skills and ambitions to this stage of a company; the worst are escape plans from a job they hate. Listen for people running toward something, not away from something. "I want my hands on the outcome" is gold; "I hear startups are fun" is a person who will leave when it stops being fun, which is month two.

4 **"Tell me about the best thing you've ever built or done. Anywhere."**
Open the door for a story and watch what they choose, because their choice tells you what they're proud of and what gets them excited. Listen for ownership, craft, and detail. Someone who can't get specific about their own best work will not get specific about yours.

5 **"Tell me about a time you disagreed with your boss or your team. What happened?"**
On a small team, disagreement is a daily sport, and you need people who do it well. Listen for whether they pushed honestly, listened honestly, and then committed to the decision even when it wasn't theirs. Watch for two failure modes: the person who has never disagreed with anyone, and the person who is still angry about it.

6 **"What would you do in your first thirty days here?"**
This tests preparation and judgment at once. The strong answer starts with listening and learning before changing things, names something specific about your company, and shows they've already been thinking about your problem on their own time. A generic answer means they're interviewing everywhere; a specific one means they're interviewing here.

7 **"Tell me about a time you had too much to do and not enough time. What did you drop?"**
Startups are permanent triage, so listen for their sorting logic. Strong candidates explain what they prioritized, what they delegated, and what they consciously let die, and they can defend the choice. Anyone who claims they "just worked harder and did it all" hasn't been busy enough yet, or isn't being honest.

8 **"What's something you've taught yourself in the last year?"**
Growth rate matters as much as starting point, because what your company needs from each seat keeps climbing, and the person in it either climbs too or becomes the bottleneck. Listen for genuine curiosity and a real answer, a skill, a subject, a tool, with evidence they got somewhere. People who are still learning at their own expense will keep learning at yours.

9 **"Tell me about your last team. Who was great, and what did you contribute?"**
Listen to how they talk about former colleagues, because that's how they'll one day talk about you. The best people give credit easily and can still name exactly what their own hands did. If their old company was full of idiots and every boss was a fool, guess what your company becomes in their next interview.

10 **"What should I have asked you that I didn't?"**
End here every time. It hands the candidate the floor and shows you what they think matters, their self-awareness, and whether they'll volunteer something real, a strength you missed, a concern they want to address, a question about the mission. The passive answer is "no, I think you covered it." The hire usually has something to say.

> **A note on how to run all ten** ask the question, then go quiet. The silence after your question is where the real answer lives, and most interviewers ruin it by rescuing the candidate. Take notes on exact phrases, decide against the role's mission you wrote before the interview, and remember you're being interviewed too: the best candidates are judging whether truth can be told in your company, starting with this conversation.

Ten Red Flags to Watch for When Interviewing

"Three flags pointing the same direction is a pattern, and patterns don't improve after the offer letter."

1. **Everything is vague.**
Ask for a specific example and you get philosophy instead of a story. People who did the work themselves can walk you through the problem, their move, and the result, with names and numbers attached. If the specifics never come, the experience may not either. Real work leaves fingerprints.

2. **Nobody at the last job deserved them.**
Every manager was incompetent, every teammate a drag, every failure someone else's fault. Strong candidates can pull something honest and even positive out of a bad experience; that shows self-reflection. A candidate who has only villains in their history is casting you as the next one.

3. **They stood next to results but never caused one.**
The resume says "grew revenue forty percent," but when you ask how they knew it was them, the answer dissolves into the team and the market. That's the difference between proximity and causation. On a small team, you cannot afford passengers who have only ever ridden in winning cars.

4. **They didn't do their homework.**
They know nothing about your product, your market, or the role itself, and they haven't formed a single opinion about your company. Curiosity you can't detect in an interview will not appear on the job. The candidate interviewing everywhere sounds generic; the one who wants this seat arrives with opinions about your product they formed on their own time.

5. **They claim they've never failed, never disagreed, never struggled.**
A career with no failure stories is either a short career or an edited one. You are hiring for pressure, and someone who cannot discuss a setback honestly has not processed one, or won't admit to one, and both versions break under real stress. The teams that survive are built from people who know what their own bad day looks like.

6. **The qualifiers and the resume don't match the answers.**
Their resume claims deep experience with something, but their answers show only surface knowledge, or the dates shift slightly each time the story is told. Small inconsistencies in an interview become large ones on payroll. Probe kindly, once; if the story wobbles again, believe the wobble.

7. **Aggression leaks out, even in small doses.**
Interrupting, talking over you, arguing to win rather than to understand, or condescending to anyone they perceive as junior, including how they treated whoever scheduled the meeting. Most new-hire failures come from attitude and interpersonal skills, not technical skill. Whatever pressure exists in an interview, your Tuesday under fire will hold ten times more.

8. **It's all about what the company can do for them.**
Every question is about title, perks, and promotion timelines, and none are about the mission, the customers, or the problem. Ambition is healthy; pure extraction is not. On a rocket ship you need people who row for the boat, and you can hear the difference in what they ask about.

9. **Money is the only currency they respond to.**
When the mission, the learning, the ownership, and the story all land flat and the conversation only comes alive at compensation, listen to that. You will lose every future bidding war for this person, because someone can always pay more. Hire people who are being paid in at least two currencies.

10. **Your gut says no and keeps saying it.**
Not the flutter of a nervous candidate, nerves deserve grace and a second look, but the persistent quiet no that follows you out of the room. You will be tempted to override it because the role is urgent and the resume is beautiful. Listen to the no anyway; an empty seat is a problem you can still solve tomorrow.

> **A note on judgment** one flag is a question to probe, not a verdict. Some excellent people interview badly, and nerves can mimic half this list, so distinguish the disqualifiers, dishonesty, disrespect, blame, from the yellow flags worth a second conversation. But three flags pointing the same direction is a pattern, and patterns don't improve after the offer letter.

Ten Biggest Hiring Mistakes

"The seat burns for a month. The wrong person burns for a year."

1 **Hiring the résumé instead of the pressure.**
A résumé is a record of what someone accomplished inside a machine that was already running, with managers, budgets, and colleagues holding up their corner. Your startup has none of that scaffolding yet. The impressive pedigree that folds under pressure is worth less than the plain one that holds, so interview for how they behave when things break, because at a startup, things break.

2 **Hiring fast because the seat is on fire.**
Growth makes every empty seat feel like an emergency, so you grab someone good enough, for a role you never clearly defined. A rushed hire doesn't fill the hole; it digs a second one next to it. The seat burns for a month. The wrong person burns for a year.

3 **Overselling the dream.**
Painting the pipeline rosier, the market bigger, and the hours lighter than they really are wins the yes and schedules the resignation, timed for your worst moment. Reality always audits the recruiting pitch, and it starts on day one. Recruit with the same eyes-open honesty you'd give an investor, and the people who sign up for the hard version arrive already committed to it.

4 **Hiring individual stars who can't row.**
Some people have talent so obvious you ignore how they treat everyone around them. A brilliant jerk subtracts more through the team than they add through their output, and your best people quietly price in the cost of working near them. You don't need a collection of heroes. You need a crew.

5 **Skipping the real test and the real references.**
Interviews reward people who are good at interviews. Give serious candidates a paid piece of real work and watch how they think and finish, then check references beyond the ones they hand you, through your network's network. One question matters most: would you work with this person again?

6 **Hiring your own reflection, again and again.**
Referrals feel safe because everyone comes pre-vouched, and that safety has a hidden bill: same schools, same companies, same answers. One answer four times is how teams sail confidently into icebergs. Build the diverse room on purpose, because comfort will never build it for you.

7 **Hiring the title before you need it.**
The urge to fill a C-suite early, or to copy whatever role is trending, buys you expensive overhead and an org chart your stage can't feed. Hire when you're drowning in a specific function and you know exactly what the person must change in twelve months. Missionaries first; mercenaries can come later, if ever.

8 **Letting shared ownership hide accountability.**
Two smart people co-owning one important thing sounds collaborative; under pressure, shared means nobody. Every important thing gets exactly one name on it. Balls don't drop because people are careless; they drop because each person assumed the other had it.

9 **Going slow at the offer.**
Founders move fast right up until the offer stage, then stall on details, and the best candidates fall through the crack of that hesitation. Decide compensation ranges before you start interviewing, authorize someone to close, and compress verbal-offer-to-signature into days. Speed is trust, and the candidate is reading it.

10 **Keeping the wrong hire too long, and calling it kindness.**
It isn't kindness; everyone on the team knew before you did, and every week you wait, your standard slides toward whatever you'll tolerate. The damage of a mis-hire compounds while you rationalize. Decide fast, part generously, and remember: the right call at the wrong time still beats no call at all.

Ten Tips for Managing Really Smart People Who Disagree

"If your smartest people always agree with you, one of you is unnecessary."

1. **Remember why you hired them: disagreement is the product working.**
Truly smart people push back on your ideas and suggest better ways; that bruising of the ego is exactly what breaks through your blind spots. If your smartest people always agree with you, one of you is unnecessary. The day they stop arguing is the day they've started interviewing elsewhere.

2. **Argue about the problem, never about the people.**
The best managers of smart teams keep every argument centered on the problem to be solved and the merits of each approach, so any point of view is welcome as long as it adds value. The moment a debate becomes about who's right instead of what's right, stop it and restate the goal. Working for you should feel like a partnership where the best ideas survive, including when they beat yours.

3. **Be willing to be bested, out loud.**
The worst response to a direct report who's smarter than you is feeling threatened and forcing decisions you're unqualified to make. Instead, learn from them visibly and say so in front of the team. Nothing buys you more loyalty from a brilliant person than the sentence "you were right and I was wrong," delivered publicly and without flinching.

4. **Don't abdicate either: smart at one thing isn't smart at everything.**
Deferring every decision to the smartest person in the room is its own mistake, because a brilliant engineer may not see market strategy, and expertise doesn't transfer just because IQ is high. Make even your stars justify their positions in a reasoned, convincing way. Give them room to run, monitor lightly, and intervene when the picture is bigger than their corner of it.

5. **Fight the smart person's disease, starting with your own.**
The hardest thing for very smart people, including you, is hearing disagreement without needing to prove the other person wrong. A leader who treats dissenters as fools trains the whole company to stop dissenting. So model the move you want: "help me see what you're seeing," said sincerely, is the most powerful sentence in a room full of brains.

6. **Decide how you'll decide, before the disagreement arrives.**
When two smart people genuinely deadlock, someone has to call it, and inventing the process mid-crisis doubles the crisis. Agree in advance: who owns which decisions, what gets escalated, and when debate ends. Smart people accept losing an argument far more gracefully when the rules were known before the game.

7. **After the decision: disagree and commit, explicitly.**
Debate hard before the call, then ask everyone, including the person who lost the argument, to commit fully to the decision out loud. Ongoing relitigating is how smart teams stall, and quiet sabotage is how they die. Honor the dissenter by recording their objection, then move as one boat.

8. **Give them real problems, not tasks.**
Smart people are motivated by ownership of hard problems, and micromanaging them is how you turn a thoroughbred into a very expensive complainer. Hand them the outcome and the constraints, then get out of the way. Self-motivated people in an environment where good ideas rise will manage themselves harder than you ever could.

9. **Feed the growth or lose the person.**
Brilliant people leave when they stop learning, not when they stop earning. Keep handing them problems slightly bigger than they are, invest in their development, and coach the rough edges instead of just tolerating them. And remember the research: high intelligence with low emotional intelligence struggles with team cohesion, so develop the whole person rather than the output alone.

10. **Protect the room from brilliance without kindness.**
There's a line between a smart person who argues hard and one who diminishes people, and the whole team watches where you draw it. Vigorous disagreement about ideas, always; contempt for colleagues, never, no matter the talent attached. The standard you tolerate from your most brilliant person becomes the ceiling of trust for everyone else.

Ten Ways to Resolve Team Conflict

"The goal was never zero conflict; it's fast, honest, respectful conflict that ends in a better company."

1 **Step in early. Small stays small only if you act.**
Conflict rarely starts with a blowup; it starts with a missed deadline, a sarcastic comment, someone left off an email. Leaders who act early see more resolutions, healthier teams, and lower turnover, so treat the first spark as your cue, not the fire. Waiting for HR, or hoping it fades, teaches your team that you'll condone the behavior.

2 **Name what kind of conflict it actually is.**
Most disagreements are one of a few types: a real work problem, a process difference, a personality clash, or an old wound bleeding into the present. Each type takes different medicine, and diagnosing wrong wastes everyone's goodwill. Two people arguing about a deadline may really be arguing about respect, and you can't fix the deadline version of that.

3 **Hear each side alone first.**
Before you bring anyone together, speak to each person privately and let them relay their full perception of it. You'll see the big picture only through every participant's eyes, and people say things one-on-one that they'll never say across a table. Withhold your verdict; first impressions formed before hearing all sides are the mediator's biggest trap.

4 **Frame the meeting around the work, not the blame.**
When you do bring people together, open with the purpose: we're here to solve the work problem, not to decide who's the villain. Get facts, not assumptions, and keep pulling the conversation back to the shared goal. On a rocket ship, the frame is easy: we're all trying to get the same boat across the same water.

5 **Make "I" language the rule and accusations off-limits.**
Have each person explain their side with reflective "I" statements and factual wording: "I felt cut out of the decision," not "you always steamroll everyone." It sounds small, and it changes everything, because "I" language can be heard and "you" language only gets defended against. Set that ground rule out loud at the start.

6 **Ask the two questions, then stop talking.**
"What are we missing?" and "Who sees this differently?" Then be quiet and let the room work. Your silence proves the questions were real, and the person who feels genuinely heard drops half their armor before you've offered a single solution. Most conflicts shrink dramatically the moment each side believes the other truly heard them.

7 **Turn the agreement into names and dates.**
A resolution without an action plan is a truce, and truces expire. Before the meeting ends, decide who will do what by when, say it out loud, and write it down so every person sees their role. Clarity at the close is what prevents the sequel.

8 **Follow up, individually, a week later.**
Conflict resolution doesn't end at "case closed." Check in with each person separately: how are they feeling, is the plan working, is anything simmering? Regular one-on-ones after a conflict act as temperature checks that keep old disagreements from resurfacing. If the fix isn't holding, go back to solutions rather than pretending.

9 **Protect the dissenter, publicly.**
After any conflict, the whole team watches what happens to the person who spoke up. If honesty gets punished, even subtly, you've priced truth out of your company, and the next conflict will go underground where you can't reach it. Thank people for surfacing problems, especially when they were right and you were wrong.

10 **Mine the conflict for the upgrade.**
Handled well, conflict reveals blind spots, surfaces buried frustrations, and challenges stale thinking, so once it's resolved, ask the team what the disagreement taught you about the process, the roles, or the communication that let it grow. The teams that treat conflict as information come out stronger and more aligned. The goal was never zero conflict; it's fast, honest, respectful conflict that ends in a better company.

Ten Ways to Build Team Camaraderie

"Shared wins become shared stories, and shared stories are the actual fabric of a crew."

1 **Give them one mission worth belonging to.**
Camaraderie doesn't start with games; it starts with a shared answer to "what are we trying to prove?" A team that can say its mission in one sentence already has the thing every bonding activity is trying to manufacture. My hundred people weren't close because of parties; they were close because every one of them was building the same place for the same woman.

2 **Win something small together, early and often.**
Nothing bonds a team like a shared victory, so engineer them: a demo that ships, a deal that closes, a hard week survived. Celebrate each one out loud, even the small ones, and name who stepped up, because publicly recognizing the moment someone helped a teammate makes helping contagious. Shared wins become shared stories, and shared stories are the actual fabric of a crew.

3 **Eat together, on purpose.**
The oldest technology for camaraderie is a table. Regular team lunches and informal gatherings in a neutral setting build relationships that formal meetings never will, and for remote teams the same job is done by non-work channels where people swap pet pictures and dinner plans. Protect this time; it looks unproductive and it's holding your company together.

4 **Make recognition travel sideways, and downward too.**
Praise from the founder matters, but praise from a teammate builds the bond. Weekly shout-outs where people recognize each other's contributions create a culture where colleagues feel valued by their peers, and which strengthens their ties to each other, and those ties hold a company together longer than loyalty to any founder. Keep it specific: "she stayed late to fix my launch bug" beats "great job everyone."

5 **Mix the seating chart.**
Silos kill camaraderie in silence, so put people from different functions on joint projects, pair new hires with veterans, and rotate responsibilities enough that everyone understands what everyone else actually does. When an engineer has felt the support queue and a marketer has watched a deploy, respect stops being abstract. Cross-pollination turns departments back into one team.

6 **Do something real together outside the work.**
The best team activities don't feel corporate: sharing an experience or working toward a common goal bonds people far more effectively than an icebreaker with a lesson attached. Volunteer together for a cause; it strengthens team bonds while connecting people to something beyond the company. A morning building something for someone else buys more closeness than a quarter of happy hours.

7 **Let them see each other struggle and recover.**
Teams bond through honest difficulty, so normalize saying "I'm stuck," "I was wrong," and "I need help," starting with you saying it first. A culture of checking in on each person, professionally and personally, is one of the telltale signs of real camaraderie. Nobody bonds with a group where everyone is pretending to be fine.

8 **Trust them visibly, and skip the micromanaging.**
Camaraderie can't grow in surveillance. Leaders who build the relationship on trust from the start see a domino effect into the whole team's culture, because people extend to each other what's extended to them. Hand out ownership, let people make calls without you, and watch the trust you spend come back multiplied between teammates.

9 **Keep everyone in the loop, especially in rough water.**
Transparency builds trust, and trust is the soil camaraderie grows in, so share the real numbers, the real risks, and the real plan. Teams with strong bonds handle hard seasons better, sharing knowledge freely and adjusting without panic, but only if they knew the truth early. Nothing dissolves closeness faster than finding out the leader was managing the story.

10 **Build traditions, and mark the seasons.**
Rituals turn a group into a tribe: the Friday demo, the launch-day meal, the silly award with the running joke, the anniversary toast for every year survived. They cost almost nothing, and they become the inside language a crew speaks. Years from now your people won't remember the sprint velocity; they'll remember the traditions, and each other inside them.

Ten Ways to Stay Calm Amidst Chaos and Regulate Your Nervous System

"You are load-bearing; load-bearing structures get maintained."

1. **The physiological sigh: your sixty-second circuit breaker.**
Two inhales through the nose, the second one short, stacked on top of the first, then one long, slow exhale through the mouth. Repeat three times. This is the fastest researched way out of acute stress; it rebalances oxygen and carbon dioxide and shifts you out of heightened arousal within a few cycles, which is why you use it in the moment, right before the pitch, right after the bad news.

2. **Box breathing: your baseline builder.**
Inhale four counts, hold four, exhale four, hold four, and repeat for a few minutes. This is the technique special operators use to stay composed under fire, and it works through rhythm: it slows the breath and entrains the calm branch of your nervous system. Use the sigh for emergencies and the box for sustained focus, before a long negotiation, a board meeting, a launch day.

3. **Lengthen the exhale, always.**
When you can't remember any protocol, remember one rule: exhale longer than you inhale. The long exhale is the lever that activates the parasympathetic system, the body's brake pedal. Inhale four, exhale eight, anywhere, silently, in any meeting, and nobody will ever know you're driving your own biology.

4. **Ground through your feet, discreetly.**
In a tense meeting, press your feet firmly into the floor and gently press your thumb into the pad of your index finger. That simple physical sensation pulls your attention out of the emotional storm and back into your body. These tools were built for the boardroom, not the yoga mat; nobody across the table sees a thing.

5. **Let your eyes go wide.**
Panic narrows vision; calm widens it, and the wiring runs both directions. Slowly scan the room, let your gaze soften toward the corners and the periphery, and you send a primal signal to your brain that the environment is safe. It's the fastest invisible reset there is, and you can do it mid-sentence.

6. **Move the stress through your body.**
Stress chemistry is fuel looking for a muscle, so when chaos hits, walk, take the stairs, do anything physical for even five minutes. Movement releases the tension your body already mobilized, and the problem looks different when you come back to it. Some of my best decisions were made on the return leg of a short walk.

7. **Anchor the day with a practice, before you need it.**
Regulation on the hard day is built on the ordinary days: meditation, breathwork, a body scan, whatever keeps your nervous system yours. Even a few minutes daily shifts your baseline stress response over four to six weeks, and practicing while calm is what makes the tools available while panicked. I've spent twenty-five years in mindfulness practice; the curtain moment was paid for years in advance.

8. **Guard sleep like the infrastructure it is.**
The all-nighter feels heroic and shows up in your voice, your judgment, and your team's mood, because a tired nervous system reads everything as a threat. Under real pressure, sleep is the first thing founders sacrifice and the last thing they should. You are load-bearing; load-bearing structures get maintained.

9. **Shrink the moment to the next move.**
Chaos overwhelms because you're processing the whole catastrophe at once. So ask one question: what's the single next thing that helps? Do it, then ask again. Composure is rarely a giant act of courage; it's a chain of small, findable moves, made one at a time while everyone else is spiraling.

10. **Take yourself off the hook: it was never about you.**
The deepest calm comes from where your attention points. When the curtain froze on live television, I stayed calm because it was never the Tiffany show; the mission was the star, and I was just the person standing near the curtain. When the eyes are on the mission instead of your ego, there is very little left for the pressure to grab. That reframe is the strongest regulation tool I know, and it costs nothing but your self-importance.

Ten Ways to Manage to Personality Styles

"Same truth, four dialects, spoken by one honest leader."

1 **Learn one framework well enough to use in the hallway.**
Pick a simple lens like DISC, four styles: Dominance (results-driven and direct), Influence (enthusiastic and people-powered), Steadiness (loyal, calm, team-first), and Conscientiousness (precise, logical, thorough). You don't need certifications; you need a working vocabulary for how the people around you are wired, one you can apply in a sixty-second hallway conversation.

2 **Profile yourself first, including your blind spots.**
Your natural style is the water you swim in, and it's quietly biasing every meeting you run toward people wired like you. A driver-style founder reads a careful analyst as slow; the analyst reads the founder as reckless; both are wrong. Know your own default and its shadow before you diagnose anyone else.

3 **Give your direct people the headline and the wheel.**
With results-driven, dominant styles: be brief, be direct, lead with the outcome, and skip the windup. Give them a challenge to own and room to run, and don't take their bluntness personally, because for them it's velocity, nothing personal. Slow them down only where the decision is truly irreversible.

4 **Give your enthusiasts the stage and the follow-through.**
Influence-style people run on energy, recognition, and being in the room where ideas happen, so bring them into brainstorms, celebrate their creative wins publicly, and match their expressiveness instead of dampening it with formality. Then help them land the plane: pair their spark with clear deadlines and a detail partner, because enthusiasm without follow-through is a very fun way to miss a quarter.

5 **Give your steady people warning, consistency, and real thanks.**
Steadiness-style teammates are the glue of a team: dependable, harmonizing, quietly carrying more than anyone notices. Manage them with patience, clear expectations, and no surprises, because sudden change costs them more than it costs you. And thank them specifically and often, since they'll never demand the credit the louder styles collect without asking.

6 **Give your analysts the data and the time.**
Conscientious-style people need logic, facts, and room to process, so never spring a decision on them in the meeting where you announce it. Send the details ahead, welcome their hard questions, and let their standards protect you, because their "slow" is often the sound of them catching what everyone else missed. Rushing them is how you buy expensive mistakes.

7 **Deliver feedback in their language, not yours.**
The same sentence lands four different ways: your direct person wants it straight, your enthusiast needs it framed with belief in them, your steady person needs privacy and reassurance the relationship is intact, your analyst wants specifics and a chance to fix it precisely. Feedback that isn't translated isn't feedback; it's noise with a bruise attached.

8 **Read the style behind the conflict.**
Most collisions on smart teams are style mismatches wearing the costume of substance: the direct one bulldozed the steady one, the analyst's questions felt like an attack on the enthusiast's idea. When two good people clash, ask what pattern collided before you ask who's right. Teams that share a style vocabulary can name the collision without blaming the people, and that alone dissolves half of it.

9 **Cast roles and build pairs by wiring as much as skill.**
Put your drivers on the crisis, your enthusiasts on the launch, your steady people on the customers, and your analysts on the numbers, then build deliberately odd couples: the visionary with the finisher, the sprinter with the planner. A team built from a single style shares a single blind spot, and it's always the one the market finds first.

10 **Flex your style without faking your character.**
Adapting to each person isn't a compromise of who you are; it's extending your range so you're effective with everyone, including the people wired nothing like you. The message stays yours; the delivery gets translated. That's the whole discipline in one sentence: same truth, four dialects, spoken by one honest leader.

Ten Ways to Keep Your Best People

"A raise keeps someone ninety days; a mission keeps them years."

1 **Be a manager worth staying for.**
The research is blunt: it takes more than a twenty percent raise to lure someone away from a manager who engages them, and almost nothing to poach a disengaged person. Your best people don't quit companies; they quit the experience of working for someone. Everything else on this list works only if this one is true.

2 **Give them the next mountain before they go looking for it.**
The number one reason top performers leave is a better opportunity somewhere else, and they are hungrier for growth than anyone on your team. So promote from within, keep enlarging their territory, and talk about their next role before a recruiter does. If the best opportunity in their field is inside your company, they have no reason to answer the phone.

3 **Hold stay interviews before exit interviews.**
Exit interviews are autopsies; stay interviews are checkups. Sit with your best people while they're happy and ask: what keeps you here, what would make you leave, what should I change? Asking before there's a problem is how you find the flight risks while they're still fixable, and the conversation itself tells them they matter.

4 **Pay fairly, then stop competing on money alone.**
Below-market pay is a slow leak you can't culture your way around, so fix compensation to fair and revisit it before they have to ask. But past fair, the currencies that actually hold people are purpose, learning, ownership, and story. A raise keeps someone ninety days; a mission keeps them years.

5 **Give real ownership, then step back.**
Empower your strongest people with autonomy, because they're precisely the ones who leave when leadership just gives orders. Give them the outcome, the authority, and the credit, and then resist the urge to hover. The people you'd hate to lose are the ones most allergic to being managed like they might fail.

6 **Show them the line from their work to the mission.**
Top talent wants to build value and do work that matters, and if they can't see how their work adds to the business, they won't stay. Connect every role to the customer it serves and the mission it moves; my writers stayed because they could see the woman on the other side of the article. Meaning is retention infrastructure.

7 **Say thank you, specifically, and in public.**
Recognition costs nothing and its absence is the quiet exit interview. Notice contributions out loud and name exactly what the person did, and let peers celebrate each other, because feeling valued is half of belonging. Your steady, uncomplaining people especially: they carry the most and ask for the least, and they're gone the day they conclude nobody noticed.

8 **Protect their life outside the building.**
Burnout is the retention killer that compliments can't fix. Respect the work-life line, encourage real time off, and don't build a culture where exhaustion is the price of belonging, because your best people always have somewhere saner to go. A sustainable pace is a competitive advantage in a market full of companies burning their people out.

9 **Keep telling them the truth.**
Openness gets rewarded with loyalty; managed stories get discovered, and discovery dissolves trust faster than any single hard fact would have. Tell them how the company is really doing, in good seasons and bad, with the numbers attached. People stay where they're treated like owners, and owners get the truth.

10 **Evolve what holds them as the company grows.**
What keeps someone at ten people, the closeness, the chaos, the mission in the room, is different from what keeps them at a hundred, and retention breaks when founders don't notice the shift. As you scale, keep leadership accessible, keep the diverse, inclusive culture where everyone belongs, and keep asking each person what they need now. Retention isn't a program you install once; it's a relationship you keep renewing.

Ten Ways to Let Someone Go with Grace

"Could this person someday tell the story of being let go by you and still speak well of you?"

1 **Make sure it's never a surprise.**
If someone is shocked to be let go, a process broke long before the meeting. Grace starts months earlier: honest feedback, documented conversations, a real chance to correct. The termination meeting should be the last sentence of a story both of you have been reading, not a plot twist.

2 **Try everything first, and know that you did.**
Firing well means you did your due diligence to make it work: the direct conversations, the changed support, the honest window to improve. You'll carry this decision, so build it on ground you can stand on. When you've truly tried, the meeting is sad but clean; when you haven't, it's guilt wearing a business face.

3 **Decide fast once you know. Waiting isn't mercy.**
A wrong fit is hard on the person too; they usually know, and every month you delay costs them time they could spend finding the place where they're great. Your team knew before you acted, and they're watching what you tolerate. I fired an executive seven days before my launch; brutal timing, right call, and the team learned the standard was real.

4 **Prepare the words, then say them like a human.**
Plan the meeting: the documentation, the logistics, what you legally can and cannot say. Then put the script down and speak in your own words, with eye contact, because people know when they're being read a legal recital, and there's no dignity on the receiving end of one. Preparation is what frees you to be human in the room.

5 **Be direct in the first minute.**
Don't warm up with small talk while they search your face; say the decision clearly and early, and make it unmistakably final. Kindness is not vagueness. The cruelest meetings are the ones where the person leaves unsure of what just happened, or believing there's an appeal that doesn't exist.

6 **Then stop talking, and let them speak.**
Grace means the person gets to be heard, even now, especially now. Let them react, vent, or cry; stay calm, acknowledge their feelings without arguing, and give them a moment to collect themselves if they need one. You're not debating the decision; you're honoring the human having the worst meeting in the building.

7 **Protect their dignity in front of the team.**
Schedule privately, at a low-traffic hour, and never let a departure become a spectacle. Afterward, tell the team what they need to know and nothing that shames the person who left. How you speak about the departed is heard by everyone still in the room as a preview of how you'd speak about them.

8 **Be generous on the way out.**
Whatever your size allows: real severance, extended equity windows, honest references for the things they genuinely did well, introductions to places where their strengths fit. Generosity at the end costs little and says everything. Wrong fit here doesn't mean wrong person everywhere, and your job is to say so with more than words.

9 **Remember the audience you keep.**
Your remaining people are watching, and how you handle this becomes their belief about what would happen to them. A dignified departure builds trust and loyalty in everyone who stays; a cold one installs fear that outlasts the person who left. You're doing more than ending one employment; you're teaching the whole company what you are.

10 **Leave the door open to the future.**
You will cross paths again: former employees become clients, partners, referrers, and sometimes, in a different season, teammates again. Part in a way that lets both of you greet each other warmly in five years. The measure of firing with grace is simple: could this person someday tell the story of being let go by you and still speak well of you? Aim for that, every time.

You don't need a collection of heroes.
You need a crew.

The full stories live in the books, free at omfund.vc/books
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