
The Complexity of Simplicity

I'm a shoe guy and with two teenage daughters, who would have ever thought the same Air Jordans I dreamed about as

a teenager would be some of the same ones back in style today? So I was intrigued to read about relatively new shoe company Allbird's story in Inc. this week. At a recent \$2B valuation, it is reasonable to conclude that their founders have attained success building a focused brand in a hyper-competitive marketplace. I find cofounder Tim Brown's 3 takeaways too rich not to apply to the world of office.

Find Your North Star: For Tim and Allbirds, it was centered around crafting high quality, stylistic but socially and environmentally responsible shoes. I would argue that for Workng and most things I've ever dreamed-up on the office side, I too, am unilaterally focused on making "environmentally friendly" a central theme. However, I define that as being intentionally focused on creating the kind of environment that induces and cultivates the very best out of the widest array of employers and employees possible – the have-to-have verses the nice-to-have. I had promised one of my favorite security guards at an office complex I used to oversee that if I was ever in the neighborhood (which I rarely am anymore), that I would stop in and see him. Recently, I finally had a chance to make good on that promise, and after we shared a heartfelt hug, he excitedly explained to me that all of the careful "environmental" touches our team had spent countless hours planning and assembling – the custom scents, ideal volume background music, local chef restaurants, compelling offerings, flexibility, our path of travel obsession, etc. – continue to be key ingredients for pulling employer and employee back to the office.





Build a Strong Team: When I was in business school and studying countless case studies (funny how easy it is to be a Monday morning quarterback sitting in the comforts of the classroom), I remember a lightbulb clicking on in an HR strategy class where one of the secrets to high performing teams was their leaders' ability and humble confidence to actively mine for and recruit people smarter and more skilled than themselves to add to the team. One of the truly refreshing and meaningful things of this journey I've been on the last couple of years is the freedom to apply that theory and seek out those kinds of people and groups to join/partner with us. My conversation and "pitch" is simple but always well received, "I commit to operating with the highest level of integrity and authenticity and would ask the same of you. Once we can agree on that, we will then earn the right to have conversations of all kinds, even tough ones, because we will be operating from that special and rare place of trust where we know we are all striving for the same things. Your success and my success are interlocked as our success." It turns out that time-tested Biblical principal of putting others first is the most effective way to grow ourselves.



Show Up: Inc.'s quote is so compelling I won't attempt to improve what they write so well: "Brown urges other entrepreneurs to focus on continuous improvement and to just show up, listen to feedback, and improve their businesses and themselves daily." I'll be blunt – it's time for office owners and operators to show up as defined by Tim – no I'm not talking about going to the office 5 days a week from 8-5. I don't see in here anywhere the word "easy" but I definitely see strong implications of words like "necessary", "success", "value creation" and dare I say "for survival". For people like Tim and me, on the entrepreneurial side of things, success and failure can come at you fast in these early stages so showing up is a daily rallying cry. For established industries and companies like in office today, the decline can be gradual as the personal connection and risk profile is absent for most individuals living two weeks at a time particularly now during the "great resignation". Are any of us surprised to learn that people like Tom Brady spend infinitely more hours away from the 4



quarters we all see in order to be ready for that relatively small window of time? Let's show up!

So why this title for this paper? When I see the teaser headline for Allbirds and the \$2B valuation, my kneejerk impulse is to assume there are layers and layers of complex steps and secrets to achieve that level of success. There are undoubtedly many details embedded, but at the root of it all, Tim has generously offered up three simple and straight forward foundational ingredients from which the rest flows. Rally behind a focused, well thought out idea, build a team around that idea and strive every day to get better, and the details fall into place. Office is hiding behind complexity right now and lobbing in popular buzz words to distract itself from the lack of customer-oriented solutions and teams. We can't solve it all at once, but keeping it simple is a great start. Why would someone hire Workng? Our goal is to convert that inactive complexity into actionable simplicity but be ready for some uncomfortable honest conversations about the three takeaways above on your way to next level success.



Mike Fransen
Founder / CEO, Workng

Hawkins, Nick. "How Allbirds Went From a Soccer Player's Side Hustle to a \$2 Billion Sustainable Brand." Inc., January 20, 2022. <https://www.inc.com/nick-hawkins/allbirds-tim-brown-sustainability.html>

