

**BOSS**

# Hey You's Rebekah Campbell on what it means to be agile

**Rebekah Campbell**

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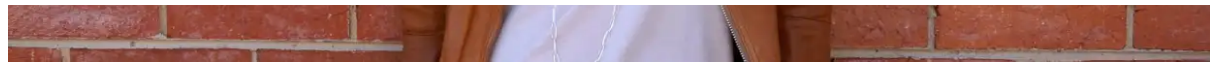


[Agile](#) is the new black. Every business leader knows their company needs to innovate at speed to stay ahead; start-ups like Hey You move fast. We raise enough capital to give us a limited amount of time to win an opportunity. As an entrepreneur, I've never struggled to adapt quickly. We are aggressive and change course frequently to respond to user feedback and analytics, better ideas and competitive threats.

Early on, this was easy. But, as our business grew, I realised that my technique for managing change also needed to adapt. One or two engineers can be experimental, trialling ideas and working through the night to test what works. But a team needs structure.

By mid last year, we had 30 staff. Hey You had an established profile; tens of thousands of customers used us at cafes every day. We hired smart people across a range of roles: marketing, sales, design and engineering.





As Hey You grew, Rebekah Campbell realised her technique for managing change also needed to adapt. Everyone had an opinion about what to do next. Team members would march in, excited about a new idea or new partner that could drive us more customers. We often wanted to get to work straight away.

But, as the organisation grew, our nimble approach constrained us. What I had thought was agile was, in reality, chaos. We released features early, moving on to other ideas without testing and improving what we'd already built. Some projects were never finished; overall productivity dropped and team members became frustrated at the quality of our work.

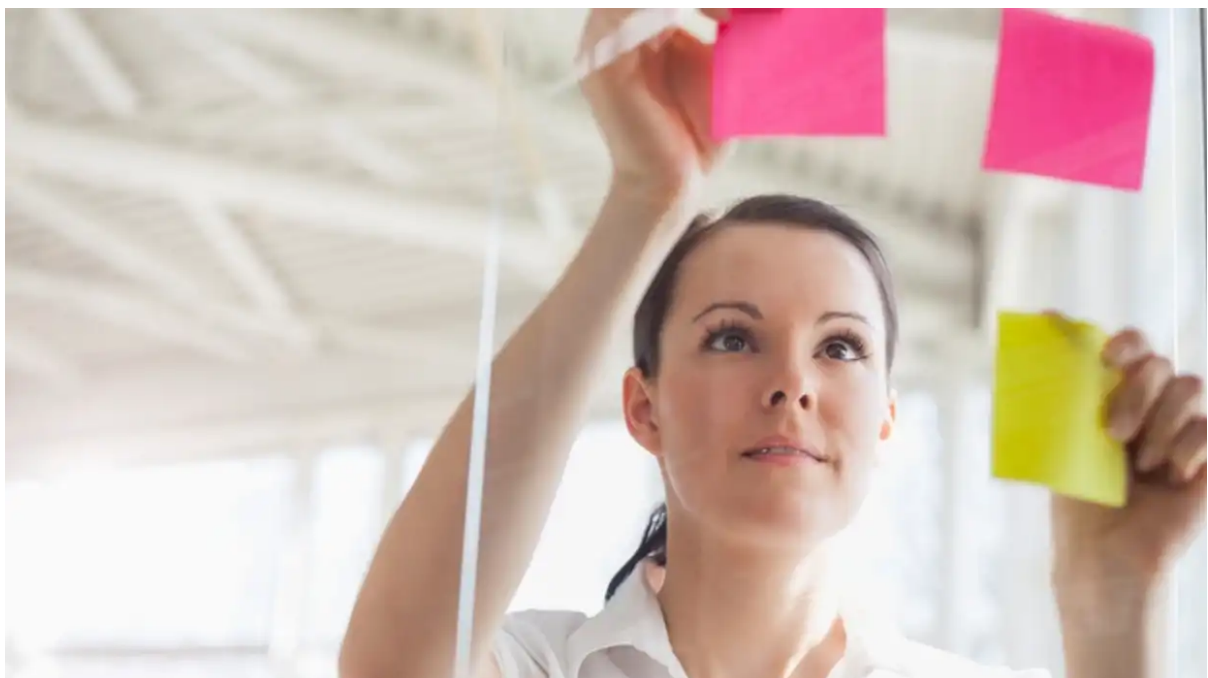
I asked other business leaders for advice; everyone had encountered the same challenge. Managing teams that innovate nimbly is difficult.

I enlisted the help of an agile coaching group called [Pragmateam](#) and learned that an agile team needs rigorous structure to be effective. We involved the whole company and, in three months, established a process that enabled us to make good decisions and build quality product and campaigns at speed.

Here are the most important principles we put in place:

## **A healthy heartbeat**

We began to run the company on six-weekly cycles we called increments. We set two to four goals at the start of each increment and workshoped what each team could commit to in order to support the objectives. We then divided the increment into three two-weekly sprints.



Every day we held a full-team stand-up where team members reported on their progress towards the goal of the sprint. Each person would rank from 1 – 10 their confidence on reaching the increment goals. At the end of each fortnightly sprint, everyone presented their achievements and committed to what they planned to accomplish in the following two weeks.

New ideas and opportunities still poured in at mid-increment. At first, I tried to squeeze in a couple of extra projects but found this derailed the whole process. "We couldn't finish X like we said because of these extra tasks." I developed the discipline of putting new ideas to one side until the end of the increment.

## **Visualisation of progress**

We created a story wall on one side of our office, posting the increment goals for everyone to see, and then used tape to create project streams. So, one increment goal was: launch Hey You gift vouchers for Christmas.

Each team member created coloured cards for the different tasks they had to complete to meet the goal. They owned it and put their photograph to their cards. Design and development would build different parts of the product, sales and marketing would put in place a process to launch to customers. Each day the team member responsible moved their card across the wall from 'To do' to 'Doing' to 'Testing' to 'Complete'. The wall gave us an end-to-end company view on every project, and it was fun to watch cards migrate from one side to the other.

## **Step back to the balcony**

Our agile coach suggested our leadership team take time off the dance-floor to stand on the balcony. We needed to get into a habit of observing and planning. Prior to each increment, we took one full day to reflect on our progress, digest data and user feedback, review our strategy and plan the next six weeks. We set goals that were two to four steps ahead of the team workshop.

At first, I worried that a shift from no structure to a rigorous process might deflate morale, but the opposite occurred. Team members chose their own tasks, made public commitments, communicated their progress daily and presented back to the team each fortnight.

We operated as one team rather than a collection of departments. Progress was clear and we started gaining momentum. I knew we'd succeeded when I came

back to the office after dinner to find our whole team eating pizza at 9pm, working to finish the sprint.

Many businesses strive for a start-up culture, misinterpreting this as scrappy and unstructured. I've learned that an agile team works best with a rhythmic process of planning, implementation and feedback.

*Rebekah Campbell is a tech entrepreneur and co-founder of Hey You, Australia's largest cafe app.*

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## Site Map