

Rob Lynch and LawnStarter CEO Steve Corcoran

RL: Alright let's just start off and introduce yourself and your company.

SC: I am the CEO of LawnStarter, which is a leading marketplace for outdoor home services. We've basically scaled by doing things like lawn mowing and landscaping from one city in 2014 to 100 cities in 2019. We're growing 100% year after year, and we've been engaged with Rob for a little bit more than a year now.

RL: Why did you want to bring in a coach?

SC: We wanted to bring in a coach not because of one thing. I think, over the previous few years, we realized that from building the right culture to executing against a playbook we just weren't the "A" players we felt we could be. One of our mentors and investors, who built a \$100 million company that he bootstrapped, told us about the Scaling Up framework and how finding the right coach was a great opportunity to level us up as individuals as well as level up the rigor and executing and planning the company.

RL: Why did you pick Burst Consulting?

SC: We talked to several different consultants to determine who we wanted to go with, and what we found a lot of the time was that there were professional coaches that experience mainly consisted of being a professional coach. Which may or may not be good, but for us in order for us to build the rapport that we wanted with a coach, we felt that it was absolutely critical that they were an operator in the past and understood what it meant to scale a company, not just what it meant to understand the framework.

When we found Rob, we basically determined that, as a 4-time CEO with 4 successful exits, in addition to being a coach for many, many years, he was going to bring both what I need in an individual and what the company needed from a framework with actual experience.

RL: When did you realize that Scaling Up was the right process for you as CEO of LawnStarter?

SC: Sure, so once Adam, our investor, recommended that we go ahead and take a look into Scaling Up, we read the book, and it was clear that somebody that was much smarter than ourselves have gone through and kinda created a framework that made a lot of sense. Once we read the book, we were set on [the process],

but it did take talking to several different coaches and finding a route that we decided that it was in fact a process we should utilize.

RL: What changes have you seen in your company because of Scaling Up and Burst?

SC: I think first and foremost it would be our hiring process. It has gone from something that, although we felt that we were really strong, it just simply wasn't, to something that we have basically no dud hires since we've switched. This has led to us running a lot of work, which this points to us growing a great culture. And then on the strategy side, I think we only said we were building a multi-billion-dollar company, but we didn't put the kind of plan that would back that up from quarter to quarter. Now that we've got a multi-year plan, we have consistently been able to hit [goals] that break down all the way to one week. Sprints essentially. It's just changed the structure of our company, and it's really helped us grow a lot faster.

RL: How have you evolved as a leader since bringing in a coach?

SC: As a young founder, I was 21 when we founded [LawnStarter], and now I'm 27. You can be a little cocky and think you have it figured out. When we decided to bring in the coach, we kinda determined: "Look, we are not where we could be as individuals, and we wanted to double down on our own personal growth." And through things like the *Multipliers* book that Rob introduced me to, time management skills, and different tips he has given from meetings, I think I've gone from what I consider a young leader that had a vision, but probably couldn't execute it as best as possible, to somebody who does a pretty solid job of consistently getting everyone where we need to be and doing it in a way that makes folks happy.

RL: How would you describe the evolution of how your leadership team works?

SC: I think that the first thing to understand is being on the same page may sound very easy, but our business is extremely complicated. So different leadership positions touch different parts of the business and have very different thoughts. By solidifying a 3HAG, a BHAG, and quarterly "Rocks," we're able to much more consistently be on the same page right off the bat. So rather than consistently go over the same things or disagree on points, we've got line in sight for things we need to do. And because of what we're able to do as a leadership team, we're able to make the right tradeoffs.

RL: What have you learned about people, specifically in how your hiring training and practices have improved?

SC: So, first I'll start with hiring. We use the "Who" method. It's made us much more efficient and made us look more impressive to candidates. And most importantly, it's made us hire "A" players, at least in our opinion, for every role we've hired since implementing this method.

When you start to think about leadership development, we didn't really have a structure in place. We're a small company. We have 100+ folks total, but the majority of those are out of the office, supporting sales reps. There are only 27 people in the main office, so we didn't have the infrastructure to invest in leadership training necessarily. But with Rob, we've been able to have consistent coaching for the tier under the executive team and really elevate them. Also, it makes them feel like they're elevating in their career, which is obviously super-important.

RL: What results have you achieved in execution and accountability in the company? What tools did you use? Just as an example: Are there meetings? Do they have agendas? Do they start on time? Do they end on time? Do you use scorecards?

SC: I think we we're always good with meetings. We don't like to waste a lot of time, so I think that was pretty effective. Where we noticed what was ineffective would be scorecards. We have been able to take all the lack of clarity out of every role. Now, people know what they are evaluated on, and they know what they need to do. This makes the company quick, and people know what they need to execute on. At the end of the day, that's wholesale because of the scorecard, and it's changed the stress between manager and their direct report. It's changed our ability to hire, and that's huge.

Additionally, we had the "Rocks" plans and the 13-week "Grace" plans. We did KPIs that were kind of like Rocks, but I don't think we took it seriously enough. We didn't do a massive amount of planning ahead of time, and because of that, it just goes back to our strategy and execution were not perfectly aligned, and things changed a lot.

With the "Rocks" process now, we're really able to highlight what we need to execute on. Using our "Swim Lanes," we have put together all 4 years and break it down to a 13-week "Grace" plan. Which works really well for some teams, but for some teams it's not really effective, like Product or for things like Sales, Ops, or

Engineering. It's game changing in making sure we're making progress and know exactly what we need to knock out each week.

RL: What changes have you experienced in profitability?

SC: As a startup that's rapidly growing, the simplest way to think about it is we burned a little less than a million dollars yearly... about 750K. That number has decreased dramatically year after year while growing over 100%.

When you look at our peers in the space, to go from tens of millions of dollars in revenue a year, and 100+% growth, a lot of folks are spending a substantial amount of cash to do that, having burns of 5, 6, or 7 million dollars. With us, we've got 11 million dollars in the bank, and we're burning less than a million dollars. It gives us options for what we need to do.

A huge part of that is because of the focus on the most fundamental economics and profitability. That's always really been key in our DNA. So, I wouldn't say that's the biggest area of improvement, but it's given us the right mechanisms to think about how we make sure everything we're doing is profitable.

The first quarter we decided to do Burst Consulting, we were about to cut \$500,000 from silly costs, and that included renegotiating with our payment processor, etc. Without the focus of profitability, we wouldn't have done that. We may have always done a great unit economically, but we weren't as crafty as we liked to think.

RL: How do you calculate the ROI of the coaching process?

SC: I think there are 3 parts to this. The first is the company and the actual profitability it's driving. When you think about a company like ours, doing north of \$15 million in revenue this year, being able to get the ROI you need to get the apparent cash flow basis is pretty simple. If we're able to get an extra .1% profitability out of our top revenue client number, we're able to pay for the service itself. So, there's the immediate ROI that can be easily calculated.

The second thing is the growth in personnel. Being able to look at the strategy to identify what we had as goals, what we're able to change those goals to, and being able to hit those goals will direct ROI eventually. But when you think about the leadership development though, it's really hard to quantify that. It's something that you have to think about, including how much it would cost to replace an executive. I'm doing two searches now, and we're paying \$75,000 to

executive search firms. Just losing one executive because they are not developing or doesn't have the right leadership style or someone without a lot of experience helping us - it is going to cost immediately right there \$75,000 plus time. So, there's the personnel side to it.

And last, completely selfishly, this isn't going to be my last company. It's my first company. I want to build a dozen companies. Being able to be invest personally in a buyer company and have it paid for really makes me feel like some of these stresses - the ups and downs of running a startup - are more worth it because I know I am getting better at my role and know that I am getting better at being able to build companies. I think that I can't put a measure on that, but my own personal satisfaction of happiness is driven massively by knowing that there is growth during the dark times. Even though we're doing great right now, we'll have another dip, things will be great, then another dip, things will be great, and it just evens out the upward trajectory.

RL: How have the strategic thinking sessions helped the company? Some examples: Developing the core purpose, the 3HAG, the BHAG, the White Space, Swim Lanes, etc.

SC: Something as simple as the core purpose from our perspective was really goofy initially. It was something that we looked at like it came from a large company - like someone over-paid to come up with that. But I was very wrong.

Having something like a core purpose does, at least from our experience, solidify the company around some sort of goal that's larger than itself. Our core purpose on both sides of the marketplace is to save people time so that they can spend it with their loved ones and doing things with them. So this year, we'll save over 500,000 hours of time that people would have spent on their lawn without spending it with their family. They paid out tens of millions of dollars to pros so they can live a better life.

When you look at some of the BHAGs or 3HAGs, the core purpose gives you a guiding light. It gets the company excited, but it is also a turn north. If we're trying to save time, then sometimes we're going to have to make hard trade-offs because we know what our customers need or what we want to deliver, and that's what we believe in doing.

The White Space exercise also is pretty interesting. When you're forced to look at yourself versus your competitors in an honest way, you start identifying what you're really good at, maybe what you're not really good at, and what may or

may not matter. For us, it solidified the 4 core pillars of success, in that, we can execute on just those 4 individual items, which although challenging, gives us clarity. We know that we're going to win that space, and it helps us decide what we don't care about.

So, the White Space exercise is great, but the biggest of all of these is the Swim Lanes. We're trying to add additional verticals, we're trying to add a massive number of people to the team, and we're trying to grow at a continued 100% year over year. We have a goal of being nearly \$200 million in revenue by 2022. To do that is very challenging, but before, we just had these goals that we didn't know what it would take to happen.

With the Swim Lanes exercises now, we go, "Oh shoot, if we need to hit this revenue number, that means we're going to have to offer pests". To offer pests, we need to have a 12-month head start on the SEO side, and 3 months ahead of that, we need to have 3 additional buds and seeds, high-quality folks on this part of the SEO team. Being able to break it down to what it takes to do well on all of those pillars, that's completely game-changing and probably the most important thing about strategy or the strategic thinking side.

RL: What have been your top takeaways from the coaching sessions?

SC: I think this one is goofy, but the single biggest takeaway is that we're doing things pretty well. My co-founders and I are all around the same age: 27, 28, 29. This is really all that we have done professionally, and it is very hard to tell what you're doing well and where you're improving when you have no frame of reference. You know we're growing fast, and we won a Top Workplace award, but what does that actually mean?

By having Rob in there as a coach, he can tell you, "Hey, these things are great. Here's a benchmark. Here's what other companies look like." We have raised over \$25 million, I have really world-class investors, but most of them are not operators. So, having Rob be able to tell us, "Hey, these things are going well," is really good to hear.

Also, I think one of the biggest factors is that he came as with the ideal team player. I think myself, Ryan, and Jonas really struggled across the many different pieces of being a team player, and I don't think we realized it. We needed to have Rob in there to tell us, "Hey, you aren't at the leadership level that you need to be. Here are the steps we're going to take to make it happen." That's probably the biggest takeaway for us.

The last thing I'll say is about planning. Although it can seem like a huge time suck, because it is, it is so important that you have that discipline to really plan effectively and stick to a plan. And if you're going to change that plan, you must have a damn good reason why and get buy-in from the company. I think those are some key takeaways.

RL: How has the company been transformed as a result of coaching?

SC: I think a lot of fast-scaling companies are kind of dumpster fires. I think we were no exception. We had a couple of skills and had a couple of sharp people, and that got us to a certain place. But when you have 100 supporting sales reps, 50,000 customers, and 5,000 providers, you really need to have excellent execution.

You need to be able to automate things. You need to eliminate a lot of the ambiguity in running a business. I think our business now, while not a well-oiled machine, it's a machine that at least has SOME oil in it, and that's really the result of the coaching.

But it is also a result of our team buying into the coaching. That starts with the CEO and goes down. Say I'm told in a meeting that I have these areas where I'm not a multiplier and these areas where I'm weaker interpersonally. If I don't say, "OK, well, shoot, I need to go fix that and put real effort towards it," nobody else is going to buy in. Nobody is going to take the time to do the discipline planning. I think that our buy-in has been a huge part of why we are still a transformational company.

RL: What would you say to someone interested in the coaching process?

SC: If you want to build a company that you can enjoy running, that enables itself to run effectively, that isn't just fighting one fire to the next fire and feeling like you're making no process, the Scaling Up framework process is a great way to do that. But with the coaching process, you have to get someone that you truly, truly believe in. Because a lot of these things, although they may be intuitive, are frustrating and sometimes can seem stupid, but once you implement them, you realize how important they are.

I'd say the most important part of the coaching process is the buying in, but that depends upon finding a coach that you really believe in. For us, operational excellence was absolutely nonnegotiable and critical. We were unwilling to just

go with someone who was a professional coach and that's all they did. After we found Rob, we were able to buy in wholesale to this process.

There are some other coaches whose goal is to help you solve your problems, to tell you "This is what your goal as a company should be." That's not necessarily how the coaching process works with Burst. It's way better. Rob will weigh in, give you some thoughts, and kind of help direct you when you have questions, but mainly it's about making the people who know the problem best get the right solutions out there.

And Rob helps facilitate this. Whether that's training individuals, implementing that framework, or giving us different assignments to do ahead of planning, he is really helping to shepherd us to where we need to go. He's not setting us where we need to go, and he's not trying to make new details about running the business. What he's doing is he is giving you the framework to succeed. Because ultimately, the only way that your business is going to succeed is if you and your team are the right people to run it. And if they're not, then you need to augment that team.

Rob's not going to suddenly fix the fact that you don't have engineering leaders. But what Rob will do is help you put together the Swim Lanes that help you go from a weak engineering department to a world-class one. And he'll help you understand why that matters for your company.

RL: So last question. What do you want people to know before engaging in the coaching process?

SC: I'll probably reiterate some of the same points I made earlier. If you're not bought in, it's not worth doing. If you're not willing to put in the time to go through these strategic planning sessions to critically think about where your culture is actually at, you won't reap that in your actual hiring process. These things don't always happen all at once. If you're not prepared to do that mentally, then it is not the time for you to dive into this.

I think that, in one's personal evolution or in the evolution of a company, if it's going to be successful, the founder of the team or the executive team needs to look inward and say, "There's something that can be done better." This applies to whatever you find yourself doing, whether that's hiring personnel, training, strategic thinking, developing a long term-vision, or making execution and profitability your point of view and explicit framework. Rob can help you get there, but you gotta be bought in, just like anything else.

Overall though, this business was in a bad spot when we engaged Rob. Not like we were going to run out of money or die, but we had kind of lost our way. We had a few members on the executive team that didn't see eye to eye. I wasn't happy. We were not building the company I wanted. It kind of felt like we couldn't make it better.

With Rob, he was able to help us help ourselves. We were able to trim the executive team, get on the same page, set up a vision, and have two years of really great growth. That enabled us to take down old goals and step up around a gross capital goal that got us to the point where we are profitable hopefully by next year. It got us to a point where we are the largest residential lawn maintenance company in the world. That's due largely in part to the work of Rob and Burst Consulting and explicitly the implementation of the Scaling Up framework.

What I would say to anyone else is simple. The people that are the best at selling their coaching services are professional coaches that are JUST professional coaches. But when you cut through all of the BS, what you realize is, if you do not have the operational experience, if you haven't sat there negotiating, if you haven't looked at a business model, if you haven't fired an employee, haven't negotiated major contracts, then you just don't know what it is like. With Rob, you get the benefit of experienced coaching and experience working with leadership teams, but also the benefit of knowing what it takes to grow a company and knowing that the Scaling Up framework is not the end-all be-all.

For us, we've said, "Hey, some of these pieces of the Scaling Up just aren't for us, and some of them have been even more critical for us than the framework makes it seem." So, this process has changed the company and our leadership capability. Ultimately, I think it will be the best decision I have ever made - besides actually dropping out of school and making the company.