

This engineer-turned-entrepreneur spends half his workday hiring the right people...

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*JotForm was ranked in the , our annual list of the best entrepreneurial companies in the U. S. Founder and CEO Aytekin Tank will make an appearance on a panel at the .*

*The original interview by Matt McCue appears in the November 2016 issue of Entrepreneur . .*

Company: JotForm creates online forms for use on websites—no coding skills required. It has helped magicians book events, bakeries accept custom orders, and even Facebook collect questions to ask President Obama during a Town Hall event.

Leadership: Tank has guided the 10-year-old company through rocky waters (i. e. a Secret Service shutdown). Now at two million users, including Uber and Harvard University, annual revenue has grown 50 percent yearly over the past five years.

What do you spend the most of your workday doing?

Fifty percent of my day is devoted to the hiring process. When I interview someone, I take them to lunch to make sure they are the right personal and cultural fit for our company. I also ask myself, " Do I want to work with this person for the next two years?"

New employees are expensive. What's your strategy for growing your staff?

Since I was such a bootstrapper from the start of my company, I was always making sure that when I hired someone, I had money to pay them for a year. I still do this today. This also prevented me from making the mistake of hiring too many people at once.

<https://assignbuster.com/this-engineer-turned-entrepreneur-spends-half-his-workday-hiring-the-right-people/>

You have a nontraditional staff structure: Most employees are grouped in four- or five-person pods. Why do this?

These different, cross-functional teams each focus on one thing—like user growth, for example. A team has a marketing person, designer, and developer, so they can all work on a solution together and execute it at the same time. This allows our teams to work faster, learn faster, and come up with solutions quickly. Small teams communicate much easier than large teams. The teams sit together and go out to a company-paid lunch every week, so they have a strong rapport.

In 2012, the Secret Service shut down JotForm. How did you respond?

A user with bad intentions began using JotForm to make phishing forms, asking for people's passwords and banking information. Because one of the Secret Service's jobs is to protect currency, they shut us down for a few days, and some of our users began to have problems. We were very quick to react—we sent an email to all users within hours, explaining what happened and how to keep their forms online. We were transparent. And the openness resulted in an incredible outpouring of support—first in our blog, then in the tech media that covered the news, and in comments on social news sites. That convinced the Secret Service that they did something wrong, and they asked GoDaddy to enable our domain.

From software engineer to CEO, how did you develop your leadership style?

I learned from making mistakes. The biggest one new CEOs make is to talk about the specific tasks at hand instead of the overall goals and mission.

Since I came from engineering, I loved the technical details and solving

problems. So I made the mistake of not letting go. Even worse, I tried to solve the hard problems for people. Those were the fun part, and I was stealing the opportunity from them. I also didn't want to upset people, so I sugarcoated my feedback. This resulted in them continuing to make the same mistakes.

You don't need to be an asshole to give honest feedback. When yourdoctortells you not to smoke, he is doing his job. If you want people to take your feedback to heart, you need to get them to trust you. To accomplish that, you need to do some groundwork.

Show them how much you care about your product or service. I learned to not beat around the bush and give my feedback straight and clearly. This way they don't get confused or miss it.

*Interested in applying for the 2017 Entrepreneur 360™ List? .*