

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / An inside look at Deel's unprecedented growth | Meltem Kuran Berkowitz (Head of Growth)

early days, it's very important to just go back to the basics.
You just build the skeleton before you put on the makeup.
So the first question I would ask is, do you have a website?
Is it fast?

Do the search engine knows that it exists?

Okay, great.

The next step would be, can people find it?

If they can't find it, do you need to write content
to make sure that people find it?

Only after all of those questions are answered
should you then consider, do I have money?

Can I put it behind some paid ads
to make sure people come to my website?

You know, you can't run a successful paid ads program
if you have a website that's loading in four plus seconds.

So really going back to the basics
and starting from a good experience of the core
and then expanding step by step from there.

Welcome to Lenny's podcast

where I interview world-class product leaders
and growth experts to learn from their hard-won experiences
building and growing today's most successful products.

Today, my guest is Meltem Koran Berkowitz.

Meltem is head of growth at DEAL,
which is arguably the fastest growing SaaS business
of all time, possibly even faster than Ramp,
which we delved into in a previous episode.

They went from zero dollars in revenue
to a mind-boggling \$300 million in revenue in three years
while also staying EBITDA positive.

Meltem has led their growth team from the early days
and today leads all their growth efforts,
including paid ads, product marketing,
content community, brand, and more.

Before joining DEAL,
she was leading marketing efforts at Branch Accounting.

In her conversation, Meltem shares how DEAL
kickstarted growth through low-cost growth channels,
like tapping into communities like Reddit
and also content and SEO.

She also talks about how she evolved her thinking
on growth investments as the company grew.

She shares a bunch of tactical advice

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for how to do SEO well, how to do paid ads well,
and how to structure your early growth team
and prioritize your early investments.
She also shares her experience
building a culture of speed and optimism and so much more.
Enjoy this episode with Meltem Koran Berkowitz
after a short report from our sponsors.
Today's episode is brought to you by Miro,
an online collaborative whiteboard
that's designed specifically for teams like yours.
The best way to see what Miro's all about
and how it can help your team collaborate better
is not to listen to me talk about it,
but to go check it out for yourself.
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With the help of the Miro team,
I created a super cool Miro board
with two of my own favorite templates,
my one-pager template and my managing of template
that you can plug and play
and start using immediately with your team.
I've also embedded a handful of my favorite templates
that other people have published in the Miroverse.
When you get to the board,
you can also leave suggestions for the podcast,
answer a question that I have for you,
and generally just play around
to get a sense of how it all works.
Miro is a killer tool for brainstorming with your team,
laying out your strategy, sharing user research findings,
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I actually used Miro to collaborate with the Miro team
on creating my own board,
and it was super fun and super easy.
Go check it out at [Miro.com](https://miro.com) slash Lenny.
That's M-I-R-O dot com slash Lenny.
Today's episode is brought to you by Element.
I just recently discovered the stuff
actually from another podcast,
and it is such sweet, salty goodness.
Element is a tasty electrolyte drink mix
with a science-backed electrolyte ratio,

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and unlike most electrolyte drinks, there's no sugar-coloring, artificial-ingredients gluten or any other BS.

Getting enough electrolytes helps prevent and eliminate headaches, muscle cramps, fatigue, sleeplessness, and other common symptoms of electrolyte deficiency.

Element is the exclusive hydration partner to team USA weightlifting and many other Olympic athletes, also dozens of NBA and NFL teams and players rely on Element to stay hydrated, along with Navy SEAL teams, FBI sniper teams, and the Marines.

You can try Element totally risk-free.

If you don't like it, you can share it with a salty friend, and they'll give you your money back, no questions asked.

To give it a shot, go to drinkmnt.com slash Lenny, and you'll get a free sample pack with any purchase, which includes one packet of every flavor.

My favorite is watermelon salt.

You won't find this offer publicly available, so you have to head to drinkmnt.com slash Lenny to take advantage of this offer.

Stay salty.

Meltem, thank you so much for being here.

Welcome to the podcast.

Thank you for having me.

I'm very excited to be here.

I'm more excited that you're here.

So you're head of growth at DEAL.

For people that aren't familiar with DEAL, can you just give us a sense of what does DEAL do briefly?

And then also, can you just share some stats around the trajectory of DEAL?

It feels like it's been this extraordinary journey, and I'm curious just to hear some of the stats of just how extraordinary.

Yes, so DEAL is payroll, HR, and compliance platform for global teams.

So essentially, we help companies expand globally, with deals like DEAL HR, immigration, employer of record hiring, independent contractor hiring, payroll, both global and US.

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So whether you're trying to hire someone as a full-time employee in Japan, or you're trying to make sure your contractor in Germany has everything they need on day one, our platform allows you to take care of everything all in one place.

And when I joined DEAL, actually, that was around the July 2020.

We were less than \$1 million in ARR.

And then over time, within the first year on January 2021, we were at \$4 million ARR.

We finished 2021 with \$57 million.

April 2022, we were looking at \$100 million.

And then we started off this year with \$295 million in ARR.

And what we're particularly proud of is that we've been even a positive.

So that's something that we are very, very proud of, on top of the ARR growth.

Amazing.

And you said that you were super early at DEAL.

Can you give us a sense of just how early and what that was like?

I was a second hire to the marketing team.

And I was, I believe, either employee not 19 or 20 on the overall DEAL team.

We had the head of product from Ramp on this podcast.

And it feels like there's this little bit of which company grew faster early on and that trajectory of the two.

But we don't have to debate.

It feels like these are like maybe the two fastest growing SaaS businesses in history.

Does that sound very right?

That's true.

Yeah.

So Ramp was the first one to be crowned the fastest growing.

And then we kind of took that crown from them.

So I think we're both right.

And that's at a certain point in time, we've been the fastest growing.

But they're amazing.

What I want to start with is something that I heard about you, which is that you specialize in cheaper growth channels.

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And that's actually the reason that DEAL ended up hiring you, is they wanted to find ways to grow cheaply. And so a couple of questions. One is just, what did you find work really well from that perspective at DEAL? And then two, what are today's maybe cheaper growth channels that you think people are under investing in? Whatever you're willing to share there, I don't know if you want to give away all your secrets. I'm happy to give away all and everything. So I think before we dive into the list of cheap channels, which I will get to, it's very important to notice, especially in the B2B world, most of the businesses are started because there's an active problem. And so when you go out to the market and try to answer people's questions, people don't want to be solved. They want their problems solved. So those cheaper channels are often places where people are just trying to get an answer to their questions. So whether that be search engine optimization through the articles that you write for people, looking on to Reddit, where people are asking these questions in communities, forming partnerships with other groups that are trying to answer these questions, existing communities where other business leaders are connecting with each other and looking at their peers to kind of find answers to shared problems that they're having or places like Quora, that's when you think about cheap channels, that's a really good place to start. It's like just add value to people, answer their questions. And when you answer their questions and present your solution, if it's a fit to what they're looking for, that ends up being a cheap channel for you. You don't necessarily have to advertise. You know, when you go to Reddit and you set up those keywords to be tracking when people ask certain questions, you're not paying any money to do that.

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You're just seeing, oh, someone has this question.
I have the answer to that.
Here you go and connecting with them.
It takes time, but early on,
those were a lot of the things that we invested in.
I think a lot of people kind of jumped that
because they think, oh, it's one person here,
two people there, but when you start helping people,
that combined with word of mouth.
And guess what, these are digital places.
You provide one answer and your answer lives out there
for other people to repeatedly refine,
as long as we're not talking about a closed slack community,
maybe a conversation happening in DMs.
So when I think about cheap channels,
I think about where are people asking the questions?
That might be Google or that might be Reddit
or any other channel and providing them the answers.
So they know that your solution exists.
Okay, this is awesome.
So this Reddit example is that,
which actually did you set alerts
for when people have questions
about HR hiring internationally, I imagine,
and then had someone go in there and give them some advice?
Yes, exactly, that's what we did.
It's important to notice that,
if you're looking at a subreddit of about 1,000 people,
recognize the upper size of this audience.
It's not, you're not going to win 5,000 businesses
through that Reddit community,
but you're maybe going to win 10% of the people there
that are having this problem.
So it's very important when investing in these cheap channels
to focus on what's the upper limit of the audience size.
And also I see a lot of people sometimes go blindly
into SEO, they're like, we're just going to write content,
which I'm a huge fan of SEO, happy to discuss that later.
But if people aren't asking this question to Google,
you can write all the content you want.
It doesn't matter, nobody's going to find it.
I love this so much because it connects
with something I find again and again

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as one of the more effective early growth channels
is tapping into an existing community
and kind of piggybacking off of what they've already built.
Airbnb is a little bit of an example
where they went to Craigslist.
Oh, actually most people pull people off Craigslist,
Uber pulled people off Craigslist,
Lyft, so many companies just piggybacked off Craigslist
and built up their own company.
But what you said is so important,
which is you can't just go into a community
and be like, hey, everyone, check out what I've got.
You need to add value to people
and add value to the community.
Otherwise, no one's going to pay attention to you,
they're going to kick you out.
And so I think that has a really important insight
is if you're trying to piggyback off of a community,
the most important thing is you need to add value
to the community.
Yeah, be someone people actually want to talk to.
I love that.
Is there a tool that you found for that Reddit strategy?
I've just had to know if someone's talking
about hiring, say, internationally.
I did have very janky assistant that set up.
I'm not proud of it, but it works.
Someone else out there built it
and I just plugged in the keywords
we were looking for into it.
I know it wasn't just Reddit
and I'm curious what else you found
was worth your time, but how did you figure out
that's where your potential community
and potential users are spending time?
Well, I think over time,
Reddit became the place that you go to
when you want peer answers,
whether that peer is someone right next to you
or someone halfway across the world.
So it was a very obvious place for me to go to understand
what's top of mind for my audience,
but also there are so many subreddits,

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whether it's founders or HR managers
that people are just asking their community
because oftentimes they have very specific questions
you can't just ask that to Google
because they have one thing that means
that they might not be able to qualify
for the exact solution that is what's most used out there.
So Reddit just became the place over the years
for people to ask their specific questions semi-anonymously
and get answers from their community
and multiple answers to be able to judge
which works better versus didn't.
So it was one of the first places
that myself and my team wants to.
And is this something that worked really well
mostly at the beginning to kind of kickstart growth
or how early was this?
And then how much of your growth would you say
came from this sort of strategy early on?
I believe I set up that little kind of keyword tracking
within the first day of me being,
starting my role at deal.
So it was very, very early.
And we still do this, by the way,
we still provide answers across Reddit core communities.
Like we're still out there connecting with people.
Over time, of course,
it went from maybe being 15% of our funnel to
less than 5% of our funnel
because the rest of our funnel has grown a lot.
But the next number of people that we get to kind of
share our solution with through those channels
have continued to grow over time.
Coming back to something asked that I wanna touch on
is in today's world,
are there any cheaper growth channels
that you are excited about?
Or is it essentially the same idea?
Look for where your potential users are
and ideally asking questions that you could help answer.
Is that roughly how you think about it still?
That is still roughly how I think about it.
I would add social channels to that as well.

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I think Twitter's a great place.
People ask questions oftentimes to their communities.
And when someone has answered that question,
other people kind of piggyback off of that.
But anywhere where someone is asking a question,
I would consider to fall into this category
of a cheap channel.
What's an example of answering the question
in a value add way versus maybe a less effective way
in your experience?
I would say the least effective way would be,
hey, we've solved that problem, check out our website.
Like, okay, cool.
Like if you have five seconds do that,
but the value add way would be
explaining what the solution to that problem is.
Because the reality is there are a lot of people out there
who can probably solve this
and then providing your solution.
But like answer their question first
and then let them decide if they wanna come with you
or go with someone else.
But the whole point of someone asking a question
isn't to be sold a solution.
It's like, I just need an answer.
So like genuinely tweet this person
like a friend of yours, answer their question.
Be like, yes, it's doable.
No, it's not doable.
Yes, you can do it, but you need to consider X, Y, Z.
If you wanna learn more about it, you can chat with us.
And these were people on the team
or you answering these questions.
It wasn't like some automated system.
It was never automated.
It still isn't today.
We would never automate our interactions with people.
So they were early days, it was myself,
the other people on my team are co-founders,
which to this day they still do, by the way.
So it's a lot of people on the team, you know,
every single person on the team
kind of has access to these.

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And whoever is the first person to jump in will kind of flag it.
And, you know, sometimes you'll see on a Twitter, someone will write a question.
There's like three people from DL Team has answered for like, okay,
I think enough of us have provided value here.
That's amazing.
And I'm spending a lot of time on this, but this is such an interesting and important tactic that clearly worked to help you all start.
And it's cheap and most, at least B2B companies could probably leverage this.
So when people are thinking about where to go, maybe do this, you mentioned Twitter, maybe Reddit, maybe Cora, is there anything else to just like the sphere of potential places, founders can go think about whether maybe people are asking questions they could answer there?
Yeah, there are a lot of close communities.
So there are still, you know, they could be Slack communities, Discord places that, you know, founders choose to connect with other founders, or we have partnerships with places like the Y Combinator, where, you know, once you go through a certain program or you qualify to be in the club, whatever that club may be, you get to kind of get access to this community where you can talk to other people.
So those are considered close communities.
It's not as easy to gain access to, but if you can find a way to gain access to those communities, there are also great places to be.
And then step number one is add value, right?
Yes.
Just get in the community, hey, check out Deal, everyone. Otherwise you'll just get kicked out.
Like you can try not adding value, you're not gonna last very long.
Yeah.
If you think about the pie chart

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of how growth happened at Deal early on, and then today, what would that roughly look like? Like what percentage of early growth came through this versus SEO or whatever else worked?

And then today, whatever you can share of where growth comes from.

Yeah, today, roughly about, I would say 50% of growth continues to come from what we would consider, you know, non-paid channels through, you know, whether it be partnerships, SEO, these kinds of moderations.

So early on, that was more close to, you know, 80 to 90%, but that number has grown.

Like again, the net number has grown, but the percentage of the overall value has shrunk because other channels have also grown significantly.

Awesome, okay, so let's talk about SEO.

First of all, how important has that been to the success and growth of Deal?

And then also just what have you learned about what is important to get SEO right?

Yeah, so I would say for SEO, the biggest mistake people make is they will just show keywords.

They're like, okay, these are the keywords people are searching for, I need to make sure I mention it five times.

Like, obviously do that.

Like make sure that the content that you wrote answers the question, but the main thing to think about it is, you know, is the Google search over?

Like if someone reads your content, if they typed in something to Google and then they read the article that you've published, are they going back to Google to continue reading more or is the Google search over?

Because ultimately, that's what the search engines care about is I wanna make sure this person gets their answer quickest way possible.

So when you think from that perspective, it's much easier to actually write things that people want to read.

And you're not just like meandering and going on and on, shoving a bunch of keywords that people are just like, I'm bored,

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I'm bouncing, I'm going somewhere else.
So asking that question of is the search over
is a really good place to start
instead of just shoving keywords.
And, you know, our content team is amazing.
I would say they're more of an operational team
than they are a creative team.
The way they run things,
the way they, you know, publish the articles,
you know, there's a very clear framework
that is used to decide what gets published when
and what doesn't get published by the same token.
So all of those things are very important to consider
instead of just being like,
oh, this keyword has, you know, 10,000 monthly visitors.
I'm just going to write a bunch of things about that.
What's an example of a page that you wrote
that ends people's search and gives them what they need?
A lot of people wonder what an EOR is
because that's an employer of record.
They tend to be confused about exactly what that is.
So we do very well in explaining to people
what EOR is and isn't.
And what its limitations are
because the first question, you know,
that you will have after the EOR questions answered is,
okay, what's the downside?
When do I need to not use it?
So that, for us, that does,
that's one of the content pieces that does very well.
I'd love to spend more time on this operational element
of the SEO team.
Maybe one question is just,
what is that bar that tells you
that it's ready to publish and worth going out
versus it's not ready?
Yes, so I can take credit to this.
This is all of our team's work,
but we have this framework
that we call the traffic light system.
Essentially, we go on whenever the team is going to do,
you know, a content series,
they will go and find up to 700 keywords.

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These are keywords that are related to what we do.
So they might be closely related,
they might be distant related.
And then those set of keywords get ranked
by highest volume to the lowest volume.
So then you have an Excel sheet,
keywords on the left, volume on the right.
And then you go one by one, this does take time,
and then say, what is the intent
of someone searching this keyword?
Is this a university student looking to write an article
and they're never going to become our customer?
Or is this someone that is actually looking
to solve their existing solution
and they are going to become our customer?
So with that, you know, you get the green light ones,
which is the intent is very high.
This person wants our solution.
The yellow light is, intents could be there 50, 50,
you know, maybe they're looking to buy our solution.
Maybe it's not soon enough.
And then the red is,
this person is not looking to buy our solution.
They're just doing this search for any other reason.
So when you do that, then you go from the greens,
highest volume to the lowest volume,
yellows, highest volume to the lowest volume.
And oftentimes you never get to the reds.
I love that.
And then once you have say a keyword, say a green,
I guess it's a green keyword where it's high intent
and high volume.
What is the process to actually put together
an article that works for SEO?
So step one is understanding the search intent.
Why is someone typing that?
Like what are they trying to understand?
You know, and a part of that is going to Google
and figuring out what is Google servicing today?
So one of, you know, the examples that I always give people
of when you tell EOR to Google,
it doesn't give you employer of record.
It gives you enhanced oil recovery

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because most of the people typing EOR to Google is looking for that solution.
Now, if my team blindly went in and said, we're going to rank for EOR, we're never going to rank for that because that's not what Google gives people because that's not what people have been looking for. So first is understanding what are people looking for and creating a content piece that answers those questions? Oftentimes the bottom part of Google, you know, where it says you ask like the next questions that you should be asking is a really good place to go to understand, okay, after someone's done with this search, what's the next question that they ask and the next one and the next one. So figuring out what do people want to get out of this? And then there are a myriad of, you know, SEO solutions, tools that you can use out there to ensure that the content you've written is in a simple enough language that someone, you know, with a fifth grade reading level can understand that you actually did the right things. You know, you put the right keywords in the right places. I almost think of keywords as like, that's your address. Like that's how you give people, give Google, like please send people my way. So you, you know, you can use many tools. We use ClearScope, we love it. So those are the tools that you use. And then it gets published. And oftentimes those tools will give you a score to say you're an A plus or you're C minus. You need to make your language less sophisticated. Currently it's at university level and we need it to be at fourth grade reading level. What is the structure of the content team at this point? Like how many people is in what are their focuses? Fun fact about our content team, the person that leads it was one of the earliest employees at deal, I want to say number two or three. So the person there is just so special to our entire company. And so the structure of the content team for us

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is it is led by our director of content.

We have one person that is in charge of all of the operations.

So that is working with our freelancers,
making sure that the briefs are sent out,
making sure that the fact checking is done on time,
that the articles are published on the website
and tracking and everything.

That they kind of run the machinery on the backend.

And then we have, you know, different people focused
on different areas of content

because you need to have expertise
that you build over time to write properly.

So we have one person, you know,
looking after certain product lines,
another person would be focusing on
behind different product lines.

And very recently we've set out a team
for different types of content

because content isn't just written article,
it's also video, it's also education.

There's a lot of different types of content
that we want to tap into.

So now there's a team that is focused
on those new mediums for us.

Awesome. So how many people total full time
that run this operation?

Right now the team is about eight people total.

And it's like, I don't know if it's exactly 50%
of something like half of your growth
essentially is coming from this team.

Yes.

Is there anything else you found
that it's really important or effective
for thinking about making SEO work?

The biggest mistake people make
is SEO is one of those things that you can try and automate it.

Like you can do a lot of things that save you time,
but it never stops being time consuming.

And to do it well, it is going to be time consuming.

So oftentimes people just get over it
or they think it's below them to be going over
and doing keyword research
and doing all of those things one by one.

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And that's oftentimes where people lose out is they try to cut corners.

And when you cut corners, you just don't create a good quality resource.

Like that's what it comes down to is like, is your resource good quality?

Yes or no?

So when you try to just be like, I want to rank and cut all those corners,

content is not going to be great.

Nobody's going to want to read it and your program is not going to go anywhere.

So I think it's one of those things that people as they become more senior, I think it's below them.

And I think that's the biggest mistake.

It's interesting how that's exactly the same advice for writing a newsletter, like the thing I do, where if a newsletter isn't working, it usually means the content isn't valuable enough to people.

It's such a clear meritocracy of if it's useful, people will read it, subscribe, share.

And if they're not, they won't subscribe.

And then Google basically figures that out based on people's behavior.

Yes, exactly.

To give people a sense of the operation, how many articles are you putting out a month, a day, a week, whatever you can share there?

We used to put out about 10 articles a week, that's net new, whereas now we are doing more of five new articles and five article updates because the type of content we write, regulations change, things change all the time.

So we need to make sure that even if something was published two years ago, it's up to date.

So we have a team that is responsible for kind of continuously fact checking.

So we do about five article updates and five net new articles written.

And of course, we do it across many different languages.

So what started off as English-only operations is now in other languages as well.

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So there's no shortage of work to go around.
Something that I go back and forth on a bit
is if SEO is something every company should be doing
and will work for them.

And in my experience, there's certain products
that are really good for SEO, especially
if there's user-generated content
or there's just like a bunch of data,
like say Yelp or Clastore where they can generate
tons of pages in all these different ways.

Do you have an opinion on what sort of business
and company is best suited for SEO
or is your feeling like everyone should probably
be doing SEO in some form?

And even if it's not a huge part
of your growth strategy, it'll help.

I don't think everybody should be doing SEO.

I think if you are in a space where people
are looking for a solution, you should be doing SEO.

But if you are a direct-to-consumer company
selling people lipstick, which I'm a huge buyer of,
you probably shouldn't invest in SEO all that much
because people don't go to Google for that.

They go to Instagram.

They go to influencers.

And even if someone types in the best lipstick of 2023,
chances of your website ranking
because you're not a third party objective
comparing to other people is very low.

So really depends on the solution,

but if you are in a space
in which most B2B products tend to be
that you're solving an active problem very specifically,
then I would say SEO is a good idea.

If you're a consumer good, maybe a little bit less effort
should be put towards it.

Makes a lot of sense.

Going back to the early days,
your heart has had a growth of deal.

There's a lot of things you could do.

I'm curious how you decided where to prioritize your resources
and what to do in the early days
versus what you started doing down the road

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and what you could almost like not worry about early on.
What have you learned about that early prioritization exercise?
Yes. So I would say early days,
it's very important to just go back to the basics.
You just build the skeleton before you put on the makeup.
So the first question I would ask is,
do you have a website?
Is it fast?
Do the search engine knows that it exists?
Okay, great.
The next step would be, can people find it?
If they can't find it,
do you need to write content to make sure that people find it?
Only after all of those questions are answered
should you then consider, do I have money?
Can I put it behind some paid ads
to make sure people come to my website?
So going step by step,
but you can't run a successful paid ads program
if you have a website that's loading in four plus seconds.
So really going back to the basics
and starting from a good experience at the core
and then expanding step by step from there
is how I would suggest everybody starts
and that's what I would do if I was to get hired all over again.
I love that.
Some of those steps.
So step one is, do you have a website?
Step two is make sure the website performs
and people can actually have a good time
when they're experiencing it.
Imagine part of it is also,
do people understand what you do?
Like tweaking maybe the pitch and the...
Yes, exactly.
And speaking of the pitch,
our copy team does an amazing job at this.
In the B2B world,
it's very easy to come up with statements
that could so easily be applied to another business
and it would work just as well on their websites.
And it sounds good.
And you and your team feel really good about it,

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but then if you're one liner
can also work for another business,
please don't let that be your one liner.
Make it so that people actually understand what you do.
Because right now there's a lot of statements out there,
like we do the complex things
so you can focus on what you do best.
Like what does that mean?
And you can give that to 90% of the B2B businesses out there
and it would apply to them,
which means it's not good enough.
Is there anything that you remember you changed
in those early days
in terms of the website or the positioning
or anything along those lines that was a big improvement?
Our website was hard coded.
And so the first thing we did with the help of the dev team
was to move it to a platform
that it was easy for me to access and edit
so that we could continuously A-B test things.
And outside of that,
we worked really hard on testing a lot of value propositions
to explain to people exactly what we do,
explain problem first, solution first,
and time savings, cost savings,
putting a lot of those against each other
and rapidly A-B testing.
Once you got past that phase
where maybe you started doing some paid ads
and other things,
where did you find you could invest more resources?
Once we covered the basics of your big four or five ad platforms,
we started looking into the long tailplaces.
So those are the platforms
that individually never contribute a significant enough chunk
for you to individually care about it.
But if you add them up, it diversifies your lead flow.
Such that it kind of ends up being about 30%
of your overall kind of lead flow that's coming in.
So those could be things like review sites,
or much smaller outlets that could also run ads,
newsletter ads, podcast ads, all of those things.
When you run an individual podcast ad,

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yeah, you're probably not going to get 2,000 customers from one podcast, but you run 10 of those and then it starts adding up.

So really long tail is where we focused on and we started going very niche with websites that have maybe 50,000, 100,000 visitors a month, which isn't all that much when you're thinking about your paid ad strategy, but all of those places add up and they're oftentimes overlooked because they're not as easy.

You have to take the time to set up from scratch to run it on everything.

Our paid ads team, they spent just as much time running Facebook and Google ads as they do, running those third party much smaller platform ads.

It takes the same effort, but you need to have a diversified source of your leads.

Huge fan of podcast ads over here and maybe this would be a good time to cue the mid-roll ad, maybe, I don't know.

It happens.

Sounds perfect.

Here we go.

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So many PMs I know are considering

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or already building with AI,
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And welcome back.
Speaking of podcast ads,
something that I find is,
with that sort of advertising,
there's a direct response component of like,
we will drive leads as running and out like this.
And there's also an awareness brand building component.
I know you're not a big fan of awareness campaigns
and marketing campaigns, especially early on.
And so I'd love to get your perspective on why that is
and how you think about that sort of investment.
I'm not a huge fan of early awareness campaigns
for P2P businesses specifically.
So if you are a consumer goods founder,
you can, you know, skip this part.
But the reason I don't like awareness early on
is because to do a proper awareness campaign,
it takes time.
You need to have, you know,
teams that are doing the strategy,
doing the creative work,
and they don't always hit,
you don't know if they're always going to resonate or not.
And then you look back
and you've worked on this thing for a whole month
and it hasn't resonated and you've wasted a full month.
So because B2B businesses uniquely are started
because there's a very real need.
And there's a lot of people that are ready to convert,
like first tap into the bottom of the funnel

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and then go out and start speaking to the masses.
But I promise you,
it'll probably take you six to eight months minimum
to tap into that bottom of the funnel of people
that are ready to convert today
before you have to start doing awareness ads out there.
Now, that's not to say never do awareness ads,
but it's oftentimes the shiny, cool thing that you wanna do.
And it just ends up being a waste of time early on
because people don't really even understand
what you're doing.
You haven't really even figured out
what's the messaging that resonates,
but you've done this creative campaign
and people are like, this looks cool,
but I'm just gonna go ahead
and continue looking for a solution for my problem.
Is there an example of a marketing campaign
or an awareness campaign that comes to mind
that you thought was like, okay,
this is, if you do it this way, maybe it's worth doing.
I've seen Notion do a great job with their out of home ads.
They didn't do it early on.
They started doing it much later in their journey
by the time when everybody that was working in tech
kind of knew what it was.
And it was really to kind of drive home
the message continuously
rather than to introduce themselves to the world.
So by then, when you saw that layout on a billboard,
it made sense.
You're like, oh, I know what they're talking about.
So what is it about Notion that you think was great?
It was timing and then also the actual ad itself.
You thought it was great?
Yeah, the ads that I'm recalling right now
were showcasing their product interface.
So they needed enough time.
This is my obviously hypothesis.
If someone from Notion wants to jump in and say,
that wasn't the reason why we did this, go ahead.
But I think they needed enough time
for people to get familiar with the interface

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because Notion has a very specific interface that when you see it, you recognize it. It's not like any other product. So unless people built that awareness and recognition, doing an out of home ad with that layout wouldn't have made much sense because just with that layout, they were able to communicate what product they're talking about. If they did that day one, people would be like, what is this thing that I'm looking at? So we've been working kind of through all the ways that deal has grown. We've talked about SEO, community. You mentioned partnerships. Is there anything interesting there to mention around just like what partnerships have done? Yeah, I would say it's very important to know who you should partner with. So there's two groups of partners like people oftentimes end up partnering with any company that has a shared audience, decent place to start. But just because you share an audience doesn't mean your audience goes to your partner for guidance when they have this problem. So in our case, venture capital partners was a huge one because when you get money from a new VC, they ask like, okay, thank you for giving us this money. Now we want to expand our team with the money you gave us. What are your other portfolio companies using? What is a platform that you trust that you would recommend? So people go to their VCs for that kind of question, but there might be another tech company out there that is tapping into the exact audience that we are, but people never go to them to ask that question. So our partnership with them will likely not work just as well. So it's important to not only recognize the importance of like an audience overlap as well as whether or not those people are seen as a trusted resource or the solution you are putting out there. I really love this idea you keep coming back to, which is where are people asking this question

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that you can help them answer.
And to make that even more concrete for people,
what are some other examples maybe of questions
people ask that deal can help them with
so that it could help people think about,
okay, maybe our product can help them answer.
These are the sorts of questions.
Since the early days and it continues to happen,
compliance is a huge question that gets asked.
So when you are an HR leader or finance leader
or legal leader in a company that works, let's say in America,
but you want to hire someone in another country,
you don't know what you don't know.
So it's very important to have people
that know what they're talking about
in context of your country of origin
as well as the country that you're trying to hire from.
So compliance is always a huge part of,
kind of has been a huge part of what we did
but we've always answered for people.
That's why we have in-house experts
that answer those questions that constantly provide updates
if the answer to that question has changed over time,
which regulations constantly change.
An answer we provided a week ago may change
and you need to be very proactive in communicating that.
Taxes is another one, especially in the space that we're in,
payroll, hiring, taxes change from country to country.
You need to know where you need to pay what taxes,
when you need to not pay them
and what types of work people do.
So those are some of the types of questions that get asked.
So for us, they're very nitty gritty and use case specific.
If the taxes you need to pay for someone who is an engineer,
that's a full-time employee,
it might be very different than who is a designer,
who is a contractor.
So those are the kinds of specifics
that we get into with people.
Got it.
So it's like, how do I pay taxes for an engineer
I'm hiring in Turkey?
And then you give them, here's the answer.

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And then it's like, if you just want us to take care of it for you, go check out Deal.

Exactly.

So the question is, what's the best payroll solution?

It's like, okay, that's good to make sure

what you're leaning towards isn't shit

and that other people agree with you.

But ultimately it's like, you need the best payroll solution

because you need to make sure that things aren't gonna go wrong.

Speaking of answering questions and content,

something that you told me is that you wrote a blog post

that the IRS ended up linking to

as the definitive answer to a question.

And I don't think this was a deal,

but can you share that story?

Yes, actually it was at my previous role

and the person who wrote that article is today at Deal.

So he came over to join us there too.

But yes, it was right around when COVID happened

and the US government rolled out the PPP program.

And there was a lot of questions about, do I qualify?

If I qualify, how do I apply for this?

And at the time, company that I was working for

had a lot of customers that were like,

what do I do?

Like I need to gain access to this,

but I don't know what to do.

So the team there took the time

to truly understand how the system works,

whether you qualify what to do

and kind of created this resource for our own customers

because we just wanted to help them.

And then it ended up being such a good resource

that it was linked from the IRS's website,

being like, if you have questions, check out this article,

which was a great moment of pride

and it just kind of went to show

that when you do your best answer questions

and other people don't have the time to do it,

no matter who it is,

they're going to kind of send people back your way.

And it was, at the time,

it happened to be a big moment of growth.

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There was a very unfortunate instance.
We wish we never had to write that,
that it never happened.
But yeah, that was kind of the story around IRS linking
to the company's resource.
That's the ultimate sign of the question is answered
and you're done with it.
The IRS decides to link to it.
So you're seeing that was actually
a big driver of growth, the IRS traffic.
I'm curious how many people actually go read that.
So that was huge for that short duration of a few week time
when people were trying to apply for a PVP.
And then it died out as did PVP.
Makes sense.
One last question around paid.
And then I want to move on to a different topic.
Is there anything you've learned
about what it takes to be successful with paid growth
from your experience of deal?
Yeah, so a few things.
Our paid team spends a lot of time
on both the messaging aspect of things,
as well as the optimization.
So optimization is the technical way
in which you set your bids,
make sure that you don't go over budgets,
whether or not you can afford that.
And then messaging is making sure
that if someone sees your ad,
whether it's on Instagram, Twitter, Google,
that it makes sense for them.
So creative fatigue is a real thing.
When you put an ad out there, that works for three weeks.
People get tired of seeing that.
You need to constantly update that.
So our paid team is actually updating
the ads we put out there on a monthly basis
with the exception of a few of the ads,
which need to be straight to the point.
So staying ahead of creative fatigue,
making sure that your messaging
also keeps up with your product.

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Even if the ad is working really well,
you need to make sure that,
as your product has evolved,
so has the messaging alongside that.
And also recognizing,
not just looking at the amount of leads
that you generated from a campaign,
but how many of them actually became a client?
And how much money did you actually make
from those clients to understand things around payback?
Because oftentimes marketers just tend to think about,
oh, this is a great lead channel,
and I get so many leads from it,
but then you ask that question to sales teams,
and they're like, yeah, I'm busy,
but none of these are converting.
So it's really important to look at
not just the volume that you bring in,
but what is the journey of that volume
with your business one year out?
How much money do you actually make from them
to be able to properly decide
how much can I spend to win this customer?
And the way that we've done it
is we've worked with our data team to set up a dashboard
that tracks that in real time.
We know an average customer
that comes from a Facebook ad,
at what rate do they convert from a lead
to a qualified opportunity to a closed one?
And then on average, how much money
do we make from that customer one year out
so that we can decide, is this a worthy channel for us?
Do we not want to invest there?
Or are we kind of reaching that peak
and we can't continue to invest there?
Something that I should mention as we talk through this,
we're talking about all these ways to grow the product,
but at the core is a great product
that people actually find valuable
and want to keep using.
And maybe a question there is just how
that plays into this whole growth strategy,

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like actually making the product something people want versus all these acquisition channels. Acquisition channels just straight up don't work if you have a product that doesn't live up to the expectation. I think I personally have been very spoiled and lucky because from the day I joined Deel, the product was top notch. As I was joining an early stage company, I joined right after Series A. I was kind of expecting certain things to be duct taped in the back. It happens. And I was like, oh no, like the engineers and the product team or if they say a product can do something, it can do that and more. So early days of my team pitching deal was people were like, I don't think you guys can do all of that. I don't believe you. And it was almost like we had to tamper down our messaging so that people would believe us. But you can be the best marketer in the world. If when people come to your product, even if your sales team does a good job at convincing them to become a customer because you can do that, if the product doesn't live up to the expectations, especially in the B2B world where people aren't going to put up with crappy products, they're gonna leave, that's going to get out and people are going to know it's not a worthy product. So like that really sits at the core of everything that we do. I think it's very easy to take it for granted when you're at a company that has an awesome product. You're like, it is like this all the time. But one of the things I would encourage anybody looking to join a young company is ask them what their team breakdown looks like. When I joined Deel, most of the team was product and engineers. So that told me that the core of this business is going to be solid. And then we built out those supporting things

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like marketing, like sales, like data
to surround the product.

But if you're talking to an early stage company
that's a B2B product
and they have six sales people into engineers,
their product probably isn't going to be great
for that much longer.

Especially if it's like an outsourced, you know,
Dev shop doing the product.

They're like, oh, they'll take care of the product.
We'll just sell it.

Something else that I think is important to talk about
is COVID was an important element of your growth.

And so I guess one is, is that true?

And then two, just what did you lean into
and lean out of in terms of growth during COVID
to kind of help people discover Deal when they needed it most?

Which is basically people go in remote
in a lot of ways, in a lot of companies.

Yeah, so COVID actually,
a lot of people think Deal was started
as a response to the pandemic.

We actually got started before the pandemic
and then the pandemic happened.

So as kind of sad as it was,
it did force people into like a pilot program
of the vision that we had for the world.

It forced people to work remotely.

What are that means you're working remotely
from someone who lives a block away from you
or you are working remotely from someone in Germany?

So we did benefit from the fact
that everybody was at least forced
to test out this hypothesis of,
does it work to not be in the same room
as the people that you're working with?

And one of the questions that we were getting early on
as the COVID was coming to an end was, are you worried?

COVID is coming to an end
that people aren't going to use Deal anymore.

And our response to that has always been,
we are not a remote work platform.

We're a global work platform.

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So a lot of these businesses have gone back into offices.
We have a lot of customers
that ask people to go back to their offices,
but now they have offices in Germany and in Canada
and in US and in France.
So we were never a remote work company.
We were just a global work company
and remote work kind of,
because there was a lot of news coverage happening around it,
we just became synonymous with that.
So I do think early on we did benefit
from being able to provide that solution.
And a lot of people saw the reality of like,
hey, I worked just as well with this person
as I did when I was in an office with them.
Well, the best person that I'm looking for the job
may not be within my region.
So let me go ahead and hire them regardless of where they are.
People got comfortable with that
and more and more companies
kind of started moving in that direction.
And is there anything that ended up being really important
in terms of helping Deal grow through that?
Like a channel that's just like,
let's go big on this channel
because it seems to be working really well.
Or is it just word of mouth basically?
And people are just like, oh, shit,
I really need to solve this problem.
My hair is on fire.
What's out there? Let me go find an answer.
I would say it was word of mouth.
Like maybe very, very early on it was word of mouth,
but within the first few months of our operation
that kind of stopped being short.
At least the word of mouth stopped being
a smaller percentage of the way in which people discover us.
But it's always that, you know,
people needed a payroll solution.
They needed a way to hire independent contractors overseas.
And we just were the answer to that.
So we consistently put ourselves in front of them
and said, hey, if you're trying to do this,

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or if you're already doing it
and you're not doing it legally,
we can help you do that legally.
I want to chat about team building,
something that I've heard of your exceptional at.
And my first question is early on
when you're building the team,
the growth team specifically at Deal,
what skills did you find were most important to look for?
And what skills and experience did you find
wasn't as important early on
that you could kind of sacrifice and wait till later to get?
Early on, one of the first questions I would ask people
is what are the KPIs that you're willing to commit to?
So if someone's only willing to commit to lead numbers,
that's not good enough.
They need to be able to commit to closed one revenue KPIs
to really show that they care about the business's bottom line.
So it was those people that were willing
to commit to the full funnel.
And also oftentimes people tend to hire
from the big companies that they want to become like
because the brand name is appealing.
But if you're a team of 35 people
and you're trying to hire the director of whatever
from a huge company,
you need to ask the question of
when did this person join that huge company?
Did they join when the company was already 5,000 people
and from day one,
they had all the resources at their disposal
or were they actually one of the earlier employees
who helped that growth?
Because oftentimes the mistake I see people make
is they'll hire someone from an amazing company
that have accomplished amazing things,
but they're not used to operating
with 10% of the resources that they had.
So they're not willing to kind of get down
and do the dirty work.
And at deal we have this concept called little hands.
I think it's loosely translated from French.
Someone can kind of correct me on that,

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but it basically means that no matter who you are,
where you sit within the organization,
you need to be willing to get into the little things
and kind of do the nitty gritty work
and not shy away from it.
And it's very important to whoever we hire
when any level is like,
are you willing to do the tiniest of the jobs?
And if the answer is yes, that's great.
And some people are like, I would build a team for that.
And of course in the future, maybe you should,
but that shouldn't be your first answer.
Your first answer should be yes, of course I'll do that.
And if someone's not excited about that,
then they're not a good fit
for at least a company at our stage right now.
That is an amazing expression, little hands.
You talked about how you check that people
are willing to commit to revenue goals.
Does that like in the interview or is that like,
how do you, cause everyone just say like,
yeah, yeah, I can commit to anything you need me to commit
so I'm going to go make this all work great.
How do you kind of get a sense
if they're the kind of person that would do that?
It happens within the interview process.
So one way to find out is what are the KPIs
that they have committed to in the past in their roles?
So if they've never committed to a revenue goal
or kind of a bottom funnel goal
and they're saying they're willing to commit to it,
that's probably not correct.
And I always say, you know, if they haven't, I say,
what are the KPIs that you have today
and what are the KPIs that you think you should have?
Because sometimes they're just not given those,
but they still think they should have been given
the more bottom funnel.
So that's something that I would look for
in the interview process.
And a really good way to also test for that is
this is more on the case study process,
but asking someone, you know, to come up with a strategy

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with \$0, with \$10,000 and maybe \$100,000
to see if they're going to be able to scale with you
and to see how are they thinking about
with different levels of spend
and what are they willing to commit
to at different levels of spend?
Because if someone's throwing up their hands and saying,
it's \$0, I can only do social media monitoring.
We're not going to get much because that's what makes sense.
Well, you probably know that they're not going to be comfortable
committing to those bottom of funnel metrics
until you give them all the resources that they need.
And it sounds like the way you goal teams within deal
is also as revenue growth teams basically have revenue goals.
It's not like you said leads or traffic or anything like that.
Yes, that's why we're called growth instead of marketing.
We care about the revenue growth.
And, you know, of course we track leads and SQOs.
Those are leading indicators to know whether or not
we're going to hit the ultimate number that we all care about.
But at the end of the day,
that's not what we consider success.
In terms of team structure,
how you thought about structuring the early growth team,
what did that look like
and what was kind of the reporting lines
and buckets of investment?
Yeah, so very early on,
we always seek to bring in kind of one leader
to manage a part of the organization
and then let them grow their teams.
We don't love the idea of hiring people
based off of a hypothesis that something is going to work.
That's a really good way to have to do layoffs
because the plans you thought were going to work didn't work.
So we always hired one person,
prove out a theory and then let them grow their teams.
So the first hire we made to the team
was actually a product marketing person.
To this day, they lead our product marketing team
and they were the ones to sit between the product team
and the go-to-market teams and really set the messaging.
And quickly we realized this person needs more help

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in kind of setting the messaging, the tone.
So then the second person we hired
was a very talented copywriter.
And that person today kind of leads our creative teams.
And then the third person we actually hired onto the growth team
was a data analyst because the sentiment was
we're not willing to spend a dollar
if we don't know where that money's going
and what it's doing for us,
which a lot of people would assume
that's a very early hire for, you know,
data is too early to hire as number three,
but I still think that we did the right thing there.
Now we have a whole data team, but back then we didn't.
So those were the kind of three teams
that we started with on top.
And then the content person was already at deal
by the time that I joined.
So that was the person I mentioned that was early employee.
So that's kind of how we originally set it.
Now the teams have changed.
So now we have a different structure,
slightly different structure,
which is we have regional teams and functional teams.
The functional teams are basically subject matter experts.
They're good at what they do
and we don't care where they are based in the world.
So those are teams like product marketing,
content, community, events, paid advertisement, brand.
You know, if we are looking for
the best graphic designer in the world,
I don't care where they are.
They can sit wherever in the world.
They are basically functional teams.
And then we have regional teams
because we are selling into a lot of different regions.
We need to make sure that we have local expertise as well.
So we have marketing managers for different key regions for us
that then work with our functional teams
to bring the strategy to life.
So that's kind of how we set it.
I've seen businesses who, you know,
set, build out a regional team

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that has their own paid ads team and their own content team.

But what we have found is when you take people away from their kind of group of expertise.

So if you take a paid ads person and if you have a team of paid ads people and you separate those five people and give them to different regions, instead of letting them sit together and be a tight team, the best practice is learning and the skill, like the leveling up of the skills doesn't happen as fast as they would if all of the technical roles are sitting together.

So we are kind of continuing down the road of functional and regional setup.

So say someone in Turkey wants to run paid ads, they convince the paid growth team to invest in resources and grow in Turkey.

Exactly.

So they would work with our central paid ads team to say, I would like to run paid ads in Turkey.

This is the audience I want to go after.

And then they work together to execute on that strategy.

How does that team decide who's gonna get their time?

Is there a rough approach to that?

So it depends on the total addressable market in a region.

What are the opportunities we're seeing?

What's the competitive landscape like?

So chances are if a market is, you know, what we consider to be tier one, it's a place that we have seen good growth.

We will invest our resources into it.

And then we, along the way we learn and we decide if we're going to double down or pull back a little bit.

Awesome.

I want to chat a bit about culture, culture deal.

So we had Jeff from Ramp on and their culture is described by one word velocity.

Also being one of you being the fastest growing business of all time.

I'm curious how you contrast your culture and broadly how you think about culture at a startup and how you help create the culture ideal.

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Yeah. So I would say culture is made up of two components. One is what do you bring to the company as a team member and what does the company give back to you? So what we expect the team members to bring to us is, you know, our version of velocity is something that we call deal speed is that we want to make sure that we act with urgency. It doesn't matter how big the team has grown. We want to act with urgency on behalf of our customers. If a customer has a problem, they're not going to wait two weeks to get an answer for that. They're going to get that answer within 24 hours. If we need to build out a product because many customers are asking for it, that product is going to get built in one-tenth the time that any of our competitors will likely build it in. So deal speed is very, very important for us. And that's something we expect from our team members who are committing to it, to say, what's the quickest way I can solve this problem properly and to repeatedly kind of push themselves to kind of act with urgency. We also care, you know, that we remain positive. You know, we have deep old optimism because we are in a new space. So if someone's going to come into deal and they're going to be pessimistic and they're like, I don't think that's going to work for X, Y, Z reasons, they're going to just slow things down. We need people to ask the question of, I think it's going to work for these four reasons. Now let's see what are the risks associated with it and let's seek to kind of solve those risks. That's again, something we expect from our team members. And then the last one kind of, well, not the last one, but one of the kind of third important ones is, you know, fully giving a shit about your customer. Like at the end of the day, the product that we have, we are dealing with humans. We're dealing with their livelihood, the way that gate paid.

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We're dealing with the way companies hire.
It's so incredibly personal
if someone doesn't get their paycheck on time
or if someone gets into a legal trouble
because their contract wasn't set up the proper way.
So recognizing that it's not a software
and a platform that we're trying to make it the best.
But it's like, no, it's a business trying to pay a human
so they can live their lives
and the business can continue growing.
So that care is something that we need people
to bring to the table.
Now, in return of those things coming,
what we give back as a company is, you know,
outside of obviously your pay,
your benefits package, et cetera, is, you know,
we offer people the flexibility to choose how
and when they do their job,
they get to decide on where they work from,
hours they work.
So we basically give people all the freedom
to set up their life, how they want to,
as long as they come to the table giving us what they need.
So I would say we do have an intense culture
and that's expected, we share that openly with people.
But at the end of the day, that's also what sets us apart.
I love this deal speed.
Are these core values basically within deal?
These are values that you come back to?
Yes, exactly.
And these are values that we publicly share as well.
How early in the life cycle of the company
did you all come up with these values?
That's something that a lot of startups think about as like,
when should we actually crystallize these values?
So we came up with them.
I believe it was about a year in,
but we didn't sit around the table and say,
what should we call our values?
Like deal speed was something that, you know,
our CEO would tell it people.
He'd be like, okay, I want you to do this,
but I want you to do a deal speed.

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And one of the early jokes was like,
let's have company swag that's deal speedo
and things like that.
It was already used so frequently with people
that we were just like, okay, we keep saying this.
Let's also kind of like define what it actually is for us
and set it in stone and shirt with people.
So we did go through that exercise probably about a year
into the company being kind of existing,
but the culture happened well before we established that.
Reminds me at Airbnb,
there was a team that came up with the core values.
I think it was like four years in probably.
And there were six of them.
And then a few years later, they realized two of them
aren't actually true.
They're like aspirational.
And there's this kind of recognition
that value should be who you are, not who you hope to be,
because it just doesn't click.
And so they actually cut those values
and they ended up having just four values.
And maybe one day they'll bring them back.
And so I think that's a really good lesson
is you wanna kind of see who you already are
and then just represent them in a really interesting,
creative way.
Yes, exactly.
There's a version of, what did you call it?
Default Optimism, yeah, Default Optimism.
Airbnb's version of that was Embrace the Adventure,
which is just like, this is gonna be crazy.
Just go for it, embrace it.
This is what it's gonna be like.
Exactly.
And try and see how can I solve this?
Like how can this be done instead of why it won't work?
Yeah, I love that.
And as urgency piece comes up again and again
in these interviews I'm doing,
what I think of is Frank Sluteman,
I think is his name the founder of Snowflake,
has his book called Amp It Up.

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Yes.

All about just like how they made Snowflake work and something he comes back to is just you need to constantly have a sense of urgency because when you don't, people get bored and they actually end up liking their job less because it's just like, I don't really know what I'm doing.

Things are like sort of moving along and there's actually a lot of value in moving fast.

Jeff talked about this as just like, you have less burnout when people feel like things are getting done and out the door.

Yeah, it's incredibly fulfilling.

You know, I look back and sometimes things, when for example, when the SVB was going through the issues that were going through, the entire team had to work on a Sunday to kind of communicate with our customers.

Like, no, we're good, don't worry about it.

But I remember that Sunday, you know, I had to miss out on a theater.

I was so excited to see, but it just felt like, oh my God, like we're in this, it was like a war room, we're doing it.

And that felt good.

I didn't necessarily show up on Monday feeling already burned out, but it was more like, yes, like I felt alive.

And I think the right people will feel that way.

Yeah, and as long as it's not like constantly for years, just endless late nights and weekends.

It can't always be wartime.

Right, I find that those end up being the most memorable, meaningful moments is when you're working really, really hard on something that you're excited about.

And it has to be something you're excited about and are proud of.

Yes.

Last question, I saw on Twitter, you showed this photo of your home office and it was this incredible view at the window and then you took a photo facing your desk

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and it was an ironing board.
And two questions there, one is just,
how did that all happen?
And then two, I think you mentioned somewhere
that you didn't even meet a lot of your coworkers
for a year and a half after joining D.O.L.
It was very remote forward.
So I'm curious also just how you made remote work
for you in that environment.
Yeah, so I'll explain the ironing board first.
So that was because I was actually visiting
my family in Istanbul.
And in the setup that we have, there's one desk.
So my husband and I go rock, paper, scissors
and we'll see who gets the desk
and who gets to come up with a secondary solution.
And he won the desk, so I had to come up
with a creative solution.
And because the view behind me was stunning of the Bosphorus,
every meeting I joined people were like, wow,
like I love your view, this is amazing.
And I was like, I don't know, you guys,
I'm sitting on an ironing board right now.
And to me that was both funny
and I kind of wanted to do a reality check with people
to be like, come on, like this is not as kind of glorious
as it looks, but at the same time,
it really like in that moment, I was like, this is awesome.
You know, I worked at D.O.L. previously
when I wanted to go visit my family in Istanbul
and I live in Canada.
I would have to use my kind of days off to go.
And for me, it just meant a lot to be able to like do my work
regardless of where I am.
You know, I had a full day of work
and meetings and everything
and my work just kind of continued
and I was also be able to be with my family.
So like it was a moment of deals, promise,
kind of coming true in a very real way in my life.
And I thought it was kind of hilarious.
My dad thought it was so unprofessional
that I shared that with the public then.

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He hasn't fully wrapped his head around the startup world.
So, you know, it was just one of those moments
of sharing that, yeah, work can be remote
and it can be whatever you want it to be.
So that's the kind of the story behind it.
In this moment as we're recording this,
I am in a proper home office with a desk
and a back supported chair.
So, you know, it changes all the time.
And in terms of kind of going back to the second question
of early days not meeting the team members,
as I said, I joined D.O.L. in July 2020.
Pandemic was kind of at its peak.
Me being based in Canada,
Canada had a very strict restrictions of
you can't leave the country, we won't let you back in.
So I had to stay put and I worked for a year and a half
at D.O.L. before for the first time
where I met our team members was at a conference in Lisbon.
And I showed up and it was the surreal moment
because I worked with them for a year and a half.
We'd accomplished so much, you know,
our revenue was already, you know, way past \$50 million.
And I was seeing these people for the first time.
So that was kind of very funny.
But if I look at the early days of D.O.L.,
there's a lot of little stories like that where, you know,
we forgot to create swag until we reached a billion dollars.
And it was actually when we were,
our photo was going to be on the NASDAQ
and we wanted to give team picture that we're like,
guys, we need to have t-shirts.
Can someone please run to a store in New York
and like print our logo on something.
So a lot of those things kind of just by the nature
of being a pandemic business kind of came in a little bit later.
But the thing that allowed, I think for me,
and D.O.L. to build the culture early on was
because we all work from home,
we've been like that from day one.
We have the option to go into, you know,
we works and co-working spaces
if that's something that you choose.

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But we all get to show up as like our very authentic selves.
So, you know, people have met my pets and my partner
well before they would have if I was showing up to an office.
So there's that kind of sincerity
that comes with being in someone's home
that we really relied on early on.
And as a company, like I never felt the pressure
to show up in a certain way
or, you know, dress up for meetings or anything.
So just being able to show up as yourself
and, you know, whether you're an introverted person
who never likes to turn on their camera
or you're someone who's going to be like,
here me, my dog, that just naturally built a team culture
and kind of camaraderie well before
we could be together in person.
Clearly, it has worked out.
Meltem, is there anything else that you want to share
before we get to our very exciting lightning round?
We had a really good conversation.
The one thing I would kind of tell people is
most of growth, people assume is very difficult.
I'm not necessarily saying it's easy,
but it's relatively straightforward
when you go back to the first principles
of just figuring out where are the people at,
how can I add value,
and how as long as your product is there
to actually bring them value.
So I would say like people should just recognize
that it's much simpler than they think it is.
It just takes a lot of discipline
to kind of execute on it.
It's not rocket science.
Quite an empowering statement.
I love it.
With that, we've reached a very exciting lightning round.
Are you ready?
I am ready.
Let's do this.
What are two or three books
that you've recommended most to other people?
From the nonfiction world,

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how will you measure your life by Clay Christensen?

That's one I recommend kind of takes the business

learnings that he's had and applies it to your life.

It's a very short and easy to kind of get through a book.

Outside of that, I constantly recommend fiction.

I think at one point,

we became like, it became uncultured fiction

that like every moment you have

and needs to be productive and you need to learn something.

I don't care what fiction it is you read.

You can read Judy Bloom for all I care,

but just refiction.

Like be creative, do something with your brain

other than reading nonfiction

and learning things all the time.

I've had to make that shift myself and it's been great,

but I still get drawn to nonfiction, but a good reminder.

Yes.

What are some favorite recent movie or TV shows you've loved?

Favorite recent movie,

I think along with everybody else was Oppenheimer.

I thought it was great.

I do wish they explored a little bit more

of like why he was the person

that drove everybody to excellence,

but overall love the movie kind of did not think

I could sit through three hours without peeing, but I did.

And favorite recent TV show was The Summer I Turned Pretty.

I absolutely love it.

I don't care that it's actually designed for TV dramas.

I enjoyed every second of it.

What is a favorite interview question that you like to ask?

Candidates, when you're interviewing them.

What would your siblings say about you?

It's very telling.

If they have siblings, if they don't,

I will say what will your parents say about you,

but it's very telling what you think

other people think of you.

What do you look for in their answer

that gives you a sign that they're a good candidate or not?

I look for sincerity and self-awareness.

Like your siblings are never...

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I mean, I love my sister,
but she'll probably should talk me a lot.
And being aware of that is very important.
Like if someone's like, my siblings will say
I'm very organized and that I'm the one
that brings our family together,
like that's probably a bullshit answer.
But if they're like, oh yeah,
like they'll say these weird things about me
that shows a little bit of like self-awareness
and humbleness that I want to see in a person.
What is a favorite product you've recently discovered
that you really like?
Oh, this is a dangerous one.
So two, one was new strips.
They're caffeine strips.
I find caffeine pills and everything,
or when I drink coffee,
it's like accidentally I'll have 300 milligrams
and then I'm buzzing,
but these are 50 milligrams each,
so it's very easy to stop yourself
and they don't taste bad.
So those I like for when I just need a little boost.
So they're just like strips that you put in your mouth?
Kind of like listerine strips
and you put it on your tongue
and then it also doesn't give you the jitters
and it's just 50 milligrams,
which is a very mild cup of coffee.
Microdosing caffeine.
Exactly.
Beautiful.
And the second one is,
I recently was gifted a personalized library stamp,
which I love,
because I love to give books away.
So I stamped them with my library stamp
and I like to think that one day
in a second hand book shop,
I'm going to run into it.
That's amazing.
There's a camp at Burning Man that's a library

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and you can borrow books
and you have to return it the year,
the next year when you come back to Burning Man.
Which is amazing.
And then there's a guy that has a megaphone
or he's just like,
hey, book has been returned.
Makes the whole scene about it.
What is a favorite life motto
that you often come back to
or share with other people either at work or in life?
The world is run by insecure overachievers.
I used to think my insecurity was a downfall
and I would just kind of hide it
and try to pretend it's not there.
And then someone that I really look up to told that to me,
I'm like, okay, so I'm not the only one.
And it's just, you know, I think,
I do think world is run by a bunch of people
that have something to prove for a good reason or not,
but it's better to embrace it than to pretend like
you're all confident and you're just doing this
because you're brilliant.
Oh my God, so good.
Final question,
what is your favorite Canadian food you live in Canada?
And thus the question.
Okay, it's not particularly food, but Caesars?
They're basically Bloody Mary's with clam juice.
Oh, Bloody Caesar, is that what they're called?
They're called Caesars.
They're called Caesars.
But the American equivalent would be a Bloody Mary.
It's so much better than a Bloody Mary.
It's not vegan.
And then the reason I qualified as food
is when you ordered in Canada,
it comes with like pepperoni sticks and pickle asparagus
and they'll shove a whole meal in there.
And it's just amazing
and something that America should definitely adapt to.
I think I've had one, I think I prefer Bloody Mary's,
but a good pitch for the Caesars.

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Meltem, thank you so much for being here.
We talked about growth strategy, team building,
deal speak, default optimism, so many things.
Really appreciate you making the time.
Two final questions, working folks finding online
if they want to reach out.
And how can listeners be useful to you?
So they can reach out to me on Twitter at Meltem K.
I'm the fastest to respond there.
Please don't reach out to me on LinkedIn.
I never respond there.
And the way readers can be useful to me is if they,
one, we're always looking for feedback on deals.
If you see something out there that you think could be better,
let me know and I'll make sure to communicate it
to the team, whatever that may be.
And also if anybody has tips that they think
I would benefit from or any good book fiction
book recommendations, I'm always open to them.
Amazing.
Meltem, thank you again so much for being here.
Thank you so much for having me.
Bye everyone.
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