FROM SOLOIST TO CHOIR

The Real Way to Scale Trust in the Age of AI

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From Soloist to Choir: The Real Way to Scale Trust in the Age of AI

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This is the third in a monthly series of mini-books on how trust is built, earned, and compounded in the age of AI. The first, *From Megaphone to Magnet*, and the second, *You Are Not One Funnel Away*, are available at IAmTomSchwab.com/books.

The "trust portfolio" concept is credited to Joe Pulizzi, as presented at the Build a Better Agency Summit hosted by the Agency Management Institute. Tone of voice development referenced with thanks to Darren Horwitz and TenTen Group.

CONTENTS

What's Inside

INTRODUCTION

THE BRAVEST VOICE IN THE ROOM

You became the voice of your business because you had to.

In the beginning, there was no one else. You were the founder, the salesperson, the marketer, and the face. You did the interviews. You wrote the posts. You took the stage. When someone asked who's behind this company, the honest answer was you, and only you.

It worked. Your voice built the trust that built the business. And so you kept going, one more interview, one more post, one more talk, because the thing that got you here was you. Founder-led marketing is the most powerful growth engine a small business has. I have built my own companies on it, and I believe in it completely. Heck, my title is Chief Evangelist Officer.

The uncomfortable truth I want to put in front of you, founder to founder: the very thing that built your business is now the thing most likely to cap it.

Have an open mind. As Bix Bickson says, "If you haven't changed your mind lately, how do you know you still have one?"

What got you here is now your ceiling.

You only have so many hours. So many interviews you can do before they start to sound the same. So many topics you can credibly own. And in a market changing faster than any of us expected, you have a new problem the old playbook never accounted for: the machines are now deciding who to recommend, and they are not recommending you nearly as often as you think.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SOLOIST'S TRAP

In the Navy, we had a phrase that has stayed with me for thirty years.

> **One is none.**

If you have only one of something critical, a single pump, a single valve, a single point of failure, then functionally you have none. Because the day it fails, and it will, you are dead in the water. Redundancy was not a luxury on a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. It was the difference between a mission and a disaster.

Most founder-led businesses are running on one. One voice. One face. One personality carries the entire weight of the brand's trust. And like every single point of failure, it feels perfectly fine, right up until the moment it doesn't.

THE FRAGILITY YOU CAN'T SEE

When everything depends on one person, three things become true, and all three are dangerous.

You cannot scale it. A soloist can only sing so many songs. You can do one interview a week, maybe two, before the quality drops or the material repeats. Your reach is capped at the size of your own calendar.

You cannot protect it. If the one voice gets sick, burns out, says something regrettable, or simply needs a vacation, the entire marketing engine stalls. A single controversy, a single bad week, and there is no one else to carry the tune.

You cannot sell it. A business whose trust rests entirely with one founder is very hard to value and even harder to exit. Buyers do not want to purchase a brand that walks out the door when you do.

THE CAUTIONARY TALE

Think about the brands built entirely on a single, magnificent voice.

Zig Ziglar was one of the most influential voices in sales and motivation for half a century. He was extraordinary. And when he passed in 2012, the brand built on his voice has largely faded with him, because there was no choir behind the soloist to carry it forward.

Look at the great personal brands today and ask a quiet question: who is the second voice? For some, I cannot name one. Tony Robbins has been a titan for forty years, but who is the heir apparent, the next voice ready to carry that stage when he steps off it? When that powerful voice is gone, retired, or simply tired, what remains? A catalog of recordings and a brand with no future tense.

> **A soloist can fill a room. Only a choir can fill it after the soloist is gone.**

The trap is that being the soloist feels like strength. The applause is real. The audience is yours. But strength that cannot be transferred, protected, or scaled is not strength. It is exposure. And there is a new force in the market about to make that exposure far more expensive.

CHAPTER TWO

AI RECOMMENDS PEOPLE, NOT BRANDS

In the summer of 2024, one of our clients, Agent.AI, told us something that changed how we think about everything.

They explained that one of the key ways to get recommended by AI, whatever you want to call it, LLMO, AEO, GEO, is to have **share of voice** and **positive sentiment** across the places where real conversations happen. Forget being discovered. The machines are increasingly the first referee of who gets recommended. And the machines have a clear preference.

AI RECOMMENDS PEOPLE, NOT BRANDS

Here is the pattern we keep seeing, and the one I want you to sit with: AI is indexing and recommending **people**, not brands. When someone asks an AI assistant who the experts are in a field, it returns names of humans far more readily than it returns company names.

You already see the same logic on social media. When a brand account shows up in your LinkedIn feed, it is usually a promoted post, an ad. Posting from the company page does almost nothing organically. The reach lives with the people, not the logo.

This was driven home for me at an Entrepreneurs' Organization event. A presenter pointed out that the founder typically has ten times the following of the brand. Think of Elon Musk versus Tesla. Richard Branson versus Virgin. Mark Cuban versus any of his companies. The human out-pulls the brand by an order of magnitude, every time. I routinely mentor entrepreneurs and consistently see the same trend.

> **The machines recommend humans. So a brand with only one human is a brand with one shot.**

WHY ONE VOICE CAN'T WIN THE INDEX

Here is where the soloist's trap and the new referee collide.

If AI rewards share of voice, and AI recommends people, then a company represented by a single person can only ever capture a single person's share. One name. One set of topics. One demographic that name happens to resonate with. The rest of your potential share of voice, the audiences, topics, and conversations your one voice does not reach, simply goes uncaptured.

At Interview Valet, one of our core values is **"More is not better. Better is better."** So when we understood this, we did not just tell our founder (me) to do more interviews and repeat himself. That would have been more, not better.

Instead, we did something that, on the surface, looks like the opposite of focus. We added voices. And it became the best growth decision we have made in a decade. The chapters ahead show you why it works, and then exactly how we did it.

CHAPTER THREE

A CHOIR OUTPERFORMS A SOLOIST

Joe Pulizzi built the largest content marketing event in the world. He is the founder of Content Marketing Institute and Content Marketing World, and the author of *Content Inc.* If anyone earned the right to be the soloist, it was Joe.

Recently, presenting at the Build a Better Agency Summit, he shared the concept that names this whole shift better than anything I have heard. He called it the **trust portfolio**.

DON'T BET IT ALL ON ONE VOICE

Joe's insight was simple and profound. If he was the only speaker, the only voice, the only face of Content Marketing World, then he was putting all of his bets on one person, himself. So instead, he built a portfolio of trusted voices across his leadership team.

No single person was the whole brand. Each owned a piece, a format, an audience, a kind of trust. Together they were a portfolio, and like any good portfolio, it was diversified against the failure of any single holding.

> A soloist bets everything on one voice. A portfolio spreads the trust, and compounds it.

THE MEDIA COMPANY MOVE

Watch what Scott Galloway has done, because it is the trust portfolio executed in real time.

“Prof G” took off as a personal brand, a smart, entertaining professor with a big audience. He was the soloist. But he was smart enough to see the ceiling, and he started bringing in other voices who spoke to audiences he could not. He launched Prof G Markets with Ed Elson. He launched Raging Moderates with Jessica Tarlov. He is deliberately pairing himself with younger, more specialized talent.

He is the trust umbrella. Underneath it, he is building a trust flywheel and a media flywheel that produces far more content than he ever could alone. He is moving from “I am a popular professor” to “I am a trusted media platform that launches voices, shows, products, and subscriptions,” and one day, perhaps, sells. The extra voices are not an accident. They are the strategy.

Dave Ramsey did the same. He has built a roster of personalities who share his tone and values while bringing their own style and attracting audiences he could not. The result is a brand with a visible succession plan, one that does not end when one voice does. Josh Dorkin started the BiggerPockets podcast. He quickly brought on Brandon Turner as cohost. Over the years, they have added more voices bringing on new hosts and spin-off shows. It allowed them to be acquired by private equity in 2018 and again in 2024. I doubt this would have happened had Josh been a soloist.

The pattern is everywhere once you see it. Venture capital firms, law offices, consulting firms, and countless others have understood it for generations: you develop a bench of experts, each with their own reputation, rather than betting the firm on a single rainmaker.

OUR OWN WALK: THE NICHE WE ALMOST KILLED

I want to be transparent about this, because it is the most honest proof I have.

As the founder, I was already doing a podcast interview a week evangelizing for our category, our company, and our clients. When we understood the share-of-voice insight. The obvious answer would have been to have me do more interviews. But more is not better. So we brought other voices to appear on podcast interviews to evangelize for the company:

> **Liz Brooks**, a senior client strategist with an impressive PR background.
> **Kristen Nolan**, MBA, a senior client strategist with deep business and client insights.
> **Chloe Williamson**, a senior client strategist who ran our health, nutrition, and wellness pod.

Here is the part few know. Before this, we were considering shutting down the health, nutrition, and wellness vertical. It wasn't generating enough leads. I was the problem. I acknowledged that I was not the right voice for that audience. A 58-year-old male who doesn't know the difference between a keto and a calorie does not build trust with wellness buyers.

Chloe started doing the interviews in Q4 of 2024. Within four months, that vertical went from the chopping block to one of our **fastest-growing**.

> **Same hymnal. Different singer. Completely different result.**

We now average around ten interviews a month for Interview Valet across our voices, not one person repeating himself ten times, but a choir, each member singing the same values in their own range, to their own audience, with their own background and insight. That is how we as a company reach, get indexed, and recommend to people I never could alone as a soloist.

The result? Since May of 2025, **AI has been our number one referral source.** I am convinced the choir is why.

WE TEACH THIS, TOO

This is not just our story. It is what we now build with clients:

The law firm putting different subject-matter-expert attorneys out front, so the brand is carried by many credible voices, not one named partner.

The franchise consultants, each with a distinct point of view, reaching franchise buyers that a single consultant's voice would never resonate with.

The venture capital firm, fielding a different expert for each thesis, so the firm's authority compounds across partners instead of resting on one.

Knowing it works is one thing. Knowing how to build it is another. The next two chapters give you both: the framework, and then the exact system we used.

CHAPTER FOUR

FOUR MOVES TO BUILD THE CHOIR

Going from soloist to choir is not about stepping back. It is about stepping up, into the role of conductor. You are no longer just a voice. You are the one who tunes the voices, points them at the right audiences, and keeps them singing together.

A choir that sings whatever it wants is just noise. The conductor is what turns many voices into one powerful, recognizable sound. Here are the four moves.

MOVE ONE

Find the Gaps in Your Sound

Your single voice has range, but not infinite range. There are audiences you don't reach, topics you can't credibly own, and demographics that simply trust a different kind of messenger. Map those gaps honestly, the way I had to admit I was not the face for wellness, nor who people want to see on Instagram.

> ACTION
>
> List the audiences, topics, and demographics your current voice is *not* reaching. For each gap, name the person on your team whose background, style, or insight could fill it. That list is your choir's roster.

MOVE TWO

Set the Shared Hymnal

We are all singing the same song; we just sing it in different ranges, with different focus and different insight.

ACTION

Write down your core values and your tone of voice in plain language. This is the hymnal. Every voice you add must be able to sing from it authentically, in their own style. You can create a tone of voice by auditing the founder's previous talks, interviews, and writings.

MOVE THREE

Point Everyone at the Same Hill

A choir needs common objectives, or the voices pull apart. Each member can have their own audience and format, like Joe's portfolio of podcast, blog, newsletter, research, and magazine, but they must be rowing toward the same business goals. Trust built by one voice should compound the whole brand, not just that individual.

ACTION

Define the one or two shared objectives every voice is working toward this quarter (for example, share of voice in a category, or leads to one offer). Make sure each person knows how their interviews ladder up to it.

MOVE FOUR

Put the Choir on Stage

Voices grow by singing in front of audiences, not by rehearsing alone. We let our talent guest on our own show to help them gain experience and confidence. The strategic podcast interview is the ideal stage: a real, human conversation on a show your ideal clients already trust. It puts your people on borrowed stages, builds their reputation, and gets them heard by your super consumers and indexed by the machines as the humans worth recommending.

There is a quieter benefit, too. Putting your team out front recognizes them, energizes them, and shows you trust them. Prospective clients ask me all the time whether they'll get to work with "the talent." The choir *is* the talent, and it answers the real question every buyer has: who will I actually be working with?

ACTION

Choose one team member beyond yourself and book them on three relevant podcast interviews this quarter. Give them an audience you can't reach. Then measure the leads, the sentiment, and how the AI starts to notice.

"BUT WHAT IF THEY LEAVE?"

It's the first objection I hear. My answer: if they were going to leave, they'd have left anyway. And when they go, the content stays. I would far rather put my team out front. It builds trust, it shows the real depth of our bench, and proves we are not just one person in a basement. For a small business, that depth often moves a buyer from interested to committed.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW WE BUILT OURS

Frameworks are easy to nod along to and hard to put into motion. So let me take you behind the curtain and show you the exact system we used to turn one voice into a choir. It was not instant, and it was not magic. It was a sequence, and you can run the same one.

STEP ONE: NAME THE GAPS

We started where this whole book started, by being honest about the audiences I was not reaching as the founder. Some gaps were about age. Some were about focus. Most businesses have multiple ideal customer profiles, but the founder usually only resonates with one of them.

I resonated with the seasoned B2B founder. I did not resonate with the wellness buyer, or the audience that lives on Instagram, or the operator who wanted to hear from someone younger who had walked their exact road. Naming those gaps told us precisely which voices we needed, and what each one had to be able to do that I could not.

> **Don’t ask who is free to do interviews. Ask who can reach the people you can’t.**

STEP TWO: FIND THE HYMNAL

Before we put anyone else on a stage, we had to define the tone of voice they would all sing from. Otherwise we would not be building a choir, we would be building noise.

We did this with the help of Darren Horwitz at TenTen Group, a top brand firm out of New York City. We fed in everything that already carried my voice: our eBooks, our webinars, and most importantly, the founder's podcast interviews. There is a useful lesson buried in that work. We found it typically takes 12 to 18 interviews to lock in a tone of voice. After that, it barely changes. The voice is already there; you just have to capture it.

SEE A SAMPLE

From that work came our Tone of Voice Report, and it gave us far more than a style note. It gave us our foundational stories, our point of view, our do's and don'ts, our brand voice attributes for both writing and speaking, our level of formality, our core points of view, our signature language and sound bites, and our voice pillars.

That report became our hymnal. Every voice we added could now sing from it, in their own range, without ever drifting from who we are.

STEP THREE: GIVE EACH VOICE A SOLO

Next, we built a one-sheet for each speaker, focused on the topics that person alone could own. Not a watered-down copy of my talking points, but the subject matter where their background, their insight, and their credibility were strongest. Liz owned the PR focus. Kristen owned the business and customer experience. Chloe owned the health/nutrition/wellness vertical in a way I never could.

STEP FOUR: CHASE THE OVERLOOKED AUDIENCES

With voices and topics defined, we went looking for the audiences I had been missing, the shows and communities the founder simply could not reach, and we reached out to the host on the right voice for that room. The gap analysis from Step One told us exactly where to aim.

STEP FIVE: REVIEW EVERY PERFORMANCE

A choir that never listens back never improves. After interviews air, we hold a monthly review and evaluate each one against the Tone of Voice Report. Where did we stay true to it? Where did we wander from the company's point of view? This matters most for younger talent, and we keep the feedback constructive and largely positive, because we are developing voices, not grading them.

STEP SIX: SING TOGETHER

We also hold a monthly debrief where the choir shares ideas and best practices. Some of our best new topics and angles have come straight out of those meetings. Like any choir, it takes coordination. Each member needs to know what the others are doing, and everyone learns from everyone else. That is what keeps many voices sounding like one brand.

> **A soloist only has to listen to themselves. A choir has to listen to each other.**

Six steps. Notice the gaps, find the hymnal, give each voice a solo, chase the audiences you're missing, review every performance, and sing together. That is how we did it, and how you can too.

CONCLUSION

THE VOICE THAT OUTLASTS YOU

You became the voice of your business because you had to. That bravery built something real. But the next act of leadership is not singing louder or longer. It is building the choir that lets the music continue, and grow, beyond any single voice, including yours.

A choir scales past your calendar. It captures share of voice your one name never could. It protects you when any single voice has a bad week. It recognizes and energizes your team. And it builds a company with real enterprise value, one that does not walk out the door when you do.

The machines have made the choice clearer than ever. They recommend people, plural. They reward many human voices having real conversations, not one logo broadcasting alone. The market is no longer asking the soloist to sing louder. It is asking the founder to become a conductor.

> **One is none. So build the choir.**

You do not have to stop being the voice. You have to stop being the *only* voice. Tune your team. Point them at the audiences you can't reach. Send them onto the stages where trust is built, one real conversation at a time.

Do that, and you build something most founders never do: a sound bigger than yourself, and a business that can outlast its founder.

Tom Schwab

YOUR NEXT STEP

CONDUCT THE CHOIR

If this gave you a new way to think about your team's voices, here is the on-ramp.

GET YOUR TONE OF VOICE REPORT

For all of our clients, we audit their past interviews, talks, and writings to create a detailed Tone of Voice Report, the hymnal your whole choir sings from. See what one looks like.

interviewvalet.com/additional-services

SCAN TO SEE

LISTEN TO THE PODCAST

Each week I host a guest on the Podcast Interview Marketing Show. Often they are our internal team members, our choir.

PodcastInterviewMarketing.com

SCAN TO LISTEN

BOOK A DISCOVERY CALL

Ready to turn your team into a choir of trusted voices that scales? Let's talk, human to human.

interviewvalet.com/dccal

SCAN TO BOOK

ABOUT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Schwab has been called the Godfather of Podcast Interview Marketing. As the founder and Chief Evangelist Officer of Interview Valet, the first and longest-running podcast interview marketing agency, he has helped hundreds of entrepreneurs, authors, and thought leaders build trust and grow their businesses through real conversations on the right shows.

Before building Interview Valet, Tom ran nuclear power plants on U.S. Navy aircraft carriers. That experience, where precision, preparation, redundancy, and clear communication were not optional, shaped everything he built afterward, including his conviction that one is none.

Tom is the author of *Podcast Guest Profits* and a sought-after speaker on category design, trust-based selling, and modern go-to-market strategy. He is a member of Entrepreneurs' Organization and coaches early-stage entrepreneurs through EO Accelerator.

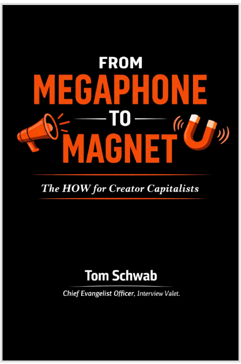
In September 2024, Tom and his wife Karen walked the Camino de Santiago. He describes it as one of the most clarifying experiences of his life. Five hundred miles of conversation, and proof that the best things never come from a single voice shouting, but from many voices, walking together.

He lives in Lawton, Michigan.

THE SERIES

Keep the Conversation Going

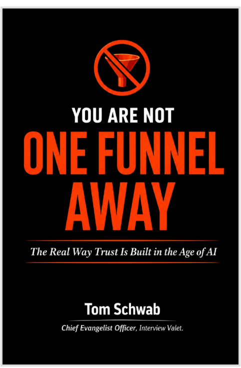
Each month, a new mini-book on how trust is built, earned, and compounded in the age of AI.



From Megaphone to Magnet

BOOK ONE

The HOW for Creator Capitalists. Why broadcasting to everyone gets you ignored, and how to become a magnet that attracts the right people through strategic podcast interviews.



You Are Not One Funnel Away

BOOK TWO

The Real Way Trust Is Built in the Age of AI. The funnel was a phase, not the future. Why the best things in business have always come through conversation, not automation.

GET THE WHOLE SERIES

Read every mini-book in the series, free, and see what's new this month.

interviewvalet.com/minibooks

SCAN FOR ALL