

## **Igniting the Possibilities for Growth**

By Harold Strunk and John Boyle

There is one question all businesses have in common; how do we grow? It has often been said that if your business is not growing it is dying. Growth is the life-blood of every business—large or small. Although business may require a different rate of growth to remain sustainable, so long as operating costs continues to rise, and they always do, growth is a must.

Starting from the premise that every business is founded on providing goods or services that meet a consumer need or want, what happens when the market for that good or service is saturated or the need changes? How well businesses stay on top of these changes in the market and how quickly they react is the difference between winning and losing.

We can cite example after example of companies that are no longer in business because they were unable or unwilling to adapt their products to new consumer trends. Does Kodak ring a bell?

On the other hand, we can also cite companies that came back from the dead because they identified the necessity and were willing to reinvent themselves to meet the new demands of the market place. Companies like IBM and GE have diversified or completely changed their offerings with remarkable results.

So, what is it that allows some companies to adapt while others get stuck in an old paradigm?

Leadership is the obvious answer, but what do successful leaders do to create the environment and culture of driving growth and innovation? It starts with three key elements to creating sustainable growth.

### **Co-Responsiveness With The Environment**

Growth oriented companies are always looking to their customers and the market to spot trends and identify needs. Their leaders respond quickly to changes in the environment, develop a sense of urgency and excitement for the rest of the organization and compel the rest of the organization to respond swiftly as well. They focus their organization to be external facing, which not only shapes their product lines to be as customer centric as possible, but their business processes as well.

There is a completely different attitude and approach when the organization is truly focused on the customer. When the interaction between the rest of the organization and the external environment is reciprocal, all levels of the organization think in terms of how does my activity help my customer and how will I make the necessary adjustments to meet the market need. This type of thinking leads to a much tighter relationship with the customer and allows for a

better understanding of their wants and needs, which in turn leads to product or service ideas that fit with the market place.

### **Innovation**

Innovation begins with a strong understanding of the customer and the market, but it goes far beyond that—you can understand the needs of the market and still not excel at creating and commercializing products to meet those needs. An organization demonstrates its commitment to innovation by designing processes and systems to enable innovation and by constructively challenging common practices in an effort to continually foster new ideas and make improvements within the organization. There must be a methodology in place to ensure the products can be produced and delivered to the market in a way that is commercially viable. There are a lot of great ideas but if you cannot deliver them to the customer at a price they are willing to pay, you do not have a viable product.

The real innovation comes into play when an organization values breakthrough thinking by creating an environment where new ideas are welcomed and allowed time to run their course before redirecting or divesting the efforts. When the organization is versatile, flexible and agile in their responsiveness to market shifts, customer needs, and organizational issues, people and teams responsible demonstrate change leadership by positioning resources that enable effective, real-time solutions. Successful companies unleash the power of their organization to find ways to deliver products to the customer in a profitable way.

### **Collaborative and Collective Leadership makes it all possible**

Collaborative and collective leadership is the ability to leverage the shared knowledge and wisdom of your leadership and entire organization to ensure the strategy and culture are aligned to create the environment for growth to occur. When this is done well the priorities of the organization become crystal clear and the appropriate resources are allocated to the growth initiatives. Here are some key characteristics of organizations poised for enduring growth:

1. Recognizes and reinforces good performance and takes action quickly when expectations are not met.
2. Ensures that individuals, teams and the overall organization are fully capable of meeting business demands. Leadership identifies and develops future leaders, prodding them to discover new possibilities for themselves and the organization.
3. Places the right people in the right jobs and when they are not, swiftly takes action to make sure there is a good person/job/role fit.
4. Stimulates employee engagement by offering challenging work and a large degree of responsibility to employees. The culture pushes leadership, employees and others to work at peak levels and beyond. The culture pushes people beyond their comfort to achieve the highest standards of excellence.
5. Leadership and employees demonstrate that everyone in the organization is valued. People treat each other with respect, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to be the best they can be. The brilliance in others' contributions is allowed to emerge.

6. The organization and teams work together as true units of performance; responsible and accountable collectively for the company's business transformation.

When leadership models the behavior for the entire organization, priorities becomes crystal clear and the appropriate resources are allocated to the growth initiatives. Without strong leadership to drive a growth agenda, chances are the company with will not realize the innovative products and services that will sustain the organization and allow it to endure in the market.

Is your leadership team and organization focused on legacy behavior and the status quo or are they collectively driving the growth agenda that will sustain your company for the long term?

---

**Convergency**Partners *is a full-service, partner-owned management-consulting firm with clients located throughout North America. It serves CEOs, C-level teams, divisional and functional leadership.*