



Galvanizing employees and customers for innovation and market superiority

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Be thoughtfully ruthless, the key to exponential growth.

Why do some leaders grow their company at a rapid pace while others flounder? When leaders experience hyper-growth it is easy to get caught in the here and now of current customers, revenue and profit goals, but this short term focus will not sustain the growth of your business.

When I advise clients to be ruthless, I often see them physically wince. It has connotations of being brutal, selfish and heartless. Once I explain my definition of ruthlessness I get more nods and acknowledgement that it could actually help accelerate results.

So here is what I mean when I say be more thoughtfully ruthless -

- Be direct and deliberate.
- Make a decision, communicate it, move on, you are the boss after all.
- Not everyone is going to like you or agree with you so don't have that as one of your goals or worry about it.
- Your time is precious and you control it, ruthlessly.

Now are you ready to hear about being more ruthless? Here are some tips on how the most successful leaders have achieved exponential growth.

Achieving exponential Growth

I. Spend more time on strategy than execution.

The more senior you are, the less time you should spend on issues that impact the business in the next three months. Successful leaders spend a relatively small percentage of time on today's issues; they focus the majority of their time on exploring potential new revenue and profit opportunities while making strategic investment decisions. They are ruthless about where they spend their time and their leadership teams time to make this happen.

The diagram left, shows the ideal mix of strategy and execution depending on your role in an organization. Where should you ideally be and how far away are you from that today?



2. You control your calendar, it doesn't control you.

Your calendar does not have a personality of its own, though too often executives that I work with tell me how hard their calendar is to manage. Common complaints include “I spend all day in meetings”, “I am not energized by my meetings and I have to use evenings to catch up on work”. These are all signs that your calendar is out of control. Skip all of your meetings for 2 days and use that time to reevaluate where you ideally want to spend your time and how far away you are from that today. Plot out your ideal time mix of spending time with customers, getting external insights, making strategic decisions, leading your team, thinking time and 1-1 coaching. Develop a plan to build that into your schedule.

3. Only attend meetings where decisions are made.

Successful leaders are ruthless with their time and how meetings are planned, attended, managed and evaluated. Put a price tag on meetings based on the hourly cost of the leaders attending and compare it to the outcomes of those meetings. Based on your strategic priorities gather the relevant people to make decisions and create different mechanisms for reviewing or sharing information.

4. Be the navigation system for your company.

“You are here...your destination will be on your left in 57 miles”. Rapidly growing companies have aligned leadership teams and organizations. Successful leaders set the destination and let people know where they are on the journey. When companies grow fast, leaders have to spend additional time reminding people of the ultimate destination and their role in getting there. Tell success stories of the past, of how far you have come along the road and what needs to happen to get to your destination.

5. Know when it's time to change how you are leading your organization.

Every company and team goes through step changes during high growth. How you operated as a team of 5 will not work when your company is 100. This also applies for the leap from 500 to 1000, 1000 to 5000 etc. Successful leaders know when they hit that pivotal point and proactively make changes to how they lead, communicate, make decisions and innovate. Too often teams hang onto how things were when they first joined and will tell negative stories about how communication, decisions and team spirit was much better back then. Successful leaders make bold moves at crucial times to accelerate growth.

CASE STUDY: Crossfit founder Greg Glassman went from being a personal trainer at Golds Gym to building a multi million-dollar business and creating a billion dollar industry. He told me *“leading a business in high growth is like operating a rocket ship where you have to change how you operate it on the ground, at 5,000 feet, 10,000 feet, 100,000 feet, and that only a select few leaders can adjust to the altitude change and succeed”.*

6. Visualize your company and organization in 3 years time and work backwards.

Take your three-year strategy, understand the organization implications and create a plan to close those gaps. Leaders who create rapid growth are acting with the long-term strategy in mind for every decision.

CASE STUDY: Company XYZ was constrained from making acquisitions because it didn't have the leadership capacity to complete due diligence and then provide management for the new businesses. Together we created a plan to actively hire additional general managers that could learn the company culture and create capacity to run future acquisitions. Building this pipeline of industry talent allowed the company to increase the number of acquisitions every year for the next three years, which created growth into new markets and profit streams.

7. Energy is spent on customers and increasing profits. Not internal drama, politics or pet projects.

Successful leaders create organizations that do not rely on them, they empower their leaders. They create tenants that give leaders guidelines to make decisions by. They decide how they are going to decide, make the decision, communicate it and move on. There is no distraction or energy invested in internal drama,

conflict or confusion. Simple.

CASE STUDY: Amazon starts every decision with the customer and works backwards. Every strategy review, business review and new product idea starts with a narrative about the customer. That's how new services such as Amazon Prime were born, the one time annual fee shipping that removes the barrier of shipping fees from customers buying choice, along with Amazon Web Services that offered to other businesses the cloud services it was providing for itself internally.

8. Create space to innovate.

Googlers have the freedom to spend 20% of their time on projects they are personally passionate about; Gmail was one of those 20% projects that created meaningful impact for the company.

CASE STUDY: The Xbox Leadership team needed to create a radical approach to achieving the goal of broadening the appeal of the Xbox from the narrow demographic of gamers that liked to race cars and shoot things, to a broad appealing family entertainment device. We brought together a diverse group of leaders, partners, creative and technical experts to a remote location and broke every cultural rule in the Microsoft book of doing business. There was lots of playtime, immersing ourselves in customers lives, competitors products and the broader entertainment industry. One of the ideas was for a 3D camera that you could control with your body and your voice. And so Kinect was born, which has sold 20 million devices since launch.

9. Immerse yourself in life outside your bubble.

Context and perspective prompts innovative thinking. Stop reading the same articles, blogs and networking with the same people. Expand your horizons; learn about what is important to your customers and the competition. Successful leaders who create exponential growth are great students and humble enough to acknowledge what they don't know and when they are outside of their comfort zone. Consider where your gaps are and create a plan to connect with those you can learn from.

10. Create an early warning system.

Do you know when you are going off track? Who holds up the mirror and helps you see the reality of your decisions and impact on others? Many leaders know what their soft spots are, successful leaders who grow and scale their companies are self-aware and surround themselves with people or triggers that allow them to course correct along the way.

Many companies have the potential to grow exponentially, but only thoughtfully ruthless leaders can make it happen. Be ruthless where you spend your time, align your organization, create space to make strategic decisions and you will create an unprecedented growth path for your business.

Do you want to achieve exponential growth faster? Contact me to hear how I can accelerate growth for you and your business.

Val Wright