10 Ways to Grow Your Business

Looking to take your business to the next level? Then check out these 10 practical ways to expand your business

When you first started your business, you probably did a lot of research. You may have sought help from advisors; you may have gotten information from books, magazines and other readily available sources. You invested a lot-in terms of money, time and sweat equity-to get your business off the ground. So...now what?

For those of you who have survived startup and built successful businesses, you may be wondering how to take the next step and grow your business beyond its current status. There are numerous possibilities, 10 of which we'll outline here. Choosing the proper one (or ones) for your business will depend on the type of business you own, your available resources, and how much money, time and sweat equity you're willing to invest all over again. If you're ready to grow, we're ready to help.

1. Open another location. This might not be your best choice for business expansion, but it's listed first here because that's what often comes to mind first for so many entrepreneurs considering expansion. "Physical expansion isn't always the best growth answer without careful research, planning and number-planning," says small-business speaker, writer and consultant Frances McGuckin , who offers the following tips for anyone considering another location:
    - Make sure you're maintaining a consistent bottom-line profit and that you've shown steady growth over the past few years.
    - Look at the trends, both economic and consumer, for indications on your company's staying power.
    - Make sure your administrative systems and management team are extraordinary-you'll need them to get a new location up and running.
    - Prepare a complete business plan for a new location.
    - Determine where and how you'll obtain financing. (See " Got Cash? " for financing tips.)
    - Choose your location based on what's best for your business, not your wallet.

2. Offer your business as a franchise or business opportunity. Bette Fetter, founder and owner of Young Rembrandts, an Elgin, Illinois-based drawing program for children, waited 10 years to begin franchising her concept in 2001-but for Fetter and her husband, Bill, the timing was perfect. Raising four young children and keeping the business local was enough for the couple until their children grew older and they decided it was time to expand nationally.

    "We chose franchising as the vehicle for expansion because we wanted an operating system that would allow ownership on the part of the staff operating Young Rembrandts locations in markets outside our home territory," says Bette. "When people have a vested interest in their work, they enjoy it more, bring more to the table and are more successful overall. Franchising is a perfect system to accomplish those goals."

    Streamlining their internal systems and marketing in nearby states helped the couple bring in their first few franchisees. With seven units and some time under their belt, they then signed on with two national franchise broker firms. Now with 30 franchisees nationwide, they're staying true to their vision of steady growth. "Before we began franchising, we were teaching 2,500 children in the Chicago market," says

Bette. "Today we teach more than 9,000 children nationwide, and that number will continue to grow dramatically as we grow our franchise system."

Bette advises networking within the franchise community-become a member of the International Franchise Association and find a good franchise attorney as well as a mentor who's been through the franchise process. "You need to be open to growing and expanding your vision," Bette says, "but at the same time, be a strong leader who knows how to keep the key vision in focus at all times."

3. License your product. This can be an effective, low-cost growth medium, particularly if you have a service product or branded product, notes Larry Bennett, director of the Larry Friedman International Center for Entrepreneurship at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island. "You can receive upfront monies and royalties from the continued sales or use of your software, name brand, etc.-if it's successful," he says. Licensing also minimizes your risk and is low cost in comparison to the price of starting your own company to produce and sell your brand or product.

   To find a licensing partner, start by researching companies that provide products or services similar to yours. "[But] before you set up a meeting or contact any company, find a competent attorney who specializes in intellectual property rights," advises Bennett. "This is the best way to minimize the risk of losing control of your service or product."

4. Form an alliance. Aligning yourself with a similar type of business can be a powerful way to expand quickly. Last spring, Jim Labadie purchased a CD seminar set from a fellow fitness professional, Ryan Lee, on how to make and sell fitness information products. It was a move that proved lucrative for Labadie, who at the time was running an upscale personal training firm he'd founded in 2001. "What I learned on [Lee's] CDs allowed me to develop my products and form alliances within the industry," says Labadie, who now teaches business skills to fitness professionals via a series of products he created and sells on his Web site, HowToGetMoreClients.com .

   Seeing that Labadie had created some well-received products of his own, Lee agreed to promote Labadie's product to his long contact list of personal trainers. "That resulted in a decent amount of sales," says Labadie-in fact, he's increased sales 500 percent since he created and started selling the products in 2001. "Plus, there have been other similar alliances I've formed with other trainers and Web sites that sell my products for a commission."

   If the thought of shelling out commissions or any of your own money for the sake of an alliance makes you uncomfortable, Labadie advises looking at the big picture: "If you want to keep all the money to yourself, you're really shooting yourself in the foot," says the Tampa, Florida, entrepreneur. "You need to align with other businesses that already have lists of prospective customers. It's the fastest way to success."

5. Diversify. Small-business consultant McGuckin offers several ideas for diversifying your product or service line:

   Sell complementary products or services

   Teach adult education or other types of classes

   Import or export yours or others' products

   Become a paid speaker or columnist

"Diversifying is an excellent growth strategy, as it allows you to have multiple streams of income that can often fill seasonal voids and, of course, increase sales and profit margins," says McGuckin, who diversified from an accounting, tax and consulting business to speaking, writing and publishing.

Diversifying was always in the works for Darien, Connecticut, entrepreneurs Rebecca Cutler and Jennifer Krane, creators of the "raising a racquet" line of maternity tenniswear , launched in 2002. "We had always planned to expand into other 'thematic' kits, consistent with our philosophies of versatility, style, health and fun," says Cutler. "Once we'd begun to establish a loyal wholesale customer base and achieve some retail brand recognition, we then broadened our product base with two line extensions, 'raising a racquet golf' and 'raising a racquet yoga.'"

Rolling out the new lines last year allowed the partners' current retail outlets to carry more of their inventory. "It also broadened our target audience and increased our presence in the marketplace, giving us the credibility to approach much larger retailers," notes Cutler, who expects to double their 2003 sales this year and further diversify the company's product lines. "As proof, we've recently been selected by Bloomingdale's, A Pea in the Pod and Mimi Maternity."

6. Target other markets. Your current market is serving you well. Are there others? You bet. "My other markets are what make money for me," says McGuckin. Electronic and foreign rights, entrepreneurship programs, speaking events and software offerings produce multiple revenue streams for McGuckin, from multiple markets.

   "If your consumer market ranges from teenagers to college students, think about where these people spend most of their time," says McGuckin. "Could you introduce your business to schools, clubs or colleges? You could offer discounts to special-interest clubs or donate part of [your profits] to schools and associations."

   Baby boomers, elderly folks, teens, tweens...let your imagination take you where you need to be. Then take your product to the markets that need it.

7. Win a government contract. "The best way for a small business to grow is to have the federal government as a customer," wrote Rep. Nydia M. Velazquez, ranking Democratic member of the House Small Business Committee, in August 2003. (Click here to read that article.) "The U.S. government is the largest buyer of goods and services in the world, with total procurement dollars reaching approximately $235 billion in 2002 alone."

   Working with your local SBA and SBDC offices as well as the Service Corps of Retired Executives and your local, regional or state Economic Development Agency will help you determine the types of contracts available to you. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the SBA also have a Business Matchmaking Program designed to match entrepreneurs with buyers. "A fair amount of patience is required in working to secure most government contracts," says Johnson & Wales University's Bennett. "Requests for proposals usually require a significant amount of groundwork and research. If you're not prepared to take the time to fully comply with RFP terms and conditions, you'll only be wasting your time."

   This might sound like a lot of work, but it could be worth it: "The good part about winning government contracts," says Bennett, "is that once you've jumped through the hoops and win a bid, you're generally not subject to the level of external competition of the outside marketplaces."

8. Merge with or acquire another business. In 1996, when Mark Fasciano founded FatWire , a Mineola, New York, content management software company, he certainly couldn't have predicted what would happen a few years later. Just as FatWire was gaining market momentum, the tech downturn hit hard.

"We were unable to generate the growth needed to maximize the strategic partnerships we'd established with key industry players," Fasciano says. "During this tech 'winter,' we concentrated on survival and servicing our clients, while searching for an opportunity to jump-start the company's growth. That growth opportunity came last year at the expense of one of our competitors."

Scooping up the bankrupt company, divine Inc., from the auction block was the easy part; then came the integration of the two companies. "The process was intense and exhausting," says Fasciano, who notes four keys to their success:

Customer retention. "I personally spoke with 150 customers within the first few weeks of consummating the deal, and I met with 45 clients around the globe in the first six months," notes Fasciano. They've retained 95 percent of the divine Inc. customer base.

Staff retention. Fasciano rehired the best and brightest of divine's staff.

Melding technologies. "One of the reasons I was so confident about this acquisition was the two product architectures were very similar," says Fasciano. This allowed for a smooth integration of the two technologies.

Focus. "Maybe the biggest reason this acquisition has worked so well is the focus that FatWire has brought to a neglected product," says Fasciano.

FatWire's acquisition of divine in 2003 grew its customer base from 50 to 400, and the company grew 150 percent, from $6 million to $15 million. Fasciano expects no less than $25 million in sales this year.

9. Expand globally. Not only did FatWire grow in terms of customers and sales, it also experienced global growth simply as a result of integrating the best of the divine and FatWire technologies. "FatWire finally has international reach-we've established new offices in the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain, Holland, Germany, China, Japan and Singapore," says Fasciano. This increased market share is what will allow FatWire to realize sustained growth.

   But you don't need to acquire another business to expand globally. You just need to prime your offering for an international market the way FatWire was primed following the integration of its technologies with divine's.

   You'll also need a foreign distributor who'll carry an inventory of your product and resell it in their domestic markets. You can locate foreign distributors by scouring your city or state for a foreign company with a U.S. representative. Trade groups, foreign chambers of commerce in the United States, and branches of American chambers of commerce in foreign countries are also good places to find distributors you can work with.

10. Expand to the Internet. "Bill Gates said that by the end of 2002, there will be only two kinds of businesses: those with an Internet presence, and those with no business at all," notes Sally Falkow a Pasadena, California, Web content strategist. "Perhaps this is overstating the case, but an effective Web site is becoming an integral part of business today."

   Landing your Web site in search engine results is key-more than 80 percent of traffic comes via search engines, according to Falkow. "As there are now more than 4 billion Web pages and traffic on the Internet doubles every 100 days, making your Web site visible is vital," she says. "You need every weapon you can get."

Design and programming are also important, but it's your content that will draw a visitor into your site and get them to stay. Says Falkow, "Putting together a content strategy based on user behavior, measuring and tracking visitor click streams, and writing the content based on researched keywords will get you excellent search results and meet the needs of your visitors."

Business Growth: needs a change in psychology

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Arpit Singh
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Sometimes in business it is hard to predict that what will go as planned and what not. In times things planned moves in wrong direction while which are not has positive impact. Practically we work on already proved mechanism to put the growth factor. Generally, the personnel are seen to keep a distance from experimentation in implementing some different and new strategies. They rely more on already applied principles. Management shows keen interest to hire those executive have rigorous experience in implementing the same methodologies, works on the already existing principles and avoid to experiment new strategy. Reason being they know that it is already proved to be beneficial somewhere or have some desired results. However, the intensity of growth through this is at minimum whereas the growth can be maximized through some other factors.

Moreover, executives are also seen to avoid the use of new things and are continued with the same older versions of their thinking. In case they move to some different organization, they start applying the same thing what they have done earlier. But to go beyond this wall or to break the walls what they have created around them become necessary to catch a faster pace.

Few good things can be adopted by the management to get the high rate of growth, provided management is open for the experimentation.

Management hires new executives and poses the responsibility on them to carry in predefined way. Which gives them a sense of working but not the working innovatively. Whereas it should be like “Hire good people and leave them alone.” If you put fence around people, you get sheep. Give people the room they need. Through which they can use their innovative mind and can get a completely different solution which is more profitable and comply all the company policies.

Management should be open to try a lot of little things, keep the one that works and discard the one that don’t. People should always be in a state of experimentation so that they can know about new things and which does not consume much time. They get an idea that what works well in what situations. And what is of no use in any particular system. So they should keep those things which provide them the results what they are craving to achieve and rest of the thing which are not the suitable outcome should be left instantly.

Management practices should encourage the individual initiative and experimentation. This individual initiative gives executives a sense of responsibility to try the new things and arouse a feeling of accountability of their initiative. These experiments give them an open space to realize the power of their innovations and increase the risk taking power of these executives. So the encouragement of this experimental doodling is very important.

Management and executives should have a way of thinking that how can we do better tomorrow than we did today rather to emphasize on “How well we are doing today or how can we do well. How well do we have to perform in order to meet the competition?

Every person or the management needs to motivate others to act for some reason or another. Reason being they can also contribute in the development process and can feel free to the experimentation.

It is not that competition is not good but it should be of the things which really add value to the customers not the one which does not make any difference. Some time we give what all others, in the market, are providing which increase the costing of product but no value. So while giving executives a room they will think differently and they should feel free for experimentation.

Business enterprises need to work on their marketing strategy. Most of the times with the changing trends in the market we have old ways to introduce the product or services which really need a different description and we fail. What reason we can find out behind this? It is right product wrong people. We also need the right people to introduce the right product and should have the exhaustive knowledge to face the outside competition.

For implementing change in the existing system requires a great change in the psychology of management and the executives also. They need to think out of the box to walk with the market growth. They need to touch customer emotionally not professionally. At times we approach customers only to sell the products or to find an opportunity for making profit. We have to leave this way of working and to connect with them emotionally to make them feel that we are working for their welfare not to rob them. Executives need to work more on customer relationship rather increase the number of customers only.

The Six Principles of the Psychology of Growth

By: Wayne Simmons and Keary Crawford
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At the start of 2007, the business status quo was disrupted by what has now come to be known as the Great Recession. The ripples from this event are still impacting economies and businesses across the globe and have created “a new business normal.”

Constrained consumer demand, limited investment capital, powerful globalization forces, and uncertain fiscal policies define this new normal. These seismic shifts mandate business strategy, operations, and culture. This is not hyperbole.

Nokia, for example, had a dominant 49% share of the mobile phone market in 2007. The company tested touch screen and smartphone technology before ultimately abandoning the technology and missing the explosion in the smartphone market. As of 2013, Nokia had 15% share of the mobile phone market.

In 2010, we launched a comprehensive research initiative to explore the 500 largest companies in the world. In our data collection, interviews, and analysis, we sought to identify patterns and methods related to growth rates. One of the patterns that we found was that growing companies had instilled a strong company culture and mindset surrounding growth strategy, corporate entrepreneurship, and business innovation.

Affecting the mindset of a company has implications at the organizational DNA level. Naturally, implementing such deep organizational transformations and creating a unique source of competitive advantage do not happen on their own. Rather, they require the deliberate adoption of principles that promote new organizational behavior, norms, and instincts that lead to new mental models that are more conducive to business growth. We call this the Psychology of Growth.

Principle No. 1: Convert Knowledge into Growth

Modern companies compete and ultimately win based on their ability to create and exploit unique insights into their industries, markets, and customers. When combined with experiential knowledge of internal corporate assets, resources, and strengths and weaknesses, these insights become distinctive sources of competitive advantage.

Companies must consider the pursuit of growth as a knowledge-based organizational competency that should be treated no differently from other corporate functions such as marketing, sales, or manufacturing. Growth-focused competencies must be incorporated into job descriptions, leadership development, corporate training, and performance assessments.

Principle No. 2: Engage the Critical Mass of the Organization

“Engaged employees are a rare and precious resource. Only 29% of U.S. employees are engaged in their work, while the remaining workers are just marking time.”—The Gallup Organization

All too often, major organizational transformation initiatives focus only on senior leadership, “corporate elites,” and selected middle managers. To create vibrant, growth-focused enterprises, it becomes essential for organizations to engage a critical mass of the organization in growth learning, collaboration, and activity.

Critical mass does not necessarily mean the majority of the organization, but the right number and types of employees necessary to diffuse organizational thinking, maintain momentum, and influence others.

Companies can achieve these outcomes by establishing a broad social engagement infrastructure to foster collaboration, catalyze conversations, and share knowledge at all levels of the organization.

Principle No. 3: Engage the “Whole Brain”

Traditional companies have developed strong competencies in analytical or systems thinking. MBA and corporate training programs emphasize finance and operational excellence to further reinforce these “left brain” skills.

High-performance growth enterprises should identify and tap into “right brain” employees to unlock new areas of insight, perspectives, and sources of growth. This can be achieved through the formation of multidisciplinary teams comprised of members from diverse groups, multiple levels, and all corners of the company. An example of this is Whirlpool's Global Consumer Design, which supports 14 major brands and 30 sub-brands with a 150-person, multidisciplinary team of executives, engineers, product developers, and managers.

Principle No. 4: Make Growth Visual

Humans are visual creatures. By telling visual stories that clarify the complexity and unknowns that can surround future growth, companies can generate dialog, create alignment, and articulate a vision. However, all too often today’s strategic and business planning is dominated by spreadsheets, slide decks, and documents with long narratives. These tools are useful for basic communication purposes, but not as useful for inspiring new thinking and ideas.

Incorporating visualization into growth strategy and business innovation activities creates powerful informatics to help companies establish common metaphors and imagery. These tools can facilitate the improved group memory, collaboration, and ideation needed to generate breakthrough ideas and differentiated growth strategies.

As companies look for new markets and new customers, visualizations can reveal trends, dislocations, and gaps that can be exploited. In the competitive space, visualizations can give companies early warning indicators of competitive thrusts and reveal ways to counteract them.

Principle No. 5: Space and Environment Matter

Traditional business environments and corporate settings, such as corporate conference rooms, hotel conference centers, or corporate off-sites, lack the most basic tools for fostering the entrepreneurial behaviors, creativity, and collaboration that are critical for growth. Following the adage "It's hard to think outside the box when you're in the box," growth enterprises must create spaces and environments that are best suited to the collaboration and creativity that are hallmarks of entrepreneurship.

Take, for example, high-tech leader Citrix. At its Silicon Valley headquarters, the company created a 2,000 square-foot collaboration space fully equipped with advanced interactive technologies to encourage innovative thinking. Collaborating in immersive, growth-focused virtual or physical work environments helps companies disengage the powerful status quo forces that hinder growth.

Principle No. 6: Compensation Matters

One of the initial assumptions regarding compensation is that large corporations have no metric to compensate their entrepreneurial employees. Indeed, existing corporate compensation models are often governed by drivers such as tenure, title, or education, which have no direct or sustained correlation to growth.

While small and large companies alike may not be in a position to offer entrepreneurial incentives such as stock options, they must establish compensation and rewards programs that are based on motivating and promoting growth-focused behaviors and outcomes.

This compensation does not have to be financial in nature and may include benefits such as work environment, work schedule, creative latitude, and nonfinancial, public recognition by leadership. These reward packages can vary from the standard corporate remuneration to venture capital-style packages with a higher bonus and carried interest in the spinoff.

For example, Unilever, the British-Dutch multinational consumer goods group, promotes corporate entrepreneurship by allowing its scientists and inventors to nurture innovative ideas from early development stage and spin them off as separate internal ventures. While financial rewards are not necessarily the main motivation for researchers in this particular model, Unilever has a set of reward and compensation metrics in place to retain these employees as ideas move from the business plan through to the investment stage.

Once these six principles are implemented, companies can align their dominant mental models and mindsets to promote entrepreneurship, growth strategy, and business innovation—the Psychology of Growth—the key elements to achieving and sustaining business growth.

In order to grow your company, you have to cultivate an environment where your employees can thrive. Check out this free AMA webcast on becoming a better leader and keeping your career on an upward path.

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How Companies Can Profit from a "Growth Mindset"

By Harvard Business Review Staff

FROM THE NOVEMBER 2014 ISSUE

When Carol Dweck was a graduate student, in the early 1970s, she began studying how children cope with failure—and she quickly realized that "cope" was the wrong word. "Some didn't just cope—they relished it," she says. "For some people, failure is the end of the world—but for others, it's this exciting new opportunity." Dweck, now a psychology professor at Stanford, spent the next several decades studying this dichotomy, which she originally described using the clunky academic monikers "fixed mindset entity theory" and "incremental theory." By the early 2000s, while writing a mass-market book on the topic, she'd come up with more-appealing labels. She now refers to people who view talent as a quality they either possess or lack as having a "fixed mindset." People with a "growth mindset," in contrast, enjoy challenges, strive to learn, and consistently see potential to develop new skills. Dweck's framework has had a significant impact: Her book*Mindset*, published in 2006, has sold more than 800,000 copies, and the concept of a growth mindset has come to permeate fields such as education and sports training.

Now Dweck is extending her work on mindset beyond individuals—and the extension has important implications for managers. Can an organization, like an individual, have a fixed or a growth mindset? If so, what are the effects on the organization and its employees? Since 2010 Dweck and three colleagues—Mary Murphy, Jennifer Chatman, and Laura Kray—have collaborated with the consulting firm Senn Delaney to answer those questions.

To explore company mindsets, the researchers asked a diverse sample of employees at seven *Fortune* 1000 companies about the extent to which they agreed with various statements—for example, "When it comes to being successful, this company seems to believe that people have a certain amount of talent, and they really can't do much to change it." High levels of agreement suggested that the organization had a predominantly fixed mindset; low levels suggested a growth mindset. The researchers then conducted surveys to try to understand how the prevailing organizational mindset influenced workers' satisfaction, perceptions of the organizational culture, levels of collaboration, innovation, and ethical behavior, and how it affected supervisors' views of employees.

"In broad strokes, we learned that in each company, there was a real consensus about the mindset," Dweck says. "We also learned that a whole constellation of characteristics went with each mindset." For instance, employees at companies with a fixed mindset often said that just a small handful of "star" workers were highly valued. The employees who reported this were less committed than employees at growth-mindset companies and didn't think the company had their back. They worried about failing and so pursued fewer innovative projects. They regularly kept secrets, cut corners, and cheated to try to get ahead.

“Instead of Output, Think About Effort”

Timothy Perlick is the senior director of professional development at CME Group. He spoke with HBR about the organization’s use of Carol Dweck’s research. Edited excerpts:

How did you get started with “growth mindset”?

In 2012 Phupinder Gill became our CEO. He recognized how much consolidation, technology, and globalization are changing our industry and believed our employees needed a growth mindset to think about the business in new ways. We hired Carol to speak with senior leadership and then with all employees. We recorded the sessions, and all new employees watch the video. Gill emphasizes the idea of highlighting the growth mindset. Instead of focusing on output, which can be seen as the result of talent (and emblematic of a fixed mindset), we think about effort. Instead of celebrating employee achievements, we say, “Thank you for your effort.”

Has this changed the way you hire?

Yes. We’ve adopted behavioral interviewing techniques using mindset-focused questions. For example, “Describe a time you confronted a challenge. How did you work through it to overcome your doubts?” We don’t hire specifically for growth mindset, but we do look for that quality.

Do some employees dislike the shift?

Definitely. Some find that they don’t fit, and some have left for other companies.

Has the cultural shift been successful?

It’s too early to say it’s a huge success. But it has allowed us to formalize and institutionalize our innovation process and innovate more quickly.

Supervisors in growth-mindset companies expressed significantly more positive views about their employees than supervisors in fixed-mindset companies, rating them as more innovative, collaborative, and committed to learning and growing. They were more likely to say that their employees had management potential.

Dweck’s team hasn’t yet looked at whether growth-mindset organizations actually perform better, as measured by financial returns and other metrics. “That’s our burning question,” she says. But the findings so far suggest that at a minimum, growth-mindset firms have happier employees and a more innovative, risk-taking culture.

How can managers help organizations embrace a growth mindset? “It takes dedication and hard work,” Dweck says. Often top management must drive the change; for instance, a new CEO might focus on maximizing employees’ potential. Dweck points to GE’s Jack Welch as an emblematic growth-mindset CEO: He hired according to “runway,” not pedigree, preferring Big 10 graduates and military veterans to Ivy Leaguers, and spent thousands of hours grooming and coaching employees on his executive team—activities that demonstrate a recognition of people’s capacity for growth.

Employees in a “growth mindset” company are:

47% likelier to say that their colleagues are trustworthy,
34% likelier to feel a strong sense of ownership and commitment to the company,
65% likelier to say that the company supports risk taking, and
49% likelier to say that the company fosters innovation.

As Welch's example shows, one area in which mindset is especially important is hiring. Growth-mindset organizations are likely to hire from within their ranks, while fixed-mindset organizations reflexively look for outsiders. And whereas fixed-mindset organizations typically emphasize applicants' credentials and past accomplishments, growth-mindset firms value potential, capacity, and a passion for learning. "Focusing on pedigree…is not as effective as looking for people who love challenges, who want to grow, and who want to collaborate," Dweck says. Google appears to be making such a shift, she notes; the company has recently begun hiring more people who lack college degrees but have proved that they are capable independent learners.

Despite the survey results, not all employees will be happier in growth-mindset organizations, Dweck acknowledges. For example, people who believe they are more talented than others may prefer an organization with a "star" system, where their talent will be better recognized (and compensated). In general, though, the early evidence suggests that organizations focused on employees' capacity for growth will experience significant advantages.

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The Fastest Way to Grow Your Business

Siimon Reynolds, CONTRIBUTOR
I write about high-performance skills for CEOs and entrepreneurs

Sometimes we make business far harder than it is.

We over-think our strategy, complicate our product line, worry too much about our staff.

All of these are important issues to be sure, but they pale into insignificance compared to the one area of business that contributes most to success.

That area? Time spent daily on Sales.

I have mentored literally thousands of business owners and almost every time I see a business not performing it is primarily because they are not spending enough hours in the day on the sales process. Either refining how they sell or getting out there and getting face to face with potential customers.

How much time should you spend on sales? Well if you're running a new business you should devote at least 80 % of your day to it.

If you're an established business, you should spend at least 30% of your day on the sales process or connecting with customers.

Does that sound too extreme? It shouldn't. What else could you be doing that is more important?

When you spend most of your time selling opportunities quickly arise. Door open. Checks get written. Good things happen. When you stay in your office talking to your staff, pontificating over product details, admin and minutiae you may progress your business, but you won't greatly increase your revenue.

Only going out there and asking more people to buy your stuff will make a real difference in the long run. All else is tinkering at the peripheries of success.

All great companies are great at sales: Oracle, McKinsey. IBM, Nordstrom, even Herbalife. They grew huge not just because of the quality product line (the world is filled with companies with great products that are struggling to survive) but their utter commitment to selling it better than their competitors. And getting out there and asking people for their business.

Here's an exercise well worth trying: Sit down and work out what the average amount of time is your people are spending each week either directly selling or on improving the sales process. Then set a goal to triple it, starting next week.

You may say you’re too busy. You may protest that you have too many other things to do. But if you can just bring yourself to drop these excuses and try this technique, you will be stunned at how quickly your business improves.

And don’t put up with any resistance from your sales staff about being pushed and held accountable either. Any sales person that isn’t completely happy to have their performance closely monitored should be fired. Sales is too important not to have a constant magnifying glass on it.

Sales should be the absolute center of what your company does, every single day. Ignore it at your peril. As the founder of IBM, Thomas Watson once remarked, “Nothing happens until somebody sells something.”

If you’re not happy with how fast your business is growing, this is the area you should focus on, first, second and third. Get out there and ask more people for money. It may sound crude, but ultimately an obsession with sales is at the heart of all sustained business growth.