Creating an Environment for Growth

Growth is not optional. As a small business owner it's critical for you to create an environment for growth. Creating the right environment will produce the right results. Imagine if your organization hired a guy like Gerry Gomez. Gerry Gomez is not a real person but he does represent the struggle many people find themselves in today. Gerry was your typical Operations Manager. He was driven, decisive, and fully engaged in his work. Gerry was a natural leader. He influenced cross-functional support from other departments and regularly created solutions to synchronize organizational shortfalls.

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Gerry loved his company and always maintained a positive spirit with those around him. He was committed to the organization and ready to make whatever adjustments were needed to get the job done. When sales dropped by more than 40% in a period of six months, the organization was forced to reduce their staff and Gerry's department was no exception to this reduction. In a heated meeting with top organizational leaders, Gerry voiced his frustration, "What do I have to do to help us grow and stay in business?" It was a great question and the answer was sure to surprise our friend Gerry.

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The VP of Sales looked Gerry right in the eyes and said, "Gerry, we need you and your people to sell!" He continued, "We need your people to network with vendors, family, and friends to serve as an extension of our sales force." With a thunderstruck look on his face Gerry replied, "Sir, with all due respect, I don't know how to sell and I don't even like it, but if this is what we need to do to get the job done, I'll do it…just show me how?" Imagine if earlier today, your largest competitor hired a guy like Gerry Gomez.

Have you ever asked, "Why do some organizations consistently grow and acquire new customers while many others stop growing and eventually lose their momentum?" Consider the world of professional sports for just a minute. Why do some teams find themselves at the top of their division year after year and other teams never even come close? Think about a restaurant, a department store, or some other business where you've consistently experienced great service. What's driving their people?

Creating an environment for growth is what moves your organization forward!

As you interview business owners and organizational leaders here in South Florida, you'll find at least one common denominator—a strong desire to grow and expand their organization both domestically and internationally. These leaders are highly driven and very passionate about growth. However, when you speak to their employees and some of their staff about growth here's what you'll hear:

- *"Growth equals more work and I already have plenty."*
- *"There's not much I can do right now to help our business grow."*
- *"Our sales team is underperforming."*
- *"We need to give our customers deeper discounts."*
- *"I do my job well, that's all that matters to me."*
- *"I'm not supposed to do sales."*
- *"I'm just a _____, I really can't impact whether we grow or not."*

You may be asking, "If that describes some of my people, what can I do to change this mindset?" In short, "How can I create an environment that hungers for growth?" Let me suggest six factors that serve as pillars for creating an environment for growth within your organization.

6 Environmental Growth Factors

1. *Generate* – As a small business owner, you're the initiator and creator. You must create and reproduce your vision for growth in the minds and hearts of your people. Generating a vision for growth is absolutely essential to the long-term health of your organization. Without vision, your people will lose focus and shift their efforts to internal problems rather than external opportunities. Here are a few questions to help you generate your vision for growth:
   - *What is my dream for my customers?*
   - *Today, what 2-3 problems do we help them solve?*
   - *How do we help them grow and capture more customers?*
   - *What problems will they face within the next 2-10 years and how can we position ourselves to help them overcome these obstacles?*
   - *How can summarize my dream for our customers in one concise statement?*

2. *Redesign* – This involves changing the way your people think and function. The design of your organization should flow directly from your vision. Vision always precedes design. Don't overreact and fire all of your staff. Dedicate a generous amount of time to share your vision publically. Next, align all organizational resources to follow your customer-centered vision for growth. This is where the experience of your leadership team is needed. They essentially help you build a bridge to connect your people with your vision. Here are a few questions for your team to consider:
   - *What needs do our customers have today that we are not addressing?*
   - *How have we responded in the past to those needs?*
   - *How has our competition responded?*
   - *What can we do differently to demonstrate value to our customers and position ourselves as a comprehensive solutions provider?*
   - *What can we eliminate from our operations that have no relevance for growth?*
   - *What changes are required to maximize time spent with customers?*
   - *How can we increase our presence within our customers? What tools are available to help us keep better track of our customers?*

3. *Ownership* – Creating an environment for growth requires complete ownership. Everyone within the organization has the responsibility to produce new business. Every department, every staff person, and every employee should be held accountable for growing the organization. When everyone takes ownership, everyone wins. The vision and responsibility for growth must be communicated regularly. Growing the business has to be much more than a catchy slogan, it has to become part of the DNA of your people. Here are a few ideas to help you create ownership:
   - *Model and communicate ownership principles.*
   - *Find examples of how other organizations have established a culture of growth.*
   - *Share this information through multiple communication channels.*
   - *Make sure your people clearly understand how they fit into the growth equation.*
   - *Develop focus groups to create "Best Practices for Growth" within each department.*

4. *Wisdom* – Your people are your greatest resource. Never forget that! Tapping into their wealth of experience will help fuel creative customer-centered solutions. Keep in mind, your best solutions for growth is not only found within the problems your customers face, but also within the expertise of your people. Here are a few questions to help you throughout your exploratory adventure:
   - *What solutions do we currently have that are outdated and need improvement?*
   - *How can we make them more effective for our customer?*
   - *What new solutions can we develop to help our customers function more efficiently and drive down costs?*
   - *How can we help our customers become more competitive and increase sales?*
   - *Is there a new market where our expertise is needed?*

5. *Training* – Continuing education helps your people develop and maintain a strong foundation for growth. At first, you may need to have longer training sessions to get your message packaged and delivered in one setting. Afterwards I recommend bi-monthly training sessions or focus groups to maintain the momentum and keep everyone on the same page. Your people and your customers will appreciate the investment. Here are my suggestions for strong training groups:
   - *Mix your groups. Use a combination of employees, managers, and directors rather than separating people by workgroups. This allows for healthy interaction at multiple levels and naturally promotes ownership.*
   - *Invite customers to share their vision for their business and ask them to provide examples of how your organization has helped them in the past. Having customers participate in a portion of your meeting will personalize your training and reinforce your vision.*
   - *Write it down and pass it around. As new ideas surface, right them down and share these insights with the rest of your groups. What you will find is that ideas stimulate ideas. Introducing customer challenges and working through potential solutions can evolve into a highly productive exercise for your groups.*
   - *Make sure your people clearly understand how you differentiate yourself as an organization and the benefits involved for the customer. Have them memorize some of these benefits.*

6. *Honor* – To help reinforce your vision, it is important to establish a celebratory plan to publically honor those who have modeled what it means to grow the organization. This celebration involves recognizing those who have exceeded growth milestones and rewarding their performance. Here are a few ideas to help you honor those who go the extra mile:
   - *Recognize them before their peers.*
   - *Give them something to demonstrate your appreciation for their performance.*
   - *Leverage their example to motivate others who are still on the sidelines.*
   - *Have them share their growth strategy and experience with other groups.*

Marcel Sanchez is the Founder and President of Motivational Speaking and Training Solutions, MSTS. MSTS helps event planners and organizational leaders connect their event and training needs with the right professional speakers and trainers. MSTS works with every budget and serves through Professional Speaking, Sales Training, Executive Coaching, and Ministry Development. When it comes to finding the right professional speaker and trainer, MSTS is your premier source. For more information, please visit their website, www.MotivationalSpeakingandTrainingsolutions.com.