

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS IN HIGH GROWTH COMPANIES

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How do you sustain the enthusiasm and productivity of a start-up in a company growing at 30 percent or more per year? The answer is to consciously manage those factors that made you successful in the first place.

Remember the early excitement of a group of people dedicated to a common purpose or vision. People identified with what the company stood for and with each other. There was a feeling of family, of intimacy, of workable personal relationships. People had a high degree of talent and knew that their contribution made an integral difference to the whole. The structure of the organization was clear and simple. People integrated intuition and reason, using the former to guide their decisions, and the latter to test their intuitive insights. Perhaps most important, there was an underlying belief that people could create what they wanted and shape their destiny. The great American dream.

What happened? You started growing. The workable, captivating vision became clouded by daily pressures, operational details, and even overflowing opportunities. People began to identify less with the total organization and more with their particular



position. The growing number of new employees did not identify as closely with what the company stood for.

Highly talented people in one area were asked to take on new jobs where they were less motivated or capable, for example managing instead of engineering. Structural changes and reorganizations made people even more uncertain about the difference they made. Formal systems and controls designed to simplify complexity and support people in being effective frequently produced the opposite effect.

Managers tended to abandon their intuition. There was a lot more pressure to figure it all out and prove the right answer before going ahead. All these pressures ultimately undermined people's belief that they could create the future. Their focus shifted to making the best of existing circumstances or protecting what they had already accomplished.

What can you do to revitalize the company? Spend some time with your top management group to establish or recommit to a common purpose of personal import to all group members. Ensure that the purpose represents a vision of what the organization stands for and strives to create, not simply an idea intended to keep it afloat.



Share the purpose and vision with all employees. Support them to rediscover what is most important to them. Help individuals understand how they contribute to the larger organization. For example, consider a simple organization structure where they can see and be measured by the consequences of their actions. Strengthen the independence of individual units, and, simultaneously, clarify the most important ways all groups are connected.

Recognize that as your organization grows and becomes more complex, it takes on certain characteristics. Perhaps most important, problems and symptoms are easily confused. As a result, people tend to waste resources on multiple symptoms without influencing basic performance. You should look, instead for a few key leverage points on which to apply pressure. Actions directed at these points will produce pervasive system-wide improvement.

Reawaken and legitimize intuition as a valid complement to reason. Intuition is a critical tool in identifying leverage points. When supported by analysis and a spirit of experimentation, it enables you to negotiate organization complexity and arrive at solutions that work, not just at ideas that should work.



Perhaps most important, re-establish the viewpoint that individually and collectively people can create the future and shape their destiny. Without this, the previous steps tend to reduce once more to a formula for how to get us out of the mess, rather than a set of guidelines for creating what we truly want.

There is always a strong temptation to translate guidelines into definitive "how to's". Write a mission statement. Develop strategic objectives, clear roles, and a set of ground rules that express people's desired ways of working together. Hire and orient new employees conscientiously, train people, establish clear connections between compensation and performance, and design your organization into families of self-managing groups connected by a strong common purpose. These may, in fact, all be good ideas.

Remember, however, that your company began with people's commitment to their vision. This commitment, rather than any particular plan or program, is the source of effective action. It succeeds, ultimately, without definitive maps to point the way. Rekindling the creative spirit taps the heart of your company's growth and provides the basis for its ongoing achievement.

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