

Introduction

Growth in small business

No one who wants a sane, staid and predictable life should ever go into small business. It's a dynamic world that deals out change and challenge on a daily basis. It's not a place for the fainthearted, but it is the perfect place for those of us who want to push boundaries, be responsible for our own destiny and make a difference in the world.

Small business owners are driven by different goals and desires, but without exception we all know that to achieve our goals we have to grow our businesses. I am not talking about turning small businesses into big businesses here; I am talking about growth that will generate the revenue and profit you need to achieve your particular business goals.

Growth is personal to each and every one of us. You may just want to grow your business turnover from \$20 000 to \$40 000, you may want to get the business to a size where it can support your family and employ one of your children or you might want to take a business with \$300 000 turnover and franchise it across the country. Even if you want your business to stay the same size, you will want it to grow so that it can provide you with the lifestyle you deserve.

2 **your business, your future**

When you think about it, growth is a standard measure for small business. When you meet up with colleagues at a trade show they don't ask, 'So, how's your marketing going, Fred?' They say, 'How's your business going?' In other words, 'How is it growing?'

Given that growth is so important, we really don't know much about how it happens or how it works in small business. We know that growth can be a direct result of marketing or sales, but we often don't appreciate that it can be affected by almost anything else in the business, from the owner's attitude, to systems and procedures, staff members and even customers. We tend to assume that growth will occur even while we focus on everything else, almost as if growth were something that just happens.

We do know that when growth does occur it goes hand in hand with change, and change brings challenge. The business we know and love starts to act unpredictably. We lose a key client, experience unexplained dips in staff morale, or our equipment all goes into meltdown at the same time. These situations always seem to come out of the blue. No matter how experienced we are, no matter how many degrees we have, we get taken by surprise every time. We know it's our job to cope with these challenges but we don't know where to start.

It's easy to believe that ours is the only business going through this trauma, that our business is so unique that nobody else could possibly understand what is going on and how we are feeling. Even worse, we assume it is all our fault. We blame ourselves because the challenges must be caused by something we did or, worse, something we didn't do. Our sense of independence leads us to believe we got ourselves into this mess so we should be able to get ourselves out of it. Consequently we tend to 'reinvent the wheel' every time we face a problem. The time, energy and stress

that goes into problem-solving slows down the growth process dramatically.

Think about how you would deal with a sudden behavioural problem with your toddler, an ear-splitting tantrum in the middle of the supermarket, for example. Do you assume it is all your fault? Do you look at the problem in isolation? Most of us would compare the child's behaviour with that of others of the same age, and discover that this unpleasant behaviour is just a part of the toddler phase and in that sense totally normal.

Small businesses are just like small children: they both go through 'stages'. So when a business starts to act unpredictably, why can't we compare it with other businesses which might be in the same situation? The good news is that we can!

We can also save ourselves a lot of heartache if only we understand that the majority of changes and challenges we see in our business are simply symptoms of growth. They are quite normal—and the majority are predictable.

I have discovered some simple truths about small business and growth:

- Growth and the symptoms that go with it can be predicted.
- There are four distinct growth phases that every business goes through.
- Each phase has distinct characteristics and results in common thoughts and behaviours in business owners.
- These symptoms of growth are normal and will be experienced by almost every business owner.
- Because growth phases can be predicted you can now plan for change and growth.
- If you are aware of the growth cycle you can use it to grow stronger, faster and more effectively.