“Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you plant.” - Robert Louis Stevenson

Growing a business is not unlike growing anything you might plant in your garden.

1. **Vision**
2. **Reality**
3. **Strategy**
4. **People Power**
5. **Communication**
6. **Measurement**
7. **Process**
8. **Accomplishment**
9. **Review**
10. **Appreciation**

Plant the seeds, follow the steps and watch your business grow!

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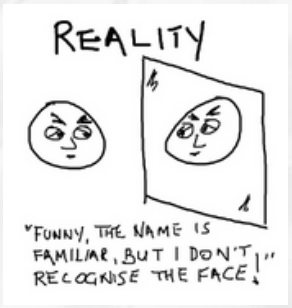
The Seed of Vision

"First I dream the painting, then I paint the dream." - Vincent Van Gogh

In the context of a business, Vision is not something you dream about while sipping on a chilled wine on a balmy summer afternoon. Well, it can be that, but it is much more as well. For a start, it should be written. From there, it should set out exactly how you see all aspects of the business when it is working at its best. Your business Vision should provide motivation for you and your people in the way you, and they, behave on a daily basis – in pursuit of that Vision.

The Seed of Reality

"In business, words are words, explanations are explanations, promises are promises, but only performance is reality." - Harold S. Geneen



The best way I know to answer these questions is to complete a **SWOT analysis** of the business. You have probably heard of it – it's the **Strengths, Weaknesses Opportunities** and **Threats** that apply to your business as it appears today, then study the impacts and consequences of each component as well as your ability to remedy each.

The Seed of Strategy

"The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do." - Michael E. Porter

So we have planted the seeds of Vision and Reality and can now clearly see the gap that exists between the two. Make a carefully constructed list of the obstacles or roadblocks that are in the way of you making your next moves towards your Vision. What are they? What will need to occur to overcome each? How is each to be achieved? Who needs to be involved? What is the timeframe for overcoming each? The activities of every person in the business should have a direct relationship to its strategy. These activities are the implementation of that strategy.

The Seed of People Power

"Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning." - Bill Gates

Our People
For years, we've been trapped into believing that we should be recruiting on the basis of skills and experience. The problem arises when, often just a few months down the track, they find that the recently employed person is just not fitting in. They ticked all the right boxes, so what went wrong?

The answer, of course, is usually that they do not fit your company culture. A positive company culture can be developed strategically, by first determining the Core Values of the business. The values that will exist even under the most extreme circumstances? From that point people can be employed according to their alignment to those values, as opposed to skills and experience, which can be taught and provided over time.

Often business owners complain that they can't "get the right people" or they "can't get them to do what I want". If your people are not doing what is required, it's because of one of the following reasons:
1. They do not have a clear understanding of what is required of them.
2. They do not have the necessary skills or training to effectively carry out what's required.
3. They do not have the resources required to complete their tasks.
4. They are not prepared to do the job asked of them.

If you have the wrong person, it's your doing – so do something about it!

Our Customers
Customers (or clients) can often be taken for granted. We supply a product or service, they need it; we publicise the fact that we have it and they buy it from us. If only it was that simple...

Socrates believed that it was necessary to "know thyself" before attempting to gain knowledge on any other matter, which was trivial by comparison. If we consider this in relation to our business, we could very easily borrow from him and practise "know thy Customer" as being the most basic of prerequisites.

Everyone in the business has (or should have) an obligation to ask, at every conceivable opportunity: "What are we doing wrong?" and "How can we improve?" This is the starting point.

Our Strategic Allies
It might sound like a pretentious term, but it really means the group of people or organisations with whom our business cooperates for one purpose or another. These are individuals with whom the business is in regular contact. As such, they know the business very well and are often in a prime position to refer your services.

It is therefore vital that these relationships are developed, maintained and nurtured in a strategic fashion. All too often they are taken for granted, instead of being treated in a way that stands the business in the very best light for referral business to eventuate.

The Seed of Communication

"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." - Epictetus

Internal Communications - how we circulate information within the business.

Think - Before speaking, that is. Well-thought-through concepts will gain the attention of people. The converse also applies.
Talk - People should be encouraged to present concepts confidently in the right forum.
Listen - Feedback is a great tool – but it must be given and received constructively.
Discuss - Once proposals are presented and feedback gained, there should be a forum whereby all appropriate team members can thrash out a way forward.
Act - Implementation is 'where the rubber hits the road'. Without an implementation plan, all of the preceding will have been wasted. Furthermore, staff will quickly become disenchanted with business leadership – or lack thereof!
Review- Every process that has been implemented should be in a constant state of review. External and other internal factors will affect other processes, thus necessitating another process for review.

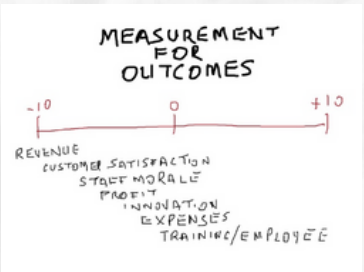
External Communications - how we communicate with our customers, or potential customers.

Because you have a really good handle on just who comprises that market (Know Thy Customer) you can start to more accurately target your marketing with a greater degree of certainty that you are actually reaching the right customers.

Potential and existing customers need different forms of communication from the business. Marketing and advertising attract new customers and generate new business, and the relationship with existing customers is nurtured through communication channels such as newsletters and personal contact.

The Seed of Measurement

"Wise are those that learn that the bottom line doesn't have to be their top priority." William Arthur Ward

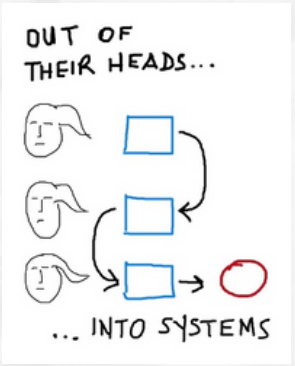


We're used to measuring the performance of our business by the number of sales, the revenue and its profitability. But those measurables are the end product of what the business does. All of the activities that produce those numbers should also be measured. Measuring revenue and profit alone is inadequate. It is equally as important to measure everything leading up to revenue generation.

A further suggestion is that cash flow forecasting be implemented. This Cash Plan, together with monthly financial statements, will provide a clear picture of the ability of the business to grow and how that growth could be financed. In planting seeds to grow the business, monitoring growth and then reviewing growth against expectations is not a choice, it is mandatory.

The Seed of Process

"In order for any business to succeed, it must first become a system so that the business functions exactly the same way every time, down to the last detail." Rick Harshaw



Small business owners often ask why the documentation of policies and procedures is relevant to them. The answer lies in what they want for their business. If they want to create an enterprise that can grow, is efficient during its growth phases and is a saleable asset when the owner has finished with it, this documentation is essential.

The business is naturally broken down into components:
Operations (what the business does in deriving its revenue and to satisfy customer demands)
Marketing (how it delivers its message to its target markets)
Sales (how it converts customer awareness into actual sales)
Finance and Administration (how it records, manages and reports on business activities).

Without written systems, there is greater potential for chaos because there is no certainty as to who should be doing what, when.

The Seed of Accomplishment

"It is time for us to stand up and cheer the doer, the achiever, the one who recognises the challenge and does something about it." Vince Lombardi

Accomplishment is the realisation of effort, it assists in keeping people on track and in understanding the importance of their achievements.

Within the seed of Vision, you created a very clear picture of what the business would look like, once complete. There were targets and goals established within the Vision and it is these that should be recognised when accomplished.

You should also celebrate the smaller successes that are required along the pathway to the bigger achievements. Don't have a party every time you send an email, but the smaller achievements must be acknowledged as they occur. This gives your people the reassurance that their efforts are appreciated and an understanding of where individual effort sits within the big picture.

The Seed of Review

"Sometimes when you innovate, you make mistakes. It is best to admit them quickly, and get on with improving your other innovations." Steve Jobs

If we do not regularly check in on our performance, it is very easy to believe that all is as it should be – knowing in the back of our minds that this is far from true. To conduct an entire business review daily is obviously impractical. However, we can review our own personal and individual performance on a daily basis.

Daily reviews are great for individuals, they allow for reflection on behaviour and the gaining of self-awareness.

Weekly reviews are appropriate for teams to clarify how you are tracking towards those goals; this will be the link between daily activity and the first set of monthly goals.

Monthly reviews; the next step. The four components of what you plan to achieve each quarter.

Quarterly reviews take on a bigger picture. What is needed to be in place each quarter to ensure you're on track towards the long term begins to take shape here.

Annual reviews look at the improvements you can make. Each review is the home of innovation. This is a great opportunity for advancement.

The Seed of Appreciation

"Among the things you can give and still keep are your word, a smile, and a grateful heart." Zig Ziglar

Arguably, the two most important words in your business vocabulary, and the two most underused. However, appreciation, expressed via "Thank You", must be more than a part of your vocabulary – it must be a part of your psyche. Appreciation expressed without sincerity is like a vase without flowers – it is empty!

For appreciation to become genuine and a part of what you do, make it part of your daily review.
What has gone well today?
Which people really excelled?
Who were the top contributors?

And on a personal level – to ensure you do not take yourself and your own achievements for granted:
Where did we begin?
How much have I achieved since that time?
What has been my own contribution to that growth?
What have I achieved today?

So, there they are; the 10 seeds you must plant for your business to grow. And grow it will, if all are implemented on a regular basis. And that's it? Well no, not quite. You have planted these seeds, but unless they've been planted in good soils, they are unlikely to grow to their full potential.

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