



GROW YOUR BUSINESS BY FINDING YOUR “HIDDEN” ORGANIZATION

Have you ever wondered what enables some entrepreneurs to exponentially grow their businesses while others go flat, or worse? Their secret lies in their ability to find and lead what I call their “hidden” organization. You may think you don’t have an organization, hidden or otherwise, especially if your business consists of a “gang of one” or there are only a few employees on staff. But the fact is that even the smallest businesses have an organization, and your success or failure is determined by your ability to find it and then lead it in a way that gives you more of the results you want. This may be a totally new concept to consider. It’s easy to think of giant corporations as having organizations. These are the “internal stakeholders” consisting of employees, departments and committees on the payroll. However, large companies are realizing that independent consultants, suppliers, outsource providers, alliance partners, customers and other “external stakeholders” also play a critical role in their organization’s ability to achieve high performance results. Just as your business is part of your customers’ external organization, it also has external stakeholders of its own that make up your hidden organization. The better you become at recognizing and leveraging the power of these many relationships, the more likely it is that you’ll survive unexpected twists and turns in the economy, minimize problems, and take your business to the next level of growth. Who makes up your hidden organization? It can be challenging to identify the many stakeholders who impact your business. While some of these relationships are obvious, it’s easy to overlook and underestimate the impact of others. However, if you think of an external stakeholder as any person, group or organization that has a stake (whether they recognize it or not) in the success of your business, your organization includes, but is not limited to: •Customers •Suppliers •Outsource providers (payroll services, virtual assistants, etc.) •Advisors (attorneys, accountants, bankers, business coaches, consultants, etc.) •Alliance partners •Subcontractors •Competitors •Business and trade associations to which you belong •Advisory boards When you uncover the wide variety of support, knowledge, skills, capabilities, and resources that are available through your stakeholders, you can offer services and products in ways that you may never have considered before. For example, a specialty-clothing designer with one store location teamed up with an online distributor so that she now runs a global business, reaching customers around the world. Even competitors have found that there are a number of ways to benefit through limited collaborations. The possibilities for growth are there if you look for them. While large companies have organizational charts that map out functions of departments and roles of employees, you can also create your own “organizational chart” to map out how external stakeholders fill essential functions and roles that are essential for conducting business. For instance, your accountant, attorney, and insurance agent are important parts of your “executive team.” Your organization also includes your customers, along with the alliance partners, outsource providers, and sub-contractors who may work with you to deliver products and services. As you continue to identify stakeholders, be sure to update your organization chart on a regular basis. Depending upon, your own goals, customers’ objectives and needs, new technology and shifts in the economy, some stakeholders will take on increased importance while others play a less important role for a period of time. Realigning your vision of your organization so it includes these and other external stakeholders will enable you to think about new ways to reach your customers, expand your capabilities, and discover new opportunities for increased revenue and profitability. Leading and managing your hidden organization Now that you’ve discovered your hidden organization, the next challenge is to lead and manage it so that you are achieving your growth objectives. Clients often tell me that unexpected and persistent problems seem to come out of nowhere (this is what I call “strategic gridlock”). However, when we look back, it’s possible to trace the source of problems to one or more common but mistaken assumptions that we all make about our organizations, based upon our individual perceptions of reality. As you lead and manage your hidden organization, here are three questions to ask yourself on a regular basis to begin to uncover assumptions, avoid gridlock, and grow your business: • What is the uniqueness of each stakeholder? Just as no two people are alike; no two stakeholders are alike. Yet it’s easy to adopt an approach to dealing with others that doesn’t allow for these variations. This can lead to persistent problems, especially if their values and practices are different from yours. Understanding the uniqueness of each stakeholder will help everyone get the most out of each relationship. • Are my stakeholders capable of doing what I want? Since external stakeholders have other priorities outside of yours, unexpected changes in direction can easily happen. Consistent communication with your external stakeholders minimizes the risk of being blindsided by these issues, and allows you to make contingency plans. It also alerts you to developments that could result in new opportunities for your growth. • Are my stakeholders willing to do what I want? External stakeholders don’t always share your objectives or sense of urgency. The more that you understand how they perceive your objectives and what their needs are in relationship to yours, the more likely it is that you can head off conflicts, improve decision making, and negotiate solutions that represent a “win” for everyone. To fully meet organizational challenges and lead your organization to high performance results, it’s essential to know not only who your stakeholders are, but also what issues they face and the impact those issues may have on you. When you seek out the perceptions of your stakeholders on a regular basis, you’ll be able to address any potential challenges from a position of organizational reality, not individual assumption. Discover the power of your hidden organization Many entrepreneurs, especially those who are used to working as “gangs of one”, overlook and underestimate the many ways that they can leverage and grow their businesses by working in collaboration with their external stakeholders. . Once you recognize that you are the architect of your own organization, the issues of leading and managing organizations of all sizes are the same; the same organizational principles apply to mega-corporations as well as to solo entrepreneurs, because even the very smallest businesses have “hidden” organizations within them. Harnessing the power of your hidden organization will help you to discover untapped opportunities, avoid organizational jams, and grow to new heights of success.

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