

Elements of Good Health in Growing Organisations

Author: Lisa Francis-Jennings



I believe that almost any growing company can make a go of it without too much fuss. As long as management keeps their eye on the bottom line and customer satisfaction, most organisations will chug along. There are, however, organisations that shine. They are organisations that are growing and exceedingly healthy. Just as it takes certain things for an individual to be fit, these thriving organisations show signs that someone is maintaining an effective balance of control and freedom. Here are a few of the things I see in these organisations.

Drive

The interesting thing about culture is that it is as much a part of the industry as it is the organisation. If your organisational culture does not, at least in a small way, mimic the culture of its industry, you may find it hard-going – at least until your organisation sets the new standard! Look around you. You have a culture and, for that matter, an organisational personality. Think about both and decide who you need to either uphold that culture or change the personality. For an organisation to be truly great, it is important that you populate key positions and have critical responsibilities taken on by individuals who can drive your culture, values and goals. Make sure you have a critical mass of people who embody the spirit of your mission and vision and help others learn and adhere to your guiding principles or philosophy.

Inspire

Growing takes time and can be challenging. For your organisation to really take off, you need to inspire your people with the identity of your business. Your stories of how the company came to be and the singular milestones and accomplishments that you have seen on the way, can add substance and fabric to the landscape of your values and vision. To inspire you must evoke some strong emotion and connect the past to your future.

Scale

Just like a person continues to grow and evolve throughout their life, an organisation does too. Even if you are content for your organisation to remain static, elements in the market and industry around it will always change and shift. Once we recognise that we have no choice in this matter, it becomes easier to accept and plan for the realities of change. One of the most important elements of change is the capacity to deal with the turbulence that accompanies it. Setting a culture that is focused and comfortable with scaling, up or down, will stand you in good stead for your changing organisation. Empowering your team to improve systems and processes, and flag issues that might come with scaling. At the same time ensure that you have managers who listen and accommodate a variety of views and perspectives. Even if some feedback is incorrect or off base, it is all-important to guiding you to where you want to be ... or away from rocky shores. Building capacity means that eventually it will become easier to plan and prepare for growth making it possible to accomplish your goals while in transition.

Trust: Respect & Respond

People need to trust their leadership. If they do, they will go above and beyond. If they don't, they will second-guess you and drag their feet. Trust is earned and won. It is not owed. The easiest way to gain trust is to respect your people and respond to them ... and their needs. To have a strong team you need strong individuals, who can respect each other and work together. Ensure you role-model strong positive behaviour and use your power and influence for the good of the team and the company, not yourself. Remember, if you keep this edict in mind: 'choose what is best for your customers, then what is best for the company and finally what is best for the team' you will set a shining example and be successful individually as well.

Focus & Formalise

Once you emerge from the chaos of the 'start-up', where everyone does anything any-time, you will be struck by the gracefulness of 'the process'. It is around this stage that many organizations begin to change out their people; looking for individuals who are process driven and systems-focused. The beat that is missed in this transition is giving your teams time to regroup and redefine themselves. Many people in start-up mode become accustomed to the 'do-everything-all-the-time' mode without realising that they can experience another, more productive state. With a bit of prodding and a small reliance on the cultural norms you have already set, you can define new milestones and adhere to reformatted policies that encourage and support business growth.

Innovate

Things change. I work with many companies that have created teams with a unique mix of process and million-idea thinking. Probably the most important element of innovation I have seen in my career is the ability to form teams of disparate personalities and communication styles that embody the innovative process. Put an 'ideas' person together with a 'process' person and you are bound to get sparks of disagreement and miscommunication... but in those sparks, if handled correctly, you will find an elegant mix of innovation and creation. In that miscommunication, you will find new ideas and the birth of theories never before discussed, or conceptualised.

Manage Risk

The difference between good and great is the ability to reign people in, and preform debriefs or lessons learned consistently – even in the most successful of endeavours. No matter the size of your organisation, having the correct governance and long/short-term goals in place ensures focus and risk mitigation. Encourage your teams to take calculated risks but make sure they learn with each passing day. Support your people when they fail and make sure you are always growing your organisational expertise and are tweaking your organisational personality. This will ensure optimal organisational health, no matter what stage of growth you are at.

