



# Grow From Here to Success

## How to make sure your business has everything it needs to grow

When I was a younger guy, whenever I would get a gadget, while I might have enjoyed it, I always thought about what the toy will be like in the future, perhaps with the same anticipation as many people have about the next generation of mobile technology. One of the things that always bothered me was the question of why things weren't designed to be used with the next generation of products.

For example, with a computer, you might be able to upgrade the amount of memory, how fast it runs, and swap out different components, but yesterday's computer probably may not be able

to run tomorrow's software as effectively as tomorrow's computer will. Yesterday's computer lacks true forward compatibility.

From a producer perspective, a producer could probably get consumers to believe that there are huge changes in the same old product in a different box and sell it again – every year in some cases. This, of course, is what drives revenue. But I digress...

## **The Problem**

As a business owner, the question begs to be asked: how have you designed your company for the future? I don't mean – how have you thought about it, or what kind of planning have you done, but rather, what are the actual activities or tactical decisions you have made that will prepare the company as it grows toward the future.

For example, with your accounting system: do you have a formal accounting or financial management process that goes beyond collecting all of your receipts, dumping them in a shoe box along with bank statements and handing them to your bookkeeper each month/quarter/year/whenever you think about it? Do you think that there might be better ways to manage your finances so that you can see how your company is performing at any given time? In doing so, don't you think it would be easier to hand off financial management as your company grows?

Of course. At the end of the day, it will probably cost you a lot less to keep things organized, help you understand where your cash is going and where you might need to cut back or invest. Poor management is one of the top reasons small businesses fail.

## **The Solution**

1. Start with your company vision – where you want your

company to go. Is it a single location with 100 employees, or multiple locations with offices both domestically and internationally?

2. Develop a mission – why you do what you do. Your mission will help to dictate how you get to the vision and will keep you and your decision-making on track
3. Develop a plan to get there – use stages and start very high level, then
4. Look at the components of your business – sales, marketing, finance, products and services, Human Resources, management and IT – and determine what these will look like at each stage.
5. Determine what resources will be required to support each function at each level.

Look, for example, at business management – how to manage the business. One of the things that has plagued small businesses is the idea that not all software solutions play well together. So we would end up with an email service that doesn't communicate with the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system, which doesn't talk to the bookkeeping system, none of which interact well with the marketing system. Ideally, they should all play nicely together so that those using the system don't have to update five systems manually in order to get an idea of what the big picture looks like!

So in planning for the future, we would want to have a system that either has native integration between the systems (they are all built into one solution), have a tool custom built that will enable all of the systems to work together or use an online service that will do the same.

In any case, when a business is young and has very few contacts and things can be done manually, it doesn't seem to be a top priority for the business. However, when the business is in a growth stage, it can sometimes be too late or very expensive to make the necessary changes...which can be the case with each component of the business.

So if you are planning on building a business that is extraordinary, think in terms of where your business is going, versus staying completely focused on where it is. Sure – you will need to take one step at a time and not tie up all of your resources in assets that you cannot use. Rather think strategically – in terms of how the business will operate the most efficiently at each stage and plan for it as you invest and grow.

Rick Meekins is the Managing Consultant at [Aepiphanni](#), a Business Consultancy that provides Management Consulting, Implementation and Managed Services to business leaders and entrepreneurs seeking to improve or expand operations. We are the trusted advisor for business leaders who are seeking forward-thinking solutions to help them plan for and navigate through the challenges of business growth. Our entrepreneurial multidisciplinary team works with clients to develop differentiating solutions and provide direction focused on lasting, strategic results. We exist to help our clients CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD extraordinary businesses.

We would love to hear from you. Please share your thoughts and comments below. If you are seeking advice on how to grow your business, streamline systems and processes, implement software or overcoming challenges to growth, please contact us, directly or submit a request for a complimentary [Coffee & a Consult](#) to learn how we can help you CREATE | DESIGN | BUILD an [extraordinary](#) company..

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# Stone Faced | Extraordinary Business

## How to make sure that you are doing the things it takes to grow your company

Growing your company – or any business, requires change. But that change has to enable the company to move toward a specific goal. Beyond creating a strategic plan, doing more marketing, advertising, hiring great people, here are seven things that you have to do:



“But this is what we have always done!” is a comment that probably resonates with a lot of people. Especially those who have created processes and systems and invested a lot of time and energy into certain activities. Some might call it the “comfortable spot” while others might harbor on “what if change is wrong?”

Here’s the thing: there may be some things that do get you, as a business leader, the results you are looking for every time. Every day, your results are hit out of the ballpark and you couldn’t be more thrilled. But that doesn’t mean a) you shouldn’t evaluate it to see if it could be done *better*. or b) there aren’t other ways to accomplish the same thing *faster, better and at a lower cost!*

Here’s what happens: while you are sitting back, proud of your accomplishments, your competitor comes across this technology

that you have ignored, incorporated it into their business and is now taking away your customers. This means that your cost to do business suddenly increases because a) it costs you more to get and keep customers and b) lower revenue means that you may have to resort to doing things like lowering your prices, offering extreme discounts or increasing the cost of your offering – each of which makes it harder to cover your monthly fixed costs.

Yow. Insult and injury? Check.

Growth requires change. That is foundational. If you want to grow from a child to an adult, you will go through change. If you want to grow a plant, it will change. If you want to grow a business, *it requires change!* Being stuck doing the same thing day in and day out without much change, without much forethought, being reactive with your decision-making will not result in the type of company you want to have.

Here is what I am thinking – generalizations about your company and why you are in business:

- Your goal is to build a successful, sustainable (not on life support) company that allows you to have a certain lifestyle, to reach some level of power or notoriety or to simply provide some exchange of value to businesses, consumers or the communities so that you can feel good about it while keeping food on your table.
- You probably don't want to be "self-employed," meaning that your company and your customers run you. You would rather be running your company so that if you take days or weeks off for whatever reason, you can continue the business when you return, either because employees have been running it or because your customers will be there when you return..
- You probably don't want to work until you fall over. While it that might be attractive to some, there are probably some negative outcomes there.

- You probably believe that the harder you work, the greater your returns will be. Better said, perhaps, if you don't work, you won't accomplish anything. You can work yourself crazy, but if you aren't doing the right things, you won't accomplish anything. Promise.

Here is the question: what kinds of things – strategically thinking – are you doing to ensure that you are running the type of company you truly want to run? Certainly, there are everyday things you are probably doing, thinking in terms of finding new customers: making or overseeing production, networking, developing content, advertising, developing new products or offers, etc.; but to what end? Where do all of these things lead? Is it more of the same: “fishin’ in the same hole” with the same or fewer results as more people enter the pond?” or are you thinking about how to move up the channel to fresher waters.

In growing your company, you will need to have a one track mind – be stone-faced, and embrace the idea that growing your company requires diligent, strategic change. You and your team need to understand where you are, why you do what you do and where you are going.

*“I am in Georgia. I want to visit my family. I must travel to New Jersey.”*

If that is my goal, the activities that I do must contribute to getting to that goal. Anything that I do outside of it will deter me from the goal. If I don't plan my route, jump in a vehicle and head northward and eastward, I could end up anywhere from Ohio to anywhere along the Eastern seaboard. If I don't make sure I have enough cash or reliable transportation (resources), I could end up stuck halfway.

*“Who builds a tower without first determining the cost?” – King Solomon of Israel*

On the other end of the spectrum, if I get stuck in planning and thinking mode, I will never move. So I have to have a happy medium and get moving. Quickly. Stone-faced.

So, how do you make sure that everything that you are doing is focused growing your company? Here are seven things that you will want to do.

1. Make growing your company very intentional. Set aside time, regularly, daily or weekly, to focus on growing your company. The more time you can contribute without hurting your organization, the better.
2. Embrace a culture of innovation..not just in yourself, but with your entire team. Find ways to motivate them to contribute, authentically, on every level.
3. Make sure that your mission, vision and values are memorable, relatable, understandable, potent and practical. If nobody gets it, if no one remembers it, if no one can understand it, it is useless. Throw it out and start over.
4. Make sure that you and everyone in your company not only *knows*, but *embraces*, your company's belief statements: its mission, vision and values. To quote G.I. Joe – knowing is half the battle! (Doing is the other)
5. Evaluate what you are doing/selling/offering/producing. Repeatedly. On a schedule if necessary. Get feedback from everywhere: your customers/clients, from employees and other stakeholders. Look at things, yourself. How can this be better? Does it provide value for customers? other stakeholders? Can it be improved? Can it be done less expensively without compromising on quality or value?
6. Always be innovating. Not innovating for the sake of innovative, but rather, to achieve a specific goal. For example, if your mission is to provide a best in class experience for your guests, through all of the tactics listed above, you will constantly be learning how to



make things better. If you don't, someone else will.

7. Stay on task. If you think about the stone monuments around the world, they face one direction and don't change, which how you need to be with your growth goals. Activities that deviate from your goal will only slow your progress. Your failure to stay on task may mean that you never arrive at your destination. If something in the environment changes, make your adjustment and get back on course.

Growth doesn't happen by accident. Only a very small percentage of businesses are "lucky." Those that aren't lucky will require stone-faced focus on where they want to go and an undying commitment to get there.

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# Thinking Different | Extraordinary Business



Which is more important – character or cash flow? Heard by some, the almighty dollar rules over men's and women's lives. An observer might say that many of us – business leaders – lead very transactional lives. Everything interaction, everything that we do tends to focus on how we can gain, how we can get better, further or more secure in our existence. Character seems to be the thing of academia or religious circles.

Many times, as business leaders, we take the short route of gathering all that we can – thinking from a survivalist mentality. Everything tends to be about “amass as much wealth as quickly as possible, spending as little as possible and putting as little work as possible into it.” Seems to make sense. Seems like that if you hook into the right program or system or niche, you will be on easy street for the rest of your life.

The problem is – it's been done before. People have been pitching these lame, short-thinking ideas to people for as long as people could communicate. Consider this, every “fall of mankind” story ever read had to do with someone taking the shortcut or the easy way out.

When you move out of the space of desperation, you begin to open your mind to think about how to become [extraordinary](#). Simply stated – part of what makes it extraordinary is that most people won't do it. It will be a nice idea, an academic thought, or some lame sales tactic. However, for those that pursue it, put the time, the effort and the work into it, the results will be so much greater than a paycheck – although foundational for the business are profitable business practices.

Some might say that this is just an example of the Protestant Work Ethic. Perhaps this is true. Guess what: it works. The practice simply states that you should work hard, save money and support your communities.

Clarity for your business should be given to why you are working. Is it actually for the money? Is it a life style? Certain things that are on the list above food, clothing a shelter, perhaps? So – you are doing whatever it is that you do, you are making money so that you can gain all of these things – and suddenly things change. What do you do? You've pretty much defined yourself by what you do, what your lifestyle is, etc.

The current economy teaches us that this is short-term thinking. It teaches us that by defining ourselves by our work or by our things leaves us without a sense of self when those things are taken away. This is why the country is in a depression. Most of us have nothing to do with Wall Street, when our banks closed, our money was moved to another one, when things got challenging, we made adjustments. While it was tough, we found ways to make it through – just as our parents did through other recessions.

Thinking different says that we think about who we are, what we do and why. We give our work and our businesses a long-view. We don't think in terms of "running through the city, grabbing as much as we can then getting away safely," as an



old story about a young thief describes. We think differently: we join the city and enjoy all the benefits of being part of a sustainable community.

Be extraordinary. Think differently. Run an extraordinary company.

[Aepiphanni Business Consulting: The Business Strategy People](#) is an Atlanta, Georgia based Operations Management and Business Strategy Consulting Firm dedicated to serving the needs of small to medium sized business leaders. We help business leaders DESIGN| CREATE | BUILD extraordinary businesses. We support our clients with financial management, product and service production and delivery, outsourced services management, sales & marketing and business growth. We provide them with a number of flexible solutions to help them reach their goals.

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**Challenge      Everything      |**

# Extraordinary Business



There is a video game company called EA (Electronic Arts – <http://www.ea.com/>) that used to use the tagline “Challenge Everything.” As one who, at times, must question the natural order of things, this tag immediately appealed to me. Many of my clients often hear the question of, “Why?” when they propose ideas. The goal isn’t to belittle the idea or thought, but rather, to make sure that the idea is completely thought out.

As business leaders, we need to understand and question everything around our businesses. As someone said to me, once, “You need to inspect what you expect.” Even if we feel like we understand certain things, or that certain things appear to be part of the natural order, understanding “why” something is done will often serve to ensure that the product or service or idea does have merits and has been completely thought out.

Understanding how an idea or thought will fit the company mission or help the company move closer to its vision also deserves some inquiry. Clarity on where and when gives you understanding about the timeframe in which you will need to act and finally, determining what resources – people, money,

agencies, etc., to accomplish a particular task is another set of questions to be heard.

Part of the effort used in building an extraordinary business is understanding the ways in which your company will best serve its beliefs: its mission, vision and values. While you may have ideas on how YOU might do accomplish a task or address an issue, as a business leader, gathering other peoples' insight – be it employees, clients, vendors, etc., will only serve to help your company do what it does better. Asking questions for greater understanding will help you make good decisions to get your company there.

As EA would say, “Challenge Everything.” Be extraordinary. Ensure that your company is on a path that will lead to realized dreams, goals and expectations.

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We welcome clients in the personal and professional services industries, including Creative and Design Services, Software & IT Services, Professional Services and Specialty Consumer Services. As always, we welcome your comments, thoughts, questions and suggestions.

If you are seeking a business assessment, or have further questions about creating your strategy or developing your vision, please give me, [Rick Meekins](#), a call at 678-265-3908, or email us at [info@aepiphanni.com](mailto:info@aepiphanni.com).

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# Chaos in the Marketplace | Extraordinary Business

I was speaking with marketing guru [Joel Alpert of MarketPower](#) at an event last week, discussing the idea of positioning and clarity of the marketing message. During our conversation, Joel was kind enough to give me some marketing pointers (I am a strategist, not a marketer, Joel!), one of which was the importance of presenting your goods and services in a manner so that people can quickly ascertain what what your company offers and who it is targeting.

For example, Aepiphanni is a business strategy company. We help business leaders create extraordinary businesses. If we decided, suddenly, that we wanted to sell memberships to timeshares, potential buyers would begin to doubt us as a company because they couldn't make the connection between business strategy and timeshares.

While, logically, maintaining consistency with your brand is a no-brainer, I cannot tell you how many business leaders I run into who are trying to sell so many things that they really have no identifiable brand or trademark expertise. Their projects, products or services, while good, don't ever reach the potential that they could because the business leader cannot devote enough time to a single focus in order to make it exactly what it needs to be. People are hesitant to purchase from their companies because they don't truly understand what it is they will be purchasing.

This is especially important in the professional services industry, since we are selling experience, education and [Aepiphanni's](#). If we decide that our organizations need "multiple streams of income" and they have nothing to do with our core business, nor serve our core market (see your mission

and vision statements!), something is going to suffer. Keep in mind – the clearer and more aligned your business is, the easier it will be for your potential market to purchase from you. The more scattered your sources of income, the more confused you and your business will appear.

Be extraordinary. Avoid the chaos.

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## Welcome to 2010

Happy New Year!

The title sounds like the ominous beginning to a Science Fiction novel or movie from years gone by. They probably would have said something about the advances in technology, such as deep space flight, robotics and artificial intelligence and cellular phones. They would also talk about society – usually in terms of its degradation: World War III, the depletion of the Ozone, the scarcity of fossil fuels or the Greenhouse effect resulting in World Wide flooding.

I suppose this gives us something to be thankful for: we have advanced, tremendously, technologically. Our lives have many, many comforts that didn't even exist 20 years ago. At the same time, our society has not destroyed itself, nor does it appear to be on the brink of doing so. Are there problems? Yes, of course. Are there technologies that we

need to have developed in the next 10 years or so in order to avoid more doomsday prophecies? Of course. But we live in the present, and can be thankful for what we have.

As a business leader, in both scenarios discussed, we saw two patterns that we need to adapt into our businesses in order to avoid disruption or our own ventures:

1) Continuous advancements. We need to continue to find ways to fulfill our mission and reach toward the company vision. Notice, I did not say that we need to find ways to make more money. I promise you that done properly, money will be the byproduct of a well-run organization that has clear focus on their mission and vision. When we talk about advancements, that doesn't necessarily mean find a bunch of products or services to dump on your target audiences, but rather, through communication and observation, determine what their growing or changing needs are and find ways to address them that make sense for your business.

2) Environmental awareness. As a business leader, knowing what is going on in and around your business is fundamental to getting to and remaining at the top of your game. This is part of what launches us from being ordinary to being extraordinary. It requires regular business assessments, business analysis and adjustments to your business plan. It requires understanding what your changing (dynamic) market is in need of, how to connect with them and how to get them to purchase your offerings. In order for your actions to be most effective, it must be strategic, rather than a hodgepodge of mediocre flailings.

So, extraordinary business leader, as we progress into 2010, take some time to systematically assess your business – where it is in its lifecycle, what its needs are and what goals you have for it for the year. Look at your market and your industry and try to determine what needs and trends are approaching and how you might meet those new needs or address



new trends. Finally, create a strategic plan. Knowing where you are going is one thing. Knowing how to get there is the foundation of success.

Happy New Year! I wish you the most in 2010!

[Aepiphanni Business Consulting: The Business Strategy People](#) is a Strategy Consulting Firm dedicated to serving the needs of small to medium sized business leaders and executives. We specialize in helping leaders create extraordinary businesses. We welcome clients in the personal and professional services industries, including Creative and Design Services, Software & IT Services, Professional Services and Healthcare Services. As always, we welcome your comments, thoughts, questions and suggestions. If you are seeking a business assessment, or have further questions about creating your strategy or developing your vision, please give me, [Rick Meekins](#), a call at 678-265-3908, or email us at [info@aepiphanni.com](mailto:info@aepiphanni.com).



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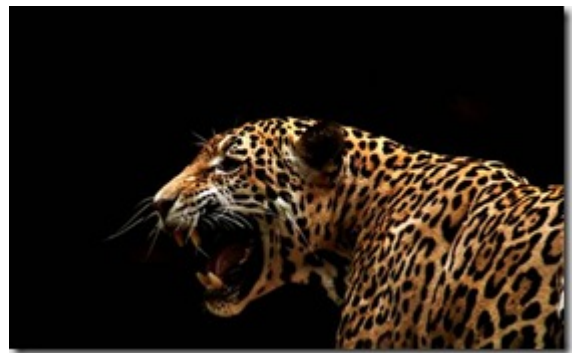
## Leveraging Your Strengths

As a business leader, it's always interesting being in a position to ride out a recession. I can't help but wonder what will be different. How will consumer preferences change? How will their spending patterns change? What are businesses doing to regroup? How many businesses merged and

what will they look like when they emerge?

Of course, with all of the resulting volatility, I have to look at the emerging needs in the marketplace and determine what I need to do differently. If I keep doing the same thing that I have been doing (running on inertia), then I will likely get left behind. If I keep my nose to the grindstone and keep pumping out new and exciting stuff for a market that doesn't exist, or one that is saturated (red, shark infested waters), then I won't continue to be successful. If I find a way to identify and leverage my strengths, I can continue to be a service to my community.

That is a mark of an extraordinary business – they not only meet the needs of their market's current needs, they are able



to anticipate it's future needs.

What does this have to do with leveraging your strengths? Everything. Some times when business leaders discover a need in the marketplace, they immediately loose focus on their vision to go after the shiny new bait in the water. Many times, this new thing will take them on a new path, which for some, is fine. However, for those who are trying to serve a specific population in a specific way, this could be devastating. Therefore identifying and finding ways to leverage your strengths is going to be the most ideal scenario for meeting new market needs.

Strengths you might seek to leverage might be relationships, the ability to learn, resources you can use to hire new people or assistant, access to different types of information and the

typical cash flow, client relationships, community relationships, access to investors or ability to raise capital through traditional methods. It will be important to identify some more non-traditional strengths so that you can begin to get a fuller picture of what your capabilities truly are. At the same time, you must be realistic. Your strengths should be something that you can tie some direct outcome to. For example, stating that you have access to \$500,000, thinking that you can find investors (that you don't have) for a product or service that hasn't been developed might be a little far-fetched (though stating that you *need* that \$500,000 may not be unrealistic.)

Once you've identified those strengths, look at the needs and trends in your market/industry and define opportunities that your company could take advantage of in the upcoming year. If you are in the fuel industry, you might be looking at how you might leverage offer alternate fuel sources. If you are in construction, you might look at how you might promote the company as a green company. If you are in professional services, you might do research in your industry and sell a trend report based on your findings. Whatever you decide to do, make sure that it is a) part of your mission, b) help you move toward your vision and c) doesn't compromise your values.

Remember that everything that your business produces has your business's name on it. Your market is watching. If you confuse them, they won't purchase from you.

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