

**Chris Jones of international business coaching company
– Shirlaws – outlines the essential strategies when adopting a
business plan**

BY CHRIS JONES

Expanded growth – what is stopping you?

There is so much talk in business about the need for a Business Plan – a document which dictates where you're going and guides you to that end goal. But too often a business plan lacks the nuts and bolts of business growth – the 'how to' guide that will help to take your business from one stage of the business lifecycle to the next. To believe it will just happen is not realistic.

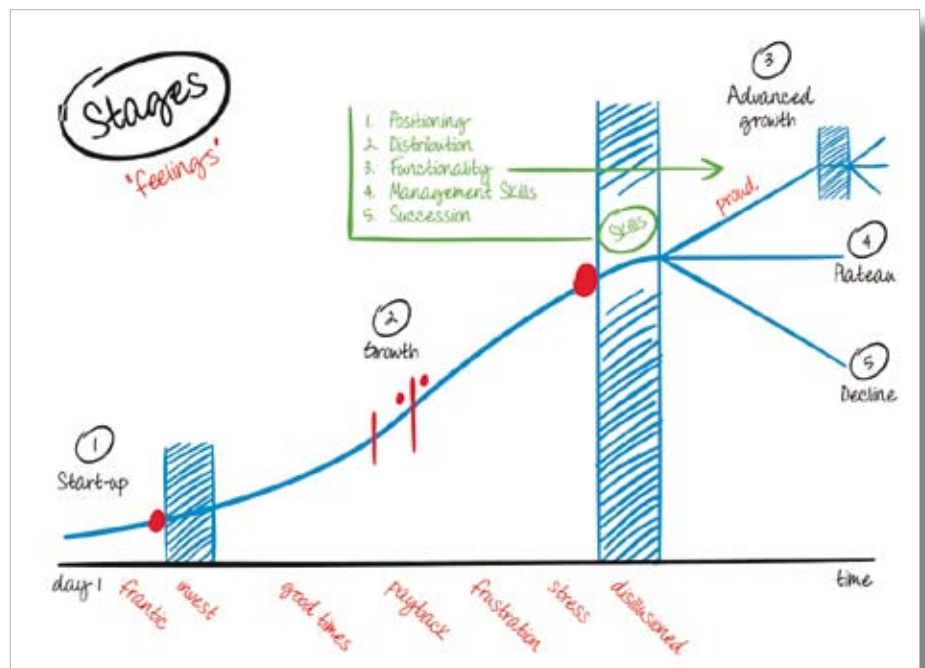
In this article we explore the key issues that hinder business growth and the steps you can take to move to that next level. Such steps include:

- Defining your vision
- Balancing commercial and cultural factors
- Getting clear on roles – who does what
- Building capability into the organisation and up-skilling staff
- Managing company leadership

Let's start with the need for a vision and values that help to define the business direction and organisational purpose. You need to get this right. It provides purpose and the context for making the right choices. Providing such direction plays a major role in managing your staff and their expectations.

Focus on commercial hard and cultural soft factors

It's important that you as an owner or manager recognise that one component of growing your business in a sustainable way requires a focus on commercial "hard" factors like net profits, return on investment (ROI) or market share. Whilst these are critically important, they can't happen in isolation because there is a second component that is less recognised, but just as important – the cultural "soft" factors of leadership and employee motivation. Success requires the correct balance between the hard and soft factors, between the commercial and cultural.



Shirlaws' Stages Framework demonstrates the journey of a business, divisional unit or individual, in depicting each phase of a typical business cycle.

It's important for your staff to 'buy-in' to the new company direction and be ready to play their part in taking your business to the next level. This doesn't mean that you should offer staff shares in your business! But it does mean that you need to involve them in determining how your company operates, because if they're involved, they're more likely to take ownership and responsibility for the future direction of the business and be motivated in doing so.

Just as organisational performance and reaching corporate benchmarks is important to any company, it's imperative for a manager to see the performance of its people and teams as a foundation for business success. As such, you need to get clear on roles and structure and align these with the strategy. An understanding of who does what, will

ensure not just an efficient operation but effective use of resources. This is good management.

By building capability into a company – at both organisational and individual staff levels – enables a company to sustain growth. Capability, in this context, would address the functional skills of departments and people but also at a higher level, in building the organisational capabilities that are core to differentiating you from your competitors. Not only is this good leadership, but operationally it will stand you in good stead.

Stage Framework to demonstrate business cycles

Shirlaws uses the Stages Framework to demonstrate the journey of a business, divisional unit or individual, in depicting each phase of a

typical business cycle (see diagram). Interestingly we have identified the different feelings that influence business decisions at each of these phases - for example: a business in start-up usually describes their experience as exciting; whereas a business that is in the fast growth phase are likely to describe their experience as being quite frustrating. Your emotional state (how you feel) does strongly influence your business objectivity (commercial decisions).

The point is that managers and owners who are establishing platforms for business growth can use this framework as a management tool to determine where their business is at, by understanding the feelings within the business, and subsequently assessing what the organisational priorities might be, particularly in the growth phase. But doing this on your own is a challenge for any manager.

Issues of leadership at all levels of an organisation also come into play. Shirlaws' research shows that half of Australian CEOs - or business owners - are not doing the job they were employed to do because they don't fully understand their leadership role and continue with hands-on duties at the expense of the business and company growth. Business owners often have a tendency to stick with what they're good at, the skills which helped them build the business in the first place, usually a functional skill in the technical (production) or commercial (sales) area.

Instead, what owners need to be doing

is coaching their staff to become as good in that functional activity so that delegation becomes automatic.

Your company will only see sustained growth if the leader manages the company - not does the doing. It's all about spending more "time working on the business, not in the business". In particular, you need to be on the lookout for these challenges when your company grows from a small start-up to mid-tier business. A shift that occurs that requires a change in behaviour from the owner, moving from business owner and implementer, to manager and coach.

It may be comforting to know that you are not unique in facing the challenge of business growth. Some managers do it on their own, often re-inventing the wheel. Others choose to seek external advice to gain support from experienced practitioners - people who have helped a business to achieve growth time and time again. Business coaching is about having someone sit alongside the leader of a business and draw the best out of you and your team.

The real stretch is something we define at Shirlaws as the difference between incremental change and radical change, recognising that anything from managing the people side of things (in terms of culture) to building capability for growth and up-skilling staff all bring benefits to your bottom line and business goals (the commercial results).

We know that business leaders have had people telling them what to do for years. And some managers tend to view having outside


support as an indication of weakness, or that they have done something 'wrong'. But very few people are experts in all areas or have had time to gain all the experience necessary to be both good leaders and managers.

Business coaches offer support

As business coaches we work on your agenda - we don't tell you what to do or what success in your business looks like. Rather we work with the owners to define your definition of success for both the business and you personally, and help you get there at a rate that you are comfortable with, because it's your agenda.

According to clients of Shirlaws, the advantages of working with a business coach include the following;

1. Clarity around their strategic direction and corporate vision, where the "smog and noise is clearer and I love my business again."
2. Feeling in control and "only focusing on the tasks that give me and my business greater leverage." This includes managing relationships much better on all fronts and building more profit into the business.
3. Ensuring everyone from the management team to all staff are on the same path or feel aligned and connected to the business.

Remember business is a journey with many exciting challenges along the way. Yes it's about the commercial results but it's also about people and it's about enjoying what you do. 

Chris Jones is Shirlaws' business coach, phone: 0434 953874

About Shirlaws

Shirlaws is one of the fastest growing, international business coaching organisations and, since it was established in Australia in 1999, has completely changed the structure and nature of business coaching in the marketplace. Its clients operate in a range of sectors, including financial services, accounting, real estate, engineering, IT, retail services, architecture and town planning.

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