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Got Growth?

Balancing responsibility, authority key to success

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You just woke up, it's still dark out, and the clock says 3:16 a.m. A great idea just popped into your head. "Do I really want to do this?," you ask ... and daylight breaks.

You talk to your team and they love it. Your initial research turns up no major concerns, and if it works, your brainstorm could have a profound impact on your organization. In fact, it could be the magic that gets you over that hump you have been grinding on for the past couple of years.

It could be all those things, but not without a flood of second thoughts.

If you are like most people with budget authority, you face a conflict. You are responsible for the outcome, and have authority. The problem is your authority does not extend far enough to ensure success. You know in the back of your head that a number of issues could arise that you have no control over, and no ability to correct. Political issues, ownership issues, pride of authorship, intradepartmental conflicts, client demands -- the list seems almost endless.

Imagine a teeter-totter. On one end an 8-year-old girl, on the other end, her father. Which way is the teeter-totter going to lean? When you visualize this scenario, it becomes pretty clear that the father and daughter are working toward a similar objective, but that teeter-totter isn't moving unless dad pushes up. Balanced? Not quite. Yes, you have authority, and yes, you have responsibility. Unfortunately they may not be balanced either.

When you are handed responsibility without adequate authority to get the job done, you are operating with limitations. If you engage others to help you, you will end up being forced to do the same to them. Not because you want to, but because you can't do anything about it, or worse, you didn't recognize the imbalance. Pretty quickly you see the problem is bigger

than you first thought.

How do you avoid getting painted into a corner where you can't fix a problem you are about to take the blame for?

Good news, there are things you can do:

- When you are offered greater authority, first ask yourself why. What is it you will be expected to do with that authority that was not expected before? Usually there is a fairly straight-forward answer.
- Who was responsible before and why has that changed? Did he or she lack skills, resources, or perhaps not have enough authority?
- Think of what it will take for you to be successful wielding your new authority, and where conflicts may arise. Look for potential conflicts with sales and production, front-line workers and management, marketing and finance, and human resources.
- Identify those areas where you may not have enough authority to accomplish your new tasks. Look for alternative ways to get around those issues.
- If you come up against a wall, you have to talk to your supervisor, the one who gave you this new responsibility, and let him or her know how and where you may run into problems. Work with your supervisor to identify solutions or negotiate additional authority.

If you accept new responsibility, you are probably working on a good idea. Congratulations! Now it is up to you to make sure you're successful.

Approach your new power with caution. Assume your level of authority is out of balance with your new responsibilities, and look for ways to build support before you find yourself up against a brick wall.

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