

From the Sacramento Business Journal:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/sacramento/stories/2006/05/22/smallb4.html>

Got Growth?

Executives should know when to seek outside help

Sacramento Business Journal - by Larry Mandelberg

Date: Sunday, May 21, 2006, 9:00pm PDT

Every successful company must deal with the normal struggles and difficulties that come with growth. Growth puts pressure on systems, structure, staff and serving the customer.

As problems arise, every executive learns how to deal with them by himself, or the problems develop into obstacles that reduce profitability.

On the surface this is a fairly straightforward concept. It becomes much more complex when you try to identify those problems that can be solved by yourself, or internal staff, and those that require outside professional help.

The efficient executive wastes little time or money trying to solve problems he is ill-equipped to deal with, a situation every executive must confront from time to time. Instead he reaches out to professionals with expertise and experience, such as accountants, attorneys and computer specialists.

Leveraging his investment with time to solve the problem faster and easier, the executive creates greater profits and customer satisfaction. The trick is to know when to do it yourself and when to bring in outside help.

The next time you think you may be facing such a situation, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the real problem? Not the symptom that is creating that sense of urgency and concern, but the real cause of the problem.
- What experience do I have solving this specific problem? If the answer is none, you must evaluate the risk of trying and failing in terms of cost, time, morale and customer satisfaction. If you do have experience, what, if anything, has proven effective? If you

have not been successful in the past, don't waste your time on it again.

- Do you need some distance between you and the solution process? The problems executives face often have complex causes and involve change that can have far-reaching consequences. It can be prudent to use an external resource just to maintain distance between you and the solution, particularly if the change involves pain or has little chance of success.
- Do you need to create a bigger problem to fix the current one? Sometimes the solution to a problem requires more change or effort than the organization is willing to tolerate. In those situations one option is to let the problem fester, another is to try a popular solution that is unlikely to work. In those instances you are usually better off letting someone outside the organization fail, or prove your point.
- In dealing with your problem, do you need to build confidence or engineer a success for a key team member? Whenever you have ulterior motives it is valuable to approach the solution from multiple perspectives. An outside resource is always a good way to get additional perspective and to ensure you are on track to reach your desired result without creating an unexpected outcome.
- Are strong personal feelings or interpersonal conflicts at the root of the problem? If so, there may be emotion involved that is hard to distance yourself from. It is always easier for an outside party to bring a non-emotional approach to the problem.
- Is the problem caused by a lack of skill or individual behavior? Do those skills exist elsewhere in your organization? If so, can you leverage them for your solution, either by fixing the problem or transferring knowledge?
- Is it possible to do more harm than good if you fail to solve the problem? (Ever try to fix a leak under your sink?) In these situations you are better off using someone who can put 100 percent of their focus and attention on solving the problem. For you to do that may mean you have to ignore other areas of responsibility.

There are many resources available for help, including SCORE (www.score.org), the SBA (www.sba.gov), chambers of commerce and local universities. There are also many professional organizations such as the American Marketing Association (www.marketingpower.com) and the Institute of Management Consultants, USA (www.imcusa.org).

Professional business coaches and independent consultants can often be excellent resources if you can verify they have prior experience dealing with your problem.

Resistance to outside help is a common reaction. "If I created the problem, I should be able to solve it," is an all-too-frequent refrain. Albert Einstein said, "You can't solve a problem with the same knowledge that created it." Feeling responsible for solving problems is natural, as is the fear of being perceived as shirking your job responsibilities.

It is the job of the executive to make sure his areas of responsibility and direct reports have

the ability to do their jobs efficiently and with little friction. Sometimes not solving a problem yourself is the best solution there is.

Larry Mandelberg is chief leadership officer of Beyond Point B, a business coaching and leadership development company in Roseville. He can be reached at lmandelberg@beyondpointb.com or (916) 787-9909, Ext. 2.