



Gaining on Gravity: Conquering the Changing Slope of Business Growth

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"It's like pushing a boulder up a steep hill!" At one time or another, every business owner has uttered this statement. "Sometimes it feels like all this weight is ready to roll back over me!"

What a powerful metaphor for the challenges of entrepreneurship. Whether you're starting a new venture, growing it to the next level, or getting close to realizing your full vision of success, the boulder-on-a-slope concept perfectly captures the many facets of business growth and transformation.

First, let's start with the boulder itself. The boulder represents your product or service; more specifically, the ease of sale of your product or service. The harder it is to find, sell to and fulfill the needs of your prospective clients, the heavier your particular boulder will be.

Lightening the load

But here's the good news. The weight lessens for businesses that take advantage of a clear need that exists in the marketplace, either by exploiting a highly specialized niche or by broadening its services to attract a wider audience.

As you consider your company's product and service offerings, ask yourself: Have we defined a truly unique selling proposition? Is there an emotional need for prospective clients to buy from us? Have we identified and articulated a clear return on investment for their purchase? The more your organization can answer "yes" to these questions, the lighter the weight of the boulder you're pushing up the hill.

Why push alone?

Now, let's take a look at the act of pushing the rock. We all know it's hard to build and sustain a business by yourself. As you build a team (real or virtual) to support your efforts, these additional hands can be used to push — or at the very least support your back as you shoulder most of the weight. You'll quickly notice that the pushing gets easier as your team gets stronger.

The greatest benefit of a team — whether employees, partners, or like-minded collaborators — is the additional support it offers. These hands (in reality, diverse skill sets) complement one another and help move your business forward.

Good managers will have their hands securely on your back. Dedicated employees will help push the boulder forward. Strong collaboration, leading to greater commitment and buy-in among your team, will always make the pushing go more smoothly.

When you take your eye off the ball (or your hands off the boulder), committed team members will fulfill their roles and help you maintain forward momentum. The standards and expectations you've established for your organization will support the push forward.

reflection

Cutting down on resistance

Unfortunately, the laws of nature dictate that certain factors will always be present to push against the boulder. In business, these are most commonly people issues: negative attitudes, partners who are not communicating well (or at all), misguided management, or employees whose roles and responsibilities have not been clearly outlined.

Resistance can also come from a misalignment of your business values and vision. Consider if these factors are interfering with your organization's progress up the hill:

- Not operating in alignment with the clearly stated values that represent your corporate culture.
- Not having a unified vision; one that has been articulated to all levels of the company.

If your company's vision is not clear to your team — worse, if there are multiple or contradictory visions floating around — you're adding unnecessary resistance to your boulder. Lose the extra baggage by re-examining your short- and long-term objectives, then outlining specific action steps to start moving toward them.

Slope: the final factor in the equation

Once we've identified ways to reduce the weight of the boulder, add helping hands, and cut down on needless resistance, it's time to shift our focus to the slope of the hill itself.

In theory, as a business matures and builds a satisfied client base, the hill will naturally level out or even start to slope downward. These situations — from enjoying the ride to steering clear of the cliff — present their own equally vexing challenges, but that's the subject of another article entirely!

For the moment, let's concentrate on ways to reduce the slope of your hill. Opportunities exist in nearly every area of your business, from a clear positioning statement, a well-trained sales team, and a fully developed marketing strategy to strong vendor relationships, supportive hiring policies, and up-to-date technology. As diverse as they seem, these factors all contribute to making your company run like a well-oiled machine...and cut down on the incline accordingly.

One important addition to the list: the wise counsel of a trusted advisor. Whether it's a business coach, a peer advisory group or a formal board of directors, nothing reduces the incline in your favor like an objective voice.

As you reflect where your business stands on the hill to success — and the weight of the boulder you're currently supporting — recognize that it's all part of the normal evolution of every business journey. The incline may become more or less taxing, the boulder's weight more or less burdensome, but the challenges they represent will always exist in one form or another. It's how and with whom you tackle them that makes all the difference.

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