



STAGE 7

Visionary: 161 - 500 employees

Special Report on the 7 Stages of Growth

Congratulations - you have progressed to a Stage 7 company! In Stage 5, you integrated the organization to operate as single unit, rather than a number of independent departments. In Stage 6, you became more focused on the strategic future of the business. Now in Stage 7, it is time to re-instill the entrepreneurial spirit in your organization.

This Special Report is based on our proprietary and highly effective 7 Stages of Growth business model, developed by James Fischer. Fischer created the 7 Stages of Growth business model based on extensive research of entrepreneurial companies. His research demonstrates that as companies add more people, the complexity level of the organization increases. This report contains critical information that will help you:

1. Predict how growth will impact you.
2. Adapt your leadership skills, knowledge and insights to your specific stage of growth.
3. Focus on the right things at the right time.

Because each business and its team are unique, this Special Report may contain some information that does not apply to you and your business, but most of it will. We hope you find the takeaways helpful.

What you are probably experiencing:

As a Stage 7 business in the Visionary phase, you are likely experiencing a number of the following. If you are not, it may be an indication that the company has not yet matured into a Stage 7 business.

Area	Description
Employees	You have 161 to 500 employees.
CEO/President	Wow, you can be proud of your accomplishments. Nice job! Unfortunately, you are well aware that change is needed to continue the growth. There is no rest for the weary in the business world and it can be difficult to know where to spend your time.
Management Team	You have 9 to 15 executives and 27 to 45 managers. You can trust your key executives because they are making good decisions, getting the job done and keeping you updated on critical issues.
Transition	You feel like you are in a Wind Tunnel of confusion as the complexity of your business has reached a level where significant change is needed. The bureaucracy your executives created to maintain control over your large employee numbers is creating complacency, which is impeding performance and growth. There's an overwhelming desire to resist change in order to remain safe and to protect what has been accomplished.
Competition	Competition in the big ocean is fiercer than when you were swimming in a small pond. If you take your eye off the ball for even one minute, your competition is waiting in the wings, ready to sweep in and capture your market share.
Climate	Your professional managers have established systems, processes and routines that are working. But, the business has become bureaucratic and has crushed the entrepreneurial spirit. Everything has slowed down: decision-making, product development/innovation, implementing change, etc.
Focus	It is all about maintaining control, while re-instilling the entrepreneurial spirit in the business.

Although you are still technically a small business (under 500 employees), you are experiencing the challenges of a big business. You have arrived - but it is probably not what you expected.

Your primary goal:

As you move into Stage 7, your primary goal is to re-instill an entrepreneurial spirit in the business. You need to create a corporate culture and structure that supports entrepreneurial endeavors, re-instilling the same spirit of excitement and innovation that you had when you were a much smaller, more nimble company. Identifying new opportunities, fostering exploration, developing action plans and assigning the necessary resources to manifest those plans is your new paradigm. You might consider several options - from creating smaller entrepreneurial divisions to spin off ventures as separate entities.

Strategic & Leadership Perspective

As a company with 161-500 people you have reached the final stage in the 7 Stages of Growth. Your main issues relate to products/services and performance issues, market trend awareness, responsiveness to those markets and profitability. This stage of growth has the widest spread of employee count from 161 to 500 people. Two critical requirements of a leader in Stage 7 are 1) the ability to ignite fires of inspiration and 2) the ability to map the company's future.

Complacency is your enemy and requires diligence every day. You and your managers need to combat the attitudes that quietly assert, "That's how we've always done it." Focus on your top-performing products and services with a laser-like focus. Hold on to the ones that are profitable and eliminate the ones that aren't to ensure a sound bottom line as you move into a more corporate environment.

Efficiency is your friend, but it needs daily reassurance that every process has been evaluated and fine-tuned to capitalize upon on-time solutions that eliminate delays that erode profits. Are your best people on board? Do they have what they need to succeed every day? Are barriers and obstacles addressed quickly and pro-actively in order to manage new product/service introductions, testing and development?

Operational and marketing excellence are hallmarks of great companies at this level. Company retreats with experts, guidance on vision and growth plans are essential. A leader of a Stage 7 organization must continually seek mentors who can help eliminate blind spots and provide insight into what that 3 - 5 year planning model should address. Your leadership team must buy-in. Beware the side agendas and rifts from the non-believers. Set the direction, engage the team and steer your company into a successful future that is well deserved. Enjoy the journey!

Your biggest challenges & most important activities:

As a Stage 7 company, your biggest challenges will likely include at least three of the following. We have provided several actions you should consider to overcome the challenges.

Challenge	Activities to Meet the Challenge
Weak Product Differentiation & Development	Develop a strategic value proposition relating to your markets, channels, customers, customer needs, product positioning, pricing, product features, etc.
Inadequate Profits to Grow the Business	<p>Develop a program to help employees understand how their jobs impact profitability.</p> <p>Challenge each department to find ways to reduce expenses/costs. Make it a team effort.</p> <p>Create process-focused teams to streamline processes/systems - and/or engage outside impartial parties to assist.</p> <p>Identify and part ways with invisible employees who are not performing.</p> <p>Challenge your product/service pricing. Will increases in pricing generate more gross profit despite some loss of customers?</p>
Getting product/service to market	<p>Use process-focused teams (see above) to find ways to modify processes and systems to reduce production time - and/or engage outside impartial parties to assist.</p> <p>Develop a program to help employees understand how their jobs impact delivery times.</p>
Improving Profit Design	<p>Develop a sophisticated profit plan system with projected revenues and expenses by department. Each department should participate in developing their part of the plan and be held responsible for its performance.</p> <p>Update (or develop) your customer intelligence system to better identify opportunities and challenges.</p> <p>Enlist your managers' help in uncovering any and all areas that may be creating obstacles to growth.</p>
Markets & Customers Change too Quickly	<p>Challenge all current assumption as you update (or develop) a strategic value proposition relating to your markets, channels, customers, customer needs, product positioning, pricing, product features, etc.</p> <p>Update (or develop) your customer intelligence/reconnaissance system to better identify opportunities and challenges.</p>

During Stage 7, a driving question needs to be: how do you re-instill the entrepreneurial spirit? Start by going through your company and lighting fires of inspiration and innovation. Be relentless in allowing mistakes in the pursuit of new endeavors. Get out from underneath the strategic and operational challenges in order to identify and carve out new opportunities.

The strategic focus you are now using will not work without the buy-in of your leadership team and your entire staff. Seize the opportunity to tune into the perspectives of your team. An emotionally connected leader who listens and learns, will be rewarded with strong growth, targeted planning and engaged employees. Continue to improve the quality of your staff from hiring, to assimilating, to making them an important part of your success and unifying them as a team.

In Stage 7, take the time to strategically rethink your positioning in the market. Challenge all assumptions as they relate to your vision, mission, your customer needs, and your products/services. Be attune to comments such as “that’s the way we’ve always done it” and work hard to reward your employees for creative and innovative thinking.

Finally, don’t let your company fall prey to the invisible employee syndrome. You now have enough employees in your company that the mediocre ones can simply fall through the cracks. You know what we’re talking about. You have employees who just aren’t performing at the level they should. It’s sometimes easy to overlook them, but they can quickly become a negative force in your company by setting a bad example; either focus on raising their performance level or part ways.

Tools you should be using to build your business:

As the CEO/President, you should be wearing the following leadership hats to lead the team.

Leadership Component	Description
Leadership Modality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominant - A directive oriented leadership style directing the staff to a defined destination via a defined route. Characterized by, “I know where we need to go. Help me do it.”
Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visionary (creating, revising, casting) - 75% • Manager (managing people) - 20% • Technician/Specialist (doing the stuff) - 5%
Leadership competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Self Awareness • Transparency • Empathy • Inspirational Leadership

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change catalyst
Builder/Protector Ratio	2 to 1: You must help the organization maintain confidence in the company's ability to react to market changes by keeping complacency at bay and igniting fires of inspiration and entrepreneurialism.

Your challenge is to become the champion of change while still maintaining the teamwork and collaboration that are crucial for future growth. You need to engage, excite and empower your employees to think about and see the new vision of where the company is headed. Spend time communicating the vision, the strategic plan, and your desire to re-instill the entrepreneurial spirit of the company - the very culture that got you where you are today. And then make sure you walk your talk.

Your leadership modality (should be Dominant. This is important, as you become a catalyst to innovation, risk-taking and challenging the status quo. Your goal is to create a corporate culture that supports entrepreneurial endeavors. Your job is to sustain and propagate the Vision and create a degree of disequilibrium and chaos within the company to keep it competitive in all areas. Don't be afraid to ignite fires of entrepreneurship throughout the company, giving people a sense of what can happen, a new sense of purpose and a desire to step outside their box and find new and better ways to deliver products and services.

While managing this transformation your number one priority will be Visionary (75% of your time). Your managers should be running the day-to-day operations, while you focus your attention on developing a vision, strategies and culture to reinvigorate the entrepreneurial spirit. Your Specialist role continues to diminish (5% of your time), but stay on top of the ever-changing market and your customers.

The Builder/Protector Ratio (BPR) is a measurement of Confidence vs. Caution. It is a critical tool to help assess the business' ability to accept change, respond with confidence to change and successfully navigate the change. Builders thrive on risk, are always looking for new opportunities and do not cower to the overwhelming issues that confront them everyday. On the other hand, Protectors thrive on caution. They prefer to apply the brakes (and should be encouraged to do so when appropriate).

For Stage 7, the Builder/Protector Ratio is 2:1 - 2 Builders to 1 Protector. This is a less aggressive BPR than you saw in Stage 6. You need to instill the entrepreneurial spirit by encouraging risk-taking and challenging the status quo. There still needs to be some caution to avoid overconfidence or carelessness, which could impact profitability, performance and productivity if left unchecked.

Five non-negotiable rules for Stage 7:

There are five non-negotiable rules for each stage of growth. The effective completion/implementation of these five rules increases the likelihood for continued survival and financial success.

Area	Non-Negotiable Rule
Business Model	Overhaul the business model to optimize direction and margins. Challenge every assumption.
Connections	You should get to know a little something about every employee.
Selling	Sell every day. Don't let complacency allow your focus to stray from taking care of existing clients and finding new ones.
Succession	Select three leaders to train for your job. Begin their training.
Cash	Generate, track and preserve cash.

Building blocks that your business should have or be creating:

Each growth stage has foundational building blocks that must be created and set in place in order to successfully navigate that growth stage and to be prepared for the next stage.

Function	Building Blocks
Strategic Plan	You should have a sophisticated strategic plan that addresses how you are going to create competitive advantages. The plan should examine markets, products, resources, operational processes, management systems and company culture. Use your board of directors to develop the plan.
Management Systems	You should have a performance management system that addresses objectives, goals, measurement, feedback, evaluation and rewards. You should also have a project management system and templates.
Financial System	Your financial system should include a 3-year profit plan, financial modeling, cash flow forecast and dashboard.
Staff/Team	You should have a hiring system that helps you identify the skills that are needed to help you find, recruit, select and hire great employees. You should also have a plan for each employee describing expectations, performance measurements and actions that will be taken to help him/her succeed.

Marketing/Sales	You should have a well-defined sales and marketing system that your sales people are using. You should have a customer intelligence system to stay abreast of your customers and market.
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If you don't establish these foundational building blocks during Stage 7 (or the building blocks required in prior Stages), it will make navigating through Stage 7 much more difficult. In fact, if you do not establish them in Stage 7, your Growing Pains (difficulties and challenges) will continue to increase until you scream "Uncle!" - and take the time to establish them. So, get these in place now and you will avoid the delays and headaches associated with trying build on an inadequate foundation.

Summary

The Vantage Group helps companies just like yours navigate the challenges that are typical for a Stage 3 organization. We have designed programs, services and tools that are directly tied to the issues faced by Stage 3 leaders.

Visit our website <https://vantagegroupinc.com/stages-of-growth-x-ray/> for additional resources:

Stages of Growth X-Ray™: A facilitated workshop with a CEO and his/her management team that gets to the root cause of critical issues in order to create alignment, engagement, and create action plans that get implemented.

About Us

The Vantage Group helps organizations to develop a people-first and objective lens within their business, so they move from talking business strategy to realizing desired business outcomes! We believe in a "work with" not "do to" philosophy of engaging leadership teams and organizations. We work with our clients to understand their organization, their people, their current processes, and their culture. Using best practices in utilizing technology, team building, and leadership development tools, The Vantage Group helps organizations move as a unified team toward shared, leader-modeled outcomes that can result in "raving fan" customers; high staff morale; clarity of purpose; focused goal execution and meaningful results. Recognizing that if a business isn't growing, it's dying, we help business leaders predict how growth is impacting them, focus on the right things at the right time and adapt their leadership skills to the needs of their company.

The Vantage Group is affiliated with Laurie Taylor, the author of the Stages of Growth X-Ray™ program and a series of How To books on each of the 7 Stages of Growth. Each book unlocks the challenges you face in each stage of growth and provides solutions to addressing those challenges. You'll also learn how to identify the 'hidden agents' that may be creating obstacles to



growth and how to find the root cause to immediately improve alignment, engagement and implementation. You can order Laurie's books on Amazon.com.

Survive and Thrive: How to Unlock Profits in a Startup with 1 - 10 Employees

Sales Ramp Up: How to Kick Start Performance and Adapt to Chaos with 11 - 19 Employees

The Art of Delegation: How to Effectively Let Go to Grow with 20 - 34 Employees

Managing the Managers: How to Accelerate Growth Through People and Processes with 35 - 57 Employees

Leadership Integration: How to Cultivate Collaboration from the Top Down with 58 - 95 Employees

Fostering Happy Employees: How to Ensure Staff Alignment and Engagement with 96 - 160 Employees

Visionary Leadership: How to Recapture the Entrepreneurial Spirit with 161 - 500 Employees