

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PATH TO GROW A BUSINESS IN INTERESTING TIMES



The ancient Chinese curse about living in interesting times is more appropriate than ever in today's business climate.

On the one hand any number of companies are struggling for survival. These entities have an urgent need to close gaps between their under performing results and projections. On the other hand, many companies are currently poised to enter new markets and launch new products.

While these two business conditions appear to be at opposite ends of the spectrum, they are actually closely linked. Certain critical strategies and tactics for sales and market development need to be applied by any company in either the *improve* or *launch* stages in order to attain and exceed projected revenue goals.

By definition, the *launch* or *improve* phases of a business are temporary stages. Undoubtedly, a company experiencing an extended launch will never survive (there are more than a few dot.coms that have proven this!), and those unable to quickly improve will also fail to successfully cross the goal line.

Both the *launch* and *improve* phases have distinct characteristics that require a unique set of skills including knowledge, experience, temperament, and methodology. Finding qualified people with these traits is extremely difficult and, when hired on full-time basis, excessively expensive. In addition, professionals with these capabilities eventually outlive their usefulness when employed on a fulltime basis. They get bored and leave (creating a huge void, leaving before an orderly transition to a qualified successor can be accomplished) or, as change agents, they become irritants to an organization (and a company's expenses go up as severance is paid and expenses incurred for finding a replacement).

Hiring an appropriately skilled fulltime executive is costly under any circumstances, but even greater for attracting the right talent for launches or improvements. Beyond salaries, benefits, bonuses, and statutory expenses there are also the direct costs for recruiting and the indirect costs for time spent interviewing and waiting for the new hire to lead the changes. Especially in today's environment, there is a significant imbalance in demand and supply for skilled launch or improve talent.

In *launch* or *improve* situations there are two precious resources that must never be overlooked: time and money. Knowing what to do, how to do it, and having the tools to it get done is the only way to stimulate results, thereby conserving both time and money.

Setting a true expectation, by defining results, is a critical consideration for anyone in *launch* or *improve* stages. The natural temptation for many companies in these stages is to look for quick-fix sales. Having proudly started my business career as a sales person, I intend no offense when I write: Making a sale is hardly as difficult as it is cracked up to be! For instance, every year elementary school girls *sell* me boxes of Thin Mints (more than I care to admit to!) in their capacity of de-facto Girl Scouts sales representatives. Finding willing sales people capable of making a sale is one of the easiest assignments an executive will ever have. But there is a vast difference between making a sale and successfully building a business.

Considering all this, a company really has only three options to choose from when managing in either *launch* or *improve* stage:

- A. The A path – In *improve* mode, they make no changes expecting self-correction and discovery by members of the current team. In a *launch* phase, they can take resources out of an existing business, committing them to the new enterprise, oftentimes to the detriment of a core operation;

- B. The B path – Companies in either phase can recruit a fulltime executive who will institute policies, strategies, and tactics designed to close the current gap or build a new business;
- C. The C path – Companies entering either *improve* or *launch* stages can partner with an organization with deep expertise, proprietary as well as proven methodologies and a proven record of success, in the hectic, resource-challenged, time/money-is-of-the-essence *launch* and *improve* situations.

It should not surprise you that I strongly advocate option C, the CPath, because it explains how we chose our company name. Option C did not exist until very recently, so to best address the unique characteristics posed in *improve* or *launch*, let me share the most compelling rationale for exploring the CPath and where companies at these stages will derive the most value.

Classifying these unique, yet absolutely critical, phases of a business as projects, I submit that professional project management is best done by reliable, expert, third parties rather than investing one's own precious fulltime resources against it.

Similarly, an organization like CPath brings expertise ideally suited to this temporary phase in a businesses evolution. Once we have completed our assignments we participate in selecting a permanent business unit leader and efficiently transitioning to them. This is certainly preferable to the disorganization that follows a sudden or messy departure of a fulltime sales leader.

Companies bear none of the recruiting, training, and general employee expenses by engaging professional project management experts in the *improve* or *launch* phases of their business. Simply, it is far less expensive for companies in these stages to choose the C path than other available alternatives, especially if their project partner is willing to tie a significant piece of their compensation to results.

While companies may attempt to conserve cash by maintaining the current condition, or by borrowing resources from other business units, they would assuredly lose time and money as few organizations have a staff of professionals experienced and skilled at ramping revenues in the “human taffy pull” phases of launch or improve.

Even when companies at either *launch* or *improve* stage hires an experienced professional, at best they acquire a talented soloist. So many things need to go right. So many things can go wrong. In an *improve* or *launch* stage, organizations are better served by affiliating with a professional services organization comprised of highly successful executives that collaborate to quickly and inexpensively drive significant results. In effect, interesting times are far less frightening by essentially retaining an entire management team, whose depth translates to offering more precise, time-efficient, performance.

In the interest of building a business, rather than making a sale, the emphasis in *improve* or *launch* is to institutionalize methodologies by quickly developing successful strategies, processes and tactics, that are implemented and reinforced through training, execution and performance measurement. Clearly this requires a deep commitment from a proven and professional project manager to drive results through focused and “hand's on” participation in the business with the goal being the achievement of lasting and superior growth.

In business, interesting times *might* not last forever, but companies that do not master them assuredly do not. Choose from the options available to you to do what is right for yours.

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