

FREEDOM AND BUSINESS GROWTH: CAN YOU HAVE BOTH?

Shawn Kinkade of Aspire Business Development helps free owners from their businesses for more profitable and enjoyable growth.

Brock Stechman had a hard decision to make. As the owner and founder of Brockton Creative Group he had grown his marketing and branding company from scrappy start-up status to an established firm delivering great work and significant revenue.

The puzzle Stechman faced was that a majority of his business was linked to one client - and the client was taking advantage of the situation. The billings weren't keeping pace with the ever-increasing time and service demands of the client.

Unwilling to upset the client and associated billings, Stechman and his group continued to deliver on their promises. Finally, he could see that things were coming to a head and a decision had to be made: Could he stay the course, renegotiate, and hope for the best? Or was it time to move on?

It was also about this time that Stechman met Shawn Kinkade, a principal with Aspire Business Development, a Kansas City business coaching and consulting firm. He sat down with Kinkade and explained his business and the problem.

Kinkade's advice — resign the client.

"At the time it was scary," Stechman said. "This client was a big chunk of our revenue but with Shawn's help we worked through it. In a couple of months we were smarter, more efficient, and our client base was more diverse, and more profitable."

Today, no single client of Brockton Creative Group represents more than 5 to 10 percent of revenues. In 2012, the agency grew 100 percent in revenues, shattering everything it has done financially in all the years since it was founded in 2005.

"A big part of our recent success has been a result of Shawn's coaching on how to go after the right projects, and how to build and develop our team," Stechman said. "His advice and insight have been invaluable."

Imagining the Possibilities

Making such a drastic change with the big client was only the first in many steps of changing his approach to his business, said Stechman. Kinkade challenged him in one-on-one coaching sessions to "re-imagine" his firm from top to bottom.

Stechman started by evaluating which types of clients best fit his agency, from both a revenue and culture standpoint. He then focused his efforts only on those clients that fit the new profile.

"In the process of re-imagining my company, I noticed trends and shifts that were going on in the industry," Stechman said. "The marketing and advertising business has clearly changed, and we decided to change with it, becoming more of a digital shop focused on overall branding, interactive development, and online marketing."



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Stechman made sure his agency was providing services in a truly unique way, beginning with a proprietary strategy that drives all content and development. This approach launches new engagements with the fundamental questions, "Who are we creating content for? What are their needs, wants and pain points?" The answers dictate brand positioning, website development and a brand's social media presence.

The approach was a hit and new projects started to present themselves. Before long, the old large unprofitable client was replaced with smaller, more manageable, and more profitable ones. More often than not, that's when Aspire is called in.

A Business Partner, Without the Equity

Business owners of successful start-ups, usually come to a point where the day-to-day consumes them and the big picture of the business becomes more difficult to see. Executing on a plan and growing becomes very hard. More often than not, that's when Aspire is called in.

"We joke about being more like hostage negotiators by helping business owners free themselves of their businesses, so they can grow the way they need to," Kinkade said. "The idea of being trapped by your business seems to resonate with a lot of people."

Kinkade started his career as a consultant with Accenture for Fortune 100 sized clients in the US and overseas and also did stints as a corporate executive responsible for developing and implementing business strategy, processes, leadership, and execution.

HOW TO HIRE THE BEST Business Coach FOR YOUR BUSINESS

- 1 | Look for hands-on operational and leadership experience in a variety of industries.
- 2 | Expect candid discussion, regular meetings and summaries of key action items.
- 3 | Find someone who asks good questions and is willing to dive deep into problems and potential solutions.

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Brian Hattaway
President
ProCore Resources



Brian Hattaway, president and founder of ProCore Resource Group, appreciates this breadth and depth of experience.

"Working with Shawn is like having a partner without having to share the equity," Hattaway said. "He's unbiased, and there are no strings attached in our working relationship. That has made it easier for me to think differently about my business."

ProCore, which Hattaway started in 2004, implements and customizes Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software - such as Salesforce.com - for clients across a wide variety of industries that include, transportation, telecommunication, and large-volume print production and distribution.

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Kinkade and Hattaway meet twice a month, which he said keeps him accountable and on track for the tasks that need to get done.

"It's an ongoing dialogue that's never really finished, and at this point, Shawn knows my business almost as well as I do and can anticipate problems and help me find solutions," said Hattaway.

Consistency and repeatability are critical for long-term success - for Kinkade, as well as his clients.

"We've found that the best entrepreneurs are the ones that fully commit, and really invest in the critical thinking required to identify problems and tackle real solutions," said Kinkade. "It's hard work, but they don't have to go it alone, and that's where the Aspire process comes in." 🧠

