

## On being stuck

Some businesses fail to thrive because they are offering the wrong product to their target market. Or they are offering a good product to the wrong market. Or the price is wrong. The answer there is clear. If you do something and don't like the outcome, do something different.

Some businesses fail to thrive because of a lack of expertise in one or more areas – whether marketing, finance, planning or anything else. This is easily remedied either by people in the business acquiring the necessary abilities, or by the business paying a specialist to provide them.

However, there is an interesting category of business which I describe as being '*stuck in growth*'. Usually these businesses are outwardly successful, but they are not meeting realistic expectations of performance. This is exemplified by one of my first clients. The business was very well run, had a large portfolio of satisfied clients, and was very profitable. Staff provided an excellent service and were happy working for the company.

The business could have been described as highly successful, had it not been that the directors wanted the business to grow and it stubbornly refused to do so. After an initial period of fast growth, turnover had been consistently flat for four years when the business took me on as its coach. Interestingly, because they inevitably lost clients from time to time, they were able to top up the client base - but only just enough to keep the turnover level, no more.

It turned out, the business was stuck because the managing director was stuck. And he was stuck because he didn't trust himself to run a bigger business *but he was completely unaware of this when he took me on*. It took five months for him to realise this and, once he shifted, the business shifted. I believe that, had I told him that I suspected this was the case before it surfaced into his consciousness, he would have sacked me. It would have been too unacceptable for this particular person.

Another business is not a client, precisely because they are stuck. Everyone is so busy, it hasn't been possible to schedule coaching sessions with the owner, even though he sees the need for them if the business is to be effective and efficient. But being busy is not necessarily the same as being productive, and this business is stuck in "busyness".

These are just two examples of many businesses where what is going on for the leaders in the business shows up in the business itself. We all understand the idea of a leader consciously motivating their team. It is fascinating that there is a largely unconscious process whereby the team 'picks up' what is going on for the leader. If the leader has an issue, there is a very real likelihood that this issue will hold back everyone else. No amount of standard business coaching will help the owner – or the business – shift. On the other hand, it often requires an appropriate intervention with only the leader for everyone to shift.

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