

## Getting Your Business to the Next Level

### Steps to achieve your goals.

When you're in school, it's pretty clear what it takes to move up to the next grade: do your homework, pass your finals and maintain a certain grade point average. Out in the workplace, it gets a little harder, but in most companies you can still find a rough road map for moving up.

Alas, when it comes to running or owning a business, it's not so easy, which is why the most common complaint I hear from other business owners is their inability to get to that elusive "next level."

The first question I ask them is, "What does the next level look like to you?" You'd be surprised at how often that question actually stumps people. But it's really important, because without knowing where you want to go, how will you know if you get there?

The next level, of course, means different things to different people. Invariably, many answers include financial metrics such as increasing sales and profits and improving margins, or customer metrics such as landing bigger or more high profile clients. Getting there involves two exercises: a road-map, and a skills assessment.

### Road Map Exercise

1. The first step is to hone in on these metrics, and attach some numerical and qualitative goals to each so we know what that next level looks like. Let's say your event company has been at \$1 million in sales for several years, and you want to get to \$2 million.
2. The next step is to break this number down. Let's say your \$1 million business comes from doing 40 events per year at \$25,000 each. To get to \$2 million, you can either double the number of events you do (80 events at \$25,000 each) or double the size of each event (40 events at \$50,000), or some combination of both.
3. So what does your company need to look like to support that kind of income? From an execution standpoint, if your answer to No. 2 is to double the number of your projects, you'd probably need to add account managers, event planners or more assistants. If your answer is to double the size of your projects, you might explore offering additional services, or hiring planners with deeper skill sets. The point is to visualize your company at this next level, then reverse-engineer a plan for getting there.

This is an over-simplification, of course, and only focuses on the execution aspect. You'd need to extend this exercise into marketing, finance, management and other operations.

### Skills Assessment Exercise

Even if you use the road map exercise to create a clear path for getting to the next level, it doesn't necessarily mean you'll be able to lead your business there. The skills required to start a business are different from the skills needed to take an existing business to its second level. And those skills are different from the skills needed to take a



company to its third level, such as selling the company or taking it public. The game changes in each phase, and the required skills change with it. Much like a reptile sheds its skin as it grows, so a business needs a new infrastructure when it grows.

This is probably the single biggest reason companies struggle to get to the next level. They assume simply doing more of the same, or doing it faster or bigger, will yield the desired results. Big leaps forward, however, usually require substantial changes in how you operate.

For example, a \$25,000 event usually has no written RFP. The specs are delivered verbally, and your proposal can be done on Word. To go after a \$500,000 event, on the other hand, you'll need to plow through a 20-page RFP and your proposal will likely need custom illustrations, professional quality copywriting, graphic design and possibly animations in order to win the job. The event budget alone will take at least 10 hours to put together, and you'll likely be asked for your company's sustainability policy, detailed bios on your staff, an organizational chart of your production team and more. Plus, it takes time to generate the RFP in the first place. And there's a good chance you'll need to upgrade to a higher level of staff in order to land and produce an event of this caliber.

If it seems like a big investment is needed to get to the next level in this example, well, that's probably because it is. But at least now you know you can't get there by simply "pushing harder" within your existing framework.

Have you gotten your company to that next level? Email me your story and we may include it in the next column.

es

Howard Givner is a strategy and growth consultant to event business owners, and the executive director of the Event Leadership Institute. He can be reached at [HowardGivner@gmail.com](mailto:HowardGivner@gmail.com) or through his blog at [HowardGivner.com](http://HowardGivner.com).

