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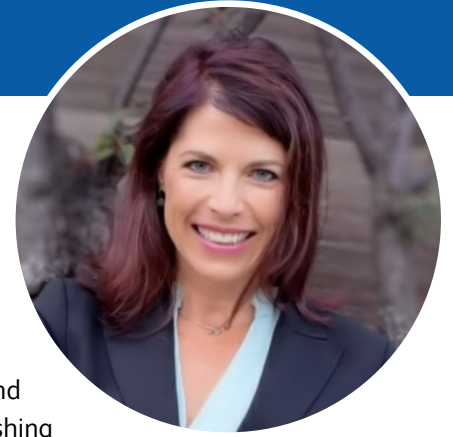


Attracting Customers and Talent

—
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*Helping
executives and
entrepreneurs
achieve results
through a
people-centered
approach*

Who Am I and Why Can You Trust Me?

I am Sara LaForest, an entrepreneur, consultant, coach, instructor, and author with comprehensive experience in the private, nonprofit, education, and government sectors.

I am on a mission to empower entrepreneurs, executives and leaders to grow their businesses and help them create flourishing workplace environments. If you share this mission, these articles will introduce my approach. I believe you will find them helpful and pragmatic.

For more than a decade, I have grown, managed, and nurtured my own companies specializing in leadership consulting, organizational development, and executive and performance coaching. My focus is on the critical—yet often overlooked—interdependencies of strategy, branding, culture, and talent necessary to foster and propel growth. My high-touch, personalized approach helps leaders improve company performance and team functioning at all levels, while facilitating a positive and productive workplace culture.

How am I different? What new perspective do I bring? My strength is combining company growth with an emphasis on the personal growth and well-being of the people with whom I work and serve. My deep-rooted commitment to human advancement is my advantage.

This article, along with many other national and international published works, was co-written with my retired partner, Tony Kubica. Our book, *Organizational Gravity: A Guide to Strategically Growing Your Company's Brand, Culture, and Talent*, is available on [Amazon](#).

To learn more about my services, publications, and speaking engagements, please visit [LaForestConsulting.com](#). You can contact me directly at Sara@LaForestConsulting.com or via [LinkedIn](#).

The Great Recession ended in 2009. Yet four years later, many businesses continue to struggle.

Our research and work with small businesses and professional services organizations has shown a struggle to either draw customers or to attract talent to support its growth. Metaphorically, these issues represent two sides of a coin. But, unfortunately, many businesses treat these as unrelated. Attracting and retaining customers and talent need to be addressed together.

For example, a business trying to attract customers will focus on sales and marketing: Improving brand recognition, hiring a sales force, and developing a sales and marketing campaign. A business trying to find qualified talent will hire recruiters, advertise for talent, and seek internal employee referrals. Even if the individual strategy works – sales increase and employees are hired - can the business support the new sales through delivery? And, can the organization retain its talent? Oftentimes, not.

For a business to sustain growth, four elements must be addressed:

- A realistic and executable strategy.
- A brand that creates a promise to prospective customers and talent (expectation).
- A culture that is designed to deliver on that promise (experience).
- Talent to support the strategy, brand, and culture.

Leave one out, and growth will be compromised.

Strategy

A company without a strategy is like a sailboat on Narragansett Bay without a keel. It will go wherever the wind takes it. As we know from the current business climate, that wind can be a very unforgiving force.

Strategy is a realistic, coherent, cohesive, and clear response to the challenges facing your company. It must be executable on the time and with the resources you have. Often, we find that businesses either do not have a strategy or, if they do, the strategy is unrealistic and not executable. As the Cheshire Cat said to Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, "if you don't know where you want to get to it doesn't matter which path you take."

Brand

Brand is the external message and promise you make to the marketplace (to your present and future clients) about your products or services. Brand creates an expectation about how you improve their condition. Branding gets the word about who you are, what you do, and what you stand for, and it positions you as the right company to do business with. And, brand is based on its alignment with the strategy you developed for your company.

Culture

Culture is essentially the "way work gets done around here." It reflects shared values, beliefs, and attitudes, as demonstrated through day-to-day behavior. It's seen in how people work together and heard in what they say; it's represented in how you build your teams and organizational infrastructure, including the systems and processes used to deliver on your promise and the office layout/physical structure. It's represented in how you lead, manage, develop, and implement strategy. It represents

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how strongly you believe in your promise, and it builds your reputation. At the end of the day, your culture gives your service experience to your customers.

It is of little value to expend time, energy, and resources building a brand if you are unable to fulfill the brand promise.

Talent

Talent (employees) encompasses the people you hire to drive the business in its strategic direction and fulfill the brand promise. It is the heart of growing the company. Without talent, especially in a professional services business, all you have is office space, desks, chairs, and computers.

Your Current Situation

How well have you, in your business, integrated Strategy, Brand, Culture, and Talent? What is your current situation? For example, do you have:

- good brand—poor delivery?
- good delivery capability—poor brand recognition?
- brand ambiguity—inconsistent delivery?
- no brand expression—poor cost control?
- no brand expression—excellent cost control
- poor brand expression—poor delivery—poor cost control?

Every business has a current situation, and it's the current situation that defines your challenge for growth.

Customers are attracted to businesses that have a well-defined brand and the ability to consistently meet the brand promise. Talent is attracted to businesses that have a recognizable and positive brand and are known as good places to work and gain experience to build a career.

It's all connected. Remember, as business owners and leaders, it's not how you see it, it's how your customers and employees perceive and experience it!

Putting It All Together

Examine how you are doing on each of the four elements. Ask your clients and employees how they perceive and experience working with and for you. That is your starting point.

Once you have this answer, you will know where you need to put your time, energy, and resources to grow your business.

Business growth has and always will be a challenge. Barriers must always be overcome. In doing so, remember that aligning your strategy, brand, culture, and talent is a critical and overlooked opportunity to propel your growth.