

LaForest
COACHING & CONSULTING

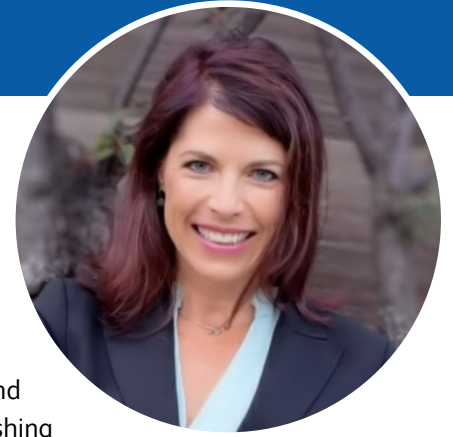


Four Keys for Business Growth

Tony Kubica and Sara LaForest

www.laforestconsulting.com

805.710.3066



*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](#).

Improving Performance

Navigating Transitions

Accelerating Results

As economic growth continues to struggle in taking hold, we advise four components for business owners and leaders to consider and adopt as they move forward:

1. They must develop a sound vision with a clear strategy to achieve it
2. They must learn how to solve problems
3. They must learn how to make good and quick decisions
4. They must have an intense focus on implementation, with attention to cross-organizational communication.

Business leaders need to deal with a changed marketplace and a new economic reality, which may become the new normal. Is your vision still relevant in today's economy? How has your market changed? Have you adjusted your strategy accordingly?

If you were selling subprime mortgages or providing goods and services to the real estate market, your market has changed for the worse. If on the other hand you are selling goods or services to Apple, Walmart and Target, you are likely doing reasonably well.

Key #1—Your Strategy. Growth strategy should not only focus on the markets you serve but should consider a broader context. Depending on your business, all of these categories may not apply, but it's important to identify which ones will and focus on these.

We encourage you to include these 3 categories, each with sub-elements, in developing or reviewing and adjusting your strategy:

3. **Macro environment**
 - a. Government
 - b. Economy
 - c. Social/community factors
 - d. Corporate issues
3. **External environment**
 - a. Resource providers
 - b. Suppliers
 - c. Shareholders (if applicable)
 - d. Market
 - e. Competition
3. **Internal Environment**
 - a. Executive team
 - b. Management team
 - c. Business processes and infrastructure
 - d. Issues-resolution process

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

In a brief review of these items, how have these factors changed for your business? Strategy is multidimensional and what was successful in the past may not be successful in the future. Without a vision there is no direction for your company and forward momentum becomes unlikely. Defining a vision or your strategic direction is the starting point. Developing and implementing a strategy of key objectives with accountabilities will get you there.

Key #2—We find that good problem solving is one of the most underrated and poorly executed management techniques. The more experienced the executive, the greater the chance that the problem-solving process will be done poorly. Why? Because of experience. It is very difficult to tell an experienced person that what they think may be happening, in the absence of clear evidence and valid data, may not be what's happening at all. Some will argue that with experience comes the ability to intuitively know the right answer or the ability to solve a problem faster. While this may be true for some situations, attempting to solve problems without fully understanding the multi-dimensionality of the issue, without having the evidence, and without having valid data to work with, the chance of correctly solving the problem is not high. Why? Because you first have to understand what problem you are solving, and that's revealed through evidence and data, that often is held in the heads and hands of others!

And, there are three factors core to problem solving before you determine the solution.

1. Understanding if there is a variation from what has occurred in the past and what was anticipated as the outcome?
2. Is it unexpected?
3. Is it worth pursuing or resolving?

For example, sales in the Northwest region represent 30 percent of all sales on a month-over-month basis but last month the region represented only 15 percent of all sales. There is no obvious reason why this occurred (i.e., it is unexpected). And, there is a significant amount of money not made (i.e., it is worth pursuing. This represents a problem.

In the absence of observation and valid information to identify what is different now than in the past, problem solving is nothing more than a guess upon which money or resources are thrown.

Key #3 —Decision-making is a third critical factor for organizational success. Decisions can be routine and relatively low risk to non-routine and high risk (e.g., where to locate a new plant or which enterprise-wide software to buy).

And decision-making has nine elements (adopted from Kepner and Tregoe's *The New Rational Manager*):

1. Define the issue—what decision do you want to make?
2. Define the Objectives—what are the specific results and benefits you want to achieve
3. Identify MUSTs and WANTS – MUSTs should never be traded in for a WANT. If it is, then it's not a MUST

*Improving
Performance*

*Navigating
Transitions*

*Accelerating
Results*

4. Weigh the WANTS – all WANTS are not created equal, some are more important than others
5. Generate Alternatives – what are ways you can achieve your objective – there are often more than one – and each carries a risk (see below)
6. Screen Alternatives through the MUSTs
7. Compare Alternatives against the WANTS
8. Evaluate risk: This is critical. As we have seen, poor risk evaluation has had a devastating effect on the economy.
9. Make the best balanced choice

Key #4—The final component key for business growth is **implementation**. Poor implementation is one of the leading causes of poor business performance. Too often, however, implementation projects:

- Are underfunded
- Are too numerous (*i.e.*, more projects than can reasonably done by the resources available)
- Do not have clear executive leadership direction
- Do not have clear and accountable project leadership
- Are chosen for political appeasement

Effective implementation is the responsibility of the organization's middle managers. Executives set strategy (ideally with input from the middle managers) and then middle managers execute strategy (implement) with the support of executive oversight and guidance.

Business owners committed to growing their companies should assess then address these four key components: strategic vision, problem solving, decision-making and implementation.

Because, if your basics are weak, performance will follow suit.