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SCALING CHAOS



By Lana Potgieter,
**Lighthouse
Leadership Coaching
& Development**

AI is supposed to give us time. And help us grow our businesses. I receive pitches daily from people who will help me “add \$50 000 per month in revenues!” or get me 30 new appointments per week. I’m sure you do too. Do you get as annoyed as I do? They don’t know what I’m starting from, nor do they know what my business capacity is for new business.

There is a general push for all businesses not only to grow but to scale or 10X. More customers, more staff, more locations, and bigger revenue can feel like proof that the business is succeeding. And yes, we should be aiming for growth. Here’s where I might sound contrarian: scaling a business and sustaining a business are not the same thing. *Often, all that’s happened is they’ve scaled chaos.*

Growth exposes weaknesses. It does not hide them.

One of the biggest mistakes leaders make when scaling is growing before the business is operationally ready. Revenue increases faster than systems, communication, and leadership capability. What

looked manageable with five people suddenly becomes chaotic with fifteen. The founder, who once knew everything happening in the business, becomes the bottleneck for every decision. And as uncertainty grows in the leader, so does frustration within the team.

Delegation is not losing control; it is creating capacity.

Many business owners built the company through hard work, sacrifice, and personal involvement in every detail. That mindset helps start a business, but it often limits growth. When owners continue making every decision, approving every process, and solving every problem, the business cannot scale beyond their personal capacity.

Unfortunately, many leaders delegate tasks without delegating responsibility, authority, or clarity. Employees are expected to “take ownership” without understanding expectations, priorities, or outcomes. This creates frustration on both sides and slows execution dramatically.

Delegating in order to scale is not the same as giving tasks or instructions; it is about sharing responsibility and making room for others to share their perspectives.

Of course, hearing others’ perspectives requires improved skills in active listening, persuasion, and influence.



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Scaling requires intentional team design, not reactive staffing.

Hiring too quickly — or too slowly — is another scaling challenge. Some businesses panic-hire when workloads increase, bringing in people without proper cultural alignment or role clarity. Others delay hiring because they fear the cost, resulting in burnout among existing staff and declining customer experience.

Profit is never equal to cash flow.

Cash flow management is another silent threat. Ironically, growth itself can create financial pressure. Larger orders, increased payroll, additional stock, and longer customer payment cycles can place enormous strain on cash reserves. Many profitable businesses fail because they run out of cash while growing.

Leaders must understand the difference between profit and cash flow. Growth consumes resources before it produces stability.

Not every opportunity is strategic. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should.

A further mistake is losing strategic focus. Small businesses often succeed because they are agile and customer-focused. As they grow, opportunities appear everywhere. New products, new markets, partnerships, and side projects

can become distractions that dilute energy and confuse teams.

Scaling businesses need greater clarity, not greater complexity. The more a business grows, the more important simplicity becomes. Clear priorities, defined processes, strong communication, and aligned leadership become essential.

That transition is uncomfortable and emotionally and mentally taxing.

Finally, many leaders underestimate the emotional transition required when scaling. The skills needed to build a small business are not always the same skills needed to lead a larger organization. Founders must shift from being the primary doer to becoming the architect of culture, systems, accountability, and vision.

Sustainable scaling is not about growing as fast as possible. It is about building a business strong enough to carry the weight of its own success. "Dig the well before you are thirsty." Scale with intention, not with hurry.

Lana Potgieter is the founder of Lighthouse Leadership Coaching & Development, partnering with business owners and leadership teams to cut through complexity, strengthen strategic thinking, and create sustainable growth through clarity, accountability, and aligned leadership. To connect with Lana or book a complimentary Leadership Clarity Conversation, visit www.lighthouseleadership.today or call 484.347.0515.

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