Proven Leadership Strategies for Growth:

Nurture and protect your culture

Establish your company’s culture from the beginning. This is the foundation for how you treat your employees and deal with your customers. It should drive all your business decisions.

As the company grows, protect that culture with fervor. The Enterprise Women winners warn there can be times when the pressures for growth and change tempt you to take shortcuts. “Remain steadfast,” they say. “Do what is right, not what is expedient.” Remaining true to your values and culture in all situations is critical to successfully leading and sustaining growth.

Grow through alliances and partnerships

Over the past three years, the winners increasingly have reported growing their businesses by creating alliances and partnerships rather than growing organically. Strategic alliances provide a ready-made presence in markets where you do not have a presence and locations where you do not have an office. It allows you to be more responsive to customers and is an excellent way to go global without a major investment.

Strategic alliances also can bring your company expertise that it does not have or the time and expense required to develop it internally. This is particularly valuable if the expertise is not part of your mainstream business and may only be needed for particular projects.

Build high-performing teams

The winning women report that one of their most important realizations was that the company would not grow unless they built a team of good people, learned to trust team members to do the job, and then let them do it. Learn to delegate and let go.

Focus on building a team, not just hiring top talent. Research shows that a high performer who cannot fit into the culture or work with other team members actually lowers overall team performance. During the hiring process, take as much time learning about the individual as you take selling the benefits of working for your company.

Create an atmosphere of trust and respect, the winning leaders advise. Invest in your employees: pay competitive salaries, offer benefits, provide education and training, and give them opportunities to advance. A strong team is integral to a company’s success.

Be a lifelong learner

Be prepared for continual change, say the women winners. It is the only constant. The most successful women business owners are lifelong learners—always learning. Use every situation as a chance to learn. Absorb knowledge from everyone you meet. Read. Attend seminars, take the experts to lunch and learn from them.

Many of the women winners have created formal or informal advisory boards for their businesses and for their personal growth. In addition to providing business and leadership advice, the board members can make introductions for you and be advocates for your business.

Industry and business organizations also are a tremendous source for learning, keeping up to date on the latest trends, and getting help with business issues.

Go green

In addition to developing green products and services, leading women business owners increasingly embrace “going green” in the way they operate their businesses. This year saw more businesses than ever becoming “first movers” in making “green” a business strategy. It is a trend to consider for your business.

Give back

Social responsibility is not a nice-to-do addition to your business. The Enterprise Women award winners view social responsibility as a vital business strategy. They give both their time and money to strengthen the community and support the causes in which they believe. They are active mentors, take leadership roles in community initiatives, and contribute financially. Many also have programs in place to encourage their employees to become involved in community and social projects.

Invest in yourself

Most importantly, invest in yourself. It does not get any easier to let go of the demands of business, community and family take over your life. “Carve out time for yourself,” say the women winners. Spend time with friends just to enjoy being together or to do special things. Set aside time for yourself to reflect, exercise or read a good book. You will return to the business and family renewed and refreshed.

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