

Growing Pains: Hitting The Ceiling And How To Break Through (Part One)

One of Gino Wickman's long-time clients, Rob Dube of Image One, is writing a 3-Part series for Forbes on Hitting the Ceiling and how EOS helps you break through. - Gene

My good friend and mentor, Gino Wickman, taught me the term "hitting the ceiling" many years ago. It refers to a time when I am stuck, frustrated, and overwhelmed. I'm not growing fast enough as a leader. We're not growing as a company...or we're growing so fast we can't keep up. I've experienced hitting the ceiling both as a leader and with my business many times throughout my twenty-seven years running imageOne as President and co-founder.

Hitting the ceiling is exciting for me as a leader. Yes, exciting! When I start to notice that the way I am doing things isn't working anymore, it's a new challenge. A challenge to go to a new level, seeking out new and better ways. It's also frustrating! It can be time consuming. I try things and sometimes they don't work. It's a time to patient and fast moving at the same time. With that awareness, I seek change, make the change, and break through that ceiling. In this series, I'll be taking a look at how I identify these moments of hitting the ceiling and how I use their challenges to grow my leadership and my company.

imageOne has been utilizing the Entrepreneurial Operating System since 2000. It's been a game changer for us and it keeps us focused on six key areas: vision, people, data, issues, process, and traction. We use an assessment tool called the EOS Organizational Checkup to ensure we are on track and operating at a high level. When we aren't paying attention to the six key areas, I have noticed some patterns...often it means I have allowed us to stray away from our foundational tools.

In the middle of 2014, we realized we were off track with our budget and goals. At one point, we were "scratching our heads" wondering how this had happened, and seemingly without our noticing. The previous year, 2013, was one of our best years in history! During our Q3 Planning Session, I dusted off the EOS Organizational Checkup, had the team complete it, and found that we scored 79, well below the mid to high 80s from previous years. As we dove deeper, we found three key areas that were off track:

1. **Traction.** We were not staying disciplined with our "rhythm" meetings such as consistent weekly 1-1s (meetings between a manager and individuals on their team), departmental meetings, daily and weekly huddles, and management meetings.
2. **Data.** Because we were off track with the rhythm meetings, we were not communicating consistently or discussing the numbers. We didn't have clarity on what wasn't working and we were not all on the same page.
3. **Process.** We were doing things the same way...but our company had outgrown the processes. Because we were not communicating regularly and paying attention to the data, we lost sight of one of our core values, "thinking like visionaries." What that meant for us was that we were not adapting to the growth and change, thinking differently, and coming up with better ways of working.

As we looked closer, everything we needed was right in front of us. We simply had to get back on track with our foundational tools. We did, and things began to shift quickly. Ultimately we turned what could have been an unprofitable year, which would have been a first in our history, into a profitable year. It was remarkable and gratifying to see it happen so fast. Recognizing the issues and making the necessary changes built our confidence for the next time we would hit the ceiling, which, of course we did!

Hitting the ceiling is common and happens to all businesses. My experience has been that it is our ability as leaders to recognize it quickly and have the awareness to get back to our foundational tools that is one of the game changers. It is not the only one, and I will be sharing more in part two and three of this series on Hitting the Ceiling.

Keep Moving!

Gene Moorhead
Qualified EOS Implementer



Davmoor
Direct Line: (334) 717-7042
g.moorhead@davmoor.com
Website: www.davmoor.com

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