



TAKE THREE KEY STEPS TO  
**GET IN YOUR  
GROWTHSTREAM**

BY BRIAN BETKOWSKI

**I AM ADDICTED TO GROWTH.** There, I said it. Doctors say that admitting your problem is the first step to recovery. However, in this case, it is not a problem I need to recover from, just a healthy addiction that I'm happy to live with. So, instead of trying to kick the growth habit, I'm always looking for ways to promote it. In doing this, I've learned three critical steps that almost always lead to faster, smarter, better growth.

## STEP 1: THINK IN THE EXTREMES

Most of us spend our whole lives trying to avoid negative extremes. Extreme cold. Extreme heat. Too much this. Too little that. However, some extremes are, well ... extremely appealing. Extreme happiness. Extreme success. And, of course, extreme growth. How does an organization or individual achieve extreme growth? It starts by learning to think in the extremes – both positive and negative.

Too many business people miss high growth opportunities because they're afraid to face extreme possibilities. It's stressful to consider the worst possible outcome, and the best often seems unattainable. Instead of ignoring these extremes, I take a different approach: I deliberately "think in the extremes" before making any important business decision.

In my mind, I swing the pendulum as far as I can in both directions and assess the outcomes. I literally close my eyes to put myself in the extreme environment and ask how it feels. The hard part is assessing not only how I feel in the extreme, but how others would feel, too. Then, I slowly back off the extremes and assess the changes until I reach a place where the rewards outweigh the risks.

Here's an example. I'm a co-founder and managing partner of Jabian, a rapidly growing consulting firm. At the time of this writing (2013), we have 85 consultants. Our growth targets are aggressive, 50%+ per year. When I'm making operational decisions to drive growth, I ask myself what would I do if we had 100 consultants? What if we had 500? Or five? I have to assess each extreme from my perspective and that of my partners, employees, clients, the market, and other stakeholders. Next, I ask what would happen if my decision turned out to be extremely bad. Or extremely good. With each question, I'm weighing risks and rewards to calculate the optimum decision.

I've also found that writing these risk/reward extremes on paper makes the process more efficient and easier to communicate to others. Once I've clearly identified the extremes, I'm ready to move on to Step Two.

## STEP 2: ACKNOWLEDGE THE MAINSTREAM

There's a myth that strong leaders, entrepreneurial types, and creatives always ignore the mainstream. Don't believe it. You will make a better decision if you know exactly what's going on in the mainstream. What are mainstream competitors doing? What can you learn from historic data? How will your allies, enemies, and the broader market all impact – or be impacted by – your growth strategy?

I am not saying you should live your life in the rearview mirror, but you do need to glance in it occasionally to see who is gaining on you and what tires they are using. There are a lot of other smart people out there that you can learn from.

Understanding the market will also help you identify focus areas for innovation and differentiation from the mainstream. This can be a healthy catalyst for growth, but don't spend all your energy trying to buck every trend ... some mainstream trends have been established over time for a very good reason.

Finally, don't be fooled by the mainstream. Often, weak or lazy leaders gravitate to mainstream decisions because they second-guess themselves and think, "if everyone else is doing it, it must be good." Sometimes they're right. But, remember that your situation is unique, and small nuances can cause vastly different outcomes. Besides, the mainstream decision-makers that you're tempted to copy may not be addicted to high growth like you.

So, acknowledge the mainstream, but don't overreact to it. It can swing your pendulum too far outside the growthstream.

## STEP 3: ACT IN THE GROWTHSTREAM

You'll find your growthstream somewhere between the mainstream and the extremes of optimal growth possibilities. It's the holy grail of high-growth decision-making. And of course, it's the hardest stream to navigate. There are constant pressures trying to push or pull you out of the growthstream. Here's what to watch for:

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Remember,  
growth is good.

- Whenever you feel yourself sliding from the growthstream into the mainstream, it is probably due to stress, fear, lack of knowledge, or laziness.
- Whenever you feel your decisions sliding from the growthstream into the extremes, it is probably due to greed, gambling, lack of knowledge, or laziness.

Don't let these pressures control you. Hold your ground and make calculated decisions with growth in mind. There are realities such as pressure from stockholders or other factors outside your control that can force you out of your growthstream. When that happens, don't get upset or frustrated. Just stick to what you know, have confidence to stay the course, and make the tough decisions that will get you back in your growthstream.

Don't be afraid to experiment and sometimes fail – it is the only way to improve. No one stays in the growthstream forever without making some mistakes. Yes, there will be times where you are pushed out of the growthstream, and you'll feel like you can't get back in. That's life. Get over it, and move on. Learn from your mistakes, and work smarter, not harder. Remember, growth is good. So think in the extremes, acknowledge the mainstream, and act in the growthstream. I'll see you there.

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