

Holistic view of growth planning

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Even successful companies need a guidebook, according to Lisa Nirell. So she wrote one.

Nirell, of Sunriver, is author of the newly released book "Energize Growth Now: The Marketing Guide to a Wealthy Company." So what makes this book stand out on bookshelves packed with countless business-help books?

According to Nirell, it's a combination of planning and guidebook for busy CEOs, primarily those who run business-to-business growth companies and need tools to get to the next stage of growth. It contains 11 steps, or "energy boosters," for businesses to follow.

Unlike some who define wealthy companies in purely financial terms, Nirell said she defines them through what matters to people today and what their customers really seek. "We're in a whole new era of business," she said.

As Nirell points out in a "disclaimer" early in the book, "This book is not about maximizing revenues because getting rich is not every business owner's ultimate dream. For some companies ... improving our environment, fostering a great culture, maximizing cash flow, or creating more free time may have greater value than the acquisition of more material goods." She calls it a "how-to guide for any entrepreneur whose dream is to build a highly valuable business that he or she would be proud to sell, exit, or fund. ... A business that reflects the entrepreneur's vision, listens to its customers, and energizes communities."

In one chapter, she lists what she calls the "new rules for creating a wealthy company." They are: "You consistently and confidently express and demonstrate your value to the market. You are paid handsomely for the value you deliver. You continuously innovate. You focus on business endeavors that educate and inspire other people. Your business endeavors honor and respect the natural environment. You have enough of the right clients " you know who they are; you can explain your ideal client to others very clearly; and you market to them in an authentic,

consistent and systematic way. You provide your stakeholders, investors and employees enough time for family, friends and personal growth."

As someone who spent 26 years working in growth companies, she's had ample real-world experience, including senior partner in Siebel Systems Inc., which later was bought by business software maker Oracle Corp. She's spent the last seven years as a consultant " "chief energy officer" of EnergizeGrowth LLC " studying high-performing growth companies and helping them, as she wrote, "re-energize their teams, their strategies and their marketing plans."

She works mostly with top-performing companies, those who say, "We know we're good, we want to stay that way. Help us refine our growth plan so that we stay on top." She also will help poor-performing companies who might come to her lamenting that one of their best customers just left them and say, "Can you help us look at why these things are happening?"

I'm not qualified to evaluate Nirell's advice. But the first page includes praise from the likes of Stephen Covey, author of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" and "The Leader in Me," and Guy Kawasaki, author of "Reality Check" and "The Art of the Start" and co-founder of Alltop.com. Kawasaki also wrote the forward in Nirell's book.

Tim Berry, president and founder of Palo Alto Software in Eugene and a full-time writer, blogger, speaker and teacher on business planning, said in an e-mail that although he hasn't specifically employed Nirell's advice at his firm, he's often in a position to recommend books and recommends "Energize Growth Now" to those at which it's targeted.

"Lisa's ... book is delightfully focused on a specific stage in business, after the business has established itself and taken roots, when it begins to feel safe but is also threatened by too much stability, and maybe a sense of getting stale, doing the same things over and over," Berry wrote. "And it's written in a way that seems like it's almost conversational with the person running that business. There's a lot of 'you' in it, if you are that person. You feel safe, but you don't want to be complacent; you want to grow. The title is descriptive of that."

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