

Growth Principle #8: Become the Threat

Break out of the cycle of countering the competition.

Many business consultants advise clients to study their competitors and play off their every strategic move to mimic successes and dodge failures. I respectfully disagree. In this article we will explore some techniques to help you innovate rather than copying, and get ruthless about trying something different.

Most companies achieve conventional growth rates because they pursue conventional lines. In order to really rocket your results into another stratosphere, you have to abandon the status quo and make an abrupt change in behavior. That can be a tall order when money is tight and you're stressed about the future, but it's truly the only way to move beyond modest, incremental improvements in your bottom line.

Since the process of thinking outside the box obviously can't be delineated in a neat list of bullet points, I'm instead going to give you some basic principles to help spark your imagination and help you see business development in a new perspective.

1. **Accept failure.** Our aversion to failure is what makes us perpetually play it safe. If we don't do anything risky or dangerous, we'll be less likely to fail. But if you're experiencing no difficulties, problems, or pain, you've probably aimed too low. You aren't pushing your limits. When Alexander Graham Bell was working on one of his many inventions, someone asked him why he wasn't discouraged after failing thousands of times to build a working prototype. Bell snapped back that he hadn't failed 1,000 times. He had simply succeeded in isolating 1,000 methods that didn't solve the problem. To him, the exhausting process of eliminating options that didn't work was success – not failure. You won't reach your full potential if you aren't willing to make mistakes.
2. **Suspend disbelief.** In business, most of us tend to operate on the principle that we must verify that success is probable before we make a move. But our most inspirational thoughts spring forth when we suspend disbelief for a moment and open up to a new plane of possibilities. Ask yourself, "What would I do if I knew I couldn't fail?" Stop holding back because you don't have hard proof that a crazy concept will fly. People typically only realize 10% of their full potential. Why not suspend doubt and skepticism by acting on one of your bold ideas?
3. **Do the opposite.** There is a Seinfeld episode where lovable loser, George Costanza, decides that all his instincts are obviously wrong and he will now do the opposite of everything that seems logical. He immediately sees a turn-around in his bad luck and makes money, meets women and starts having fun. It's just a sit-com, but consider the natural principle of 'ricochet'. By launching yourself in the opposite direction of where you want to go, you gain momentum and are able to leverage other things to move in the right direction.
4. **Embrace the supernatural.** Unseen forces... we all have different labels for them, but most people believe that there are invisible powers beyond us. I don't think most of us have the strength and fortitude to achieve our dreams through our own singular effort. Embracing the supernatural is comparable to playing bridge: your bidding is based not only on your own cards, but also on your partner's cards. Though you can't see the value of those cards until you play your hand, you trust that they will bring additional strength to you when you need it most. Whether it is God, angels, spirits or sheer luck... leverage your belief in mystical powers to summon the courage to act on a breakthrough idea.

5. **Second guess yourself.** I know, I know... we're always being told to trust our intuition. And a lot of times our gut instincts are right on the mark. But to move beyond the bounds of familiarity you have to second guess your initial reactions and push the envelope. Instincts are great, but they're designed to help us survive – not thrive. If it's thriving you want, you'll have to rethink your tried and true responses and make a quantum leap into the unknown.

6. **Risk more than you have to lose.** A top-notch poker player (I can't recall which one) once said that you don't really learn to play the game until you risk more than you have to lose. When you have a net to catch you, you will automatically tend to hold back your best efforts and most creative ideas because everything is not at stake. But, if you are brave enough to risk so much that losing will hurt immensely, you are forced to play the best game of your life!

The business climate is very competitive right now. The ease of tweaking a competitor's successful ad or copying a new service model can lure us like a siren's song of proven performance. But that strategy will take your company from innovation to stagnation. Look inside yourself today for the opportunity, the vision, the timing and the courage to break away from the pack and try something new.

My advice to you is BECOME THE THREAT. While every smart business owner knows understands his differentiators and keeps an eye on the market, the most successful organizations step away from the norm and make their competition worry about them!