

## Media Mention: Adam Beaudoin on Planning for Business Growth

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Wilmington business attorney Adam Beaudoin was featured in an "Insightful Discussions" article about planning for business growth, including strategic planning, finding qualified employees, and developing a culture that drives success. The article was published in the print edition and distributed to email subscribers of the Greater Wilmington Business Journal. The full article is available [here](#) and excerpts with Beaudoin's comments are below:

What should business owners consider when planning for growth, and how far ahead should they plan?

ADAM BEAUDOIN: When I'm talking to business owners, one of my first questions is, "What is your ultimate goal?" The reason I ask that is because in law school, you're taught that the purpose of creating and growing a business is to make a profit, eventually sell it and then move on to the next business.

But business owners don't always have a vision of where they want to end up. Then, they get to a point where they actually have a valuable business and people are asking if they want to sell it, expand it, merge, etc.

So, the biggest thing is that ultimate goal. Are you trying to create a business that is going to be generational, that your grandkids and great-grandkids are going to inherit? Is the purpose to make a large profit, sell it and move on to the next thing or to grow it, sell it and then retire? Those types of things are important to know at the outset. But, in my experience, most businesses don't start out that way.

How far ahead should you be planning? The reality is, you should be doing it almost immediately and thinking about succession planning, too. I can help you get to where you're going if you know where you ultimately want to end up.

How important are culture and a clear mission statement to overall growth and success?

BEAUDOIN: The culture of a business is important because that's how you're going to attract new business, investors and employees, and that's how you're going to keep them. You may just start small with family members, or it might just be one person or a married couple. But eventually you have to figure out your culture and what values are important to you and your business as you move forward to your ultimate goal. But, it's hard to have a culture unless you know where you are headed.

To me, the mission statement is really just an affirmation of your culture. It's so important that the mission statement be thoughtful and in line with the culture. But you can't have a mission statement

until you know what your culture is.

What benefits and obstacles to business growth do you see locally?

BEAUDOIN: There are a lot of college students who want to stay in Wilmington after they graduate. The obstacles businesses in Wilmington face is sorting through the overwhelming candidate pool, not just from this area but from all over the state, because Wilmington is a destination location. It's looked at as a beach town, but we also are growing and have a lot more industry.

That's the challenge - finding the right candidates in a pool of applicants. Then, when you find them, how do you keep them?

What are your tips for avoiding a plateau?

BEAUDOIN: The number-one tip is to have self-awareness. And the way to have self-awareness, in my experience, is to make sure you're constantly seeking out other perspectives and seeking to know how you're perceived in the marketplace by customers, competitors and prospective employees. You need to have people you trust provide you with this type of feedback.

Don't be afraid to change. There's a saying I use quite a bit with my clients, "The only people who like change are babies." It's hard to change, but you have to understand that change is necessary and you have to evolve your business with the times.

Otherwise, you're going to end up like Blockbuster. Blockbuster had an opportunity years ago to purchase Netflix and they low-balled the owners of Netflix. And who's laughing now? Blockbuster has gone the way of the dodo and Netflix is worth almost \$100 billion.

What is your advice for hiring and retaining talent?

**BEAUDOIN:** The previous mentality of business owners a decade ago was "Hey, I'll just pay them more and that's going to make my employees happy." I see that less and less.

Now, I think work-life balance and culture are more important to people. Employees want to know how many hours they are going to spend at work and how those hours are going to treat them. The more talented the person, the more he or she is able to demand of their employer, and there are different ways to provide incentives and bonus structures, so you can get creative. But I think employees and potential recruits are looking at not just, How much money am I going to make? but How much of my free time am I going to give up to make it?

As a business' staff grows, what legal and human resources guidelines should consider?

BEAUDOIN: You really have to be cognizant of the labor laws because they change, and you're subject to more obligations as you grow and increase head count. The biggest thing is to not be complacent about it and understand that there are thresholds and get to your service professionals - your HR resources, your lawyers, your insurance people - to make sure you're covered before you make the leap.

When preparing for growth, do you think it's better to "think big" or embrace the niche market?

BEAUDOIN: I don't think one is better than the other; they're just different. You're going to have choices to make and you're going to move in different directions based on which market you're looking at. A challenge for clients or businesses that think too big is they end up drinking out of a fire hose; they end

up getting overwhelmed. The niche market may appear a little easier to get your hands around but at the same time the niche market has different challenges, which can be even more limiting.

If you don't have a goal, it's not going to matter whether you think big or stay in a niche market. Because what's going to happen is, you're going to be reactive instead of proactive. You're going to be on the bleeding edge, not the cutting edge.

How much should you focus on your competition?

BEAUDOIN: I think it's wise to focus on your competition, at least to have an awareness of their pricing or how they're advertising. What does their customer base look like? Has it changed?

But I think this scorched earth idea or thinking of competition as a boxing match isn't there anymore. In most cases, there is enough market share for everyone to kind of coexist. It just depends on what they have set as their main business goal, which may not be solely dependent on the market.

How can collaboration help you grow your business?

BEAUDOIN: Groups where you bring in business owners from different industries and meet together are a great tool, in my experience. These groups can allow you to get different perspectives from successful people who aren't in your industry so you don't need to worry about them stealing your ideas. It may be that they've thought about things you haven't thought about or have already dealt with issues you are currently dealing with.