

The Five Warning Signs of Success

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Every urgent care physician and operator seeking a path to success wants to understand exactly what creates success and why some organizations are successful and others are not. However, while the factors leading to success can vary from a somewhat random “right place/right time” to one’s tireless resolve and unceasing hard work, what is often overlooked are the factors in *maintaining* success. In many cases, once an organization reaches a certain size and maturity, its continued success seems inevitable. What is important to realize is that growth and success create their own issues that need to be addressed to ensure longevity.

Executive consultant and *Twelve Warning Signs of Success* author Kirk Dando has noticed this trend in thousands of organizations, and what he has found is that there are twelve common “warning signs of success” that undermine growth and even derail companies. He calls them *warning signs* of success because if they are not understood and addressed, the very things driving success today could cause demise tomorrow. Dando’s leading five warning signs, adapted from <http://kirkdando.com/the-top-12warning-signs-of-success/> follow:

RIGHT IDEA, WRONG PERSON

The road to success begins with the right people, ideas, and direction. However, along the way it is very easy to end up with the wrong people in key positions.

- Promoting and hiring people with true leadership skills and management expertise is difficult.
- As your organization talks about growth, think ahead to the specific management skills you will need.
- Take likeability out of the equation, identify the exact skills for a position.
- Make the tough decisions.

In growing urgent care organizations, it’s common that a biller or medical assistant with a high school education who is instrumental in setting up the first clinic gains the trust of the organization’s founders and maintains a leadership position in the growing operation. But after the operation expands to multiple sites and several million dollars in revenue, the organization’s needs can become complex beyond the initial manager’s education and experience. At that point the urgent care operator should invest in additional education and training for its initial management team, or look at bringing in more experienced leadership.

Letting employees go is never easy. “Dealing With Employee Termination: Smart Strategies for Optimizing Your Team” in the April, 2013 edition of *JUCM—The Journal of Urgent Care Medicine* offers tips for protecting your business and yourself if termination is necessary. Among the key recommendations are compiling documentation and seeking legal advice: <http://www.jucm.com/dealing-with-employee-termination-smart-strategies-for-optimizing-your-team/>.

SOWING THE SEEDS OF DECAY

In some cases, the systems and processes that generated your initial success may be eroding it today.

- Identify key systems and processes – how you get work, how you do work, and how you measure quality and profitability of work – in your business.
- Look at these through the eyes of the customer, understand their entire experience with your organization.
- Document what exceeds, meets, and does not meet consumer expectations.
- Change or eliminate things that now create poor customer experiences and hurt profitability.

Investing time in designing repeatable processes and documentation can pay off in a more efficient, effective, and scalable urgent care operation. For more information, see “Achieving Scalability and Consistency in Urgent Care Operations” in the October, 2013 edition of *JUCM—The Journal of Urgent Care Medicine*:

<http://www.jucm.com/achieving-consistency-and-scalability-in-urgent-care-service-delivery/>.

SAYING YES TO EVERYTHING

In the beginning, success arises from limited opportunities and precise focus on developing and selling one or a few products and services. As you grow, unlimited potential, opportunities, and ideas exist.

- You shouldn't be saying yes to every new idea once success is attained.
- Acknowledge potential, and that it is possible to attain all of it, but not at once.
- Remember your primary goals; refer back to your mission, vision, and strategic plan to guide the next moves.

Whether it's adding new services like telemedicine, occupational medicine, or ancillary services from medically supervised weight loss to pain management and addiction medicine...it's easy for urgent care providers to lose focus on the "core" walk-in injury and illness business. According to "Minding Your Urgent Care P's and Q" in the June, 2008 edition of *JUCM—The Journal of Urgent Care Medicine*, appropriate attention to place, product, price, promotion, people, and quality help ensure the right approach to facilitating the success of your practice.

<http://www.jucm.com/minding-your-urgent-care-ps-and-qs/>.

HOPE IS NOT A STRATEGY

As an organization succeeds and grows, the need for active and clearly communicated direction increases, but so does the distance from those responsible for strategy development to those responsible for its execution.

- The widening gap between executives and the "front lines" that execute organizational strategy can sometimes leave leaders hoping their ways to goals.
- Things change quickly during growth and success, so have a planning process to predict, prepare, and communicate opportunities and problems before they show up.
- Concentrate only on what will truly help you achieve your goals.
- Creating focus and alignment depends on development, review, and communication of key goals strategies, and tactics.

Just because you build it, patients won't necessarily come. As entrepreneurs, successful urgent care centers must market their services to the community, innovate with new services to fill excess capacity, and create positive patient experiences that spur repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth, explains "Head in the Game: Cultivating the Mindset of a Successful Urgent Care Operator" in the October, 2014 edition of *JUCM—The Journal of Urgent Care Medicine*:

<http://www.jucm.com/head-game-cultivating-mindset-successful-urgent-care-operator/>.

RANDOM ACTS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

As an organization grows, the need for clear areas of accountability increases. Success can mask issues and create random acts of accountability that undermine growth.

- Identifying accountability can be hard and awkward, even scary, but it is necessary.
- Hire people who are personally accountable – test this in the hiring process and include in review cycles.
- Create a culture where people are personally accountable to win and succeed.

Registration specialists, medical assistants, and technicians may be your lowest-paid employees, but the success of your urgent care is in their hands—and their success is yours. The January, 2012 edition of *JUCM—The Journal of Urgent Care Medicine* provides more detail on how to "Motivate Your Front-line Staff with Enlightened Leadership"

<http://www.jucm.com/motivate-front-line-staff-enlightened-leadership/>.

Conclusion

As organizations grow, they experience "growing pains" which can be considered "warning signs of success." Management becomes focused on the outward environment and future plans while overlooking "obvious and embarrassingly simple repairs it needs to mature and stabilize." According to Dando, when these "warning signs" materialize, it's as if an organization is on a "treadmill—fighting the same battles, in precisely the same way, churning on and on, year after year." Whether management identifies these "warning signs" or keeps doing "business as usual" determines whether the organization becomes mature, financially stable and professionally led or "simply moves on aimlessly—or worse."