

Like A Boss: Managing Rapid Growth

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Brent Ayles

Brent Ayles, CLT, president of [Ayles Natural Landscaping, Ltd.](#), based in Riverview, New Brunswick, Canada, says that the “gazelle-style growth” he experienced has raised challenges with cashflow. But planning for cashflow management has saved him from a lot of headaches.

Most businesses grow without any plan for cashflow management—and that can cause huge problems, says Ayles. In time, most landscape businesses are eventually going to grow as long as they are doing good work and continuing to keep up with it, he adds. But growth can definitely be challenging, especially if you don’t have a plan in place.

“Most business owners start out without a clear growth plan,” Ayles says. “Work comes in, they get excited, and they deliver the work. That sounds like a good business cycle but it can pose challenges. Growth is not always your

friend.”

Ayles says that a lot of businesses can continue to operate and grow by keeping up with delivery of work—that is, until they reach their capacity. It’s at that point where growth can start to pose challenges. The biggest challenge, Ayles says, is that getting these issues under control requires “hard skills,” which are not often talked about—and that many landscape business owners lack.

Ayles says that in the industry, landscapers often spend time talking about things like mission, vision, or values—and those are all very important. But they are also “soft skills.” He says that soft skills are all the “warm and fuzzy” aspects of business that are often talked about in business books and in motivational speeches. But Ayles says landscape business owners really need hard skills to manage growth appropriately. If they lack cash flow management skills, for instance, fast-paced growth is going to overtake them.

“As a business grows, much of the skills of doing the work become over-consumed by trying to manage internal operations,” Ayles says. “Seek out wise counsel early on to avoid financial failure.”

It’s a topic that Ayles can speak on because he experienced it himself.

“After many years of that gazelle-style growth, we were faced with a major issue—poor cash flow,” he says. “Growth can kill you if it’s not managed. Thanks to good client relations, good relationships with suppliers and vendors, we sustained. But it was an important lesson in understanding business life cycle.”

And if business owners aren’t good at these things? Well, Ayles says not to be afraid to reach out for help.

“Most often, the owner is responsible for the overhead budget, the marketing plan, the strategic plan, and more,” Ayles says. “One almost needs to be a genius to excel at all of these areas. Always ask for help! Reach out to many of the well-seasoned consultants within our industry. Ask someone to mentor you. Don’t be afraid or too prideful to ask for help. I am a firm believer that people need several mentors in their life. For business finance and management, strategy, and for spiritual, physical, and mental well being.”

Our [Like a Boss](#) series highlights some common business challenges landscape professionals face and how they conquer them.