

A Scientist's Formula To Scaling A \$50M Business

6 min read

*A SCIENTIST'S FORMULA
TO SCALING A
\$50M BUSINESS*

*Path to
PROFIT
PODCAST*

Host:
Stephen King
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Guest:
Laurie La-Pat Polasko
Vice President at Matrix New World Engineering

GrowthForce

What do solutions to environmental tragedies (including the Gulf Coast oil spill) and a \$50 million dollar service business have in common? Laurie La-Pat Polasko.

Key Takeaways

- **The Secret to a Highly Profitable Service Business Just Might Surprise You:** Although you might expect the secret to running a highly profitable business to be focusing on your profits or prices or costs or anything else money-related, according to Laurie, the secret to having a highly profitable business is...
- **Focus on Your People:** Focusing on your own people is a task that needs to start from the very beginning when you should be focused on being sure to hire the right people for your business...
- **How to Continue Growing and Being Profitable:** Businesses that want to be successful should not only focus on their people but also on the future in order to grow their profit in the present...

One of our most-recent *Path to Profit* guests, [Laurie LaPat-Polasko](#) has an impressive professional history which includes items such as being bitten by a shark on her first day working as an intern at Shedd Aquarium, studying the oceans with [Jacques Cousteau](#), monitoring the reproduction patterns of humpback whales on Silver Bank, working as the National Director of Remediation at [Matrix New World Engineering](#) (an environmental consulting firm), and serving as a chairperson for the City of Scottsdale McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission.

Taking her scientific background and a life-long passion, Laurie ventured into the business world with a unique perspective that made her the successful leader she is today.

If all that wasn't enough to pique your interest, GrowthForce Founder and CEO, Stephen King sat down to talk with her about her experiences working as a marine biologist and environmental consultant in addition to her accomplishment of growing a service business with scientists and engineers to \$50 million in top-line revenue.

Perhaps, even more importantly, King talked with her about how she managed to maintain consistency – even through the pandemic – 15% to the bottom line.

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The Secret to a Highly Profitable Service Business Just Might Surprise You

Although you might expect the secret to running a highly profitable business to be focusing on your profits or prices or costs or anything else money-related, according to Laurie, the secret to having a highly profitable business is focusing, not on the profits, but on the people, instead.

Laurie says she and all of her people across the company do not spend time thinking about profits.

Focus on Listening to Clients

For everyone working at Matrix New World Engineering, 100% of the time should be focused on the clients. Laurie especially places a strong emphasis on the importance of really listening to clients.

Laurie says, "Oftentimes, consultants go into a situation, and they already have a preconceived notion of what the issues are and what the problem is... they come in with a solution that may not be in line at all with what the client is looking for."

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She says it's common for consultants to have assumed ideas in their heads about what the problem is along with a solution already materializing – before the consultant has even talked with the client, asked questions, listened to their concerns, and actually understood them.

"The first thing," she says, "is to listen to your clients and understand what their needs are and [what's most important to them]."

According to Laurie, the most important thing that her company does is carefully listen to their clients, as scientists and engineers. As she puts it, "We all want to get up on our platform and tell all the things that we know, and we want to sound like we're super intelligent...[But] that's not what it's about. It's more listening and understanding what are their biggest concerns."

Focusing on Stakeholders

Since the nature of the consulting performed at Matrix New World Engineering stands to affect a lot of people, animals, and the environment, she says that, next to focusing on the clients, the most important thing that they do is to consider all of the stakeholders and bring them into the process from the very beginning.

Considering stakeholders becomes increasingly important as jobs become larger and larger. With bigger jobs, the stakes are higher and there are more stakeholders.

For example, Laurie refers to working on the Exxon Valdez oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. She says, "If you don't identify all the stakeholders when you're trying to develop a solution, you can get blindsided or you can end up having unintended consequences... and that's not good for anybody."

*“Without a doubt, we are
**only as good as the people
on our team.**”*



Guest:

Laurie La-Pat Polasko

Vice President at Matrix New World Engineering

GrowthForce

Focus on Your People

The third people-centered focus that is essential to running a successful and profitable business is your own people. Focusing on your own people is a task that needs to start from the very beginning when you should be focused on being sure to hire the right people for your business.

This means finding people who are both qualified to fill the open position and handle its responsibilities while also focusing on identifying whether or not a potential hire will be a good fit for the culture of your company.

Laurie has developed a unique interviewing process to test her applicants on both of these qualifications. She says she's looking for knowledgeable people who are smart, creative, and experienced, but it's also important that they exhibit qualities that indicate they'll be able to work well on teams with other professionals because the problems they are addressing require multiple people from several different scientific backgrounds.

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During interviews, she presents applicants with a problem, like an oil spill disaster, and asks them to come up with a solution. She provides some information in writing and some of it through her own oral explanation. This interview format helps her determine whether an applicant can listen well, admit when they don't know something, and be naturally open to collaboration – all qualities of individuals who are good at working on teams.

How to Continue Growing and Being Profitable: Look to the Future

Laurie says, "One hundred percent of your time should be focused on the clients. Where are they going? What are their issues right now?" She also says, however, that it's even more important to try to anticipate what issues might be just around the corner for clients. She says if you know what issues they will face in the next one to five years, then you can start to address those issues and position yourself to deal with them as they arise.

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As Steve Jobs once said, "People don't know what they want until you show it to them. That's why I never rely on market research. Our task is to read things that are not yet on the page."

Laurie and her team are currently working on studying emerging contaminants. Laurie's hoping to find solutions for addressing "forever chemicals" such as DXA or PFAS. Even though there are no current drinking water standards for these compounds, she says her goal is to find a way to destroy the contaminants. "I spend a lot of time traveling around the world," she says, "looking for microbes that can actually biodegrade these contaminants to non-harmful compounds."

By keeping an eye on the future needs of her clients, Laurie keeps her business relevant and essential for her clients. Knowing what clients need before they know that they need it, and being prepared to provide is what keeps your company's mission and solutions valuable to present-day clients.

With this in mind, businesses that want to be successful should not only focus on their people but also on the future in order to grow their profit in the present.



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