

# How to Deal with Growing Pains

## A Nice Problem to Have

When a successful marketing consulting firm experienced rapid, unexpected growth, it turned to Drive to help retain an intimate, “small-organization” culture despite its new size. Sage Age Strategies is a nationally recognized, award-winning strategic marketing organization specializing in operational, marketing and growth solutions individually developed to help senior living and senior care providers thrive in their select markets.

Known throughout the senior living industry for its ability to boost lead generation, increase sales and develop and implement effective marketing plans that maximize growth and return-on-investment, Sage Age experienced explosive growth over the past two years. To keep up with the expanded client list and resulting project work load, it was forced to quickly hire new team members oftentimes without ample time for adequate training. While new team members consistently and effectively met client needs, internally, there was concern about the different approaches being adopted – a lack of consistency and structure – which was causing confusion and frustration. There was also an overall lack of communication between external team members and the home office, causing further concern and confusion over policies and procedures.

Sage Age engaged Drive to help it develop a more personalized and intimate “small organization” culture despite its rapid growth and new, continually expanding size.

We helped Sage Age understand the “brightspots,” that is, those positive and unique best practices that make a culture special, while helping to define specific operational changes needed to drive and sustain growth. We conducted an organizational assessment, which kicked off with a leadership retreat for Sage Age leaders and managers, followed by a series of interviews and focus groups with all levels of employees. After gathering the feedback, the team received detailed recommendations and then met to determine and prioritize goals. Specific recommendations included ways to establish new processes, improve job flow and sustain future changes.

## Think Big, Act Small

In the months that have followed our organizational assessment Sage Age has experienced improved team and organizational cohesion leading to increased productivity and satisfaction. They have deepened their understanding of their organizational mission, increased creative communication & collaboration, they now have a higher level of financial transparency, they established a timeline for projects resulting in a decreased number of rush jobs, and they now focus on creating opportunities for personal development.

Drive continues to provide ongoing mentoring to the Sage Age leadership team through monthly accountability calls and executive coaching. Sage Age team members have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be heard and to have their feedback shared, and acted upon, by the Sage Age leadership team. Monthly accountability calls and coaching are a great way to sustain and anchor any changes into the future. For more information on this process contact us at [info@cultureoutcomes.com](mailto:info@cultureoutcomes.com).

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## How You Too Can Maintain Structure

If your organization is lucky enough to be experiencing rapid growth, and you want to maintain a small organizational feel, try out some of the following recommendations. Even if your team isn't rapidly growing but you are experiencing some type of organizational change, these tips will help maintain a certain level of clarity that won't damage your culture.

1. Walk the Talk. Make sure you're modeling the way for others by doing what you say. The last thing you want to do is to send mixed messages especially in times of great change. If you want your team members to follow a best practice – you yourself need to as well!
2. Make sure that everyone is clear on current processes. This includes consistently utilizing and reinforcing information through multiple channels of communication. Look at current processes that are already working – why are they working? What's going well? How can you replicate them? If they aren't going well review the process from start to finish.
3. Emphasize the “Why” behind the work. Motivating team members to try something new isn't always easy and emphasizing “why” things are happening is a great way to provide clarity and maintain a strong culture. It's not just something else to do, but rather it's something that needs to happen because there is an added benefit. Be sure to explain what the benefits are and how it may impact specific team members.
4. Prioritize and establish a realistic timeline for implementing a new project or process. Often times we rush into something new and exciting but that can sometimes lead to failure. Lay out a realistic plan that includes ways to communicate pertinent information to team members and try to buffer in time should things get a little delayed.
5. Develop a process for leaders to check-in with their team members on a regularly scheduled basis. That's right – actually schedule in time to check-in with team members on what's going well, what could be better. Ask: What can we do to set you up for success? Remember: put it on your calendar!
6. Establish a team to review the entire job flow from beginning to end. Look at each step with a fresh set of eyes. How can it be more efficient? How can communication be improved for each task? How can team members visualize the “big picture” while focusing on their own roles? An example might be when a new person is hired, or maybe it's when a resident moves in. Look at the steps from beginning to end.
7. Set a parameter of time for testing out a new process or procedure. For example, commit to testing a new system for four weeks before determining if it needs to be changed, scrapped, or reinforced.
8. Growth is a type of change. Speak a common language regarding “change.” A great way to speak a common language and build excitement is to have your team all read a book. Here are two of our favorites:
  - Read “Switch: How to Change When Change is Hard,” by the Heath Brothers. As a group or introduce the various topics and discuss the questions they have listed on their resources page. <http://heathbrothers.com/resources/>
  - Try reading “Our Iceberg is Melting,” by John Kotter and utilize John Kotter's Change 8-step change theory, <http://www.kotterinternational.com/the-8-step-process-for-leading-change/>.

*This article was written by team member, Allison Duda.*