

SCALING... NOT GROWTH

Different Mindset. Greater Impact.

SAME
MISSION.
FURTHER
REACH.
A BRIGHTER
FUTURE.



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THE FULCRUM POINT | AN OPINION ARTICLE



It's Not About Growth. It's About Scaling

The Fulcrum Point – An Opinion Series

The nonprofit sector loves growth.

We celebrate bigger budgets, larger staffs, more programs, new locations, increased fundraising, and more people served. Growth appears in strategic plans, board presentations, annual reports, and leadership goals. We have become conditioned to believe that a growing organization must be a successful organization.

But growth and scaling are not the same thing.

And confusing the two can send an organization in the wrong direction.

Growth makes the organization bigger. Scaling makes the organization's impact bigger.

That distinction matters.

Growth usually requires adding resources at roughly the same time we add activity.

More programs require more people. More locations require more infrastructure.

More employees require more managers. More revenue creates more systems, compliance, technology, fundraising, and administrative needs.

There is nothing inherently wrong with growth. Sometimes growth is exactly what an organization needs.

But growth should never become the goal simply because bigger feels like progress.



An organization can grow itself into weakness.

Revenue can increase while financial sustainability deteriorates. Staff can expand while culture erodes. Programs can multiply while quality declines. Geographic reach can increase while leadership becomes stretched thin. Complexity can grow faster than organizational capacity.

The organization becomes bigger, but the mission does not necessarily become stronger.

Scaling asks a different question: How can we dramatically increase impact without requiring everything else to increase at the same rate?

That changes the conversation.

Instead of asking, *How many more people do we need to hire?*, ask, *What capabilities would allow our existing people to accomplish more?*

Instead of asking, *Where should we open another location?*, ask, *How could our model reach another community without us having to operate it ourselves?*

Instead of asking, *How do we make our organization larger?*, ask, *How do we make our mission travel farther?*

Scale can come through technology. Partnerships. Advocacy. Training. Intellectual property. Better systems. Replicable models. Coalitions. Shared knowledge. Licensing. Convening. Sometimes the greatest scale happens when another organization carries your idea farther than you ever could alone.

That requires something nonprofit leaders do not always find easy: **letting go of ownership.**

If another organization can advance the mission more effectively, perhaps we should help them do it. If a partner can reach a population we cannot, perhaps



partnership is better than expansion. If our knowledge can strengthen hundreds of organizations, perhaps teaching is more powerful than building another program ourselves.

The goal is not to own every solution.

The goal is to advance the mission.

This is why leaders must be careful about the metrics they celebrate. Budget size is not impact. Headcount is not impact. Number of programs is not impact.

Organizational footprint is not impact.

They may contribute to impact, but they are not the same thing.

The question is not simply whether the organization is getting bigger.

Is the impact getting bigger?

Sometimes achieving scale will require growth. Organizations may need additional people, capital, technology, infrastructure, or facilities. Growth can be an important ingredient in scaling.

But it is the means, not the destination.

Nonprofit leadership is not a contest to see who can build the largest organization.

The real test is whether we can build organizations capable of producing impact far beyond their size.

Growth should be a means. Scale should be the strategy. Impact should be the measure.

Don't confuse getting bigger with getting better.



Grow when you must. Scale whenever you can.

And never forget which one actually serves the mission.

For more information about Fulcrum Nonprofit Leadership, please visit our website at www.fulcrumleader.com or reach out to us directly via email at hello@fulcrumleader.com.