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The Phases That Shape a Rental Company

LESSONS FROM EACH STAGE OF GROWTH

I have spent a lot of years in this industry, first running a rental company and now building equipment for companies all over. And the more people I meet, the more I see the same thing happen over and over. Every tent rental business goes through stages, and each stage asks something different of the owner.

The first stage is the easiest to spot. Someone is sitting on the couch thinking, "I want to start a rental business." And they can because startup costs are pretty low in this industry. You can begin with a couple of tents, a garage, and a little bit of cash. The real fuel is excitement. You have a vision for what you want to build, and you run on that energy. Then, you see money come in and start feeling like you are on your way.

That excitement can carry you to about \$250,000 in revenue. After that, reality shows up. Cash flow gets tight. Bills come faster than you expect. You realize you are working a lot of hours and not paying yourself much. A lot of companies never make it past this point. It isn't because the owner is lazy. It's because the things they did in the beginning are no longer enough. New problems appear that they did not even know existed.

If you do make it past this point, you enter the next stage. This is where owners often try to survive by working harder. Longer days, more sweat, more stress. I've seen many people get stuck there. You have to understand your finances. You have to understand sales and marketing. Those two things change everything. They tell you which jobs make money and which ones do not. They help you adjust your pricing and whom you sell to. And once you learn them, your hard work finally turns into real progress instead of constant struggle.

When you break past a million in revenue, the next challenge shows up fast. You suddenly have more people than ever before, and keeping everyone moving in the same direction becomes one of your main jobs. This is where processes matter. I always compare it to the Army. They spend a huge amount of time teaching the basics: how to march, how to tie a boot, how to turn left. It looks simple, but if you want a large group to move as one, you can't skip the fundamentals.

In a tent rental company, those fundamentals are your daily processes. It's things like how jobs get prepped, how crews load, and how everything gets taken down and put away at the end of the day. If any one step in that mix is unclear, the entire process slows down. Culture also plays a part in this. People work best when they feel like they're more than just a worker at a company. They want to know what they do matters to the business. And if they believe in what you're building, they treat work differently. They give more of themselves, and the whole company gets stronger.

The next shift comes at about \$5 million in revenue. Once you reach this point, everything is about your work as a leader. There's no way to do everything by yourself anymore, so you have to assemble a great team around you. They carry a big part of the load while you keep your vision clear, set goals, and motivate your people to reach them. Throughout all this, you keep learning because becoming a strong leader is an ongoing process. What grew you yesterday will not grow you today, but if you keep that in mind and stay focused on improving, you will guide your company through every stage it reaches.

-Steve Arendt



From Shore to Store



What Are Those Seagulls Doing in the Parking Lot?

If you walk through any suburban mall parking lot these days, you may encounter one of nature's puzzles: Why are *seagulls* hanging out here? With no oceans nearby, no beaches, or no enticing seaside picnics, what attracts an ocean bird to a retail plaza?

For many of the 50 species of seagulls, the name is a misnomer. While many species do stick to the coasts, a large number, including a species known as the ring-billed gull, are just as happy living inland, especially in suburban parking lots! These gulls enjoy picking up human leftovers wherever they land, and shoppers exiting with mall food often leave an appetizing trail.

But gulls aren't craving just any food scraps. When scientists in Massachusetts studied suburban flocks of ring-billed gulls roosting on a drinking-water reservoir, they discovered the birds flocked during the day to a nearby shopping mall to eat.

Surprisingly, the gulls weren't satisfied to scavenge for rubbish in trash cans and dumpsters. They were waiting patiently for humans to *feed them deliberately*. Scientists divided these bird-feeding humans into two groups: "casual feeders" who would toss a french fry out of the car window for the birds, and "dedicated feeders" who regularly drove to mall parking lots and served flocks of birds en masse by dumping big loads of bread and other food!

While the gulls weren't above dumpster diving, they preferred to await food deliveries from "their" humans. The scientists concluded that humans' deliberate mass feedings encouraged the mass gull gatherings at malls around the country.

Also, parking lots resemble the birds' natural habitats in some ways. Gulls dislike having anything obstruct their flight path overhead or getting in the way. Various species will flock to almost any kind of open space, from baseball fields to landfills.

Maybe that's so they can dive-bomb picnickers below and swipe your toddler's hot dog, or snatch that piece of pizza out of your hand. And while many dedicated feeders believe the gulls need their help to get enough to eat, scientists say that is just another trick these savvy birds play on us humans! They're actually fully capable of foraging for themselves.

THE REAL WORK OF LEADERSHIP WHEN EFFORT ISN'T ENOUGH ANYMORE

If you're running a tent rental business, you likely got to where you are through a lot of hard work. That will take you pretty far in this industry, but there comes a point when hard work is no longer enough. Ultimately, leadership is what keeps a business moving forward, not sweat.

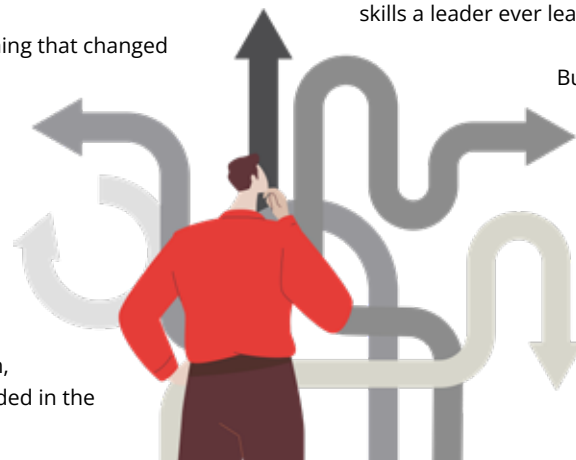
Most business owners in the startup phase start with nothing but excitement and effort. That will get you off the couch and into your first couple of years, but the job changes as the company grows. You have to learn how to put people around you so the work gets done through the team rather than just through you. That's where a lot of owners get stuck. They keep pushing instead of learning how to lead.

Years ago, a business coach told me something that changed the way I saw leadership. He said a great leader is someone others want to follow. That one line took months to really sink in. I grew up thinking leadership meant telling people what to do. You pay them, they produce. But that only gets you so far. People want to be part of something. They want to be seen, heard, and included in the

work. If they want to follow you, everything gets better. If they don't, it doesn't matter how hard you push.

Learning how to become that kind of leader takes work, and a lot of it is inner work. It's really a lifelong journey to become a better communicator and listener. It means changing old habits and being willing to hear things you may not like. I've found professional organizations like EO to be extremely helpful, but I've learned the most from the people closest to me. My wife and brother have helped me see blind spots more than anyone else. They know me well enough to tell me the truth, and I've had to be open enough to listen. That's not easy. It takes vulnerability, and vulnerability is one of the hardest skills a leader ever learns.

But that's where the real growth is. You don't need to be perfect or to know all the answers. You simply need to keep learning and showing up as someone worth following. If you can do that, your company will grow in ways hard work alone could never create.



Before & After



TRACKING SUCCESS THROUGH WHAT PILES UP

The KPI Hiding in Plain Sight

Most companies track a long list of numbers, but the best key performance indicators (KPIs) are the ones you can look at instantly and know if you are on track. In your car, that job belongs to the speedometer. In a tent rental business, the job belongs to something far simpler. It is the dirty pile.

Every tent company has one. Crews come back from the field and drop dirty tops in the same spot, planning to wash them later. The problem is that a tent sitting in the dirty pile is not making money. It can't go back out until it is clean and on the shelf. A tent on the shelf can earn. A tent in the pile can't. That's the entire point of using the dirty pile as your main KPI. It tells you, at a glance, whether your cleaning process is healthy.

Once you see it that way, the KPI becomes simple. You can set a goal around it. Maybe the goal is no tents in the dirty pile at 5 p.m., or nothing sits longer than 24 hours. Whatever the rule is, it needs to be clear. Either you hit it, or you don't. If you don't, something in your process is broken. Maybe workflow has slipped. Maybe people aren't following the steps, or volume has increased, and you haven't adjusted. The dirty pile shows you the truth right away.

This is also where the tent washing machine proves its value. People think the big advantage is cleaner tents, and that's true, but the real payoff is that the machine helps you keep the dirty pile from building up at all. More clean tents ready to rent means more turns in a year and more revenue from the same inventory.

A simple KPI can change the way a business runs. Keep the dirty pile empty, and your tents will always be ready to work for you. If the dirty pile keeps slowing you down, give us a call and we'll help you choose a washer that fits your workflow.

