



grow



Garage Equipment Service (GES)

A story of tenacity
and success



From zero to hero in one year

Garage Equipment Service (GES), supplies vehicle maintenance equipment for all vehicle types, which they manufacturer and import for the transport, logistics, motor, oil, mining and construction industries. GES currently turns over R80 million a year.

GES started in 1938 as a vehicle repair business in Johannesburg, back when there weren't any dealerships and people visited service stations, which were fully kitted with workshops, for fuel and vehicle repairs. In 1969, Rob Rudling's father, Louis Rudling, and his partner took the opportunity to purchase GES.

The two had a good thing going, with Louis handling the technical, while his partner dealt with the admin and accounting. The company flourished and even expanded beyond repairs into equipment sales until Louis's partner embarked on a new business venture, selling his shares to him in 1981. Whilst studying accounting at Wits University, Rob helped his father as best he could with the administrative and financial side of the business until he had to leave in 1985 to complete his national service.

This resulted in Louis running the entire business on his own, taking on responsibilities that he didn't enjoy, resulting in him wanting to sell the business. Rob says "I still thought that GES had lots to give and could do so much more, so in late 1986, my brother in law, Dave Jones, and I decided to make an offer to buy 50% of the business from my father."

A symbiotic partnership led to growth, with Rob operating as CEO and managing the operations and admin while Dave conquered sales and marketing. Says Rob, "In the beginning communication was easy as it was only Dave and I, but as we grew it became more difficult. Unfortunately, over the years I started becoming less open with people, choosing not to share performance details, doing other people's work when they did it badly, resulting in Dave and I working 14 hour days, and not progressing. The company had grown from 25 to 60 employees, but what had worked when we started, was not working now.

The year that changed it all

In 2016, GES had a very bad year. So bad that Rob called in Dave and Sean their general manager to review their situation and decide the fate of the company. Says Rob, "Work was no longer fun. I've worked here for 32 years and I'd always loved it, but not anymore – and worse yet, I was blaming everyone else and not seeing my own part in our failures."

It was around this time that Rob bumped into one of the coaches on the Grow team at the airport. Having met each other decades previously, it was quite by chance that the two connected. They got to talking and Rob invited him to visit GES and speak to the three of us. After the initial discussion we agreed to set two days aside for a workshop. **"In these two days we were encouraged to speak honestly and openly with each other – including: where we were, whether it was professional or personal," says Rob.** "We were also asked to share our personal short-, medium-, and long-term goals. This was probably the hardest thing I had ever done, as sharing honest feelings is not in my nature."

"It was important for us to understand why we were in business and what success looked like. For me personally it was about the importance of preserving the 80 year old history of the company; ensuring that those that work for the company retire secure as reward for their many years of service; that by the setting the right example we could create a culture of morality and generosity; and that by living our core values we would create a culture where everybody we come into contact with, would be treated with respect and dignity."

The team was impressed by how their coach encouraged them to have open and honest conversations about a number of difficult topics and assist them positioning the company for a successful future. Shortly after their session together, they formally asked Grow to partner with them to turn GES around.

How GES went from failure to a steady growth rate of 20% per annum

Early on their coach emphasised the importance of the leadership defining the company's 'why'-their reason for existing. As Rob explains "We defined our 'why' as helping our customers solve their problems and making it easier for them to run their businesses and become more profitable. Knowing our purpose meant that whatever we did from there on out had to serve this vision, and not just our bottom line."

The early stages of the intervention included helping the team feel comfortable with challenging conventions, in particular the way that success was measured in the business. Historically the primary driver and success indicator was revenue. The team was encouraged to focus on gross profit which included reviewing individual product profitability. This was tough given that the resulting information challenged the viability of products that had been the foundation of GES growth and success in the past.

To assist the business to stay on course, Rob, Dave, Sean and their coach set about analysing the company's processes, the GES team and their current roles, team dynamics, customer interactions, and the range of products. Subsequently, processes were refined and redefined, the profitability of client relationships assessed, the product range adjusted and better people decisions were made by defining and changing roles.

Speaking particularly of GES's workforce, given that it is the human capital which often plays the biggest role in a company's success, it became hugely important to improve the company's people strategy. Guided by their coach, they started by going from a small little executive group to creating a middle management layer of A-players who would focus on running the day to day activities of the company. This provided opportunities for other loyal and dedicated employees to aspire and grow contributing differently towards helping the company execute. This included sharing and giving more access to important business information and creating rhythms promoting a greater level of collaboration and better alignment. The result was a team that understood more about the business,

and bringing everyone together as a unit operating with the same understanding of what the company needed to achieve.

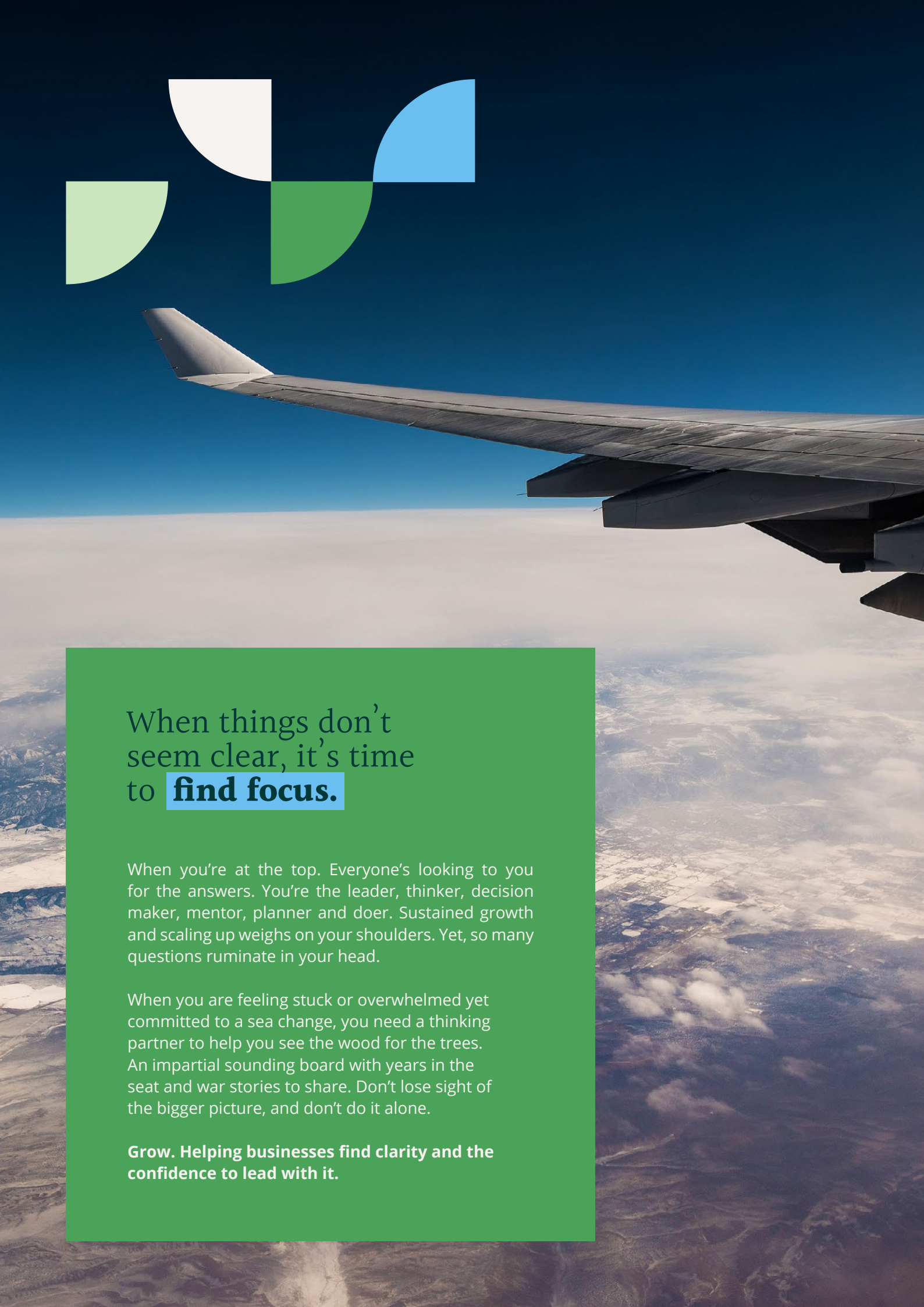

Another important benefit of the coaching intervention was assisting the executive team find balance. Adds Rob, "I've also reduced my working hours by 20% which is mainly due to Sean Deeley (Group GM) and Shane Govender (Branch Manager in JHB) who were identified by our coach as individuals who could offer GES far more than I had previously recognised. Once given the opportunity to step up, they took over increasing levels responsibility and freed me to be more strategic and work less in the business."

Ultimately success in a business is measured by what happens on the bottom line. This motivated the team and helped provide, Rob, Dave and Sean with confirmation that the business had opportunity to grow and scale to levels that surprised them. Now that the basic business structures were in place the need to review the current business model and strategy became evident.

The following year was not as straightforward as some errors in our sales strategy were exposed. This was highlighted when looking at the data in one of our quarterly sessions. Together with our coach's guidance we identified the problem quickly and revised the strategy. Whilst we did not hit our sales target that year, we did not lose money either. The change in strategy proved to be correct and resulted in the company getting back on target of a steady 20% per year growth and 10% profit margin.

In conclusion when asked why they still have a Grow coach, given that they have achieved what they wanted for GES, Rob's answer is simple, "it's good to have someone with whom you can sound things off before you verbalise it to the rest of the company or press straight ahead to just doing it. Our coach keeps us honest about our personal goals, ensures that we are not going back to old habits or deviating from the plan, and most importantly that we are delivering on our values. As a bonus he has an ability to see things developing early and assist in finding solutions that work for our company DNA - which is far more effective than going at it alone."

It was just two years, but the company has truly achieved a remarkable feat and will continue to do so for many more years to come.



When things don't seem clear, it's time to **find focus.**

When you're at the top. Everyone's looking to you for the answers. You're the leader, thinker, decision maker, mentor, planner and doer. Sustained growth and scaling up weighs on your shoulders. Yet, so many questions ruminate in your head.

When you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed yet committed to a sea change, you need a thinking partner to help you see the wood for the trees. An impartial sounding board with years in the seat and war stories to share. Don't lose sight of the bigger picture, and don't do it alone.

Grow. Helping businesses find clarity and the confidence to lead with it.



The Growth Formula is an easy-to-understand model that sets out what you need to master to build a truly successful, profitable, and enjoyable business.



You the Leader

This is about your effectiveness as a leader. The success of your business is directly proportional to your capabilities as a leader.

Setting Direction

This is about disciplined thinking and having clarity on where you are taking your business to, and ensuring everyone in the business is clear and aligned around this direction.

Winning Team

Your business is bigger than just you. To build a successful business, you need a talented and engaged team of people.

Operational Excellence

This is about disciplined action to ensure everything is working in your business to allow it to grow without drama.



Build your business with **clarity and confidence.**



Contact us

Johannesburg | Cape Town | Durban | Pretoria



011 234 3453



info@Grow-za.com



www.Grow-za.com