



POLYFLOR
AFRICA



Polyflor

What it took to grow a family business from a 1950's start-up to a multinational success



Everyone can benefit from support from someone who knows your business, understands your strengths and weaknesses as individuals, and invests time and effort into ensuring you become the best person and leader possible

A family company geared for growth

There's always a risk when it comes to family businesses, especially when the time comes to pass the baton on to the next generation. Any number of factors could influence the business' success during this transition. There are distinct leadership styles at play, strong personalities, possibly alternate visions for the company, and different ideas of how to achieve success. It's tricky to manage these dynamics, but the Coleman family has done this three times amidst many challenges. Here's how.

A digitally grounded, intelligent presence, Tandy is a third generation Coleman. She is also the CEO of Polyflor SA, a wholly South African owned company specialising in vinyl flooring and building protection solutions for the healthcare, education, hospitality, retail, commercial, IT and ordnance sectors. In 1958, when Louis Coleman introduced Polyflor into South Africa, it was on a much smaller

scale and to a much smaller market. And it was under the name of Poly Sales Africa (Pty) Ltd.

Having entered into an agreement with a UK-based company responsible for manufacturing the Polyflor product, Louis worked hard to achieve his dream of opening a factory and producing the product locally. A force to be reckoned with, Louis accomplished this in 1961 and Louis' son, Denver Coleman joined Poly Sales. Poly Sales grew beyond all expectations during the 60s and then the business was stopped in its tracks. In 1969, it was announced that Poly Sales had been sold to Marley Company.

The company and trademarks were taken over and a 20-year restraint of trade was imposed on the products and trade name preventing the Colemans from continuing to trade in these products.

Working together to see it through

Restoring the family business

Did the Colemans give up? No. In the meantime, Denver had started Denver Coleman Marketing CC, specialising in teak flooring from Zimbabwe and when the restraint of trade ended 20 years later, he re-established Poly Sales, introducing the product to his offering.

As a true family start-up, the company was run from the home office, together with the family dogs and babies. Says Tandy, "It was my dad, my mom, and I around the dining room table in our home. We just got stuck in, with my dad's determination to drive the sales, my mom's hard work and unwavering support, and my ability to set up the accounting systems and processes. We all became an integral part of running the business."

The market was gradually established – no mean feat given that the only other South African vinyl flooring company had enjoyed a 20-year monopoly. Starting in a small warehouse in 1996, they built their own offices the following year, and established an agent network throughout the country. By 2002, they moved to bigger premises and in 2004, Denver Coleman Marketing CC started trading again. By 2007, the company traded again as Poly Sales Africa (Pty) Ltd t/a Polyflor SA, as the only non-UK owned company with the privilege of using this name, so long as a Coleman is at the helm.

This was just the beginning.

The value of knowing who you are

In the years that followed, the company regained its rightful place as the premier vinyl flooring company in South Africa and crucial to their success was setting the right tone for the business. Says Tandy, "**Everything we did was according to our motto of 'vinyl done right!' and maintaining our strong family business values.**" Tandy had played an active and vital role during this part of the

company's journey, and yet she felt that she was more 'Denver's daughter' than a valuable member of the company. She took a sabbatical to pursue other interests and explore the world outside of Polyflor, studying a diploma in reflexology for two years and thereafter establishing a successful bookkeeping company.

This time of self-discovery paid off. Tandy found an internal powerhouse and in 2009, when she returned to the business, she did so with confidence.

A new leader and a new strategy

Over the next few years, Polyflor expanded tremendously. It had outgrown its reporting structures and had become disorganised. The time had also come to start planning for Denver's eventual retirement.

To overcome these challenges and press forward, Tandy worked closely with her father as well as Pieter du Plessis, Polyflor's Financial Director, and Ryan Falkenberg, an excellent strategist and entrepreneur and Tandy's brother-in-law. Together, they decided on a three-pronged management approach. Sales was brought under Sandy McLardy, Operations and Finance under Pieter du Plessis, and Marketing and Brand management under Tandy, all reporting into Denver as the chairperson. Each led their own teams, introduced new technology and systems, and developed a stronger brand and selling strategy.

This worked for a while. "We achieved great results in the first three years and we had a great structure and mostly the right people, but then it stopped working as the economy started getting tighter, and we needed a more focused approach and strong leadership to get us through the tough times and position us for growth", explains Tandy.

When it stops working, it stops working

The cracks started showing, most noticeably in a lack of cohesion as a management team, no clear specific strategic plan or clear deliverables, and an inability to make quick decisions. It was also difficult to get their agents and salespeople to totally adopt

the new systems and sales methodology they had worked so hard to implement. Change was sorely needed and in March 2016, Tandy was appointed CEO, tasked with taking on a more strategic role. In spite of knowing the products and technical details, and having previously run her own company, she realised that she needed help to execute her mandate, especially when she realised that Polyflor was going to miss their targets by a whopping 20%.

During her search for answers in 2017, Tandy was introduced to a Grow coach, where the two struck up a good rapport and started their journey together to make the company fit for the future.

Introducing the Grow factor

The first thing that Tandy and her coach decided on was to identify the main issues and tackle these head on. This included stepping away from the previous autocratic leadership style, bringing the leadership team together, and creating a positive corporate culture.

“We started implementing regular staff meetings, daily huddles, monthly executive meetings, and quarterly planning sessions – all to improve the flow of communications. Our people were released from awaiting instructions and empowered to challenge each other, hold each other accountable, and become proactive and collaborative”, says Tandy.

The result was that Polyflor slowly started becoming a stronger unit, capable of achieving goals together. Wanting to bolster this change in their company culture, Tandy took the tools Grow had imparted and in Quarter 2 of 2018, she introduced a shared company goal that rallied the company around reaching revenue target – with prizes and a themed celebration. Split into four levels, staff could win nothing if they achieved nothing, a company lunch at the local restaurant, a trip to Gold Reef City, and even be flown to uShaka if they achieved the unbelievable, fourth target.

It required everyone pulling together. Salespeople needed to bring in sales, operations had to focus on being operationally excellent, client services made sure to deliver their best, and accounts had to be accurate. It was a mind-blowing moment when they achieved the unbelievable fourth target – earning a company-wide trip to uShaka, and

this being done in the very tight conditions of the construction industry during 2018! It sounds easy, but in actual fact anything of this magnitude necessitates an ongoing process with continued support. This is what Tandy, her team, and their Grow coach understand, and they work together to see it through, weathering whatever comes next .

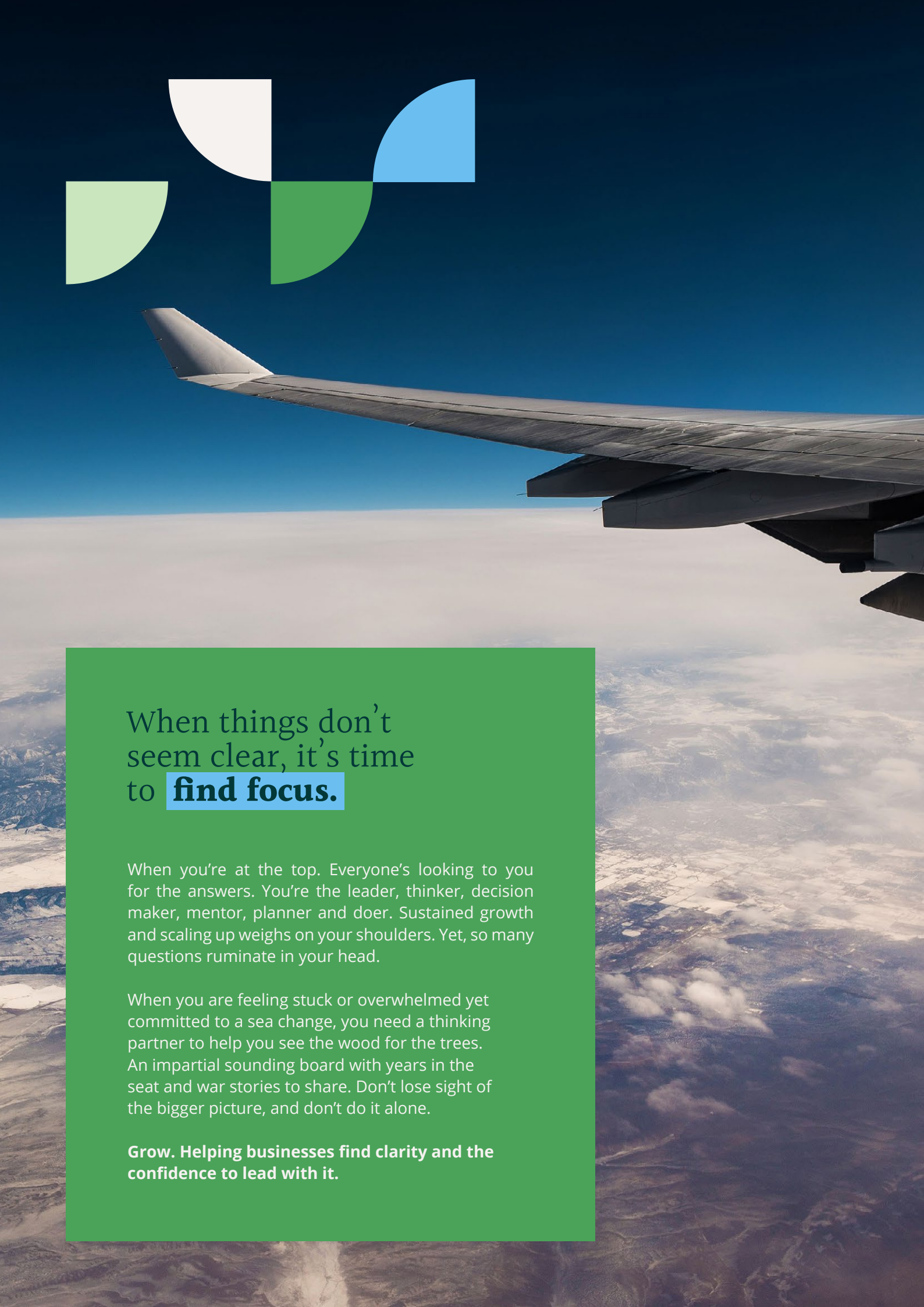

The future is bright for generations to come

This initiative is just one example of how Tandy and her team managed to transform Polyflor. **Using the methodologies, strategies, and tools introduced by Grow, they also reversed the declining trend in just 18 months and last year, they achieved target for the first time in several years – and in a difficult economy.**

The company now has a renewed energy and the staff are more engaged and motivated. They've already set their priorities for next year, as well as their big hairy audacious goal (BHAG) which sees them aiming to grow 350% over the next 5 years.

In a family business, when to a certain extent a position is inherited, it can be tough to make your own mark. Working with Grow has given Tandy more skills and confidence to lead the business into the future. Says Tandy, “Without a doubt, our coach’s belief in me, not to mention his guidance and ability to keep us focused and accountable, has been vital to what we’ve achieved in the past months and what we’ll achieve in the future.”





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.



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



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