



grow



SWM Communications

A growing voice in engineering
communications

Sandy Wardle had been running her business, SWM communications, for 16 years. Although it had supported her well, she was increasingly thinking about the future. She realised that if she elected to exit her business now, it would close down - because she was integral to the business. To change this, Wardle would have to make some dramatic changes in terms of how she was running SWM Communications.

SWM is a public relations and communications company that specialises in servicing engineering clients working in the technology and built environment sectors. "Engineers never promote themselves. You never hear about them. So we promote them," explained Wardle.

It was in 2004 when Wardle - who had grown tired of the corporate world - decided she wanted to run a small business that would allow her to do what she loved, writing. Her corporate career had seen her head up large teams, both in IT and engineering, as well as in the events and visual communications space. With the intention of keeping her business small, she set out on her own as a one-woman communications show.



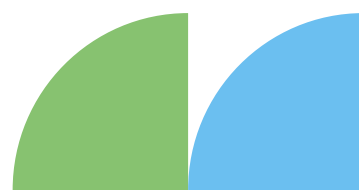
Diving head-first into coaching

But now, with retirement looming, Wardle realised that if her business was going to carry on without her, she needed to change her approach. So she set off to find a coaching company who could help her adapt her strategy to ensure the long-term sustainability of SWM Communications.

At a Business Day event in 2017, Wardle met the Grow business coaching team who were exhibiting on the day. She liked their offering and, in 2018, her business coaching adventure started. Almost three years into her journey, Wardle has transformed her business from a small three-person operation, to a company with 12 staff members and the potential to expand internationally. Wardle's coaching journey started off in a group setting, led by coach Sakhile Mkwanazi.

This format, she said, was invaluable. "I learnt so much from other people. We all had to do reports and give feedback, so we were not only learning from the coach but from the other businesses in our group. We brainstormed and came up with ideas that I would not have come up with on my own," she said.

In order to ensure Wardle was going to get the most out of the coaching, Mkwanazi said they needed to understand exactly what the business needed. "We started by clarifying Sandy's endgame. Where did she want her business to be in the next 10 to 15 years? We explored her BHAG, Big Hairy Audacious Goal. When we understood what her long-term goals were, we could then start creating the type of business she needed, one that was independent of her," explained Mkwanazi.



Armed with a firm appreciation of her goals, Mkwanzazi and Wardle then worked on the action steps needed to address specific areas that she had to work on in order to achieve these ambitions.

Steps:

1 Focus on marketing and sales and clarify your value proposition to clients

As an engineer and an award winning writer, Wardle offered a rare combination of skill and experience to her clients. The goal, to get three new clients on board every quarter, was set.

2 Work on the efficiencies within the business

As sales started to grow the company needed to maximise its profits. To do this, Wardle needed to look at its numbers more closely. Together Mkwanzazi and Wardle started working on driving productivity around the business, among team members, and in the execution of work.

3 PUT Systems put in place

This would allow Wardle to see what was happening in her business. She could now identify when she needed to recruit more people, where employees' time was being spent, and how her customers could better use her services to meet their needs.

Tackling challenges head-on

As a small business owner, Wardle's biggest challenge was to take herself out of the business. **"The thing that resonated with me most was the bit about 'working ON the business and not working IN the business'. I was working in the business. Everything revolved around me. Nothing happened without me."**

Wardle explained that she was in the position of

being completely overworked. As more clients came on board, Wardle saw herself working nights and weekends, just to keep up and deliver. **Through coaching she started to realise the value of getting the right people on board to work in the company.** She employed more designers, admin staff and sales staff. But the most important new recruit was a professional technical writer. A lady who not only understood the industry, but also had experience in the field of writing and editing. This freed up Wardle - who was SWM's primary writer - to start running her business and selling its services.

Once the right people were recruited, Wardle then looked at her systems. The first nudge Grow gave her was to make sure her company started focusing on actively selling its services. Since its inception the company had relied on word-of-mouth referrals, but although this kept them in business it did not allow the company to grow. Now the focus was to actively grow the company.

Then, as more clients started using SWM's services, Wardle needed to ensure seamless production processes were introduced to increase the efficiency of the business. Linked to this was the introduction of a time-management system, Clockify. "Everyone had to log their time, then we would analyse the information. This allowed us to see when the company needed to recruit another member to assist the team. I could see if we needed another writer, account executive or designer. This has made a very big difference to the business," noted Wardle.

In addition, through understanding the work that was being processed through the firm, Wardle could better manage the amount of time being spent on retainer clients and if that time was in line with their retainer amount, as well as allowing Wardle to be able to advise her clients on the best use of their funds with regards to their communication strategies.

Having seen really positive changes to her business, Wardle was keen to carry on coaching. As her business was not big enough to qualify for Grow's fully-fledged one-on-one coaching, the company decided to pilot an advanced coaching programme with Wardle. Wardle has been on this programme for 18 months and meets with Mkwanzazi once a fortnight. She believes that coaching will continue to be a major part of her business for the long term.

A new way of working

With new systems in place, SWM was able to not only survive the COVID-19 lockdown but thrive. "During COVID-19, the only thing companies had was communication. We are a communications company. So we were called upon to rise to the challenge," she explained. The lockdown period put the company's team under tremendous pressure to deliver. "Everyone needed to communicate with their stakeholders, with their staff and their clients, so we actually worked harder than ever during the lockdown period," said Wardle. Not only were existing clients being looked after, but new clients were also coming onboard.

This time proved to be a massive learning curve for Wardle, the SWM team, and their clients. It was the first time that Wardle had ever recruited someone without having sat in the same room as them. Client's started realising that they could meet virtually with SWM via online meeting platforms, rather than requiring company representatives to travel hours a day to attend client meetings. This meant that the company's production and output increased significantly.

Wardle's approach to team management also saw her team improve their productivity, as she focused on her team's output rather than on timekeeping. So her team were able to choose how best to manage their family and working lives. Wardle only insisted on a team Zoom meeting at 08:30 every morning to set the day's agenda. "We run through what everyone is doing and what the key focus areas are for the day," she explained.

Onto bigger and better things

The biggest challenge for Wardle now is to ensure her business can run without her. Mkwanzazi believes that Wardle has made significant progress in this area, but says, "There are still some elements that require her to step back. But the business is definitely becoming more independent from her input."

After two-and-a-half years of coaching, Wardle is in the position to start exiting the business if she would like, whether it is driven by moving to a new city, or simply a personal choice to work remotely.



"The business is getting to a point where it no longer needs her. She can sell or hand it over to someone else to run. These are realisable goals because her business is extremely well run," says Mkwanzazi.

This element of the business is going to become more important for SWM as Wardle seeks to expand the business. "I want to stay in the business with oversight. I would like someone else to run the business. At the moment we have quite a big growth strategy going on as I would like to make it into a substantial business. My long-term aim, however, is to take it into Africa," explained Wardle.

It appears that coaching has not only turned SWM around but has had the added benefit of reinvigorating Wardle's enthusiasm to continue developing her business.



Coaching helps you to start focusing on the RIGHT things

Wardle's critical success factors

Coaching has seen Sandy Wardle take SWM Communications from a small-three person business to an almost standalone, 12 person operation in just two-and-a-half years. But this did not happen by chance.

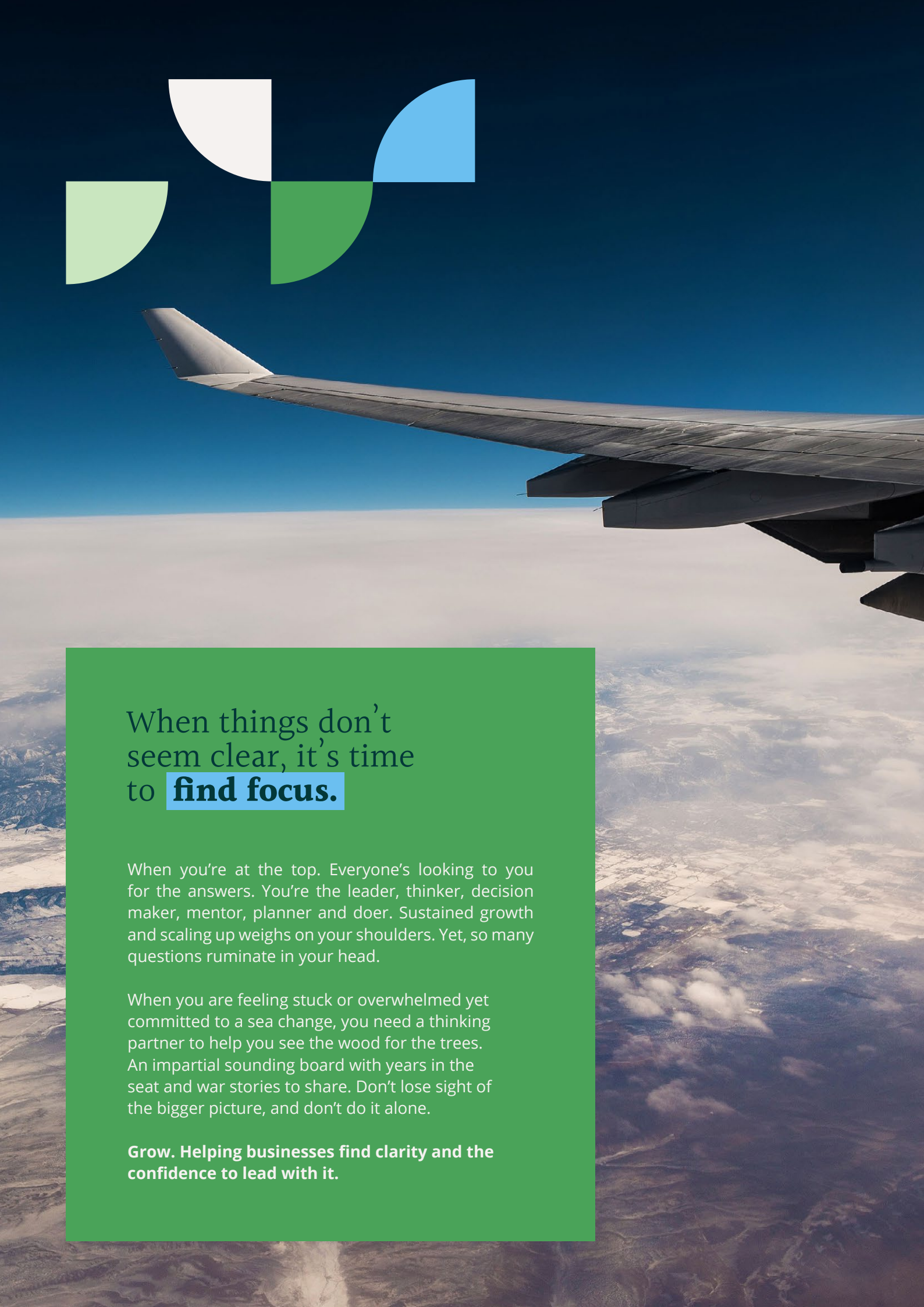

Wardle's mindset from the beginning was to get the most value for the money she was investing into her coaching journey. "It is on you to do the work. It is benefitting your business. There are people who came to the sessions without preparing and, I thought, why are they paying for something if they are not going to get maximum benefit from it? For me that is just not right. I put a huge amount of effort into all of my coaching and I have benefitted from it," she explains.

Mkwanazi believes that Wardle's success is directly attributable to the fact that she put 100% into her coaching. "Sandy always seeks full value from her sessions. Because of this, I was more than happy to give her more than full value," he says.

"We would spend extra time working on things and fixing issues. The level of her desire to get things right has kept her growing and moving her business forward."

Having benefitted so greatly from the process, Wardle's advice to business owners looking for help is simple, "Just do it. If you are serious about growing your business, then coaching is essential. It is vital to have someone continuously focusing you on your end goal." Without this help, she says, there will always be a deadline, something urgent, a client shouting and wanting something from you. And, in the process, this derails your focus. With coaching, however, comes clarity.





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.**



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