



grow



VIVA
ENGINEERING

ON TIME IN FULL
ALWAYS SAFELY



VIVA Engineering

Fabricating a sustainable future



The steel fabrication industry is complex and easily buffeted by geopolitical events. For 13 years, Collen Gibbs and Mike Pollastrini had built VIVA Engineering as they survived the ups and downs of a volatile global economy. Then, in 2018, Mike decided to retire and Collen bought his share of the business.

Collen went from sharing the load with his business partner to shouldering responsibility for a company that turns over more than R150 million a year and employs 160 people. "With Mike leaving, there was a void in the company, and everything started coming to me. Day in and day out there was a morass of problems. I wanted to grow the company and change a lot of things, but I was too busy managing small operational issues," Collen explained. "I realised that there must be a better way to do this and that I needed help." This is when Collen sought out Grow.

VIVA Engineering is a steel fabrication business that specialises in steel, mechanical, piping and plate (SMPP) products for mines and industry. Being a turnkey operation, the company does everything from the design and drawing of components, to the production and even installation on site. Collen is the sole director and although he works with a team of managers who help with day-to-day operations, there is no one to support him with the strategic planning for the business.

When Collen met his Grow coach, he was feeling isolated. "Although Collen had a strong team of managers, they were not at executive level," his coach explained. "They are all good technicians and knew their own jobs inside out, but they did not fill the executive hole that Mike had left."



Pushing hard and fast for change

In order to support Collen, his coach needed to help structure the business in such a way that the VIVA management team could take on greater responsibility and accountability for their roles. This would free up Collen to concentrate more on the sales function and developing the company's future strategy. "We needed to free up more time for him," explained his coach, who also noted that Collen, although an incredibly astute businessperson, needed someone with whom he could share and bounce around ideas and who could offer reassurance and validation that he was on the right track.

"I didn't know what I was looking for," said Collen, "But, I was aware that I could not carry on like this. There were just so many things coming to me that I was becoming the bottleneck in the company."

Collen explained, "I realised that we had to grow the senior team. They had to become more managerial, take ownership and accountability and run with things themselves, make decisions. That has been a big focus with Grow over the last year. Putting systems in place to chip away at the problems we have and to improve things."

It was mid-2019 when Collen and his coach started working on the business together. Collen committed completely to the process, and he pushed hard and fast for change. Within a few months he had a number of wins under his belt.

This came down to tackling key issues quickly and directly:

Core values

The first thing they did was to identify the core values of the business. This clearly set out the behaviours which VIVA would accept, and those it would not. This was encapsulated in the company slogan, 'On Time, In Full, Always Safely', and was an important step in differentiating the business in a very competitive market. They needed to deliver the jobs in full and on time while ensuring the safety of the company's employees. This approach is vital to the success of their business.

The big hairy audacious goal

The next step was for Collen to define his Big Hairy Audacious Goal (BHAG). This was the long-term goal that Collen wanted to achieve in the next five to 10 years. With that in place, Collen could then start structuring his business with the long-term goal in mind. He noted, "We didn't have a strategy, we were stumbling from project to project. Our Grow coach helped us implement a strategy and it has really helped give us a plan within the company to work towards."

This was a very big step for Collen, and once the goal was set it was shared with everyone in the business, right down to the shop floor. "A lot of times the guys on the shop floor get forgotten. I have seen some real excitement from the people when we have shared our plan of where we are trying to take the company. It has been heartwarming to see that" Collen said, smiling.

Corporate rebrand

With the strategy for the business defined, Collen and his coach started working on achieving growth. Collen enlisted the help of Grow's marketing team, to help with a complete Corporate Identity (CI) rebrand.

"They tore our old logo and website to pieces," said Collen, "But it revealed that what was happening internally at VIVA wasn't getting communicated externally at all, and a lot of our clients saw VIVA as it was 14 years ago and not as we are today." Collen explained that too many clients were asking questions like 'can you manufacture plate work?', which was a staple bread-and-butter item for the company.



Customer surveys

As part of the rebranding process, Collen also used the COVID-19 hard lockdown as an opportunity to survey his customers. **“We took the time to focus on our customers. We asked them questions that would help us understand what is important for them.** The acid test was whether they would recommend us to other businesses. Some of the answers that came back were very uncomfortable and made us rethink our customer service. It changed the way we worked and pushed us to rethink our client relations, which was something we had to work on,” explained Collen.

Consistent workflow

One of VIVA's biggest challenges is the flow of work that comes through the business, with all the company's work coming from tenders they get awarded. As a result of this, the company found itself with either too much work or too little work. It was not a situation that Collen wanted to continue. “A really big problem with the business is that there is either too much or too little. There have been times that we don't know which way to turn, and then before you know it the work has disappeared and you have nothing to do,” said Collen. The problem with this is it made planning very tough, and too often resulted in being unable to fully meet customer expectations. He realised this had to change.

So Collen and his coach worked on the sales and marketing function of the business. Collen invested in a Customer Relations Management (CRM) system to help the team better manage the company's sales opportunities and processes. They were now able to see what leads they had, what tenders had been submitted and what work was likely to come their way.

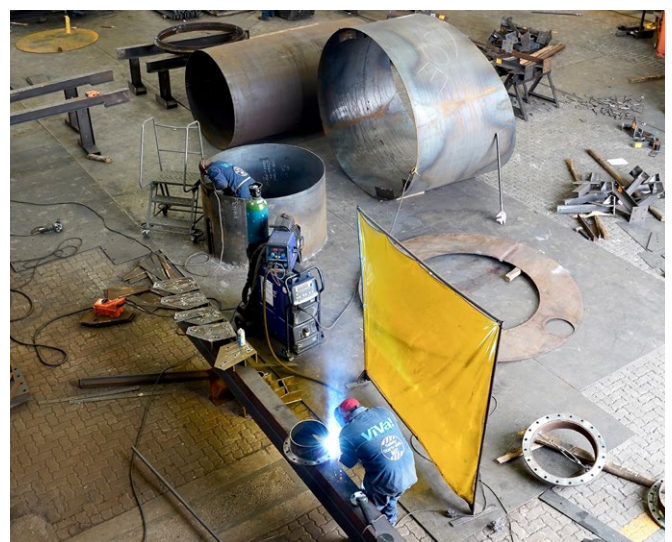
Setting this up was a massive job, but it proved well worth the effort. Collen explained, “The new system has revolutionised the way we manage our clients. It is transparent, so anyone can go in and see how a salesperson is performing, the feedback they are getting, whether and how many projects are heading towards us or whether they are getting delayed and what the impact may be. It

is singularly the biggest change that has happened in our business, and it has given us confidence to manage our workload. We can now act quicker.” His Grow coach also noticed a change in Collen's stress levels thanks to the implementation of the CRM system. “It has given him a much greater sense of comfort about what is happening and where they are going. Before, it was just every man for himself. Now the processes and controls in the background are much better.”

Building efficient teams

The next step for Collen and VIVA Engineering was to ensure that every person in the company was clear on what they were employed to do, and that they were being held accountable to deliver on their specific function. Collen was encouraged to start breaking the business into clearly defined teams and to identify who was responsible for what role. “Collen is busy drafting job scorecards and getting clarity about who is accountable for what, and how their performance will be measured,” said his coach of this ongoing step. “This is a big job and will take a lot of time but is critical.”

Collen's coach explained that once the roles and measures are defined, Collen will be able to begin to move the business towards more of a measurement culture. “We are implementing business-level KPIs (key performance indicators) so we can see if we have had a good week or month. Then we are putting up a scoreboard that displays the key metrics and measures and allows everyone to see exactly what is happening in every department, across the business,” he said, who added that putting this into practice has been quite a culture shock.



Taking the wins and moving forward

A lot of the focus has been to help and support Collen and to free up his time, but it's a process, a journey. Collen's coach explained that there are a lot of moving parts in a business like VIVA Engineering. The company is not just pushing out widgets. Every item that leaves the factory is custom-designed and different, which makes it a challenging business to manage. It is for this reason that systems and processes need to work.

The complexity of the business meant that Collen needed support. As a result, **the next step in his coaching journey will be to enhance the management team in the business.** Supported by his Grow coach, Collen has engaged a specialist coach within Grow to help his management team to function together more effectively as individuals, as a team and as managers, to help Collen more effectively execute on the growth strategy of the business.


This process also touches on one of Collen's biggest personal challenges: letting go of control. "It has been excruciating," he said. "I am an absolute control freak. I didn't think I was, but apparently I am. I think as time goes on, and as you get more confidence in your team, it is easier to let go. But I am definitely trying."

VIVA's success factor

In just a very short time, Collen has made significant strides in changing the face of VIVA Engineering. "It has been a year of coaching. From where we are now it is a completely different place to work, a different company. It is a lot more inclusive," said Collen. "Much of this has to do with my Grow coach and his involvement", he says, which is why he believes his coach will be part of the team well into the future.

When asked, Collen said that he would recommend coaching to any business owner. "It has been a very exciting journey. There have been a lot of changes, and I would really recommend it to anyone who is thinking about it," he said. "Give it a try."





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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