

Business challenges  
are when your team  
builds muscle and  
confidence

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When I was younger, I used to read about the wildly successful companies featured in popular business magazines, such as "Entrepreneur," with a great deal of jealousy. I thought, these companies are so successful, every day there must be like paradise. No struggles, stressor challenges on the horizon. These upper echelon organizations must never have software issues, be forced to let someone go, or deal with challenging customers and deadlines. And then a funny thing happened.

I had the good fortune to join an organization other people often hear about as a great place to work and one of the fastest growing. I very quickly came to the realization that our company has the same adversities as everyone else -- our team just reacts to them differently. In fact, what winning teams do best is to find a way to be at their best when things are at their worst.

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One way to identify a company's ability to sustain success is how it responds to stress and challenge. I liken a firm's capacity to emerge stronger from adversity to muscle growth in the human body. In the process of getting stronger, your muscles actually are being challenged to a point of damage. This is critical, because there must be tension on the muscle greater than previously adapted to. This breaking down of the muscle actually leads to greater strength and growth after an initial period of soreness.

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Growth in your organization -- and in your people -- resembles building muscle. When stressed beyond what they're used to, the organization is

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forced to grow stronger to survive. Your team adapts. If your people are never tested, they will settle in, become comfortable. The best companies never settle in, they've never totally arrived. Growth happens year after year because they embrace challenges. And once they conquer a challenge, once they've been stressed and have come out the other side stronger, it breeds confidence. The new "muscle" leads to increased self-assurance. And this combination is lethal to the competition.

Plenty of people struggle trying to build muscle and gain strength. The reason? The added muscle and strength that comes as a result of weight lifting often takes weeks or even months to build. When you begin lifting weights intensely, for the next few days, you don't look or feel any stronger. In fact, you often feel worse. Your muscles are sore, making it awkward to do even the most routine things such as walk up a flight of stairs or pick up your kids. Not only does the soreness hurt, it's also a painful reminder that the muscle building process is difficult. It can be so bad at times that it will prevent you from doing your next workout.

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Even if you persist through the soreness, the process still takes time. You can lose pounds of fat in a week, but building muscle takes much longer. The same is true when building an organization. Too often the "soreness" from stress or impatience to allow growth to happen derails us from seeing the true benefits of consistent effort.

Pay close attention to how your team handles and reacts to stress. This will be a telltale indicator of future success. Growth and strength don't happen quickly or without overcoming challenges. It comes as a result of steady and consistent effort. After a while, the team becomes conditioned to manage stress, as well as addicted to growth. When your organization is faced with a stressor, appreciate the challenge. It's all part of growing.