FOSTER
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

Ascend Seattle – Strategic Foundations of Driving Growth

Ben Hallen and Leonard Wright, September 2025

Session Description

This session takes a strategic perspective on driving growth in small-to-medium sized businesses. We will talk about how to create *cycles of growth* that compound over time, the importance of *repeatable mechanisms* that predictably drive key outcomes (and the challenges in scaling these), and the role of *courageous leaps* where key activities need to be upgraded to scale to the next level. A particular focus is on scaling service-oriented firms, and the intertwined roles of sales excellence, operational excellence, and building a reputation for quality.

We will explore these topics and associated challenges in the context of INPAX Shipping Solutions, a courier service in the Metro Atlanta region. We will also use this case to explore the business and personal tradeoffs of growth, as well as navigating economic downturns. While we will illustrate core concepts using the INPAX story, a key emphasis will be on applying concepts to your business and personal goals.

Readings to Complete Before Session

Background: **Creating and Sustaining Competitive Advantage** (UW Foster Note)

Case: **INPAX Shipping Solutions: Part I – Scaling to $15M** (UW Foster Case)

Preparation Questions

Please come prepared to discuss the following questions with other participants about <u>the case</u>. You do not need to write-out your answers.

- What has driven Complete Courier's / INPAX's growth to date? Consider the role of both changes in the market for courier services and the ways in which the business is differentiated from competitors.
- What personal challenges did Leonard face as he scaled Complete Courier? What risks did he take on? How did he need to grow?
- What should Leonard do at the end of the case?

Please also come prepared to discuss the following with other participants about <u>your business</u>. You do not need to write-out your answers.

- Why have current customers selected your firm over competitors? Is it because of a unique offering? A reputation for quality and reliability? A lower price point?
- What might your answer mean for how you want to grow the business going forward?

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Ben Hallen is the Neal and Jan Dempsey Endowed Professor in Strategy and Entrepreneurship at the Foster School of Business at the University of Washington. A former entrepreneur, his research focuses on how to accelerate business growth. A particular focus of his current research is on driving growth in the "mighty middle" of businesses with seven and eight figures in sales. He has published in many of his fields top journals, including Strategic Management Journal, Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly, and Organization Science. He is currently an associate editor at Strategic Management Journal. For his teaching, he has been named by Poets & Quants as one of "Best 40 Under 40 Professors" amongst global MBA faculty and has received the "Dean's Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching" at Foster. At Foster he helped launch the MS in Entrepreneurship, the Creative Destruction Lab course, and created a popular course on "Strategies for Scaling and Funding Businesses". He earned a BS in Electrical Engineering and a masters in computer science from the University of Virginia, and a PhD in Management Science and Engineering from Stanford University, where he previously served on the advisory board of Stanford Technologies Venture Program.

For more on Ben's recent research, see this piece at Harvard Business Review:
https://hbr.org/2024/05/scaling-a-midsize-startup