

# 7 Expert Tips for Sustainable Business Growth

## Design and construction pros share their wisdom on how to grow a business



### 1. Create an Organizing System — and Stick With It

When information, communications and to-dos are flying at you from all corners, having a plan for organizing them is key. Some designers and builders work with old-fashioned spreadsheets and shareable documents — and those might be just fine when projects and the employee roster are light. Others might need a system that works a bit harder for them, especially when the pace of projects picks up.

For project manager Ryan Price at Bearded Builders, staying on track comes down to in-person check-ins. “Our project manager meets our subs on each job to discuss the expectations and job details of every project to ensure we are all on the same page in order to meet all necessary deadlines — over-communication is not a bad thing,” Price says.

**Phil Shearon of Shearon Design Collective turns to technology. "I'm in our Houzz Pro CRM dashboard first thing every morning and multiple times during the day," he says. "Starting in there allows me to be synced up with our team on projects and deadlines, and helps me to positively contribute to things progressing forward each day."**

**Wakeela Jones of CuttingEdge Built also loves the software's CRM dashboard. "Having the ability to message leads and clients via email and text, store documents, create floor designs and mood boards, generate estimates and invoices, and have access to this information in a central location makes our jobs so much easier," she says.**

**Whatever system you decide on, it's important to find something that works for you, so you'll use it consistently.**



## **2. Find Great Team Members...**

**Whether you're outsourcing certain tasks, like accounting and payroll, hiring subcontractors or bringing on full-fledged partners in your business, choosing the right people is essential to building trust and running your business smoothly. Yes, the current labor shortages and market competition can make this harder. The key here is to focus on what you can offer employees — and that doesn't always mean the highest salary.**

**"Be willing to be flexible with them on days or hours of work if they are part time. If you do not offer benefits, focus on the benefits of working for a small company, such as exposure to more and easy access to the decision-maker," Shearon says.**

**Anne Sciarrone of Anne Architecture gives her staff "ownership in the projects." She also says she demonstrates "how much I value and care for them with a flexible work schedule and generous bonuses."**

**Craft job descriptions thoughtfully as well. "Prior to posting [job openings] or interviewing, I determine the aspects of these responsibilities that I expect someone to already embody and what can be learned, taught or caught," Shearon says. "That way I can ensure we are hiring someone that can fill our most tangible needs, and that they have the potential to grow into the full responsibilities of the role."**



### **3. ...And Keep Them**

**Once you've hired the right people, consider what will keep them happy in their jobs and with your company as a whole, so they don't decamp for a competitor before the ink on a contract is dry. Interior designer Kate Roos works to ensure work-life balance for her employees. "We try and run an effective, but very flexible situation around here, everybody's got stuff going on and we all work hard but we also value our personal and family lives, so preserving that becomes pretty important as a business owner," she says.**

**Jones nurtures her employees. "Because we are a small company, we can create opportunities as needed, as well as specifically teach and train job skills based on our company culture," she says. "We strive to empower every team member."**

**Shearon also cultivates an environment where employees feel supported and valued. “Invite and listen to their ideas and feedback. Equip them, empower them and release them to do what they are there to do. Recognize them in the ways that are meaningful to them, and be their leader, not their boss,” he says.**

**Don’t forget to handle nonemployee team members with consideration as well. “Treat all your subcontractors with respect,” construction pro Leo Lantz says. “You never know if they or their employees would prefer to work directly for you one day.”**

**Business coach Mark Richardson says in his “Managing Growth” webinar that having the right team is one of the five essential elements for business growth. Mastering the hiring process, offering team training and creating healthy internal competition can help you build a strong workforce and culture for business success. “Growth can mean different things to different businesses and owners, including personal fulfillment,” Richardson says.**



#### **4. Ensure Satisfied Clients**

**Hitting high profit and project numbers without paying attention to client satisfaction will only hurt your business in the long run, in the form of negative reviews and fewer repeat clients. So it's important to manage expectations from the get-go, and that starts and ends with regular, honest communication and scheduling.**

**"Try to exceed expectations by not promising things early," interior designer Joe Sturgill says. Interior designer Andrea Fava takes a similar route: "We have learned over time to be very, very, very clear from the beginning, so it's managing the expectations ahead of time and almost making it worse than it hopefully will be. It's underpromising [and] overdelivering, so you can make them happier that way rather than always sharing bad news," she says.**

**As the project progresses, keep clients in the loop to avoid any unexpected and costly changes. "We text our clients daily to keep them informed of conditions, delays and progress," builder Bill Varian says. Tools like Houzz Pro's shareable daily log, which can include detailed notes and project photos, can save you the trouble of messaging everyone individually, and ensure that no one falls through the communication cracks.**

**Houzz Pro eliminates the need for lengthy phone conversations and emails with clients. "The rewards are honestly revolutionary for us, because before all of our communication with clients used to be via email or phone call, and now we can place products right into a project room on Houzz Pro," John McClain says. "We can then put all of those items into a nice clear proposal that the client can take and approve line by line. I particularly love the fact that clients can approve and decline each line item, because it allows them to feel that they have control over the project."**

**Jones also provides “regular updates to our clients, so their impatience and frustration are not misdirected and produce trust issues between us going forward,” she says. Her team also checks in regularly with clients about things like product selections and possible alterations, and discusses any “shifts to the timeline in an attempt to alleviate any other disruptions.”**

**And don’t forget to make clients aware of their role in keeping the project on track. “I give clients the heads-up in advance of decisions and payments,” designer Tara Veith says. “I alert them that indecision will extend their timeline and possibly increase their costs.”**



## **5. Juggle Projects Without Missing a Beat**

**Fast growth tends to mean a lot more: more projects, more clients, more admin tasks. But it doesn't have to mean more stress. Grist believes in the power of delegating. Varian stresses the importance of responding promptly before things have a chance to slide. McClain uses time blocking. "On specific days, the entire team is working on a specific project, so that our minds are focused on that client and not scattered by working on multiple clients at the same time on the same days," he says.**

**Designer Brigid Wethington of B. Chic Interiors relies on software tools to maintain balance. "I use Houzz Pro to stay organized and manage multiple clients at the same time," she says. Shearon does as well. "We are constantly working from our homes, client homes, offices, coffee shops and even from the side of a mountain for a new-construction home. We use the Houzz Pro app for all communications as a baseline, which keeps everything streamlined and organized," he says.**

**And remember that it's OK to turn down projects. "We made the decision early on to grow responsibly by not taking on more projects than our team can comfortably handle," Jones says. "Therefore, we are still able to provide special attention to our clients with a high degree of excellence and remain their trusted adviser."**





## **6. Get Help to Scale Up**

**Increasing leads can feel like a job in and of itself, requiring marketing and advertising skills as well as time for vetting and responding to requests. Consider taking advantage of the many resources out there instead of trying to figure everything out yourself. Houzz Pro, for example, takes a lot of the legwork out of lead generation. It has a pro directory linked to professional profiles, along with targeted advertising and even a Live Connections feature that enables responding to potential clients in real time.**

**“Leads are vetted that match our criteria,” Lantz says. And having leads pre-vetted, along with having marketing and advertising help without needing to hire a full-time person, can save a world of time and expense.**



## **7. Stay Inspired**

**Being able to focus on the parts of your business you love, rather than getting bogged down in the parts of it you don't, will go a long way toward helping you maintain success while avoiding burnout. And whatever you're passionate about, make sure to feed that passion with regular inspiration. Maybe inspiration comes for you by visiting museums or gardens, traveling, diving into pop culture through videos and music, or visiting trade shows.**

**And of course it can come from browsing home design websites and taking in all the amazing projects of other designers. Designer Jill Nelson loves the creative inspiration Houzz offers. "It's a great resource for ideas," she says. "I have each client create an Ideabook right away so we can start sharing ideas." Similarly, for kitchen and bath designer Alisa Hofmann, Ideabooks, "provide something tangible for clients to start talking about with friends and family and get excited."**

**However you keep inspiration bubbling up, remember that you'll have more time and energy to do it by taking advantage of the available technology and tools — especially if your business is growing by leaps and bounds.**

*I hope you found one, or more of these points beneficial to your business.*

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