

Introduction and Background

The leadership team (1) of GROW Nebraska has been engaged in updating GROW's strategic plan. This work is rooted in the 2020 GROW Nebraska Strategic Plan. The leadership team engaged in three working sessions moderated by Connie Hancock with support from Board Member Don Macke. This document captures the outcome of this work with the leadership team in support of next stage Board strategic planning.



About GROW Nebraska

In the spring of 1992, the Holbrook Public School closed its doors and the school district combined with Arapahoe Public Schools. Little did the Village of Holbrook know, great things were going to happen in the building.

John M. Koller, a local businessman and owner of ATC Communications, decided to purchase the building and create a nonprofit foundation. Central Plains Foundation and the former Holbrook Public Schools building was turned into Central Plains Development Center.

The early years were not without struggles. Three directors later the Central Plains Foundation Board hired Janell Anderson Ehrke January 1, 1995. This board quickly supported Janell's dream to start a statewide marketing program for Nebraska products, arts, and businesses. A business plan was developed in the Fall of 1996 and fundraising started launching the GROW Nebraska Program January 1, 1998, with 60 members.

Forward 20 years later. The Central Plains Foundation was responsible for creating and assisting 11 businesses as well as retaining and creating over 35 jobs for the area. The board realized GROW Nebraska had become much more than they ever realized and agreed it needed to be run by a statewide board and become the sole purpose of the foundation. The Central Plains Foundation name was changed to GROW Nebraska Foundation and the Central Plains Development Center Building was sold June 2018 to a sole proprietor to continue to offer business space.

Source: www.grownebraska.org/ourstory, June 21, 2021

Amazon Principles

Given GROW Nebraska's niche in the commerce marketplace, it's leadership team embraces Amazon's Principles as follows:

Customer Obsession. Leaders start with the customer and work backwards. They work vigorously to earn and keep customer trust. Although leaders pay attention to competitors, they obsess over customers.

Ownership. Leaders are owners. They think long term and don't sacrifice long-term value for short-term results. They act on behalf of the entire company, beyond just their own team. They never say, "that's not my job."

Invent and Simplify. Leaders expect and require innovation and invention from their teams and always find ways to simplify. They are externally aware, look for new ideas from everywhere, and are not limited by “not invented here.” As we do new things, we accept that we may be misunderstood for long periods of time.

Are Right, A Lot. Leaders are right a lot. They have strong judgment and good instincts. They seek diverse perspectives and work to disconfirm their beliefs.

Learn and Be Curious. Leaders are never done learning and always seek to improve themselves. They are curious about new possibilities and act to explore them.

Hire and Develop the Best. Leaders raise the performance bar with every hire and promotion. They recognize exceptional talent, and willingly move them throughout the organization. Leaders develop leaders and take seriously their role in coaching others. We work on behalf of our people to invent mechanisms for development like Career Choice.

Insist on the Highest Standards. Leaders have relentlessly high standards — many people may think these standards are unreasonably high. Leaders are continually raising the bar and drive their teams to deliver high quality products, services, and processes. Leaders ensure that defects do not get sent down the line and that problems are fixed so they stay fixed.

Think Big. Thinking small is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Leaders create and communicate a bold direction that inspires results. They think differently and look around corners for ways to serve customers.

Bias for Action. Speed matters in business. Many decisions and actions are reversible and do not need extensive study. We value calculated risk taking.

Frugality. Accomplish more with less. Constraints breed resourcefulness, self-sufficiency, and invention. There are no extra points for growing headcount, budget size, or fixed expense.

Earn Trust. Leaders listen attentively, speak candidly, and treat others respectfully. They are vocally self-critical, even when doing so is awkward or embarrassing. Leaders do not believe their or their team’s body odor smells of perfume. They benchmark themselves and their teams against the best.

Dive Deep. Leaders operate at all levels, stay connected to the details, audit frequently, and are skeptical when metrics and anecdote differ. No task is beneath them.

Have Backbone; Disagree and Commit. Leaders are obligated to respectfully challenge decisions when they disagree, even when doing so is uncomfortable or exhausting. Leaders have conviction and are tenacious. They do not compromise for the sake of social cohesion. Once a decision is determined, they commit wholly.

Deliver Results. Leaders focus on the key inputs for their business and deliver them with the right quality and in a timely fashion. Despite setbacks, they rise to the occasion and never settle.

GROW Nebraska Core Beliefs

Our GROW Nebraska **Core Beliefs** provide the foundation for the work we are doing:

- We are passionate about Nebraska business and want to see these organizations thrive
- We believe that great business ideas can come from anywhere
- We believe that innovation and continual education are essential for business growth and sustained success
- We believe all businesses should have an online presence
- We believe digital marketing and eCommerce must be part of a business/marketing plan
- We believe in being team-focused and team-driven
- We believe team members are creative and think innovatively
- We believe our culture allows board members, team members and program members to thrive and be empowered

Vision Statement

We help Nebraska Entrepreneurs connect to the global marketplace, marketing expertise and growth opportunities for their businesses.

We are the premier marketing educational nonprofit organization for GROW Nebraska members.

Mission Statement

GROW Nebraska's Mission is to create viable economic development through business training, technical assistance, promotion, and access to markets. We create impactful opportunities for small business owners and entrepreneurs to live in anywhere in Nebraska and make a sustainable living.

Vision and Mission Statements can have different meaning. We are employing the respective meanings as defined by the Corporate Financial Institution and Oxford Languages Dictionary respectively:

Vision – “A **vision statement** describes what a company desires to achieve in the long-run, generally in a time frame of five to ten years, or sometimes even longer.”

Mission – “a formal summary of the aims and values of a company, organization, or individual. "a mission statement to which all employees can subscribe”

Development Goals

The future development of GROW Nebraska will be driven by the following Development Goals.

- Establish a better tracking system to quantify story
- Increase GROW enterprise income by 12%
- Continue to build strong collaborations with other resources providers; We believe great change can happen through collaboration
- www.BuyNebraska.com becomes the premier shopping platform for all Nebraska-based products and becomes a household name
- GROW Nebraska becomes the source for information and resources for Nebraska businesses
- More documented Member Testimonials, Member Success Stories, and news about the foundation
- Increase membership to 500 members, have members in all Nebraska counties, and have a satisfaction/retention rate at more than 84% by 2022
- Establish a reserve fund by the end of 2021 with 6 months of operating funds
- Reach \$650,000 in sales by the end of 2021 calendar year
- Develop multi-year fundraising support
- 1,200 participants in educational webinars, conference, etc....
 - ✓ Increase sales revenue
 - ✓ Number of employees
 - ✓ Capital improvements
 - ✓ Connections made

Development Enablers

Development of a high performing organization requires not only an expansive vision and mission, and smart development goals, but commitments and investments that enable development.

- Continue to develop **GROW Nebraska's Board** to assist in carrying out the foundation's mission, help with fundraising goals and grow the program and its services
 - Clarify the role of the Board versus paid staff
 - Invest in fundraising software
 - Establish a reserve fund of \$50,000+

- Develop a culture within the **GROW Nebraska organizational structure** to hire and retain key team members who will increase outreach, services, and ROI to members
 - Continue weekly team member meetings and individual meetings between CEO and each team member
 - Furnish Innovation Center with latest technology and create a warm inviting location for staff to work and be creative
 - Update equipment
 - Purchase desks
 - Build a functional, pleasant working space
 - Update job descriptions, update employee handbook, and establish benefit package
 - Write corporate structure to detail organizational function and continued operation
 - Outline organizational procedures
 - Write Standard Operating Procedures

- Develop and define GROW's primary products, including:
 - Electronic Commerce
 - Social Media Marketing
 - Retail Sales

- Continue to improve **GROW Member Services**

- Write out formal policies for all aspects of the organization's work with members

- Formalize contact system to ensure members' expectations are being met

- Further develop GROW Creative Services

- Increase GROW member marketing opportunities by:
 - Redesigning GROW Nebraska website and Buy Nebraska website
 - Establish selling platform on Walmart Marketplace
 - Continue to develop eBay as a selling platform

- Grow and increase MarkeTech Conference attendance so that the conference becomes the premier marketing/technology conference in Nebraska

- Continue to deliver services that benefit entrepreneurs

- Increase awareness of the ecommerce service GROW provides to other businesses, such as with Dorothy Lynch

Short-Term Program Priorities

- Provide GROW members with resources and training to help them increase the notoriety and profitability of their businesses
- Increase members' online presence through modern day marketing campaigns, social media platforms and digital search traffic

Build meaningful relationships with GROW members and help them establish professional and personal connections with others

- Provide purposeful opportunities for grantors, corporations, and individual donors to support the GROW Nebraska Foundation
- Establish partnerships with other organizations that have similar goals of helping Nebraska businesses and/or communities
- Be a driving force to connect Nebraska businesses to the global marketplace through eCommerce
- Remain open to working with any Nebraska business, with a particular focus on businesses with 1 to 50 employees

High Performing Teams Evolve and Sustain High Performing Organizations

Ernest Sirolli, an international thought leader in the field of entrepreneurial ventures makes the case that the Trinity of Management is foundational to both high performing teams and ventures. Sirolli's Trinity approach calls for human talent that is capable and passionate in the three core venture areas of sales and marketing, production, and business.

During this work with GROW Nebraska's leadership team, we introduced Seynep Ton's remarkable book **The Good Jobs Strategy – How the Smartest Companies Invest in Employees to Lower Costs and Boost Profits** (MIT Sloan School of Management, 2014). Four key insights from this book include:

- ✓ Offer Less and Do Better
- ✓ Standardize and Empower
- ✓ Cross-Train
- ✓ Embrace Slack

Plan Operationalization and Progress Tracking

This process with the GROW Nebraska leadership team has created space and opportunity to spend time **working on the venture** versus simply **working in the venture**. This represents a unique experience for the leadership team. The progress made is substantial, but much work remains as follows:

- ✓ The leadership team needs to reflect on this document and fine tune it via regular staff meetings. We recommend that a little time of each staff meeting be dedicated to this process.
- ✓ The GROW Nebraska Board of Directors needs to become engaged. Ultimately, the Board owns GROW Nebraska and is responsible for its success and future. Board engagement in reviewing and refining this document is recommended.
- ✓ This document is too complex in our opinion and requires focusing both in content and sequencing of implementation.
- ✓ Finally, once this work is advanced, it must become operationalized with smart goals, objectives, and actions. Central to this work is a timeline rooted action plan with measurable outputs and outcomes with progress tracking on an annual and quarterly basis.

Questions and Additional Information

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