

## Jim's Profit Accelerator 19: Using Incubator Leadership to Hatch Success

Because leadership is about enabling people to get the right things done, it is endlessly challenging. It's the people who make it that way. Each one comes equipped with a different viewpoint and set of skills, which is why learning and applying new leadership tools is essential for ongoing success.

One effective tool is **incubator leadership**—creating space for a team to hatch better approaches together. It's the opposite of checking off the to-do list, which can consume the capacity for great answers. Incubator leadership takes courage precisely because it sets the to-do list aside in service of a greater goal. The courage is also necessary because not everything in the incubator will hatch. Not only do conditions have to be right, but not every egg is fertile. It depends what people bring to the discussion.

There are a few critical elements to incubation, and one of those is time. An incubation discussion can't be a rush job. The point is to provide some healthy and nonjudgmental space where thoughts, ideas, issues, and even conflicts can surface. Here are a few results that an incubator discussion can produce or uncover:

**Hidden talents:** One valuable benefit of blocks of time set aside is that eventually those who take more time to consider and express their thoughts will have the chance to do so. The more withdrawn personalities will also begin to contribute, as opportunities appear. The point of an incubator is to get all the chicks to hatch.

**Productive disagreements:** An incubator discussion surfaces different ideas, which can lead to some disagreement and conflict. But in the churn, better solutions may appear. Time and space are the necessary environmental elements for such an outcome.

**Dissolving dissension:** There can be numerous reasons for one team member to be separated from the others. The silent spaces in an incubator session may bridge the divide and allow talking through a concern or issue. If the incubator conditions are right, this can help reduce the concern to a manageable size and may even surface some new ideas or solutions.

**The seams:** Most unsolvable problems can be solved by looking for seams in the wall, rather than up, over, or down. The opportunity to sit together to find the seams produces results. Because different people have different perspectives to offer, they can spot the seams that others are blind to. These results require incubator conditions that create respect and real listening.

**The real agenda:** The open-ended nature of genuine discussion opens doors. Having no agenda can pop up the real agenda, with space to consider it effectively. This is where the courage comes in. As a

leader, it takes guts to surrender the agenda to others while no “real work” gets done. Nothing but talk can sometimes lead the way to increased effectiveness, improved efficiency, or the next great idea.

**The step between plan and action:** Dramatic changes can promise mind-numbing choices, which can blind leaders to the next small step toward action. Time and space to discuss can lead to consensus about the next small steps as well as realistic goals and deadlines, which are critical to actually achieving success.

The purpose of an incubator is to get the chicks to hatch, but that is just the first step, of course. Be sure to take good care of the results of your incubator discussions. Careful care and feeding is necessary if you want to see those chicks grow up and become productive.

Incubator discussions are an opportunity to practice real leadership—the leadership of setting the agenda aside and investing in your people to see what is inside of them and how they can help your organization achieve genuine, lasting growth. When this week will you dare to try incubator leadership with your team?

Call me.

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Jim Grew is an expert in CEO-level strategy and executive leadership whose clients refer to him as the Business Defogger and Accelerator. Jim helps leaders swiftly discover the hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Nearly three decades of success as a COO and CEO coupled with his experience running nine thriving businesses provide the foundation for his consulting work as president of the Grew Company. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights on his blog, BizBursts.com: <http://bizbursts.com/>. He holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University.

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