



ON THE FAST TRACK

Change expert Verne Harnish coaches Kiwanis in its pursuit of growth

When Kiwanis set a goal to grow to 1 million members by its 100th birthday in 2015, its leaders knew that some things needed to change. With help from well-respected author and entrepreneur Verne Harnish, Kiwanis embraced the disciplines and habits of fast-growth organizations. Author of Mastering the Rockefeller Habits, and CEO of Gazelles Inc., Harnish is on the cutting edge of leadership development for organizations that have growth as a major focus. He recently shared his thoughts on leadership with Kiwanis International CEO Rob Parker.

Parker (RP): When did you first get interested in business education and developing leaders?

Harnish (VH): I have an early memory of riding in the car with my dad listening to audio tapes of Napoleon Hill, who wrote the book *Think and Grow Rich*. Dad was in sales and he would take me along with him on the weekends. He was always learning and trying to improve himself, and I was intrigued by these great speakers who were sharing their secrets to success. Later when I ran the executive program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, I was impressed with the way successful leaders always seemed to be reading and listening for new ideas and that extra edge.

RP: You've gotten a lot of media attention for being the "growth guy," which is how I first found out about your work. Tell us about the

special niche you're focused on, and why it matters.

VH: Our business model is focused on a small sliver of fast-growth companies we call "Gazelles." This term is used to describe companies that are growing at least 20 percent a year for four years in a row. They're the ones generating the most new jobs and making things happen in our economy. It's always been an exciting niche for me because these are the innovators, these are the job generators, and I believe they're the ultimate ones who help make a community or society or country gain its freedom. At the end of the day, young people who are meaningfully employed don't commit crimes or become terrorists. So there is also a real cause behind what we do and why we're doing work in countries all over the world. We know these job generators can transform communities and create remarkable economic opportunities.

RP: What habits do you recommend to companies or organizations that want to grow?

VH: The tools we typically identify with fast-growth companies are useful in any environment where you are experiencing great change. It comes back to the first fundamental, which is if you want to move faster you have to pulse faster. It also includes that fundamental communication rhythm your teams have embraced, where you're communicating daily with your leaders so you're all moving quickly and at the same rapid pace.

RP: How will we know we're making progress other than with top-line growth?

VH: I'd guess there's a lot happening below the surface that people just can't see yet. It's the old acorn analogy. For years the acorn appears to be dormant, then all of a sudden it pops through the ground and grows fairly rapidly. That's a lot of what you see when you're taking a 94-year-old organization and one that has to resprout. Any good farmer understands that.

RP: Your book *Mastering the Rockefeller Habits* highlights some of the principles that J.D. Rockefeller used to build his empire during the 1900s. What would you encourage us to focus on.

VH: Fundamentally, our position is that decisions equal success, and J.D. Rockefeller made some great decisions. People talk about a lot of other stuff, but at the end of the day, until a decision is made, it's hard to really move forward. So there are a few decisions leaders