Building a Team Around Your Next Milestone, Not Your Org Chart

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One thing I've noticed is that growing companies often start asking the same question.

"What should our organization look like?"

It's a fair question. But I think there's a more useful one to ask first.

"What are we trying to accomplish over the next twelve to twenty-four months?"

Those lead to very different conversations. I've seen companies spend weeks debating reporting lines, titles, and organizational charts before they've agreed on the milestone that's actually driving all of those decisions.

Is the goal to get a submission out the door? Prepare for a first FDA inspection? Move from development into commercial manufacturing? Expand into a new market? Support a product launch? Each of those milestones places different demands on the organization. The team that gets a company through product development isn't always the team that's needed for commercialization. The structure that worked when there were twenty people may not work when there are one hundred, and that's normal.

The mistake is assuming the organization should grow in a straight line, when in reality most companies grow in stages, and each new milestone exposes a different constraint. One year, the challenge is getting enough technical expertise around the table to solve complex problems. The next, it's creating enough structure that work moves consistently without depending on a handful of people who know everything. Then the focus shifts again.

I've seen this play out at more than one small company that decided to have Quality report into Operations or Engineering rather than stand as its own function. On paper, it can look like a reasonable way to streamline headcount and reporting lines. In practice, Quality and Operations often have different agendas, and the arrangement can create something closer to a conflict of interest than a clean reporting structure. Operations is usually measured on speed and output. Quality is measured on catching problems before they become bigger ones, sometimes by slowing things down on purpose. When one reports into the other, it's not hard to guess which priority tends to win when the two disagree.

In the cases I've seen, that tension showed up as real turnover on the Quality team, roles that stayed open for months, and delays the company hadn't planned for. Some strong candidates learned about the structure during the interview process and chose not to move forward at all. The org chart had been drawn to simplify things on paper. It just wasn't built around what the company actually needed to accomplish next.

That's why I think the best leadership teams spend less time asking, "Who should report to whom?" and more time asking, "What's going to help us reach the next milestone without creating problems down the road?" That question forces the conversation away from titles and toward outcomes, and it encourages leaders to think about where decisions need to be made, where work is slowing down, and where people are stretched too thin to keep the business moving at the pace it needs.

An organization chart is a snapshot. A milestone is a destination. The strongest leaders I know build their teams with the destination in mind. They understand that the right structure today may not be the right structure a year or two from now, and that's okay. As the business changes, the team should evolve with it.

This is a conversation I hear more often as companies move from one stage of growth to the next. The leaders who navigate those transitions well tend to keep their attention on what the team needs to achieve next, rather than on what the organization is supposed to look like.