By David Deane October 31, 2026

The CEO’s growth dilemma

“Never tell me the odds,” says an agitated Han Solo to C-3PO. Success in health tech startups feels a lot like that.

Regulations, reimbursement, technology, misaligned incentives and the funding ecosystem can all change the next right step for an entrepreneur. A tailwind today could be a headwind tomorrow.

You’re the CEO because this started with your idea, your spark, your conviction that something could work better. You convinced other people to believe in it, got a pilot off the ground, and have some encouraging results. Getting this far has taken a ton of work.

Now you need to turn those results into a business that can keep delivering them.

Some days, you’re the only person deep enough in the details to make an operational decision. Other days, you wonder whether dropping into every meeting is helping or making everyone wait for you.

> **And somewhere in there, you’re supposed to sell.**

You want those first few game-changing deals. But between conversations with payers, providers and employers, you can find yourself moving from one version of the strategy to another. Every meeting produces a new possibility, a product request, or an introduction you should probably follow up on.

It’s a lot of motion. It doesn’t always feel like progress. You can’t afford expensive mistakes, but you also can’t afford to sit still.

The experience you need at this stage

“Being the CEO means I get to do what I really like about 10% of the time,” a successful CEO once told me.

That stuck with me. She loved selling and spending time with clients, but the company was in the middle of a major technology build. It needed her attention, too. Every hour had a tradeoff attached.

She knew she needed experienced help with targeting, commercial strategy and execution. She also knew what the company could afford.

I’ve had versions of that conversation many times. An experienced growth or revenue leader could help, but a senior hire is a significant commitment while revenue is still taking shape. And the work may span several disciplines: deciding where to sell, what to offer, what it will cost to deliver, and how long the cash will last. That’s a lot to put in one job description.

The timing makes this especially tricky. Market selection, product changes and enterprise sales all take time, while the cost of a senior hire starts immediately. You may need several kinds of

experience before there's enough work or budget to justify a full-time leader in each area. The question becomes: what do we need to build now, and who can help us get it done?

Why are we doing that

This simple question works almost anywhere in a startup, and even in established businesses, if we're being honest. The trick is asking it with some curiosity and then leaving room for the answer. We need to know what the evidence supports and which assumptions we're making. It's surprisingly easy to skip that part when an interesting opportunity shows up.

Before we dive into market mapping, messaging and targeting, we'll interview the team and ask simple questions around the "why."

A salesperson may say, "I know someone there. We worked together years ago, he likes what we're doing, and we're meeting again next week."

That could be useful. A warm relationship is worth having.

But a few more questions may reveal that the company's current delivery footprint is elsewhere, the prospect serves a different population, or the contact has limited influence over the problem we're trying to solve.

None of that makes the introduction worthless. It does change how much time we should put behind it and what we should expect from the meeting.

I'd love to hear something closer to: "They serve the population we've designed this for, they're in a market where we can deliver well, and we have a reason to believe this problem matters to them now."

In practice, we may only have one or two of those answers. That's a useful place to start. We can identify what we know, what we're assuming, and what the next conversation needs to tell us.

> **There's value in low-hanging fruit. But you still need to find the right tree.**

What should we do next

This is where mapping helps. Boy, do we love maps. We map everything from relationships to regulations. A useful map gives the team a shared view of where to go next, what needs to be true, and what might change the decision.

There's plenty of data available, and better tools to help us work through it. But someone still needs to ask whether the information is relevant, whether the assumptions hold up, and what it means for this particular business.

The work usually falls into six connected areas:

Market strategy and targeting. Which buyers, populations and markets make sense? Why would they buy now, and where should we concentrate our effort?

Messaging and demand creation. How do we explain the value to each buyer, support it with proof, and create a practical calendar of papers, talks, conferences, webinars and outreach?

Product development, pricing and deal design. What is the smallest useful offer we can deliver well? What needs to be built, how should we roll it out, and can we make the economics work?

Pipeline and sales operations. What evidence moves an opportunity forward? Who owns the next step, and what makes us believe a deal will close? That's often where we start: what have we actually learned in discovery?

Financial modeling and forecasting. How do sales assumptions translate into revenue, delivery costs, staffing and cash needs? What happens if the timing changes?

CEO and operating strategy. What needs the CEO's attention, what can the team own, and which decisions or investments can wait?

The connections between these areas are often where things get interesting.

A promising buyer may need a product change. That change may affect staffing and margin. A large contract may look great in the pipeline but require months of implementation before meaningful revenue arrives. You want to see those connections while you still have choices.

Why we built Seedling

That's why Corwin and I built Seedling. We've spent years working through these questions from commercial, product and financial perspectives, and we tend to spot different things. I may be focused on the buyer and the path to a deal. Corwin will be asking what that deal means for delivery, staffing, margin and cash.

We work alongside the leadership team on a defined scope. Sometimes that means a ranked account plan and a clearer buyer story. Sometimes it's a financial model, a product rollout plan, or an honest assessment of what's actually in the pipeline. We bring in specialist help in areas such as coding, regulatory matters and operations where the work calls for it.

The starting point is a conversation about the decisions in front of you and the work needed to make them. From there, we can agree on a scope and budget that make sense for the business.

If this sounds familiar, I'd be happy to compare notes.

Contact Seedling Advisors

David Deane david@seedlingadvisorsllc.com 540-520-6146

Corwin Broxson corwin@seedlingadvisorsllc.com

seedlingadvisorsllc.com