



# Perspective & Accountability

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**Kem Krest:** A Story of Resilience and  
Expansion in a Certified Minority-  
Owned, U.S. Business (MBE)



**In 20+ years as President, Amish Shah had seen incredible and continuous year-on-year growth when Kem Krest hit a flat spot.**

With the support of Lawrence & Co., Amish built a strong, new executive level team, and simplified his strategy to take the company to the next level.

**“It’s all a function of first who, and then what. It’s about getting A-players on the team, and Kevin made sure I didn’t settle for mediocrity.”**

— **Amish Shah**, Chief Executive Officer



**WHO IS**

## **Kem Krest?**

Starting in 1979, Kem Krest established itself as a family-owned business that provided supply chain management, serving the North American automotive OEM market. The company takes ownership of the North American Automotive OEM supply chain for service parts, chemicals and accessories for delivery to dealerships. Kem Krest’s mission is to create a frictionless experience for customers, and to represent the easy button.

After years of year-on-year growth, Amish faced flat growth, declining margins, and ballooning inventory. Known for their employee first organizational culture, Amish leads with a big heart. He places emphasis on people over profits for sustainable growth. But over time, as his business faced challenges, he boldly faced the brutal facts and with the help of Lawrence and Co., he diagnosed challenges in the executive team and took action.

At the time that his growth flat-lined, Amish turned to his two CEO forums, which he leaned on for support. He presented his challenges, looking for a go-forward plan. Amish’s metrics were heading in the wrong direction. Everyone in the forum said, you need a coach. He wanted to get unstuck. So, he reached out to Kevin Lawrence, the founder of Lawrence & Co, a boutique consulting firm. Kevin coached Amish and together they identified opportunities for substantial change in the business. Kevin helped Amish develop an approach to the people, the strategy, and the performance of Amish’s business. A review of the business led to a plan: they would fix the team, and then fix their strategy and execution process.

## THE IMPACT



### Significant *increase*

in operating cash flow



### Strong *improvements*

in balance sheet health



### Significant *improvement*

in inventory efficiency



### Strong *improvements*

in staff turnover rates



### Strong *improvement*

in gross margin and EBITDA performance

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### *A-Players.*

The first thing you have to have in order to be successful is a highly qualified, ambitious, talented team. In the case of Kem Krest, the CEO restructured his executive team completely over two years.

### *Process & Management Systems.*

You need a process and management system that allows the team to get aligned, focused on the right stuff, and execute effectively.

### *Cadence.*

You need a strong communication rhythm throughout the company that drives toward the discipline and accountability of assessing results and recalibrating focus every 13 weeks.

## THE SOLUTION

### Kem Krest had outgrown their management and learning systems.

In order to thrive, they needed to adopt the mantra: “less is more.” Lawrence & Co. used Scaling Up methodology and Jim Collins’ tools to help Kem Krest get back to the basics by building a simple strategy, sourcing and growing exceptional key players, and putting the right tracking systems in place. Lawrence & Co.’s, Lance Neale, a strategic advisor of 35 years of experience in business operations, led a series of workshops with senior leadership to introduce this new management system and build a foundation of strategic priorities and detailed execution planning. Once the foundation was built, the vision started to cascade the tools and disciplines into the company culture.

## TWIN GOALS

### From the beginning, Kem Krest’s twin goals of growing a people-first business with results never wavered.

But Kem Krest needed a co-pilot with a big picture perspective, and an instrument-rated license. It started with a talent review of the leadership team. As mentioned, Amish was challenged to answer whether he had a team of A players, and with guidance and courage, he turned over his entire executive team and specifically sought out an HR leader with strategic capabilities, to help lead the transformation process, a CFO that could provide better insights and execution around margin and balance sheet health, and a COO who could bring the organization back to operations excellence.

## SIMPLE STRATEGIC PLAN

### Next, Lance supported the team’s development of a one page strategic plan which illuminated critical financial insights.

The team created a hierarchy of KPIs detailing the most important indicators at a corporate level and at each of the functional levels. They developed a clear understanding of the flywheel which embodies how a business creates value, as well as a clear picture of the performance gaps and the strategic imperatives for the next three years. They put emphasis on profit margin as the critical number. And with numbers guided by facts not feelings, they set sights on the next peak, with quarterly check-ins to stay on track.

At the end of six months, Kem Krest was operating off of a simple one page plan. Within 18 months, they had A-Players in the key seats, a simplified dashboard, and continued to have regular touch points with Lawrence & Co. With a strong commitment from senior leadership, Kem Krest adopted an entirely new exec. team, incurred record growth, the highest profitability recorded, and all metrics turned in the right direction. Today, Kem Krest continues to raise the bar for innovation and excellence.



“ I’m a mountain climber, so I think about the perspective of the peak. Say you’re climbing Kilimanjaro, on the first day, it’s a switchback. It takes a few days to get perspective, to be the trailhead at the top. An advisor standing at a different perspective can help you see where you’re going. I think it’s physically and emotionally impossible without that perspective.”

— **Amish Shah**, Chief Executive Officer

#### THE VALUE OF A SEASONED CO-PILOT

According to Amish, “when you are in it—the business and the problems—you are in it.”

It’s hard to rise above the situation to get an unbiased perspective. It is crucial to keep the team accountable, enable a transparent conversation without politics, and to stay honest about brutal facts, while keeping a results centered mindset. Having a co-pilot, someone who can look at the challenges from the perspective of having been there and give an unbiased viewpoint expedites the transformation.

The reality is that business goes through cycles; it ebbs and flows. CEOs often feel they have to do it alone, and that it’s difficult to be vulnerable or confront the brutal facts. But having peer groups, a coach, and advisors helps you build and engage an outside perspective and enables a leader and their organization to reach optimal potential.

In the case of Kem Krest, they needed to get aligned on the most important things to achieve their ambitions—easier said than done in a large, complex environment. The keys to their success were a culture of strategic thinking, attention to detail, discipline, humility, and willingness to do the work. What Lawrence & Co. brought to the table was an objective outside view, a management system, a coaching mentality that this was a championship team in the making, and that they needed help to keep it simple. After all, it’s critical to have a neutral third part to talk things through when the path forward becomes less clear.