PIGS IN FLIGHT

# HOW I'D RUN YOUR MONTH

The board meetings, the numbers and the habits that let a business run without you.

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FOR FOUNDERS DOING £2M TO £20M

WHY THIS EXISTS

# TAKE A MONTH OFF. WHAT BREAKS?

Most founders go quiet for a second, then start listing things. Sales. The big decisions. That one client who only speaks to you. The quote sitting unsigned because only you can approve it.

You won't take the month. I know that. But the answer is the most useful thing you own, because it's a map of everywhere the business still runs on you.

This is what I'd put in place instead. It isn't clever. It's a rhythm: **one meeting, a handful of numbers, and a short list of things you stop doing.**

I had to do this in my own business, badly, for about three years before it took. I was the bottleneck in a company I'd built specifically so it wouldn't have one. So none of what follows is theory, and none of it worked first time.

**Read it in ten minutes. Start one thing this week.** If you only ever do the monthly board meeting on page four, you'll still be most of the way there.

THE ONE IDEA

# YOU'RE THE THING IT RUNS ON

Here's the thing. You course correct all day without noticing.

A nudge on a price. A word with someone in the corridor. A late email that saves a deal. None of it feels like work. It feels like being good at your job.

**It works. That's the problem.**

Because it works, nobody else ever has to get good at it. The business doesn't learn to decide. It learns to wait.

So the job isn't to care less or delegate harder. It's to replace a thousand invisible corrections with something visible that happens whether you're there or not.

That's all a rhythm is. Not a process document nobody reads. **A repeating set of moments where decisions get made by other people, on purpose, in front of each other.**

The rest of this guide is just the detail of that.

AT A GLANCE

# YOUR MONTH ON ONE PAGE

| | |
|---|---|
| **WEEK 1** | **The board meeting**<br>Two hours, same day every month. Last month's numbers, this month's decisions. |
| **WEEK 2** | **Nothing from you**<br>Deliberately. If the business needs you every single week, you haven't built a rhythm, you've built a queue. |
| **WEEK 3** | **One to ones**<br>Thirty minutes each with the people who own a number. Their agenda, not yours. |
| **WEEK 4** | **Close the month**<br>Numbers land by day three of the next month. No exceptions, even when they're ugly. |
| **QUARTERLY** | **A day out of the office**<br>Not in the building and not on a screen. You cannot see your business properly from inside it. |

Notice what isn't here. No weekly all hands, no dashboard nobody opens, no strategy offsite with sticky notes. **Five things. That's the whole operating rhythm.**

THE BIG ONE

# THE MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

If you only do one thing from this guide, do this. Put the next twelve in the diary now, before you finish reading.

### Who's in it

You, and the three to five people who actually own something. Not everyone. If someone can't change an outcome, they don't need to be in the room, and inviting them anyway is how a decision meeting turns into a presentation.

### The agenda, in this order

1. **The numbers.** Fifteen minutes. Not a presentation, a reading. Everyone has already seen them.
2. **What we said we'd do last month.** Did it happen? Yes or no. Not "we've made progress".
3. **The two or three decisions that need making this month.** This is what the meeting is for.
4. **What's coming that nobody's looking at.** Ten minutes of lifting your head up.
5. **Who's doing what, by when.** Written down, in the room, before anyone leaves.

### Four rules that make it work

- Numbers go out 48 hours before. Anyone who hasn't read them doesn't get to speak first.
- Decisions get made in the room. "Let's take it offline" is where accountability goes to die.
- **You speak last.** Every time. This is the hardest one and it changes everything.
- Someone else is running it within three months. Ideally not you, permanently.

The first three of these will be bad. Run them anyway. You're building a habit, not staging a performance.

THE NUMBERS

# SIX, NOT FORTY

Most founders I meet have either no numbers or forty of them. Both mean the same thing: nobody knows which way is up.

You need about six. They fit on one page and you should be able to say them out loud from memory. Pick one from each of these.

- **01**
  **Money coming in**
  Revenue, or booked revenue if you sell forward.
- **02**
  **Money staying**
  Gross margin, by the thing you sell. Not blended, that hides the problem.
- **03**
  **Money in the bank**
  Cash, and the date it runs out if nothing changes.
- **04**
  **What's coming**
  Whatever genuinely predicts your next three months.
- **05**
  **The people**
  The one number that tells you whether the team is coping.
- **06**
  **The one that's yours**
  Every business has an odd number that really explains it. Churn, utilisation, repeat rate. You know yours.

**Two tests for any number on that page**

- Could a new starter read it without you explaining what it means?
- When it moves the wrong way, does **one named person** feel it?

If it fails either, it isn't a number. It's a chart.

THE HABITS

# WHAT YOU STOP DOING

The meeting is the easy part. It's the other 160 hours in the month where this actually gets decided.

**Stop answering first**

When someone brings you a problem, ask what they'd do. If it's reasonable, say do that. Even when yours was slightly better. **Especially then.**

**Write the rule, not the decision**

"Discounts up to 10% don't need me" is worth more than a hundred individually approved discounts. One is a system. The other is you, again.

**Let it be done worse**

The first few times, it will be. That's the price, and it is much cheaper than the alternative, which is you doing it forever.

**Protect the gap**

Week two, you're not in it. Guard that like a client meeting. It's the week where you find out what the rhythm is actually carrying.

WHERE TO START

# THE FIRST 90 DAYS

| | |
|---|---|
| **DAYS 1 TO 7** | Put the next twelve board meetings in the diary. Pick your six numbers. Tell the team what's changing and, more importantly, why. |
| **DAYS 8 TO 30** | Run the first board meeting. It'll be clunky. Afterwards, write down every decision you made that week that somebody else could have made. |
| **DAYS 31 TO 60** | Give away three of those decisions, each with a written rule. Run the second meeting. This time, speak last. |
| **DAYS 61 TO 90** | Hand the agenda to someone else. Then take a Friday off and tell nobody in advance. |

## WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

**Three months in**

- The numbers arrive without you asking for them.
- Somebody else spots a problem before you do.
- A decision gets made that you'd have made differently, and it's fine.

**A year in**

You could take the month.

And here's the bit nobody warns you about: **that's unsettling.** If the business doesn't need you, what are you for? That's a real question and I don't think there's a tidy answer. But it's a much better problem than the one you started with.

# IF YOU WANT A HAND WITH YOUR VERSION OF THIS

That's the rhythm. It's simple and it's hard, which is true of most things worth doing.

Every business bends it differently, though, and the interesting part is always the bit that doesn't fit the template. If you'd like someone to look at yours, that's what I do.

It starts with a day out of the office, going through the market, the numbers, the people and you. You'd leave with your strategy on a page, short enough that you'll actually use it. If I can't help, I'll tell you, and try to point you at someone who can.

**TALK TO NEIL FOR 30 MINUTES**

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Written by Neil Witten. Please do share it with another founder who needs it.