RECLAIM YOUR ROLE AS CEO

EMPOWER YOUR TEAM AND GROW YOUR BUSINESS

JASON P. GATES

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BY HUMAN

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Introduction

Do you enjoy running your business?

As a CEO, you've undoubtedly reached a point where the operational challenges are becoming increasingly difficult to overlook. You've built something remarkable, but you're facing a barrier preventing you from surpassing the 5 million mark.

You're not alone in this.

You may have a great team that can crush any task within their craft, but they have never had the opportunity to run a business. As the months and years tick by, you learn more and more about business, and the gap between you and your star executors widens. You get stuck in a business building rut between some of your best ideas and a group of amazing people who are too knee-deep in the weeds to execute your vision effectively.

Being Stuck Is No Fun

Although the tasks are different, the symptoms and problems are usually the same. You get the sales, you celebrate, you do the work, and you send out that final invoice. Then, crap, now you have 30 days of cash flow, but you've spent so much time working your tail off that you have to quickly hunt down the next sale in order to keep the lights on.

You're stuck in a never-ending cycle that allows you no time to grow your business.

You Need To Reclaim Your Role As CEO

I wrote this book to show CEOs like yourself a better way. By taking the proper steps and using the system inside, you can fall in love with your business again and break that 5 million barrier.

You can have the flexibility to push your company further forward. When you go through the process I've laid out in this book, you'll experience those "Aha!" moments of clarity. You'll see where your gaps are and how you can fill those gaps. You'll discover how reclaiming your role means reclaiming success for your team members as well as your company. Everything realigns as you realign as a CEO.

This is my invitation to you to discover how my years of building businesses have revealed a systematic approach you can deploy starting today. If you're ready to elevate your position, your business, and your team, turn the page and start reading now.

CHAPTER #1

Redefining Your Role As CEO

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Do You Own Your Business, Or Does It Own You?

You built a business with a promising future, and you feel proud of that accomplishment. You're ready to take your business to the next level and make even more of an impact. Yet, perhaps, things are not going as well as you like, and you feel forced to make some decisions that don't quite align with your vision.

Too often, business owners feel trapped by their businesses instead of enjoying the thrill of building something amazing. They make decisions based on reactions to current circumstances, and those decisions don't drive things forward to where they want to go.

Over the last few decades, I have encountered many businesses, primarily those attempting to break the five million dollar ceiling, that seem to be falling into the same cycle or trap. Maybe, like them, you feel like the lone warrior trying to keep the ship going in the right direction at the right pace. You may be fighting to portray an “everything is okay” mentality with your team even though you really know that something needs to change.

You’re not alone in this.

So many CEOs are looking for a better way. These CEOs are playing roles in sales, implementation, and client communications while managing the internal team and oh… yeah… trying to run the business itself. Typically, when you are knee-deep in new work you have sold and are leading the implementation team; you do not have the time you need to refill the pipeline.

If this sounds familiar, you are stuck in the Hunt-Kill-Eat cycle. Different scenarios can lead to your business being trapped in this cycle. For instance, a lack of delegation during implementation could be one reason your business gets stuck.

I’ve seen too many companies fall into this common trap. Your months consist of generating leads and closing deals, and then you have to fulfill those deals. Once you fulfill the deals, you celebrate, only to realize your funnel is empty. You respond by running back to generate more leads and starting the cycle all over again. God forbid you land a bunch of deals at once (let’s celebrate!), but then you panic because you don’t have the team and infrastructure to fulfill what you sold.

This is where you find yourself scrambling to expand the team to carry out what you promised in those deals.

The problem is that you haven't built enough reserves to support that growth, and you haven't put enough process in place to ensure the team is effectively and efficiently navigating through projects.

But it doesn't end there...

When you realized you needed quick deals, you may have promised to do some projects that aren't in the normal scope for your business. Now, not only are you trying to fulfill too many deals for the size of your team and infrastructure, but your team is trying to invent systems and processes that will help them accomplish the random thing you sold.

You live in this world where big revenue months are followed by months where you feel like you might have to close the doors.

Does this sound like you? If so, you're stuck, like many businesses, in a zone known as forced decision making.

Forced Decision Making

Forced decision making occurs when your time or finances force you to do things you would otherwise not decide to do. You're in the zone of forced decision making when you are forced to make decisions that may not align with your goals, vision, and values, but you don't have a choice.

Forced decision making becomes your state of existence if you don't redefine your role as CEO.

I see three major categories of problems that put a CEO into the "Zone of Forced Decision Making."

Delegation Gaps

- Hunt-Kill-Eat Cycle (See example #7)
- The CEO Decree (See example #1)

Deferring Necessary Decisions

- Not confronting painful decisions (See example #5)
- Not Deciding on Minimum Viable Product (See example #4)

Complacency Holds You Back

- Keeping a wrong fit for too long (See example #2)
- Less to work with when the time is right (See example #3)
- Over-servicing a client (See example #6)

Below are examples from each category to help you visualize this concept. Each example has a path forward that we specifically address in this book.

Example #1: The CEO Decree

A company meeting is called, and the CEO spends a lot of time plotting the perfect path forward. The presentation is beautiful, and the team nods their heads in agreement—your presentation was delivered perfectly. So, what is the problem? **Delegation**.

So many CEOs stop here and do not have the resources or business skill sets to convert a high level plan that sounds great on paper to an actual executable plan.

Invariably, the team gets busy, you get busy, and you fall into the first trap in this book: The CEO Decree. It is a toothless powerpoint presentation given from your CEO Podium with no bite to propel your company forward.

The way forward: Grow into your newly defined CEO role.
Yes, get input from your team. Yes, develop your presentation. But make sure you develop a plan and delegate enough duties off your plate to ensure the next leg of your journey actually comes true.

Example #2: Keeping a wrong fit for too long

Perhaps you hang on to an employee too long. They're not a good or bad fit and they are not incapable of doing the job properly, but you haven't let them go because they do a somewhat passable job. You thought you interviewed well, and you saw some potential… Where did it go? Will it resurface? What if you miss out?

The truth is this type of situation starts as a deferred decision and then moves into being complacent. It then has an even higher risk of eroding your team's morale as deficiencies get brighter and brighter, animosity seeps in, and you have now sown the seeds for a toxic culture. This costs your team time trying to compensate for a weaker team member. One thing I have learned over time is that, in this case, if you feel it, they feel it, too. Don't keep them in a dead end—try like hell to find a solution. Don't just fill the job. You created a better company than that.

The way forward: Make Careers Not Jobs

Chapter 7 will explain how to audit your current team and create a better, more sustainable future. When you set your team up for success, you have fewer painful decisions to make.

Example #3: Less to work with when the time is right

You come across a small company that fits perfectly into your narrative and mission. You want to acquire it. The acquisition target can instantly provide revenue and personnel that fill some of the gaps in your roadmap.

Even though things are going well enough, your cash position, P&L, and Balance sheet need to be better to make the transaction worth it.

The stronger your company looks on paper, the better deal you can strike. However, being complacent about your finances, humming along, and paying the bills may force your otherwise healthy company to pass on a great deal. You should take deliberate yet simple actions to have the strongest company you have on paper so that when the perfect deal does come along, you look incredible and you can either use cash directly or preserve equity for more acquiring in the future.

This is where you're forced to make a decision not to do something, even when you feel it could be a great move for your business.

The way forward: Don't overcomplicate your finances.

In Chapter 6, we'll discuss how finances can get away from you and how you can gain control (and clarity) over them.

Example #4: Not Deciding on Minimum Viable Product (Scope Creep Example)

You have a product roadmap. You are knee-deep in the process, and now AI would be a great addition to your platform. So you add it to the pile! You keep adding more resources and features. Ideas keep coming, and the end goal of a version 1 product keeps getting further and further away.

The team is very excited working on a new technology, and experiment after experiment erodes both your budget and timeline. This is another form of deferred decision making, where eventually, the gravity of money will force your hand to deploy a product early, resulting in a launch that may be more buggy, maybe even of lower stature than you originally envisioned.

In this case, you've extended your financial budget and team resources further than originally planned. Now, you cannot predict future needs and problems, and your team keeps making the same mistakes.

The way forward: Create a Strong Infrastructure
Chapter 8 of this book goes into building predictable and repeatable systems and processes that eliminate these issues and make your business more scalable.

Example #5: Not confronting painful decisions

I witnessed a disagreement between a lead developer and a CEO regarding the approach to a software project buildout. The lead developer was a perfectionist and wanted to build a part of the system that would stand the test of time. The CEO wanted speed—build the software fast and get to the minimum viable product ASAP.

Instead of being firm on timeline and budget, the CEO provided gentle reminders regarding the importance of time and budget. The development team was working hard and really enjoying the project and the CEO didn't want to rock the boat.

More time passes, more pressure builds. By not getting ahead of this issue, the CEO lost valuable time and had less resources to button things up in the end.

How many uncomfortable conversations do you have nagging at the back of your mind, hoping they will one day go away? Hint: they usually don't.

Example #6 Complacency - Over Servicing a Client.

Yes, the client is happy you're getting results. You have the margin to absorb the extra time the team is spending on it, but what does this get you? You're not paying attention to the amount of hours or budget you spend on this client. You become complacent and let this go.

Then, a new client comes in, and your team is pushed to their limits or more.

You now wonder if you need to hire, but the act of over servicing is restricting you. You're in a forced decision making zone where you really shouldn't be hiring. You could be forced to hire to cover for the inefficiency of your implementation process. You feel stuck hiring when you know it is not the right call.

In Chapter 8, I will help you discover how to set up your business to avoid over servicing clients.

Example #7 Hunt-Kill-Eat Cycle (**delegation gaps): There are some projects you will want to be involved in, but *should* you be?**

Do you really need to be involved? You should always try to delegate things that can be done effectively by other people on your team. Without the CEO handling the most critical tasks and keeping the sales pipeline full, no one will have a job in the long run.

I saw a situation recently where a CEO kept performing tasks they would enjoy doing. After all, they started their business to enjoy the heck out of their craft. The problem is they overfill their plate: they bring in the work, do the work, and finish the work.

You do the same, and then, a real issue comes up—the proverbial hit-the-fan moment with something critical. You cannot drop the tasks you are in the middle of doing because there's a check attached to them. You have to address the hit-the-fan issue. So, now you can't outreach to new prospects. You're now stuck in a hunt-kill-eat cycle, putting you into a zone of forced decision making.

This is how not delegating forces you into the hunt-kill-eat cycle. I go into more on how to avoid this in Chapter 8.

When we find ourselves in a moment of forced decision making, nothing feels worse in business. You have to say no to things that would be a good move for your business. You are forced into doing things that may not align with your values, your timeline, and your goals.

Build the Business You Want, Not the One You Are Forced to Have

It is your company, and your values matter a great deal. Being forced to make decisions you do not want to is a painful feeling to endure, especially if it contradicts who you are at your core. Here is a way to run a business that maintains these values while allowing you to grow a healthy business.

Where Are You Right Now?

You may have read up to this point, and luckily, none of it seems too familiar yet. You are building a great team, things are flowing well, you haven't reached a capacity restraint yet, and you feel in control. You feel as if your business is growing well.

Or maybe what you've read so far is too familiar, and you've caught yourself saying "yep" at various moments throughout it. Your team feels stuck. *You* feel stuck in a rut. Every so often, you or your team say, "Here we go again."

Do you let the cycle start over, or is it time to put your foot down and say, "Not again!"

No matter where you are in your business journey, there will be tools and strategies that will help you break through the barriers. You can have the company you envisioned building that clearly aligns with your goals, keeping everything from slipping into chaos, forced decision making, uncertainty, and more.

Are you ready to Reclaim Your Role As CEO™? You are in the right place, and the time to act is now.

CHAPTER #2

Introducing The Reclaim Your Role Framework™

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.

– Aristotle

Over the last few decades, I've worked with many agencies and software companies where I saw and experienced this growth journey with them. I'm super analytical, with a background in operations, and I love exploring solutions. I kept trying to figure out the common denominator in companies who found themselves stuck and unable to grow their businesses as they envisioned. What made them keep slipping back into the zone of forced decision making?

I found common ground after years of engaging with these companies through conversations with team members, executive meetings, and digging deep into their core infrastructure. The more companies I partnered with and helped build, the more my findings were validated.

It wasn't just the companies I partnered with that led me to the answers. I also saw the same issues within the companies I own. Those same issues appeared in other companies I consulted with, clients I worked with, and elsewhere. My operations background allowed me to identify the solutions and how they fit within the building block to make me a better consultant.

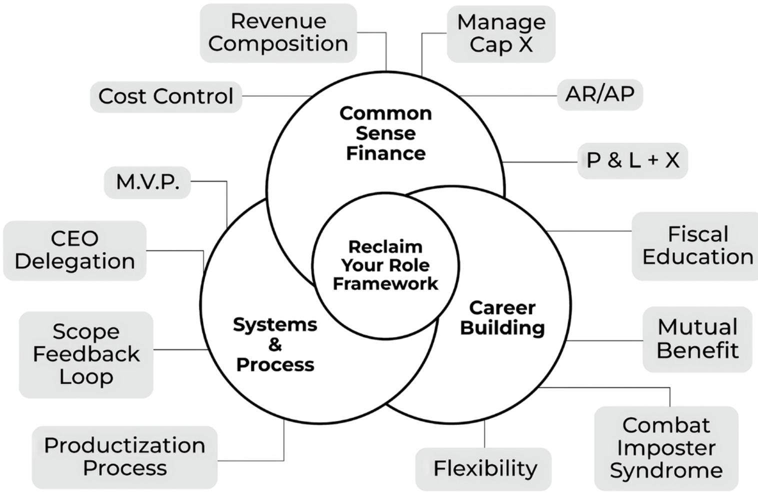
As I sat there in the CEO seat at my companies and as a fractional COO for others, those "Aha!" moments happened where I realized things I should have done differently. I studied the areas where my CEO instinct was to do one thing, when in reality, that one action drove me further from my vision instead of closer.

Eventually, I realized what needed to happen: **we needed to help the CEO reclaim their role.**

I isolated three pillars we had to focus on to elevate these businesses to success while redefining the CEO's role. That led me to build the simple solution companies need now: The Reclaim Your Role Framework.

Engaging The Reclaim Your Role Framework

This book will help you redefine your role as a CEO and take your business to the next level with a structured system I've developed. The Reclaim Your Role Framework consists of three main pillars: common sense finance, career building, and systems and processes.



Common Sense Finance

Common sense financing looks at cost control, revenue consumption, P&L health, AP and AR management, and much more. In Chapter Six, I introduce you to simple rules you can follow to uncomplicate your finances and eliminate areas of financial waste.

Career Building

Successful CEOs build careers, not jobs, in their companies. In Chapter Seven, I provide you with the tools to build a mutually beneficial relationship between your team and the company for long-term stability.

Systems and Processes

A solid core infrastructure enables you to get the most return from The Reclaim Your Role Framework. In Chapter Eight, I provide you with the tools to create an infrastructure that minimizes mistakes and optimizes results while providing your business the stability it needs for long-term growth.

It's Time To Get Started

The next few chapters will help lay the foundation you need to implement The Reclaim Your Role Framework. Please don't think these are too trivial and try to skip them. They provide the building blocks you need to successfully redefine your role as CEO.

Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight will then show you how to use that foundational material to tackle the system's three pillars. Then, in Chapter Nine, we'll talk about what is possible when you've implemented The Reclaim Your Role Framework.

This book is your first step toward building the business you want, not the one you're forced to have. First, let's gain clarity on your business and help you reconnect with the big reason WHY you started your company in the first place by re-examining your original vision with Chapter Three.

CHAPTER #3

Where Is Your Business Today?

Today is the oldest you've ever been, and the youngest you'll ever be again.

– Eleanor Roosevelt

Realigning For Your Role

You are redefining your role as CEO. Part of that redefining is making sure that your mission and vision are realigned to where you are going as you redefine your role.

What drove your desire to start your business in the first place? Maybe you had an idea you felt the world needed and built your business around that idea, offering it with a different twist. Perhaps you wanted more flexibility in your life and built a business to align with your value systems and life goals. You may have had other reasons, ranging from short-term financial goals to the fact that it was just the right time.

Whatever the reason you started your business, I want you to reflect on the WHY.

There is a difference between WHY you started a company and what makes your company unique. Most companies are NOT unique, but when you dig under the surface, you find that there is a process, approach, or philosophy that adds a dimension of uniqueness. This is what this exercise is designed to explore.

Do You Have A Job Or A Business?

Part of redefining your role as CEO is making sure that your mission and vision are aligned as you redefine your role. While you reinvent and redefine yourself, the business will also need to be realigned.

I want you to take a second and "get back to basics." Please don't skip this section. It plays a critical role in helping you build the company you want in the way that you want. It helps confirm your place in the industry.

Let's look at the core infrastructure for your business. The core is built by the answer to these three questions: What do you do? How do you do it? And why are you better than anyone else?

Here is a real-life example of someone else's journey through this exercise to help you understand.

> Example Illustration:
>
> Alex runs a business. His WHY is that he created his company so he could have the flexibility to spend time

with his family with a more flexible work schedule that allows him to work in his own way and in his own time.

What does Alex do? Alex Provides SEO services for companies that have in-house SEOs. He's the SEO's SEO.

How does he do it? Alex works from three pillars (Content Authority, Domain Authority, and Technical SEO), keeping the company's business goals in mind. He builds a strategy using a process that generates the maximum value for the resources at hand.

Why does Alex do it better than anyone else? Alex's proven track record shows he has an 80% chance of hitting the top ten in Google across tens of thousands of keywords.

Now, it's your turn. Answer the three questions that show how your business should align with your redefined CEO role.

1. First, define what you do.
2. Next, explain how you do it.
3. Finally, why are you better than anyone else?

What do you do?

Have you ever seen those memes? "Explain what you do for work as poorly as possible."

Example: In marketing, I would say, "I convince people to buy things they don't need."

All kidding aside, be to the point—a couple of quick sentences describing the problem you solve.

How do you do it?

Okay, it's secret sauce time, narrow it down to a few concise sentences. You are not in a 45-minute sales pitch.

Why are you better than anyone else?

Avoid fluffy terms like customer service, process, or another way of saying "how" you do your work. Be results-oriented here, and brag a little!

Merging Into One Statement

You should have a concise 30 second (or so) statement when you are done. Let's put it all together for Alex above:

> I provide enterprise SEO services for in-house SEO teams. I review each client through the lens of the three pillars of SEO:
>
> - **Content Authority**: The depth of content on your site
> - **Domain Authority**: How much the world cares
> - **Technical SEO**: Speed and usability of your site
>
> The result of my process and experience is getting into the top ten of Google for 80% of terms on the first try.

Clarity Leads To Great Success

Clarity is the difference between doing a job and owning a business.

Clarity is the difference between working FOR your business versus working ON your business.

Clarity is the difference between deliberate growth and hoping you sell enough to make it worthwhile.

This chapter may seem trivial to you, but it's important you take the time to do the exercise and consider your business's current state. By doing so, you are establishing the anchoring point for making the most impact going forward.

What's Next?

By now, you have a clear picture of your WHY. You've answered the questions: What do you do, how do you do it, and why are you better than anyone else? You've placed the cornerstones of your business foundation in place. This will allow you to make aligned decisions as you move through the rest of the book.

Now that you've looked at the business at that high level, you can dig into it to discover what's broken and how to fix it. In the next chapter, you will dive into the business and determine what's happening.

CHAPTER #4

Defining Your Current State

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest"

– Benjamin Franklin

What Do You Think Is Wrong?

The next step forward is to find clarity on the current state of your business. Before you can redefine your role, you have to redefine what your company is doing. This starts with what you feel is wrong, and I want you to take this step more slowly than you normally would. We slow down here so you can speed up going forward.

This chapter will provide a clear picture of your current state so that you have the clarity and confidence you need. You will look at where you want to go and how you will get there based on where you are at during this moment. What you discover here will contribute to targeting the improvements in your finances, building the careers within your company, and developing the systems and processes that take your business to the next level.

Step One: Create Your Hypothesis

You know your company better than anyone else. You likely have ideas on what is wrong and what is a challenge for your business. Gather your thoughts and write them down. Define those challenges and problems. What needs fixing? What could be an opportunity? At this point, there are no right or wrong answers. Give yourself the freedom to create freely here.

This builds your "hypothesis." The goal here is to give yourself some clear ideas on what you believe needs to be done. Then, your job is to move through the rest of the chapter with an open and curious mind.

Step Two: Gathering Information

It's time to put your energy into gathering and reviewing just about every relevant piece of information you can. To make informed decisions, you have to inform yourself!

Some pieces of information could be:

- Historical Business Roadmaps
- Time Management Data
- Project Management Data
- Existing Systems And Processes
- Financial Documents
- Any Other Available Documentation

These are just some of the things you should gather. For a more complete list, download a PDF checklist at www.ReclaimYourRoleAsCEO.com

Step Three: Team Interviews

Conducting interviews with every team member plays a crucial role in moving your business forward. You're not interviewing them to fix problems. Your goal is to get to know your team members better. This will play into Chapter Seven, where you Make Careers, Not Jobs.

> **Suggestion: Shut Up & Listen**
>
> I never met a CEO who didn't have a witty suggestion ready, who was not up for the challenge of making a point, or who wanted to leverage some creative solution.
>
> My best advice? Don't!

You want to know if what they feel is good or bad and what they think should change in their position. Remember, again, you're not here to "fix" things or answer issues. You should strive to set aside your passion for your business and be focused on others to ask deep and meaningful questions.

The detailed notes you'll gather will give you clarity on your team. These notes will help you during Chapter Seven, where we explore how to Make Careers, Not Jobs. You'll learn critical information on their goals, skills, what drives them, and more that will enable you to make stronger, more productive decisions later.

Prepare For The Interview

Make sure you come up with a detailed list of questions so that you can hold yourself accountable for where you want to go and why. Rabbit holes often crop up during these interviews. You have to know if the rabbit hole you are going down has value or not. You don't want to get sidetracked by going down one of them, but you also don't want to miss a conversation that leads to a key insight. When in doubt, let the conversation organically progress, then pull it back once it feels appropriate.

You'll want to know what tools they use and how they use them. Where do they feel the breakdowns occur? Are they using a tool just because they have to, or is it really helping them do their job? These answers will help you see what is and what is not working within that team member's role and within that group.

The Order Of These Interviews Matter

I suggest you structure who you interview first a little differently than you may expect. Typically, I interview the CEO first. If you're doing this for yourself, you may go through the questionnaire yourself first to clarify what you're thinking about these topics. You can find a downloadable questionnaire at the end of this chapter section.

Next, interview the entry-level folks and folks relatively new to the company. This helps you get an understanding of what's really going on because this is where you're likely to get the most honest feedback.

Take the detailed notes you gathered so far when you interview your managers for a more informed conversation. They'll be more protective and rehearsed in their responses and may look at the interview as a danger to what they have built professionally. The more informed you are when approaching the middle tier of your team, the better. You will want to confirm the things you feel need addressing while diffusing any concerns of impact that the process is having on them and their team.

NOTE: This process is something you can do if you feel equipped, but it may be a moment where bringing in an outside, objective thinker who is not involved in the business's day-to-day operations would be beneficial. It's incredibly difficult to be objective when it's your baby.

> **Warning:** Don't "jump." It is important to gather all the information and compile it before making any decisions about what action you should take.

To download a stakeholder interview questionnaire, go to www.ReclaimYourRoleAsCEO.com

Let's Recap

At this moment, you should have a clear definition of your WHY and the answers to the three most important questions: What do you do, how do you do it, and why are you better than anyone else? You should have your hypothesis of what's wrong with your business and the challenges you face, as well as all your information and data gathered together and ready to use. Finally, you should have detailed notes from the interviews with all your team members.

Now, let's put this all together and generate a plan.

Clearly Defining Your Initiatives

The goal here is to take all the information and all those raw ideas, no matter how crazy they are, organize them and convert them to documented initiatives. It should be a brief write-up of what you want to do, what you expect to get out of that initiative, and the level of effort it will take to perform that activity. You'll put all this information into a prioritized list.

Compile all the ideas—the things that you feel must be done based on the feedback you received from your team. Eliminate nothing. You want to build a clear list of all the things that should and could be done.

Think back to your hypothesis. How does this list compare to your hypothesis? This is your time to reflect on where you were right and where you may have been off. This will help you get clarity on where you're missing information when making decisions moving forward.

What are the initiatives that will help you reach your goals? You're going to focus on the things most attractive to you—things you identify as providing a benefit to your business.

Think about what is going to help fix the bottom line. Is it going to give you more time? Is it going to free up resources? What is that thing going to do? Will it give your team education so you can speak more freely about finances? Will it give you a mechanism to grow?

For each initiative you write down, you should include:

- Title and description of the initiative
- Estimated effort (high, medium, or low)
- Estimated benefit (high, medium, or low)

Now you have a prioritized list and can break it down further to implement it with your team. When you present your plan to your team, remember to avoid the "CEO Decree" moment. Give them the why and how so they can buy into your initiative, engage them during the presentation, and delegate the load of the plan.

To download a plan template to organize your thoughts and present to your team, go to www.ReclaimYourRoleAsCEO.com

You Have A Lot Going On Now

Reclaiming your role as CEO is understanding that part of your role should be owned by someone else. As a CEO, you're running many internal tasks while trying to do a lot of external selling. You need a partner who is of that C-Suite mindset that you can unload executive-level tasks and executive level implementation onto. A COO who is good at the things you're bad at becomes one of your most valuable partners.

Now is the time to explore who this is and how that fits into your journey of redefining and ultimately reclaiming your role as CEO. The next chapter gives you the options you have and the guidelines on how to choose the best one for you.

CHAPTER #5

The CEO & COO Relationship

"Great things in business are never done by one person; they're done by a team of people."

– Steve Jobs

Someone Needs To Own Each Initiative... And It's Likely Not You

Hopefully, you have some clarity in what you would like to tackle and what it will get you (the outcome.) In truth, you may be feeling a bit overwhelmed because you have just now identified more work for yourself and your team. It may feel the opposite of what you thought you wanted to accomplish.

Keep moving forward and avoid that urge to have a big team meeting to brain dump all the great ideas everyone helped you create. You worked hard with your team to create these awesome solutions to your problems, and you should feel accomplished.

But don't let it slip away now. Before you announce your major breakthroughs, you have another step in redefining your role as CEO. It's time to delegate the responsibility of these initiatives to others. Maybe you do not have all the pieces in place yet, but you should have an idea of what you need by now. You must delegate, or all your hard work will be wasted, and your vision will never become a reality.

> *"You cannot mandate productivity; you must provide the tools to let people become their best."*
>
> – Steve Jobs

Ownership Of The Initiatives

In order to successfully implement the initiatives, there has to be ownership of them, helped by a person in the company who is not you. You are going to align initiatives with profitability and business objectives to take your company beyond the five million barrier. You are going to make sure all these objectives fit into the larger picture by taking the next logical step.

When you redefine your role as CEO, you are no longer the sole provider of direction. You need someone you can really depend on to help manage the people performing all the duties that keep your business moving while you focus on your craft. The COO will help you ensure that those initiatives get across the finish line.

Your Role As The CEO

You're the future-focused executive who defines the vision and propels the company with growth strategies for sales opportunities. You drive revenue and come up with creative ideas that will grow your business. You focus on sales and relationships to see where the company is at now, where it is going in the future, and what needs to happen to take it there.

The Role of Your COO

The COO is your core thoght partner to not only vet out ideas, but help strategize the critical components of how you will grow your business. The COO manages your company's daily operations, overseeing the department heads, managers, and supervisors. This person is the person who is going to take ownership of those initiatives and manage the people fulfilling them.

The CEO & COO Relationship

At this growth level, a CEO like you needs a COO to implement the company's vision and make the reason you started the business a reality. You can see the cracks, usually in the form of growing pains, and you need someone to come in and fix those cracks—to help elevate the people on your team. The COO helps buy you a tremendous amount of capacity. The right COO for you will fill in the gaps where you are weak, help you organize the team, refine and expand processes, and keep a sharper eye on the finances so you can focus on your strengths and push forward with implementing your vision. By leaning on a partner who is strong where you have gaps, you free up valuable time.

> A COO is a thought partner who can take on the tasks that the CEO needs off their mind. That strategic thought partner needs to be a person who understands their business and what they are trying to accomplish and will bring innovative execution-based solutions to the table to work with the team and get things done.

The COO supports you as an accountability partner:

- When you're stuck, they can source solutions.
- When you have "big" ideas, they can help determine which ones to implement, why, and how.
- They can be your voice of reason when you need one.
- They can help you vet ideas and be a sounding board. This benefit is huge, as it gives you a wider perspective.

How To Fill The COO Position

While you need someone to work in the capacity of a COO, you probably don't need a full-time position, and you may not be positioned to allocate the funds and resources to hire a full-time COO.

Step One: Assess your needs

What is your need when it comes to the skills gap? How much time and energy will be needed to fill that skills gap?

You have multiple ways to fill this role. Let's look at your COO choices and what each option provides. Understanding the pros and cons of each will help you choose the best one for your company. Heck, you may find that you do not even need a COO yet.

Option one: Coaching / Project Manager

Here are two extreme ends of the spectrum. Project management offers 100% organization but no business alignment. On the other hand, coaching can be great for helping you get unstuck, learn new ideas and concepts, how to be accountable to a goal, and much more. However, where it doesn't help you in this process is with the "doing." Most coaches are great advisors and may have a lot of knowledge, but they often don't structure their services in a way that helps you execute the initiatives you have outlined.

Coaching/Project Management is no different from other options. There is a time and a place for it, but based on this process, you need a bit of both and then some.

Option Two: Full-Time COO

Now, let's look at the option on the other side of the spectrum—hiring a full-time COO. As a CEO, you're likely operating on a pretty positive instinct that says, "You know what? Let's figure out how to do this." You're looking at everything you need from an operation standpoint. You've identified your gaps. You know you need a person who can do X…and do Y…and do Z.

That's starting to sound like a full-time job to you, but the problem is that you don't need to pay all that money to get X, Y, and Z done. Spending $200,000-300,000 on a full-time resource when you really need a half-time resource puts your business at risk of being top-heavy from a P&L standpoint (We'll talk about that more in the next chapter). You're adding too much salary that isn't necessarily going to be billable or cost effective in implementing the things you need to have done.

On the pro side, a full-time COO is someone you choose with the right fit versus the outsourced vendor who doesn't have your company's best interest in mind. You're going to hire a great cultural fit fully focused on you, your business, and your goals. So, if you have enough work and can afford to hire a full-time COO without putting your business in a top-heavy position, this might be the right option for you.

Option Three: Fractional COO

A fractional COO is a part-time COO. This individual may have a few clients at any given time. They can still be a good cultural fit and fulfill the value you're looking for without making you try to justify a full-time hire.

A fractional COO can be a cost-effective alternative that allows you to bring in an individual to help you vet ideas, source solutions, be the voice of reason, and all the other things you need from a business standpoint from someone more than a project manager. You get a person you can rely on to be focused on you and your goals.

What Makes a Fractional COO A Wise Investment?

When you're drowning in a sea of tasks that prevent you from implementing your vision, a fractional COO can help you delegate away all the tasks that get in your way. They help you ensure your vision, culture, and processes are in alignment without you having to sacrifice your time.

At a fraction of the cost of a full-time COO, they can help you break through some of those questions you already know you need solved:

- Are you tired of being swamped with the day-to-day operations of your business?
- Wouldn't you like someone in your corner helping you create a more refined path to accomplishing your goals?
- Wouldn't you rather focus on what you love versus what you have to do?

A fractional COO comes with years of experience from working with other companies. They have likely seen the challenges your business is facing, saving you time and money because they'll know what to do to resolve issues as quickly as possible. Your fractional COO isn't another outsourced service. It's an executive-level business professional who is your partner in helping you build systems and processes to scale your business. They're devoted to your business, your team, and your vision.

> If you need help determining what would be best for you, visit ReclaimYourRoleAsCEO.com

Step 2: Make the Hire

Here are your hiring options:

- Do it yourself
- Project Manager
- Coaching
- Full-time COO
- Part-time COO

All have their pros and cons. The important thing is that you have an implementation plan and that you have confidence in that plan.

What's Next?

At this point, you should be able to see the need for expanded capacity and ownership of the initiatives. In the next chapter, we will explore the Reclaim Your Role Framework and how you can use the three pillars to Reclaim Your Role As CEO™.

CHAPTER #6

Common Sense Finance: Don't Overcomplicate To Overanalyze

> *"Finance has to be a partner to the business with the help of data. It's all about questioning whether the decisions made by the company are making sense both internally and externally."*
>
> – Gerardo Adame, VP Finance at XP Power

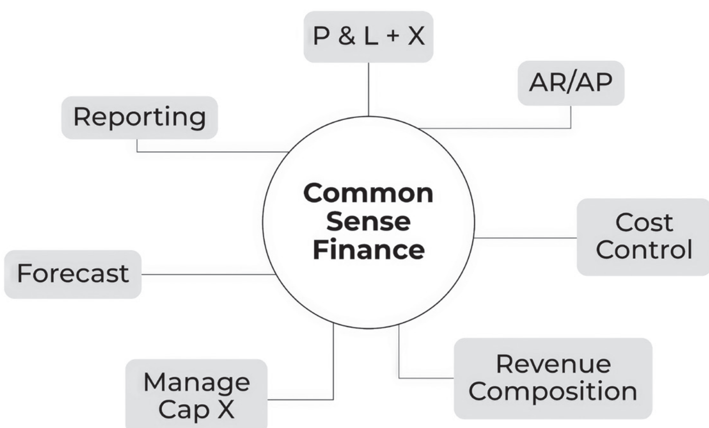
Financial Management Leads To Success

We approach the Common Sense Finance pillar first because it empowers the Career Building and Systems and Processes pillars. These next three chapters tackle each pillar you must address while you're reclaiming your role as CEO.

Finance intersects with career building because it allows you to help people understand where they can make an impact in the big picture and how they can directly change the business finances.

Finance intersects with Systems and Processes. You must consider things like cost control measures, avoiding scope creep (see example #4 in chapter one), and preventing gold plating, which we get into later. Finances help you keep the projects under control by initiating the templatized processes that we'll get into with that pillar. You will avoid burning cash to get projects done.

A strong grasp of the finance pillar empowers you to reclaim your role by properly implementing initiatives and having confidence in integrating a COO into your business. Aligning your initiatives with financial (or similar) metrics allows you to fully chase those initiatives.



Simple Rules To Manage Your Finances

Give yourself certain rules and guardrails to follow, and then get your head out of it. This may go against your nature, but the truth is no matter how hard you stare at that number, it's not going to change. Do what you're good at. If you are feeling financial stress, fight your way out of it. Don't fight the numbers; numbers do not have feelings.

After working with many businesses over the last few decades, I've seen far too often that their finances are overcomplicated. This led me to look for patterns and identify some clear rules that can be followed to simplify how you approach your finances. I'm going to share with you some rules that have always treated me well, starting with two 10-15% rules.

10-15% Rule #1:

Don't spend more than 10-15% of your time managing a project. That includes any form of communication (internal or external) and any form of organizing (timelines or task management). No more than 10-15% of your time managing a project...period.

You need to know the numbers, but the rest of your work is doing the craft and driving your business. Think of it this way: managing tasks in a spreadsheet is super valuable, but in order to get to "done," you have to do the work. Keeping your team's time in a productive balance requires limiting the time you spend on organizational tasks. Project management done poorly can look like a toddler moving mashed potatoes and peas around a plate to avoid eating them.

10-15% Rule #2:

Don't overanalyze things. Never spend more than 10-15% of your time tracking and reporting. Avoid going so deep into the numbers that you're spending an excessive amount of time trying to figure out what direction is up.

Rule #3: P&L+X(%)

Your P&L is your best friend. This should be your guiding light to understand how much you can actually spend. It makes you say, "I'm going to spend less than I make. I'm going to be good." If you bring this one attitude to heart, you're leagues ahead of other business owners.

> The formula P&L+X(%) sets the baseline goal you want for your company. It could be P&L+20% or P&L+15%, whatever.

Using this rule is how a COO and a CEO can give their leadership team some flexibility to be themselves and grow the organization. You say, "Look, I trust you guys. You're going to make good decisions, and you're going to take some bruises along the way. But as long as we are making P&L+X, I'm not going to get involved."

That doesn't mean you're not involved. You'll have your say. You'll be the stakeholder. You'll nudge when you have to, and you'll nudge hard, but for the most part, you allow your team to grow the organization alongside you by creating that ownership.

P&L+X(%) becomes your tool, enabling you to sit back and say, "This is the baseline. If we cross it, I'll get involved, but otherwise, I can focus on my company."

Remember, you cannot reclaim your role as CEO if you fall back into the zone of forced decision making. If you end up in a situation where you're paying payroll out of your reserves, you end up with a trend line that looks like a skipping stone. You keep hitting that water, skimming off it, getting a little bit of growth. This tool lets you see those trends and recognize when you have a different issue that you need to solve—it enables you to know when you need to do something.

Rule #4: Avoid going over 20% Overhead Expense

You want to avoid being top-heavy. 80% of your company must generate enough revenue to catch that 20% of administrative roles and responsibilities that aren't doing billable work. You don't want 30, 40, 50% of your company not performing billable tasks. It makes the job of the remaining doers impossible.

Rule #5: Be aware of when your biggest client is over 10% Revenue

This is more of an awareness issue than a problem. You need to be aware of how much risk this client poses, because if they leave, you may take a big revenue hit. The solution is to grow your way out of it through additional revenue. Sell another client of the same size or many clients that generate additional revenue to lessen the percentage.

Your redefined role will help you avoid situations that go wrong, which could lead to unplanned layoffs. The last thing you want is to be in a situation where if a client goes, you have to let go of people. That works against your initial vision of creating a business of stability and longevity for your team.

> Sometimes, they don't start out as a 10% client. Sometimes, they grow into it at a sneakier pace until one day, you look at your P&L, and suddenly, they're a 20% client. This puts your company at risk of taking a big hit if they decide to leave. Watch your client growth and be aware of these instances so you can plan accordingly and manage that risk.

Rule #6: Don't just forecast

This is when you say, "If I just land this one deal, then it will be fine."

When you try to forecast to the P&L in that hungry moment, you're not keeping an eye on business atrophy. Don't just look at all the rosy situations. Always make sure you keep one eye focused on keeping the clients you have. Forecasting shifts your focus to be on the future instead of on retention, churn rate, and the current cash flow.

When you only look at one side of the equation, you may justify certain business decisions or invest more than you should. There are moments when you have to sell your way out and generate revenue, but be realistic about the situation.

Fiscal Education

You are in the business of making money, and the whole team wants the company to be successful. They want to see a bonus at the end of the year, the ability to grow their paycheck, and other rewards. You can benefit from developing team ownership of the finances, too, but talking to your entire organization about money is hard—money is a touchy subject.

When you sell at $195/hour, and that team member makes $45-50/hour, it is natural for them to start asking questions about their worth and where the money is going. These conversations can lead to confrontation, and having them with the people working the hardest for your company is tough. Most employees don't know the true cost of what goes into having a team member on staff, for example:

- Dollars paid by an employee for taxes need to be matched by the company (double taxes)
- Health insurance is ridiculously expensive
- Paid time off / sick time
- Not to mention operational costs, such as rent, equipment, and so on…

It helps to find ways to talk about money without talking money. Most CEOs want to and do make good on sharing the wealth, but explaining and justifying every decision, every hire, every investment to every employee's standards… It is impossible.

For example, you could always talk about hours. Let's say you have a client paying $25,000 a month at a $195 an hour average rate. That means you can give them about 130 hours. That 130 hours is now handed to the manager, who knows they have 130 hours available to implement all the work. They can then take that to the people who are working and say let's figure out how we're going to break this up so we complete it within 130 hours of work.

This shared language enables your team to take ownership of the project based on the 130-hour metric.

Attaching identifiable KPIs to a monetary goal or number in some tangible and trackable way will create ownership all the way down to the most junior team member, who will clearly understand when we're over budget or behind schedule. This could be with hours as above or with timelines revolving around projects.

AP & AR Management

"See a bill, pay a bill."

Many companies practice the net 30 rule when it comes to Accounts Payable. Many businesses get a bill and decide not to pay it immediately.

My methodology is "See a bill, pay a bill."

The value of paying people right away can lead to better service, better terms, and more. The intangible benefit is very real, and it compounds over time. They'll treat you like the best client they have because, frankly, you are.

It creates an extra runway for you. If you end up with a cash flow issue or have a big bill that comes in, you've built in a safety cushion because you pay bills right away. When that bill shows up, you have time to tackle it and plan. It does not add to the stack of compounding bills you have.

Your accounts payable is not a 30-day interest free loan from the companies and people that help you run your business. It's not your money. Get it out of there. Get the extra credit from all the people that matter and build yourself that built-in buffer. Your AP doesn't need to be more complex than saying, "See a bill, pay a bill".

Be Aggressive With Your AR

Set your terms when you create the invoices, typically net 30, and generally leave 7-10 days for delivery by mail (if you have clients that still pay by physical check). When it comes 15 days past due, follow up with an email or phone call. If you don't get a response in two days, follow up again. If you don't get a response, you call them.

You're not trying to be an enforcer. You're just trying to make sure that they received the invoice and don't have a problem. They can be open and transparent about their situation, and you can create a timeline that helps them. That's what we're all in this business world for.

If you see one of your clients that pays you reliably for months, years at a time, and suddenly they stop, there sometimes is a reason. If it makes sense, get in there and help them out! It is about protecting your business from having your accounts receivable go nuts, but it is also a mechanism for you to have a human moment when working with the people who pay your salaries. I can't tell you how valuable a bit of flexibility, donated time, and confidence in your client are. They equate to a long-lasting bond and a brand advocate.

How Everything Works Together

These things all play together. Your AR and AP are almost transactional within a 30-45 day window, which supports a healthy and stable execution on your P&L+X, which provides room to create a shared fiscal language to an educated team, now with fiscal discipline. It's creating a snowball effect on how you manage your finances and how you're marshaling forward incrementally to ensure that you have positive cash flow, revenue, and growth.

It's tough to make any decisions on new initiatives, goals, fractional COO, or anything else without clarity in your finances. With clarity and fiscal breathing room, you can answer the question: Do your finances allow you to do what you want to do in the way you want to? Hopefully, a few of these ideas can be implemented in your company to help you simplify your finances.

Now, let's take a look at the Career Building pillar in the Reclaim Your Role Framework.

CHAPTER #7

Career Building: Make Careers, Not Jobs

Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

– Henry Ford

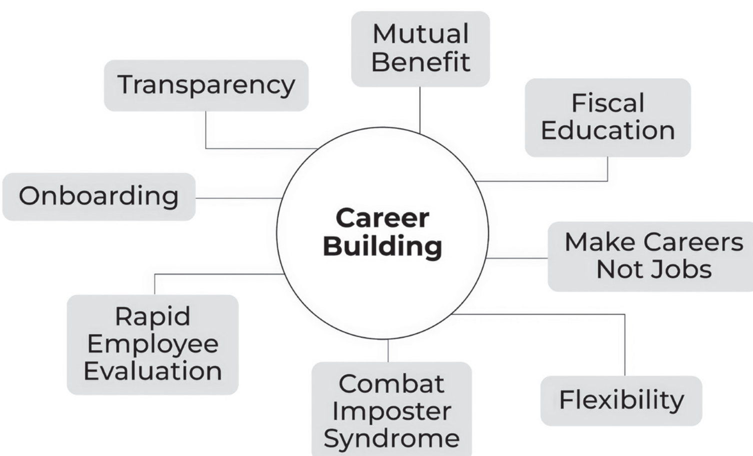
Let's Talk Team Building

The second pillar in the Reclaim Your Role Framework is the Career Building pillar. Your team is your business, and the health of your team is nearly identical to the health of your business. There is something to be said about a team with a high morale working to create something truly special. Your goal is to build that high morale and a culture that empowers your team!

How do you create high morale? You give people careers, not jobs. You give people the tools they need: fiscal tools, process support, and the flexibility to grow, expand, test, and yes, sometimes fail so that they can grow from it.

In this chapter, we'll discuss some things that help create a strong team. Hopefully, you will leave with a few new ideas you can implement in your company to help create a culture that empowers your team. Some of those topics will involve:

- How breaking down projects helps provide cohesiveness in your company.
- The importance of testing new employees.
- Creating a beneficial structure for team onboarding.
- Combatting imposter syndrome.
- Creating an environment of flexibility & transparency.
- Breaking barriers.



Mutual Benefit For Employees & The Company

This is where those team members' interviews really come into play. You want to know everything: how they think, their passions, where their career path is going, what they read, how they consume information, what interests they have, etc.

This information will empower you to dig deeper and create better alignment with your team and company. You should also focus on your organization's goals to see where things align well and where they don't. Often, this is where the match-making magic can happen.

Sometimes, you'll see someone in a role who you know is exceptionally bright and feel their current role doesn't allow them to reach their full potential. During the interview you realize there is an opportunity for them to grow in a different section of the company that you are actively trying to grow. You don't want to lose a valued team member, so you move them where they fit best for their own good and for the company.

Case Study: Data Transformation leads to match-making magic.

A company I helped had a person who was two or three years out of college and had been with the organization for about a year. Her duties consisted mainly of general marketing. Whatever they gave her, she crushed it and produced great results. One thing that the interview process revealed was that she had a passion for analytics and enjoyed it.

One of the company's core initiatives was to be more aware of the impact the services were having on their clients. They needed the entire team to be more aware of numerical KPIs. We gave her the tools and guidance

> necessary to succeed, so she dove in and found insights that no one had noticed before. She took some initial guidance and then started presenting reports in her own way and her own voice, building the role and, eventually, the team to her specifications.
>
> You can take a lot of pride in the mutually beneficial relationship between the company and the employee because they're getting a career out of it rather than a job. They're putting their own mark on it. This awareness of data has helped improve the company's overall customer retention rate.

The more aligned you can be with your team members' goals, passions, and skills, the more empowering your work culture becomes. You shift their attitudes from having a job and coming in with the thought, "I have to go to work" each day to having a career. They come to work feeling pride at being able to do what they do.

Turning Jobs Into Careers

Heroes are born when you see a better opportunity to excel for an A player in your company and make it happen. That's real magic. Redefining your role as CEO sometimes means redefining your team members' roles. Maybe it's a job for them today, but magic can happen when you give effective people an environment to grow their careers. Opportunity, environment, and mentoring can turn team members into the heroes that make real contributions to your company's success.

Combatting Imposter Syndrome

Imposter Syndrome tends to erode an individual's ability to push their career forward. People get complacent in the roles they are in, comfortable with what they are familiar with. When the time comes to grow, sometimes, they feel like they are not ready, that others can do it better than them, and if they stepped up they would be impersonating a professional. It's your job to think ahead of that with encouragement and a bit of a kick to get them going.

It is amazing what a little nurturing will do to make an individual grow. Imposter syndrome is that one barrier I don't get. It seems so obvious to me when I am speaking to an *amazing* person in front of me. When you create a culture of personal growth where it is okay to try, fail, and progress forward, it will remove this silent team hindrance.

Giving Your Team Flexibility

We talked briefly about this in finance, where the team has flexibility as long as you're hitting P&L+X(%). This is your opportunity to let them fall to the grass, not the road. Maybe they'll be right, maybe they'll be wrong, and maybe they'll surprise you. But as long as you don't feel it's a fatal mistake, and your company is in pretty good standing, state your opinion and move on.

Let your team fall to the grass versus fall to the road.

It's like when you teach a kid to ride a bike. You push them down the sidewalk, and then you let go and follow along after them. You want them to learn balance, and they need to know what falling feels like. You know how the saying goes: let them fall to the grass, but not in the road.

This is the same for your team. As a CEO, it's very difficult to try and correct every single thing that happens. Know when you should step in and when you should move on. Have boundaries and let them fall to the grass, but make sure you are aware of when they may fall onto the road. Falling to the grass is great for learning and creativity when you have the finances to support it, and who knows, you may be surprised at the results!

Transparency Allows Flexibility

In addition to encouraging learning and creativity within your team by letting them fall to the grass, you can empower them in another way. Show how everyone fits within the larger plan by giving them clarity in their role and how their role relates to other roles and departments. You allow them to participate, to give their ideas, and to take pride and ownership in the work that they're doing. You will enable them to see the plan in the way that you see the plan.

Let's say you have a team member who writes content (Blogs, Social Media, Video Scripts). They are great at it! The content is of quality. They take feedback and iterate. The content always comes out incredible. Do they need to know that their content ranks #1 in Google? Do they need to know that a popular influencer picked up their social media post? Do they need to know that their video just crossed 100K video views? 100% YES, they do! But you would be surprised about how few know the true impact of their work.

The Power of Breaking Down Projects: not all deadlines are created equal.

The more granular you are on the project, the more flexibility your team has in ensuring the project gets finished within the set boundaries. A good rule of thumb is that if a task takes more than four hours to accomplish, then it probably needs to be broken up. That task is probably not well enough defined. Anything that takes longer than four hours is likely a milestone or something larger.

Walking from Boston to Reno.

If I'm standing in Boston, how long would it take to walk to Reno? I don't know, but I can tell you how long it will take me to walk down the street. I can tell you how long it will take me to walk to the edge of the border of town. And then, I can keep breaking it down, whether town by town or street by street, until I have a deeper level of clarity on how long the path will take me to complete it. For the record: 90 seconds to the end of the street and 1,009 hours to walk to Reno, thanks to a popular online mapping tool.

In the example above, I may not know the whole distance, but I can get town by town estimates for the walk from Boston to Reno. As I begin my journey, I will know quickly how I am matching up against the actual schedule. From there, I can adjust and plan. The same goes for your business initiatives.

Breaking it Down by Nouns and Verbs

Another way I was taught how to break down projects was to break them down by nouns and verbs. The noun is the deliverable (Website, Design Comps, Blog Post). The verbs are the things you will do to accomplish that noun (Write Content, Review Content, Publish Content).

The noun becomes your deliverable. The verbs become the things that you do that break up your time.

The Output of Flexibility

When your team has more flexibility over their accountability, you have more control over the roadmap. Your company continues to advance and innovate with less of your time and management. Empowering your team also empowers you to be a better CEO. Look back at the data transformation case study earlier in this chapter. When you create a mutually beneficial environment, you empower a person who sparks an empowered team. Educating the staff and clients alike drives customer retention. A project kept is a project a CEO doesn't have to sell to replace.

Furthermore, you give your team more control over the roadmap and the project cost. Discovering you're wrong after your team has invested an hour into the project versus a week is much better. This allows you to adjust before the project costs you too much time and money.

Set Yourself Up to Succeed

> *Hiring is guessing, firing (and promoting) is knowing.*
>
> – Gary Vaynerchuk

To achieve everything we've discussed in this chapter so far, you have to set yourself up to succeed in three critical areas.

1. Recruiting
2. Onboarding
3. Testing New Employees

Master Your Recruiting Procedures

First and foremost, have an open and honest job description. Don't be the type of organization that demands ten years of experience for an entry-level salary. Make sure your description doesn't have unnecessary demands based on the position you're trying to fill. Review the resumes, pull out the ones that satisfy your core competencies, and then the fun begins with the interviews.

When it comes to interviews, just speak like you're having a conversation. This is the moment to have fun, get to know them, understand their perspective, understand their why, and see how they fit within the language and philosophy that aligns with your company and culture.

Your goal is to make them comfortable so that you can gain insight into their personality- nerd out a little!

Importance of Onboarding

Why do you need a predictable onboarding process if you only hire one, two, or even three people a year? You need a predictable way of getting people into your company so that they can as seamlessly as possible perform the role you hired them for. Just throwing new team members in and hoping they land is not a real approach to quality growth. Maybe this is one area in which you may not feel a need for a dedicated procedure, but it can really impact your bottom line.

A predictable onboarding process provides new team members with the tools they need to quickly get their bearings and puts focus on the reason you hired them. The last thing you want to do is waste a month with inefficient communications, retraining on internal systems, and wasting time fumbling around various processes that were not communicated clearly. Is that the environment you want? Is this the way you want to say, “Hi, nice to meet you?”

> **Actions speak louder than words**, and onboarding (or lack thereof) is your first impression on your new hire as they integrate into your team.

Here are some ways you can make your onboarding more impactful.

- First, the basics: provide training materials for key systems like project management tools, time tracking, how to log PTO, benefits management, and so on. This doesn't have to be a huge task. With your next hire, take a video while you train them!
- Meet all the team members and understand where and how they fit in with the other team members. Identify who they can reach out to for help on various topics.
- Set up a recurring, deeper one-on-one with the new team member to help you get quality feedback and break any barriers they may face. At some point, they should be able to tell you, "I'm comfortable, and I got this!" and then you nix the meeting.
- Onboarding is a continual process that doesn't stop at day two. You need to take that team member on a journey. It took you years to build this company. Don't expect anyone to know what direction up is after just 2 days of onboarding.

Most companies have a 3 month probation period for employees. Guess what? You should treat the three-month probation period as a bidirectional agreement, during which you keep winning that person back, just like you keep winning your clients back. During that three-month timeframe, you should have goals and support for that team member. You include questions during your meetings, asking how the company can support the team members. Follow up with another three-month goal, and then with a one-year goal. You want to break barriers while facilitating integration and growth. Companies have goals, but people have goals, too, and you can embrace the overlap while respecting the differences.

Be Quick to Test Employees

You'll likely know how well the team member works in a particular role within the first three months. You'll have a gut feeling about them, just like you had when you hired them. Unfortunately, many CEOs will hold on to employees longer than they should, hoping that the spark they initially saw shines through again. This, more often than not, lets mediocrity leak into your company.

There may be special situations where giving it more time makes sense, but you need to have a plan and set clear expectations with the team. The more senior the team member, the more aggressive you need to be to confirm their fit. For the more junior roles, if they're doing a halfway decent job, you can't expect the world out of them. If they're a good cultural fit, let them explore who they will be as they start their professional journey.

Most people fresh out of school do not know how their career will unfold. They have a general idea and are trying you out as a job. You convert them from job to career by giving them the tools, flexibility, and knowledge to succeed.

A good onboarding process gives your new team members the proper tools to succeed. Remember, you are investing in your team. When you don't have proper onboarding, you "hope" they survive, and then you have excuses and delays because the new team member can always say, "I burned time because of x, y, z."

> Proper onboarding and rapid response to barriers being removed leaves no room for excuses if you find that a new hire is not performing. The stronger your onboarding, the stronger your conviction will be when making a potentially tough call, one that could cost you dearly if you wait too long.

Where Are We Now?

Now, you have the Common Sense Finance and Career Building pillars for the Reclaim Your Role Framework. The next chapter will complete this book's overview of how the system redefines your role as CEO with the Systems and Processes pillar. This pillar will help you build a predictable and scalable business.

CHAPTER #8

Systems & Processes: Building A Scalable Business

> *"The most dangerous kind of waste is the waste we do not recognize."*
>
> – Shigeo Shingo

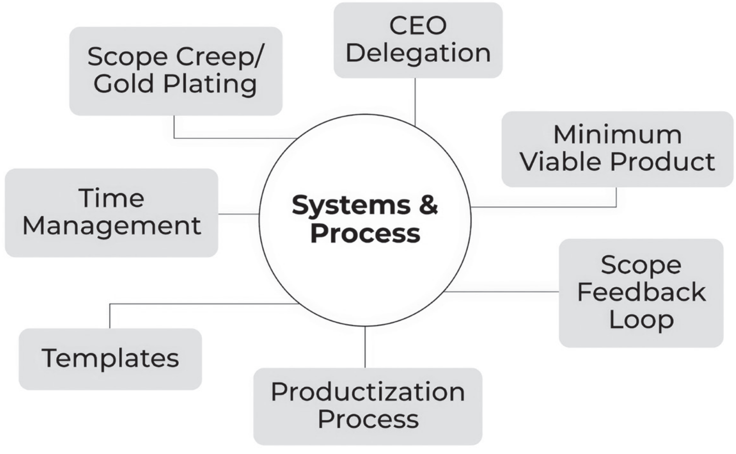
Your Core Infrastructure: System and Processes

We've discussed your team and your finances. If you think of those as the first two pillars of your core infrastructure, the third pillar would be your company's systems and processes. The systems and processes you use in your business are core to supporting everything we've discussed on your path so far. For maximum benefit, you want everything established so it's repeatable and executable.

How you define your systems and processes establishes the expectations that are set for managing quality, timeline, budget, and communications. This sets the standards for client customizations that are outside of your normal scope. When everything is standardized and documented in ways that your team and your clients can clearly understand, your clients have a better overall experience.

- Your team becomes more efficient and accurate.
- You optimize every touchpoint for a more streamlined experience and improved quality.
- You improve internal communications.
- You create a simple history of documentation.
- Future adjustments and improvements cause less friction.

In this chapter, we'll look at how templatizing your processes saves your team time and maintains consistency. Then, we'll look at how you can utilize retrospectives during a scope feedback loop to keep things streamlined and ever improving. After that, we'll go over how a 3,2,1 productization process helps you scale with less risk.



Template Scope, Timeline, & Implementation = Scalable Revenue

When it comes to service work, you listen to a problem, and your instinct is to try and come up with a custom solution to that problem. Although each client is unique, normally, their problems are not! You can make a template for your scope to handle the majority of problems you solve. You can template the timeline, the research, the feedback process, and everything else in your product set. This helps you on the implementation side, which ultimately becomes scalable because it's predictable.

> For example, within an agency, you do your research. Then, you do your discovery and formulate your strategy. Each strategy will have certain core tenets and areas of customization for their specific industry. The real value comes when you see the commonalities in all the deliverables and create templates that illustrate when customization should be used or if you should just stick to good solid marketing principles with some template text. When you implement it across a number of clients, work will be much more streamlined and more scalable, helping your business become more predictable.
>
> Another example could be your SaaS process for onboarding new clients to a platform. You do the research and discovery. You figure out the configuration. Deploy and measure, and then iterate. Your onboarding process becomes more streamlined, adding another layer of predictability to your business.

Scope Feedback Loop

The goal here is to never make the same mistake twice. With the scope feedback loop, your team will have a retrospective at the end of every implementation, project, or client onboarding. They'll report what worked and what did not work.

> **Phases of the Scope Feedback Loop**
>
> Use Template scope -- do the work -- evaluate the work → Update the template scope
>
> The goal is to make sure you protect yourself going forward while producing an incredible product.

With this retrospective feedback, you can update and streamline not only your scope but also your process, allowing for continuous improvement in quality and efficiency. You update your Statement of Work to protect yourself from things your client misunderstood, didn't understand, or things that went outside of your normal scope.

This scope feedback loop allows you to protect yourself going forward. Not only that, it helps you develop feasible improvements that assist in maintaining client loyalty.

> **Scope Creep Example Involving Design:**
>
> Design is something very subjective—it's tough to make it quantifiable. You may say, "We'll get this design done, and you'll be happy with it. Guaranteed." Guarantees are welcomed safety nets for your clients, but sometimes

those guarantees can cost you. You may go through a process, and at the design phase, the client may say they're not happy with it. Six rounds later, they may come back and say none of it is working for them, and you need to start all over.

How do you protect yourself? In this case, during the retrospective phase of the scope feedback loop, you would create a version limit that fulfills the majority of projects. You would also create a new section in your scope outlining what happens if they want more.

This was a lesson I learned very early on. During a project, a client took advantage of the fact that we didn't cap the design phase. It was not malicious. They had high expectations and were quite particular, and of course, the company wanted to do the best job possible. After 2-3 more rounds than expected, the client was happy, our team was accomplished, and our budget was blown.

This came up in our retrospective, and now our template scope has been updated to cap at 3 rounds of revisions. This is plenty for 99% of the customers, and expectations are set for those who want a bit more of a high-touch solution.

The Silent Killer: Gold Plating

Scope creep is a common problem area for hard-to-please clients, but there is another common issue I've seen with businesses over and over again. It's known as Gold Plating.

Gold plating is when your team says, "You know what? It would be so much better if we did ***this***," to something already laid out and approved. Often, it happens again and again. It's awesome. Your team's proud, but before you know it, you've developed something the client didn't ask for and gave them something extra for free. That's gold plating.

This is where templatizing your systems and processes will help you reap the benefits of a scope feedback loop. It's great to have a team willing to go above and beyond to keep a client happy, but not at the expense of your budget. Without a proper process in place to manage scope and timeline, an eager team can burn tons of money.

With proper management, the people in charge of the scope can detect these amazing ideas, hit pause on them, and potentially turn that work you were about to do for FREE into an additional scope. If the client wants it, you can get paid for your efforts. Turn those ideas into revenue while adding even more value to your customer. It's a win-win.

The good news is that implementing the scope feedback loop into your business can help your company avoid future scope creep and gold plating mistakes. In the next section, let me show you how 3,2,1 Productization gives you another benefit from documenting the work and creating templates.

3,2,1 Productization

You've got your core product down, and you're starting to get some sales. Congratulations! It's a great place to be. But invariably, you will get prospects and existing clients who want more— features, integrations, usability improvements, tools, whatever.

This is an excellent time to look back at Chapter 1 and reacquaint yourself with Example #5: Confronting Painful Decisions as you read this.

You agree to the client's extra needs, get the contract, and deliver on the client's expectations based on the agreed upon terms. Let's say this happens every time you sign a new scope, and your existing customers are nipping at one-off upgrades as well. To avoid a platform with uncontrollable and messy sprawl, use the 3,2,1 method of productization.

First Unique Deployment: You just extend it. It doesn't affect the main offer. You're not trying to bulletproof anything. You're just trying to make sure the client's happy.

Second Feature Deployment: Then, the second time that same request comes in, you take notice. Maybe this is something more clients really want, and you decide to consider implementing these requests as part of the main service. For now, you can copy and paste your "one-off" and move on.

Third Feature Deployment: When that same request comes in for a third time, you know it's a real thing that your market is responding to. Now, you will actually put it into your product and bake it for everyone. This is where the 3,2,1 Productization allows you to serve your clients better while keeping you out of the custom world.

> Let's say you have a member management platform that services a community. It can promote events and content, take payments for membership dues, and so on. You have received a request to allow a new payment method. Integrating and making it compatible with all of your clients and scenarios will be costly.
>
> Luckily, a client of mine with this type of request had a process in place to handle such a scenario. The feature was deployed with an easy mechanism that allowed for individual client code repositories.
>
> As the new payment method gained popularity, we received a second request—all we had to do was copy and paste!
>
> Third time's a charm—on the third request, we baked it into the platform for all to use, taking the learnings from the first 2 projects and creating a fully integrated feature.

Hopefully, by now, I've helped you see how utilizing templates, feedback loops, and productization in your systems and processes can help you make a more predictable business. You see how these work together to make your company more scalable. But there is one more step I want you to pay close attention to and get serious about—**delegation**.

Why You Should Delegate...

“I can do that! I am not beneath any task.” How many times have you found yourself saying this? Your moral compass is solid; why push to someone else when you can do it yourself? In short, because there is no shortage of things for you to do and you have to reserve your time for the tasks where you are most valuable to your company.

Delegation is one of the most valuable tools at a CEO’s disposal that drives success through all three pillars of the Reclaim Your Role Framework. When you delegate, you are able to focus more on implementing your business plan versus executing your business plan.

Be careful this doesn’t happen to you...

I worked with a CEO who created a scalable business, going through the various steps in all three pillars in this book. Except, he hasn’t claimed his role as CEO. He’s missing sales, but he can’t do it because he’s stuck in the hunt-kill-eat cycle.

He needs to get out there and take care of the sales, but he can’t because he has too much stuff on his plate. He’s got passion for the company’s work, he is managing a few clients, and then WHAM! A client fire only the CEO can step in and solve occurs and it will take some level of involvement for 3 months.

So, what do you do? You’ve made so many promises and committed to so much work, but those people on

> your prospect outreach list aren't going to care. You're forced to delay your sales outreach—heck, they don't even know you're about to contact them. If your outreach stops, your sales will eventually stop too.
>
> Even if you implement the Reclaim Your Framework system and things feel like they're going well, you can mess it up. Delegation is one of those variables that if you do not pay attention, you risk slipping back into all those things I keep talking about.
>
> Make sure you're delegating out the things that do not fit your role as CEO.

Take the Time Tracking Challenge

You may be asking your team to track their time, but do you track your time as diligently as you ask them to? Most of the time, not. You probably know what is billable work and what is not, and you are in 100% control of what you do on a daily basis... So what is this?

For one week, write down every task you complete, even if it is a repeat, in fact, heck - especially if it is a repeat.

> Download a time tracking template here:
> www.ReclaimYourRoleAsCEO.com

After the week is up and you have tracked all your time, categorize all the tasks into four buckets:

1) Keep - Critical tasks that should be your core focus (Sales, team building, breaking barriers, you know, CEO-ish stuff)
2) Document & Delegate - Lengthy or frequently performed tasks. Some examples:
    a) Booking calls
    b) Repeatable reports
    c) Client research data pulls
    d) Finance/Board of Directors Reports
3) Automate - Tasks that could be automated via a tool or the use of AI.
4) Eliminate - Upon review, you may realize that some tasks simply are no longer as useful as you thought they were.

Example:

Recently, I worked with an SEO firm CEO who was trying to free up time to scale his organization. After going through the time tracking challenge, they found that almost half of the tasks they were doing could be documented and delegated.

Tasks ranged from content briefs to call bookings, data collection, and reporting. He is in the process of implementing, but only weeks after starting to implement, he has seen an immediate difference—not only in time but also in being able to pause from the frantic day-to-day running around and start working ON the business, not FOR the business.

Mastering Delegation

Remember the CEO decree example, where you may have great ideas but don't feel your team is acting on them? It's similar here. You cannot be part of the implementation team. Your job is to master delegation so you can focus on the things that matter most to your company. When disruptions come up, your team needs a system and a process to solve those items.

> A CEO in this stage of growth needs to CONVERT into a master of delegation. For many CEOs, this is one of the most difficult hurdles to get through.

If you take on too much and get too involved, you're going to come in like a hurricane, especially if you're trying to sell, and you are going to do things to the best of your ability. You may drop something. You may be breaking the processes your team has spent so much time developing, but you're the CEO, and you don't even realize the negative impact you may be having. It causes them to run with some inefficacies regardless of your best intentions.

Delegate away everything that you can so that you can focus on what your company really needs. For example, you may want to keep sales, keep culture, keep mentoring your senior leadership and delegate the rest. By following everything we have discussed in this chapter, you can master delegation. Mastering delegation is critical if you are to Reclaim Your role As CEO™ and grow your business.

When delegating, here are a few tips:

- Be clear in what you need your team member to do
- Work with them up front if needed to make sure they are trained up to do the task correctly
- Iterate and ask for input remember, we are building careers, not jobs here
- Have patience, no one gets it perfect the first time

CHAPTER #9

Reclaim Your Role As CEO™

"If you don't drive your business, you will be driven out of business."

– B.C. Forbes

Where we are now...

In chapter one, I introduced the zone of forced decision making to you and how it's eroding your business success. You cannot Reclaim Your Role As CEO™ while in this zone.

Chapters two through five laid out the foundation you need to redefine your role and take your business to the next level.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 explain the three pillars in The Reclaim Your Role Framework that will empower you to reclaim your role.

> You no longer have the problems we discussed in Chapter #1. You are in control of your business.

Reclaim Your Role as CEO™ - it is a bold statement, but the concepts in this book are designed to do just that and the results can be transformative.

- Less stress regarding money now that it's predictable
- Less stress trying to get to remedial tasks now that they are delegated
- Less second guessing yourself about staffing decisions with proper onboarding
- Better product development and productivity
- Better client satisfaction and retention
- A team that is building themselves as much as they are building a company

Reclaiming your role as CEO is more than you personally taking charge. It's about getting you back at the head of your company, leading the charge. You're no longer struggling to survive until 9:30 PM at the office, only to wake up early the next day and do it all over again. Instead, you're positioned to break the 5 million dollar barrier while maintaining a better work/life balance.

Lean on your COO

Part of being an effective COO is making sure the CEO has room for ideation. That doesn't mean every idea goes to implementation, but one of the things I love about operations is gaining insights into all those ideas—some crazy, some awesome, some we laugh at as soon as they are said.

It's part of the process of building something awesome.

You're Ready To Break the 5 Million Barrier

When you are the CEO operating on the implementation level, you can't scale. You can generally articulate and implement your product better than anyone else, especially if you're the first to master it. Scale takes over when the CEO is replaced, and the job can be done by someone else. Getting other people to do the implementation and keep adding people and expanding starts with you, the CEO, getting out of the way.

Scaling means recasting your vision with your new system to see what could be possible for your company. Breaking that 5 million dollar barrier isn't as unobtainable as it was before. You are able to set your business up for bigger and better achievements.

Beyond the 5 Million Barrier

Once you are positioned to break the 5 million dollar barrier through this system it's time to set your sights on what happens next. There are tons of places you can take your business but there are three areas I see companies utilizing the most:

- Mergers & Acquisitions
- Growth via new products & services
- Exiting / Selling your company

This is where investing in your team will really pay off. As you continue to grow you will likely have nurtured a few managers to executives, maybe converted that fractional COO to full time and have a killer execution team. Leaning on this crew really pays off as you position yourself for beyond the 5 million dollar barrier.

Preparing For Mergers And Acquisitions

Let's explore how mergers and acquisitions to acquire a customer base or scale up your offerings can bring you closer to your goals.

A Real Life Scenario

An SEO consultant authored a course materials book on search engine optimization, traveled the country teaching it and became really good at developing and implementing strategies. When a friend wanted to expand their design & development shop into marketing, they realized that being able to handle both marketing and technology was valuable. The friend bought the SEO company and expanded their design & development shop into marketing. The SEO specialist stayed on as COO, and together with the other cofounder, they scaled the company from six people to 30+ people.

Being able to make this merger a success meant that both parties had to be out of the way enough to have the conversation and see the opportunity. With the ideas and strategies outlined in this book, you can free up more of your time to explore mergers and acquisitions your company may benefit from.

New Products & Services

Whether it be a productized service or process that get templated or an extention to a piece of software, innovation becomes easier. Once you have your engine running it's much easier to navigate your product roadmap, growing market share or expand into a side vertical that compliments your existing offering.

A steady, profitable engine that has repeatable, scalable components allows you to align products and services more efficiently. You're able to scale while fostering innovation where you could not before.

Positioning Your Exit

Positioning is really important. EBITDA is your baseline for valuation, but what will get you more added value are the processes, systems, and technology. You need to show how your processes are streamlined. By illistrating that you have the pieces in place for more growth you become that much more valuable.

Nothing will happen if you don't put the time and attention into system development, margin expansion, revenue growth, systemizing, and everything else that allows you to have something worth approaching your network for your exit strategy. You'll just be stuck in the business if you don't position the company properly.

This could be a management buyout, strategic acquisition, a private equity firm, or a rollup to a company you respect. Maybe there's a location benefit and having exposure to a certain state or country may be of value. Especially if you have an office, connections, and deep roots into the community.

You're Holding The Future In Your Hands

Everything we discussed in this book and getting the right COO position in place is vital to redefining your role as CEO and establishing the future you want for your business—the future you envision enjoying long after you're done with your company.

It's not too late to pivot and start creating the business you want. However, the earlier you start, the easier it will be to achieve the results you seek. Wait too long, and then you and your team will begin to feel stressed and stuck in a rut. I hope that this book has given you some tools to fight your way out of whatever situation you are in.

If you want to learn more, go to ReclaimYourRoleAsCEO.com. If you have questions and need help with anything, reach out to me for a consultation via the website.

CONCLUSION

Your Company's Future

You hold in your hands the engine that will allow you to propel your business forward. You can grow your team and add 10, 20, or even 30 more employees to scale your company beyond the 5 million dollar barrier. You can free up your time so you can spend more effort on ideation and growing the company you envision.

Your company will create a team of career-minded, future-oriented people who will enrich your business and help you produce a better product. Instead of just supplying them with a job, you now provide them with an environment where they can grow and prosper.

When you follow the steps in The Reclaim Your Role Framework and Reclaim Your Role As CEO™, you discover a more powerful exit plan lies before you. Your business now plays a vital role in your life after. It provides you with what you need to provide for your family while maintaining a solid work/life balance.

Are you ready to Reclaim Your Role As CEO™?

I hope you're motivated to propel your career, your business, and your team forward by what you have read. I hope you're ready to give The Reclaim Your Role Framework a chance to help you achieve everything you envision for your company.

You are going to:

- Simplify your finances with the Common Sense Finance pillar.
- Empower your team with the Career Building pillar.
- Scale and build a predictable business with the Systems and Processes pillar.

With the Reclaim Your Role Framework, you will be empowered to reach further than you thought possible. When you are freed up to build the vision and ideas for your company, you enrich the lives around you as well as your own.

When you bring a fractional COO onto your team, your ability to level up your company increases greatly. You're no longer stuck dealing with the day-to-day issues because you know someone has those under control. You can be aware of what's going on in your company without having to devote your time to dealing with the fires and filling in the gaps. You've got those covered.

Visit www.ReclaimYourRoleAsCEO.com to:

- Download all the supplemental materials referenced in this book

- Subscribe to our newsletter
- Schedule a call to discuss your needs, goals, and the challenges you’re facing

About the Author

For over two decades, Jason's core experience has been rooted in the agency world of Boston. He is a COO building complex strategic and operational processes and offers a straightforward, hands-on, and data-driven approach to growing businesses.

Jason has a deep understanding of how small and mid-sized businesses function in the SaaS and agency domains and the challenges they face. He uses his ability to untangle these highly technical and complex problems to help CEOs in these fields answer tough questions, solve their most pressing issues, and build thriving businesses.