Revenue Forensics

A field guide to the money you already have

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The revenue is already there.
You just can’t see it.

HOW TO READ THIS

Coral marks the finding: the lever, the number, the answer.

Steel marks the evidence: what is being tested, and by whom.

Black marks the question. Every section ends on one.

SECTION 01

Who this is for

You run somewhere between $10M and $30M. On paper it looks like traction. Underneath, something is straining, and you'd struggle to say exactly where.

Maybe you've had the thought in this shape:

> "A bunch of tiny projects that make money. Not a business."

Or this one:

> "Everyone's working hard, so why does nothing feel like it's moving?"

Or the late one, the one you can't say to anyone on your payroll:

> "I can't get to the next level, and the people around me can't get me there. They've never been there either."

If those landed, keep reading. If they didn't, this probably isn't for you and I'd rather you knew on page two than page twelve.

THIS IS FOR YOU IF:

- You're doing around $10-30M and growth has gone flat despite doing the obvious things right.
- You built software, tooling or products alongside the core business, and now you're not sure whether you have a software company or eight side projects wearing a costume.

- Or the reverse: you built the product, shipped it, and the market didn't come.
- You already use AI heavily and you've hit the ceiling of what it can decide *for* you.
- You want a straight answer with a name attached, not a deck to file away.

THIS IS NOT FOR YOU IF:

- You want research, benchmarks or frameworks. Generate those yourself, free, this weekend.
- You want someone to agree with the decision you've already made.
- You want a big firm and a team of twenty-three-year-olds building slides. That market is disappearing, and rightly.
- You want someone to build the thing. I diagnose. The execution stays with your team, and that distinction is where the value is, not a limitation I'm apologizing for.

FOR THE HIRED EXEC

You're not the owner. You were brought in because the owner couldn't get there alone, and you run a real P&L you have to defend upward to people who can fire you. Your version of the 11pm thought isn't "is it me." It's "what am I about to be blindsided by in front of the board." Read every page with that substitution and the guide works the same way.

QUESTION 01

If you had to bet your own money on which of those two problems you actually have (the one you'd name out loud, or the one underneath it), which way would you bet, and what would you be betting on?

SECTION 02

Why I’m giving you the entire method

There's an obvious objection to a document like this, so let me make it for you.

I tell people constantly that I don't hand out frameworks, that an AI will give you a hundred of them free by Sunday, and that anyone still selling frameworks is the thing getting commoditized. And then here I am, handing you a framework. Thirteen pages of one.

Both things are true, and the reason they're both true is the whole point.

The research was never the hard part. It hasn't been for a couple of years now. You've already pulled the market sizing, the competitive landscape, the pricing benchmark, the GTM framework. The work that used to cost fifty grand from a boutique gets done on a Sunday afternoon between other things. You mostly know what you should do.

So there's no scarcity left in the method. Withholding it would be theatre, and I think the sin in this business is not giving people the information to make a rational decision. If you can run this on yourself and find the money, run it. Genuinely. That's a good outcome and it costs me nothing I actually own.

But I want to be straight with you about what running it actually costs, because that's the part nobody puts in the PDF.

A full pass is **ten to fifteen conversations**, one person at a time, each one 45 to 90 minutes. Then the same questions asked again in different words, to different people, until the stories stop agreeing. Then a reconstruction of the numbers against something external, usually the bank account rather than the dashboard. Then the synthesis, which is the slow part, because you're looking for the one place where two accounts of the same event can't both be true.

Call it **forty to sixty hours of focused work across about two weeks**, and that's if nothing surprises you. Something always surprises you.

You do not have forty hours. That's not an insult. I've never met an operator at your size who did. And there's a second thing, which I'll come back to at the end, about who in your building can actually be the one asking.

Everything from here is the real method. Nothing is held back.

QUESTION 02

When was the last time you spent forty uninterrupted hours on how your own business works, rather than on running it? And if the honest answer is “never,” what has that cost, compounding, per year?

SECTION 03

The claim

The problem is never where you think it is.

It can't be. Not because you're not sharp, but because you can't see the thing you're standing inside. That's not a criticism, it's physics. The constraint has been walked past so many times it's part of the furniture. Nobody notices the furniture.

Which means the work isn't inventing revenue. It's forensics: reconstruct what actually happened, from outside, until the leak shows itself.

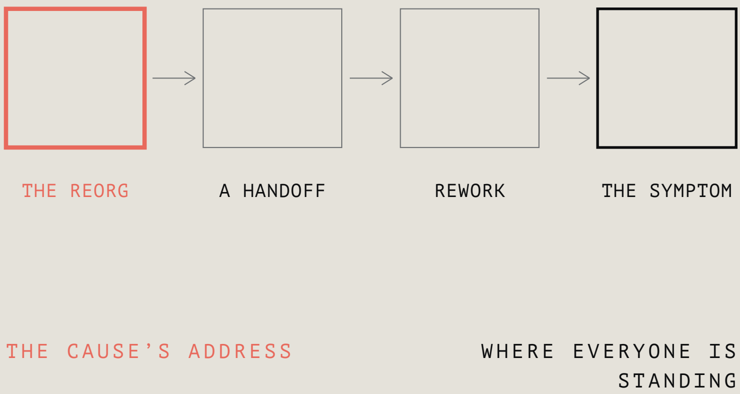
The method has two rules, and they're both stolen from due diligence rather than from consulting.

Rule one: events cause events. Every business runs on the same physics. Something happened, and then something else happened because of it, and the thing you're looking at now is four or five links down that chain. So you don't diagnose the symptom. You walk backwards. Why did that happen? And why did *that* happen? You keep going until someone says "oh, that was because of the reorg in 2023" and the room goes quiet.

Rule two: assume the problem, then try to disprove it. This is the opposite of brainstorming, and it's the part most people get backwards. You don't generate options. You take the most likely explanation, state it flatly, and then spend all your energy trying to kill it. If it survives, it's probably real. If it dies, the thing that killed it is your next lead.

Detective work, not ideation.

EXHIBIT 1



Events cause events. The symptom is four or five links downstream of the thing that caused it. The address everyone is standing outside is the last box in the chain, never the first.

Most operators are staring at the symptom's address. Very confidently. With good data.

QUESTION 03

Write down your one-sentence explanation of why you're stuck. Now: what evidence would have to exist for that explanation to be wrong, and has anyone in your company ever been asked to go look for it?

SECTION 04

The grid

Four layers. Three columns. Twelve cells.

Read it **across** and you get a layer: how the world works, where humans break, what I do about it, what falls out. Read it **down** and you get a spine, one complete pass from belief to result.

	SEE	JUDGE	OWN
WORLDVIEW *how the world works*	systems	pragmatism	network
BEHAVIORS *where humans break*	focus	decisions	accountability
PROCESS *what I actually do*	xray	analyze	build
OUTCOMES *what you get*	growth	profit	time

The twelve, one line each.

WORLDVIEW: HOW THE WORLD WORKS

- **systems**: every business runs on the same physics: events cause events. There's machinery under this, and machinery can be traced.
- **pragmatism**: it depends, and that's not a cop-out. The answer lives in your actual situation, not in a framework. Sometimes the problem is just the way something works and nobody turned it on.
- **network**: nobody fixes anything alone. The room is the asset.

BEHAVIORS: WHERE THE INABILITY TO MAKE MORE MONEY ACTUALLY LIVES

- **focus**: too many ideas isn't a strength. It's a silent killer. Ten opportunities chased is zero opportunities caught.
- **decisions**: almost none of this is an information problem. It's a judgment problem. Calls made on gut, habit, questionable data, or politics.
- **accountability**: anyone can veto, nobody can greenlight. Your to-do list is a confession.

PROCESS: WHAT I DO

- **xray**: look under the hood. Reconstruct how this whole thing came to be in the first place.
- **analyze**: assume the problem, then try to disprove it. Ask everybody the same questions in different ways until the story breaks.
- **build**: the small lever beats the big apparatus. Not plugging holes. Getting a better bucket. And the execution stays with your team.

OUTCOMES: WHAT FALLS OUT

- **growth**: the plateau breaks, because the revenue was already there.
- **profit**: the leak stops. I'm not especially interested in going faster. I'm obsessed with waste.
- **time**: you stop being owned by the thing you built.

That last one is the one I'd actually sell if I only got to sell one.

QUESTION 04

Point at the cell where your problem lives. Now ask the three people who report to you to do the same, separately, without seeing your answer. How many of the four of you point at the same square?

SECTION 05

Spine one: SEE

“Find the system, pull the one lever.”

SYSTEMS → FOCUS → XRAY → GROWTH

The world is machinery. The human failure is scattered focus. The move is the x-ray. What falls out is growth.

Here’s the mechanism, reasoned out.

If events cause events, then whatever you’re looking at is downstream of something. Fine. But there’s a second consequence people miss: **effort is also an event, and it also has downstream effects that can be eaten.** So when a team is working hard and nothing is moving, effort isn’t the broken input. Something between the effort and the output is consuming it. Rework. A handoff nobody owns. A queue. An approval. A file format.

Why does that go unnoticed for years? Because everyone can see their own piece working. The designer’s work is good. The developer’s work is good. Nobody is looking at the seam, because looking at seams isn’t anybody’s job.

And focus is the same shape one level up. Ten initiatives, each individually defensible, each getting a fifth of the attention it needs to clear the bar where returns start. Every one of them is *nearly* working. None of them is working. The instinct is to push harder on all ten, which is exactly the thing that guarantees none of them clears.

So the x-ray isn’t a health check. It’s a reconstruction. I go backwards through how the situation came to be: every fork, every reorg, every tool bought to solve a problem that no longer exists, until the machinery is visible rather than assumed.

The anchor. A client had an automation problem. That was the brief, that's what it looked like, and there was a real budget attached to solving it. The actual problem was one cell in a spreadsheet: free text, where a dropdown should have been. Every downstream system had to guess at what humans had typed, and every guess it got wrong generated work for a person. Changing that one cell was maybe eighty percent of the problem.

Which sounds ridiculous until you've traced enough machinery to know the lever is usually one level up from where everyone's been looking, and usually far cheaper than expected.

RUNNING THE SEE PASS YOURSELF

6-10 interviews, one at a time, 45-90 min each. You need the people at the seams, not the people in charge of the boxes.

The reconstruction: roughly 8-12 hours mapping how the current state came to be. Old org charts. Tool purchase dates. Who left.

The hard part: you have to interview people who report to you, about work you signed off on. They will answer the question they think you're asking.

Elapsed: about a week, if you can protect the time. You can't.

SELF-AUDIT: THE SEE QUESTIONS

1. Name the last five things your team shipped. For each: how many hours went in, and how much of that

was rework?

2. Where does work sit still in your company? Not who's slow. Where does it *wait*?
3. List every initiative currently live. Now list the ones that would survive if you had to cut to two.
4. What tool did you buy to solve a problem you no longer have, and is it still in the chain?

FOR THE HIRED EXEC

your version of the seam problem is that you inherited the machinery. You didn't choose the tools, the org chart or the sequence, so you have no memory of why any of it is the way it is. The people who do have that memory report to you, which means they're editing. The x-ray is how you get the history without the edit.

QUESTION 05

If you asked every person in your company "what do you spend time on that you're fairly sure doesn't matter," and they believed there'd be no consequence for answering honestly, what would they say? And notice: you can't ask that question. Not you personally.

SECTION 06

Spine two: JUDGE

“None of these are information problems. They’re judgment problems.”

PRAGMATISM → DECISIONS → ANALYZE → PROFIT

Events cause events. The human failure is calls made on gut and politics. The move is analysis: assume the problem, try to disprove it. What falls out is profit: the leak found and priced.

The mechanism here is quieter than the SEE one, and more expensive.

Everything in your business gets reported by someone with a stake in how it looks. No corruption required. It’s just how the reporting is wired. The agency reports on the agency’s performance, the department reports on the department’s numbers, the person who championed the initiative reports on whether the initiative worked. Everyone’s honest. Everyone’s also framing.

So the number arrives at you having passed through a person who benefits from a particular reading of it. And you, reasonably, treat it as data.

The instrument that’s missing isn’t a dashboard. **It’s that nobody’s job is to doubt the story.** Not to be cynical about it but to reconcile it, independently, against something that has no stake. Bank deposits. Signed contracts. Shipped units. Something outside the system that produced the claim.

I learned this running diligence on acquisitions, where the entire job is to disbelieve professionally, and the technique is simple and slightly rude: ask everybody the same question in different ways, and wait for the versions to stop matching. When two people who should have the same answer don't, you've found the seam. Not the answer, the seam. That's where you dig.

And pragmatism is the guard rail on all of it. Sometimes there's no conspiracy and no deep structural rot. Sometimes the thing just isn't switched on. I've walked into situations braced for a systemic problem and found a setting. It depends, genuinely, on the actual situation in front of you, which is why I distrust anyone who arrives with the diagnosis already written.

The anchor. An agency was reporting 11.7× ROAS to a client. Beautiful dashboards. Consistent, month over month. Ten thousand dollars a month for the relationship.

Nobody had run the numbers backwards. So I reconciled the reported revenue against the bank account, which is a boring thing to do and takes an afternoon. Real sales attributable to that spend: **$918.**

Not $918K. Nine hundred and eighteen dollars.

The thing that stays with me isn't that the agency was lying. It's that nobody inside the building had checked. Not because they lacked the skill or the access, they had both. Because doubting the story wasn't anyone's job, and so it was nobody's.

RUNNING THE JUDGE PASS YOURSELF

The same 10 people, asked differently. The value is in the repetition and the variation, which means you can't delegate it to different people. Same asker, many askings.

The reconciliation: 10-15 hours pulling reported numbers back to a source with no stake. Usually the bank. Sometimes signed contracts.

The hard part: you have to be willing to find out you were wrong in front of your own team, and to keep pushing after the point where it gets uncomfortable. Most people stop one question early. The last question is the one.

Elapsed: 4-5 days of real work, spread across two weeks of everyone's calendars.

SELF-AUDIT: THE JUDGE QUESTIONS

1. Take your three most important numbers. For each: who produces it, and does that person's standing improve when it goes up?
2. When did you last reconcile a reported number against the bank rather than against another report?
3. What decision are you currently circling? Now state the case *against* it as strongly as the person who'd lose most. Can you?
4. What's the most expensive thing you believe about your business that you've never tested?

FOR THE HIRED EXEC

this is the spine that protects you specifically. The number you carry upward is the number someone else produced, and when it turns out to be wrong, the question in the board room won't be "who made this up." It'll be "how did you not notice." An independent reconciliation before the deck is written is the cheapest insurance available to you, and it has to come from outside your own reporting line, because your reporting line is the thing being tested.

QUESTION 06

Pick your single most trusted number. Who would have to tell you it was wrong for you to actually believe them, and does that person exist inside your company?

SECTION 07

Spine three: OWN

“Skin in the game.”

NETWORK → ACCOUNTABILITY → BUILD → TIME

Nobody fixes anything alone. The human failure is accountability living nowhere. The move is the build: one small lever, handed to your team. What falls out is time.

This is the spine people skip, and skipping it is why so much good diagnosis dies in a drawer.

Here’s the mechanism. As a company grows, it adds people who can say no. That’s deliberate and sensible. You add a finance function so spending gets checked, a legal review so contracts get checked, a senior team so decisions get pressure. Every one of those is a veto point, added for a good reason.

What nobody adds, because it never appears as a gap on an org chart, is the corresponding **greenlight**. Vetoes accumulate. Greenlights don’t. And you arrive, without anyone deciding it, at a company where five people can stop a thing and none can start it.

The tell is small and physical. A $500 expense that needs the CFO’s signature at a company doing $100M. Frugality doesn’t explain it. Nobody genuinely believes $500 is a material risk at that scale. It’s the absence of decision rights, showing up as a receipt. And it’s being paid for, in hours, every single day.

Then there’s the thing underneath, which is harder to say. For a founder, the company and the self are frequently the same object. So delegation doesn’t feel like an operational change. It feels like an identity threat. “If I bring in a whole new team I lose control, but I can't keep owning everything" is not a logistics problem, and treating it as one is why the reorg never sticks.

Which brings me to why the fix has to be small. The instinct, when you finally see the structural problem, is to build the apparatus: the new operating model, the RACI, the committee, the tooling. The apparatus becomes its own job. The lever doesn't. **One question, asked at the level of authority that can answer it, moves more than a quarter of process design.** And it has to be handed to your team, because a fix that depends on me being there isn't a fix, it's a dependency I sold you.

The anchor. A $100M consultancy, sixty years old, had a software business that had stalled. Five leaders, five visions of what it should be, all of them defensible. Any of them could block. None of them could commit. Every quarter the same decisions came back to the table and got relitigated with slightly different slides.

The move wasn't a strategy. It was one question, put in front of the one person with the authority to answer it: *who owns this, and what is it for?*

Five visions became one owner and one sequenced roadmap.

I'd like to say that fixed everything. It didn't. A year of relitigating leaves residue, and some of those five were never going to love the answer. But the thing started moving, which it hadn't in two years, and the movement was worth more than the harmony.

RUNNING THE OWN PASS YOURSELF

The mapping: 4–6 hours drawing who can veto versus who can greenlight, per decision type. The printed org chart won't tell you. It's usually wrong and always out of date.

The conversations: 5–8, and these are the awkward ones. You're asking people to describe authority they think they have and might not.

The hard part: you are one of the veto points, and quite possibly the main one. Self-assessment fails here more completely than anywhere else in the grid.

Elapsed: 3–4 days. Plus however long you spend not doing it, which in my experience is the larger number.

SELF-AUDIT: THE OWN QUESTIONS

1. Name a decision from the last quarter. Who could have stopped it? Who could have started it? If the second list is shorter, that's the finding.
2. What's the smallest expense that still needs your signature? Multiply the approval time by its annual frequency.
3. Look at your to-do list. How much of it is work, and how much is decisions? Your to-do list is a confession. Read it as one.
4. If you disappeared for six weeks with no contact, what would stop? Not degrade. Stop.

FOR THE HIRED EXEC

you were hired to install exactly this and you know it. It's the thing you're good at and the reason you have the seat. The trap is that you can't install decision rights you weren't granted. Mapping the greenlight gap and taking it upward as a structural finding, rather than as a complaint about the owner, is a very different conversation, and it's the one that works.

QUESTION 07

Ask three of your leaders to name, in writing and separately, the single decision they're empowered to make without you. How many of the three answers surprise you, and what does it mean that you had to run an experiment to find out?

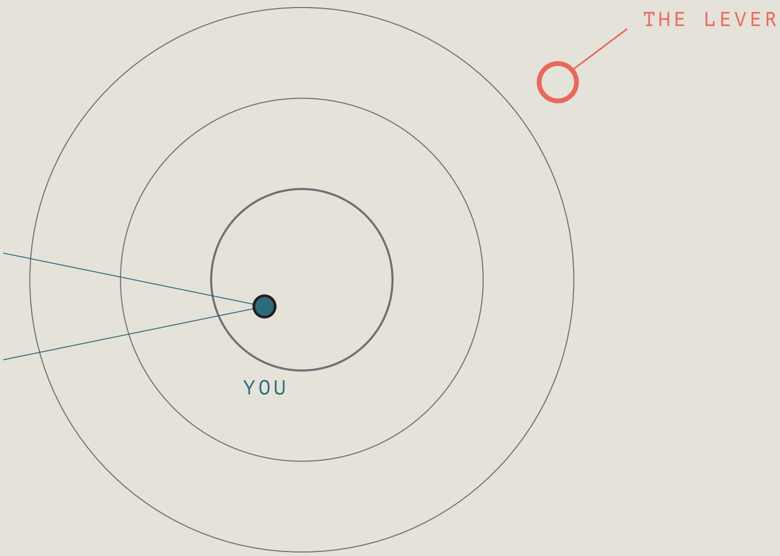
Outside eyes

SECTION 08

Outside eyes

One idea sits in no cell, because it isn't a lens or a behavior or a step or an outcome. It's the *position* the whole grid is operated from.

The leak is never where you're standing. It can't be. You've walked past the constraint so many times it's furniture, and furniture is invisible by definition, not by weakness.



You are inside the machine, holding the torch, lighting the wall in front of you. The seized gear is behind you and slightly above. Not smarter. Outside.

The natural next move is to ask the people around you, and that's where the second half of the physics bites. The people around you can't get you there **because they haven't been there either.** Your leadership team hit the same ceiling you did. No knock on them. A company at $20M is staffed by people whose experience tops out around $20M. Everyone is looking at the same wall from the same side. Adding people to that doesn't add a vantage point. It adds agreement.

That's the mechanism, in one sentence: **someone standing outside your machine can see the lever you can't.** Not smarter. Outside.

It's also the reason this survives AI, which I get asked about constantly. The research was never the hard part; I've said that twice now and I'll keep saying it. A model hands you a hundred frameworks free, this weekend, better organized than mine. What it cannot do is sit in a room with your VP of Ops and notice that the third time she describes the handoff, she skips a step she mentioned the first time. It cannot take accountability for a call. It cannot be outside your machine, because it was never inside anything.

Judgment, accountability, and the outside eye don't get cheaper as the models get bigger. Everything else does.

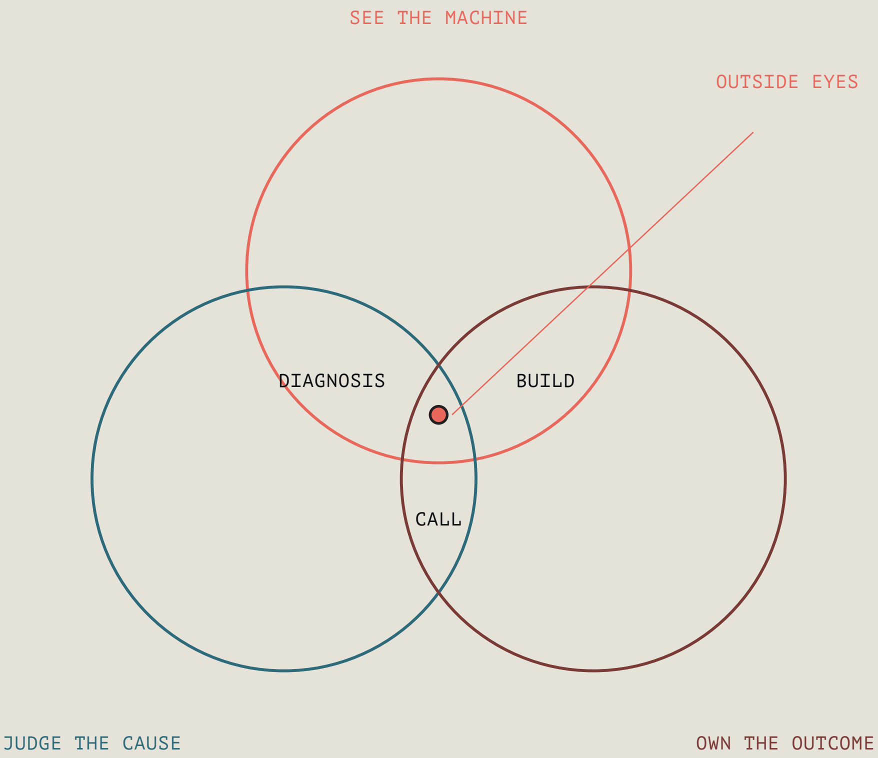
QUESTION 08

Who has told you something about your business in the last twelve months that you didn't want to hear, was right, and had nothing to gain from saying it? If you can name them, keep them close. If you can't, that's the finding.

SECTION 09

Three ways to stay stuck

The three spines aren't independent. Run two without the third and you get a specific, named failure, and each one is common enough that you'll probably recognize your own.



Run two of the three and you get a named failure. All three at once, from outside the machine, is the only place the work actually happens.

SEE + JUDGE, WITHOUT OWN: THE DIAGNOSIS.

You saw the machine, you found the real cause, you priced it. And nothing happened. Because the finding landed in a company where nobody could greenlight acting on it, so it became a document. This is the most expensive failure of the three, because you paid full price for the truth and got none of the value. It's also the standard output of most consulting.

JUDGE + OWN, WITHOUT SEE: THE CALL.

Decisive, accountable, resourced, and pointed at the wrong thing. You had the will and the authority, so you moved fast on the symptom's address. The confidence is what makes it costly: a slow wrong move gets caught, a fast one gets funded.

SEE + OWN, WITHOUT JUDGE: THE BUILD.

You saw the machinery and you had the authority to act, but you skipped the step where you try to disprove your own explanation. So you built the apparatus (the platform, the new function, the operating model) instead of finding the one lever. Now the apparatus needs feeding, and it's very hard to admit that the thing you built to solve the problem is now part of it.

All three at once, from outside the machine, is the only place the work actually happens.

QUESTION 09

Which of those three have you already paid for? And what did it cost? Not in fees, in the quarters it took to find out.

SECTION 10

Find your door

Almost nobody arrives saying "I have an accountability problem in the OWN spine." They arrive with a sentence, in their own words, usually said with some exasperation. That sentence is the door. It's the *stated* problem, which means it's the thing to assume and then try to disprove.

Find yours. Then read across.

THE WAY YOU'D SAY IT	WHAT IT'S ACTUALLY ABOUT AT 11PM	WHERE THE PROBLEM USUALLY LIVES
"Everyone's working hard so why does nothing feel like it's working?"	Effort and output have decoupled and I can't find the disconnect	**SEE**: something upstream is eating the work
"A bunch of tiny projects that make money, not a business."	This might be a high-paying job wearing a business costume	**OWN**: projects stay projects when nobody can greenlight
"We need to monetize all these projects."	We built real things and can't make them a business	**OWN + focus**: you have 8-10 products and bandwidth for 2
"We built it and they didn't come."	Maybe the market's verdict is about me	**JUDGE**: the market gave you data, not a verdict
"I'm paying this agency $10K a month and I think they're lying to me."	I can't tell real numbers from theatre	**JUDGE**: doubt the story, reconcile against the bank
"Digital doesn't work. We're a dinosaur."	We tried, we paid, it failed. Maybe we're too old for this	**SEE**: you bought a story of innovation, not an outcome
"I can't get to the next level and nobody around me can get me there."	My ceiling might be the company's ceiling	**Outside eyes**: that's physics, and it includes you

THE WAY YOU'D SAY IT	WHAT IT'S ACTUALLY ABOUT AT 11PM	WHERE THE PROBLEM USUALLY LIVES
"If I bring in a team I lose control… but I can't keep owning everything."	Letting go feels like losing the self that built this	**OWN**: the job is decisions, not work
"Is it the market, or is it me?"	The one question I can't ask anyone internally	**SEE**: wrong binary; it's usually one level up
"Nobody was in charge. Anyone could veto, no one could greenlight."	Decisions die in the org chart and I let it happen	**OWN**: name who can greenlight. One owner, one call
"You shouldn't need the CFO's sign-off for a $500 expense."	We're penny-wise because nobody trusts the machine	**OWN** + **SEE**: absence of decision rights, priced daily
"Growth's gone flat despite doing the obvious things right."	The playbook that got me here is finished	**SEE**: the moves that got you to $10M are capping you at $10M
"Am I going to have to borrow and lose control of my own company?"	The endgame fear: losing the thing to save the thing	**OWN**: find the revenue before you sell pieces of the building

Note what these have in common: every one of them is a confident diagnosis. That's the trap. The door is where you enter, never where you build.

QUESTION 10

Your door is the explanation you'd give a peer over a drink. Now: what would have to be true for that explanation to be a symptom of something one level up?

SECTION 11

One full pass, worked

Abstractions are easy to nod at. Here's what a complete run actually looks like, on a real engagement, anonymized.

The setup. A services firm, roughly $30M, sixty-odd years old. Over about a decade they'd built software: tools for clients, internal platforms, a couple of products that had real users. Nobody had ever stood up and said "we are a software company." It grew sideways. The door they arrived with was: *"we need to monetize all these projects."*

SEE, the x-ray. I reconstructed how the situation came to be, which took most of a week and a lot of old email. The pattern was that each product had been born from one client relationship, funded from that engagement's margin, and then orphaned when the engagement ended. So there was no product organization. There was a decade of sediment.

The machinery finding: multiple people reporting to multiple executives, each with their own idea of what the software was for. And the physical tell: a team running analytics through a bootlegged free trial of a BI tool, rotated periodically, because getting a real license approved was harder than working around it.

Nobody was hiding this. Everybody thought it was normal.

JUDGE, assume then disprove. The obvious explanation was underinvestment: not enough engineering, not enough go-to-market, hence no monetization. It's the explanation everyone inside had, and it's the one that would have been funded.

So I tried to kill it. I asked the same question, *what would* *you do with more budget?*, to eleven people in different words over about a week and a half. And the answers didn't reconcile. Product wanted feature parity. Sales wanted two specific integrations. Engineering wanted to rewrite. Each was individually reasonable. Together they weren't a plan, they were five plans.

Which killed the underinvestment story. More money into that structure would have produced five better-funded plans and the same result. **The constraint wasn't budget. It was that eight to ten products were being carried by an organization with the bandwidth to take two of them seriously.**

OWN, the lever. The temptation at that point is to design the product organization. New roles, a portfolio process, stage gates, a whole apparatus. It would have been a good deck.

The lever was one question, asked at the level of authority that could answer it: *who owns this, and what is it for?* Not a workshop. One question, one room, one person who could actually say the word.

Five visions became one owner and one sequenced roadmap. The team executed it. I didn't, and shouldn't have.

The undercut. It wasn't clean. Two of the five leaders had championed products that came last in the sequence, and that's a real cost to real people who'd done nothing wrong. Some of that never fully settled. I also think, looking back, that I spent about a week too long on the underinvestment thesis before I stopped defending it and started attacking it. I liked it because it was tidy.

The thing moved, which it hadn't in two years. But I'm not going to pretend the finding felt good to everyone in the room, and I'd be suspicious of anyone who told you their version did.

QUESTION 11

Could you have run that on yourself? Not the analysis. The eleven conversations, asking the same question in different words, to people who report to you, about a strategy you approved.

SECTION 12

The question bank

Twelve blocks, one per cell. This is the real audit. Take it, run what you can, and keep whatever you find.

SEE

- **systems**: Where does work wait rather than move? What happens between two teams that neither team owns? Trace one delivery end to end: what surprised you?
- **focus**: List every live initiative. Which two would you keep? What happens to the others? Actually, not aspirationally.
- **xray**: Why is the process this shape? Who designed it, and are they still here? What's still in the chain that solves a problem you no longer have?
- **growth**: Where did growth actually come from in the last three years? Would that source produce the next $10M, or is it tapped?

JUDGE

- **pragmatism**: What are you treating as a strategic problem that might just be a setting nobody turned on? Where is your answer "it depends" doing real work versus hiding a decision?
- **decisions**: What decision has been made twice? What's been circling for more than two quarters? Who benefits from it staying open?
- **analyze**: For your main explanation of being stuck: what evidence would disprove it, and who's been asked to find that evidence? When did you last reconcile a number against a source with no stake?

- **profit**: Where does money leave without a decision attached? What are you paying for monthly that nobody has evaluated in a year?

OWN

- **network**: Who outside your company has told you something hard and been right? When did you last get an opinion from someone with no commercial interest in your answer?
- **accountability**: For your five biggest decisions: who could veto, who could greenlight? Which of your leaders can spend without asking? What's on your to-do list that shouldn't be a decision at all?
- **build**: What did you build to solve a problem that now needs its own maintenance? What's the smallest change that would move the most? Have you looked for it, or gone straight to the apparatus?
- **time**: What stops entirely if you're gone for six weeks? How many hours a week go to work only you can do, versus work only you *will* do?

SECTION 13

What this costs to run yourself

Adding it up honestly, because I said I would.

THE PASS		FOCUSED HOURS	ELAPSED
SEE: the x-ray	6-10	20-25	~1 week
JUDGE: reconcile and disprove	the same people, asked again	15-20	~1.5 weeks
OWN: map the greenlight gap	5-8	8-12	~4 days
Total	**10-15 people, most twice**	**45-60**	**~2 weeks of protected time**

Two weeks of protected time. You don't have two weeks. You have a business to run, and the reason the leak has survived this long is precisely that nobody in your building has forty spare hours to go looking for it.

And there's the second thing I said I'd come back to. Read down the "hard part" line in each cost box and it's the same problem three times: **you can't be the one asking.** Your people don't answer your questions, they answer the question they think you're asking, from someone who decides their compensation. That's not disloyalty. It's completely rational behavior, and it's why the same question from outside gets a different answer.

So the method is yours. Genuinely. Run it, and if you find the money I'll be pleased and I'll never know about it.

But if you'd rather have it run properly, by someone who isn't on your payroll and isn't inside your machine, that's the thing I do.

What happens now

ONE 20-MINUTE CALL.

You tell me your explanation of why you're stuck. I'll tell you the first thing I'd try to disprove, live, on that call. That's not a sales technique, it's just the method, and twenty minutes is usually enough for something real to surface.

If it's not a fit, I'll say so on that call. No pitch, no charge, and you keep whatever came up.

If it is a fit, what follows is **The Two-Day Teardown**: two days, flat fee, and a decision memo naming where the money's actually stuck, the one to three moves that unstick it, and who executes each one. It cannot become a six-month retainer. When it's done, it's done. And if by the end I haven't shown you something that's costing you more than the Teardown costs, something you didn't already know, you don't pay.

I do a handful of these a quarter. That's a real constraint, not a manufactured one.

→ EMAIL ME: [MATT@MATTHEWKANTOR.COM](MAILTO:MATT@MATTHEWKANTOR.COM?SUBJECT=THE%20TEARDOWN) AND TELL ME THE NUMBER THAT WON'T MOVE. I READ EVERY ONE OF THESE MYSELF.

There's also a room. Eight operators, one table, no pitching, no stage. The outside eyes problem solved by putting eight of them around the same table. It's not something you can sign up for. People are brought.

The revenue is already there. The only question left is who's standing in the right place to see it.