TOOLKIT — FIELD GUIDE

The Founder Dependency Audit.

How much of the business runs through one person, why handing it over keeps failing, and the four steps that actually work.

Companion to the Founder Dependency Audit workbook.
Read this once. Live in the register.

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This is not a complaint about how hard you work.

It is a measurement of how concentrated the business is. Those are different problems, and only one of them gets better if you work less.

The register is going to read like an indictment for about twenty minutes. Line after line with your name in the owner column, most of them marked as things nobody else can do. The instinct at that point is to feel either defensive or slightly heroic, and both are wrong, because neither one is a finding.

Here is the finding. Every one of those items ended up with you because at some point that was the fastest option available. It usually *was*. What nobody did was revisit the decision when the business grew past the point where it stayed true, because there is no meeting where that gets revisited and no number that makes it visible. This file is that number.

> **Founder dependency is not a character flaw. It is a set of local decisions that were each correct when they were made and were never made again.**

The version of this that matters to other people

You can live with founder dependency indefinitely. Plenty of people do, profitably, for decades. It becomes someone else's problem the moment you want to sell, raise, borrow, hire a real leadership layer, or take eight weeks off — and every one of those conversations opens with a version of the same question. An acquirer calls it key-person risk. An insurer prices it. A strong senior hire notices it in the second interview and takes the other offer.

So the number worth having is not "how busy am I". It is **how long the business runs without me before it starts visibly degrading**, in writing, in a form you can hand to someone without it sounding like a grievance.

> **The workbook measures. This explains why the fix keeps not working.**
>
> If you have tried to delegate this stuff before and it came back to you within a quarter — which is the normal outcome, not the embarrassing one — sections 03 and 04 are the ones to read.

There are three kinds of dependency, and they need three different fixes.

Most handovers fail because all three get treated as the same problem — usually as a documentation problem, which only one of them actually is.

KIND	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	WHAT IT ACTUALLY TAKES TO MOVE
Decision	Things wait for your judgment. Approvals, scope calls, pricing exceptions, who gets hired.	A written limit, not a document. "You decide up to X. Above X you ask me." Then you honour it, including the time they decide something you would not have.
Knowledge	Only you know how it actually works — the pricing logic, why that client is handled differently, where the bodies are.	This is the one documentation genuinely fixes. It is also the one that never happens, because it is never urgent until the week it is catastrophic.
Relationship	A customer, supplier or partner deals with you and considers that part of the arrangement.	Months, and a deliberate handover with the other party present. It cannot be documented and it cannot be done quietly. It is the slowest and the most valuable.

> **Writing a document does not move a decision dependency. It moves a knowledge dependency, and it makes everyone feel like something happened.**

Why the distinction is the whole game

Think about the last handover that did not take. If it was a decision dependency and you responded with documentation, the person read the document, understood the process perfectly, and then came and asked you anyway — because what they lacked was not information, it was permission and the confidence that using it was safe.

If it was a relationship dependency and you responded with an introduction email, the client replied politely to your colleague and then called you the next time anything mattered. Nothing went wrong. Nothing changed either.

The register asks you to mark the type on every row for exactly this reason. Filter it by type and you are looking at three separate projects with three different timescales, rather than one vague ambition to "delegate more" that has never once survived a busy quarter.

You handed over the task. You kept the judgment.

This is the single most common failure, and it is almost invisible from the inside, because from where you sit it looks like you delegated and they did not step up.

What actually happened is that you gave someone the work and retained the right to be disappointed with how they did it, without ever stating the standard. They can feel that. So they check with you, which is rational — and every check confirms your suspicion that they are not ready, while confirming their suspicion that this was never really theirs.

Four patterns cover almost all of it:

The undefined edge

WHAT HAPPENS

You hand over approvals but never name the limit. Every unusual case comes back to you, and unusual cases are most of them.

THE FIX

> Write the number. "Up to $15k, you decide. Above that, ask." Then live with what happens below the line, including the one you would have called differently.

The invisible standard

WHAT HAPPENS

They do it, you redo it. Sometimes silently, which is worse — now they think it went fine and you have quietly concluded they cannot do it.

THE FIX

> Say what good looks like before, not after. If you cannot articulate it in advance, that is a real finding: the standard lives in your judgment, which makes this a knowledge dependency wearing a task costume.

The rescue

WHAT HAPPENS

It starts going wrong and you step back in. The problem gets solved and the handover ends, permanently, without either of you noticing that it ended.

THE FIX

> Decide in advance what failure you are willing to absorb. If the honest answer is none, do not hand it over yet — you are not delegating, you are auditioning them.

The half-handover

WHAT HAPPENS

They own the work; you own the relationship it touches. The client keeps calling you, you keep relaying, and now the job takes two people instead of one.

THE FIX

> Move the relationship or do not move the work. A half-handover is more expensive than no handover, and it is the most common state in a growing company.

Four steps. Most people do the first and the last.

Nothing here is original — it is how anyone has ever been taught anything practical. It is worth writing down anyway, because under time pressure the two middle steps are always the ones that get skipped, and they are the two that do the work.

1 — You do it, they watch

ONCE OR TWICE

Not a demonstration. Narrate the judgment out loud while you work — what you are looking at, what would change your mind, what you are deliberately ignoring. The mechanics are the easy part and they could have read those. The reasoning is the thing that only exists in your head, and this is the only step where it gets out.

2 — You do it together

TWO OR THREE TIMES

They drive, you are in the room. The point is not supervision, it is that they hit the first awkward case while you are still there — and the awkward cases are the entire content of the job. Anything you both handle in this step is something they will not need you for later.

3 — They do it, you review afterwards

THREE OR FOUR TIMES

They decide, act, and tell you what they did. You review after the fact and you do not reverse it unless it is genuinely damaging. Living with a decision you would not have made is the price of the handover and it is where founders quietly bail out. If you reverse it here, you have taught them that step three is theatre and you are back to step one permanently.

4 — They do it. You find out if it comes up.

FOREVER

Handed over. This is also when you write the limit down somewhere other than your memory — the Decision Rights sheet in the workbook exists for this — because an undocumented handover quietly reverts the first time that person is on holiday and somebody asks you instead.

The whole thing takes about six weeks of low-grade attention per item.

Which is why the workbook asks you to estimate hours-to-hand-over and works out the payback. Some items are not worth it. You want to know which ones on purpose, rather than by never getting round to any of them.

Some things should never leave your desk. Decide which on purpose.

Handing over everything is not the goal and it is not even a good outcome. A founder who has delegated all judgment has not built a resilient company, they have built one with an expensive figurehead.

Things that are usually worth keeping, and the reason:

- **What the company will not do.** Non-goals set the boundary everything else operates inside. Delegate this and you get scope creep with a governance process attached.
- **The pricing philosophy** — not the prices. Someone else can quote. What a discount means about who you are is a founder question and it leaks into everything.
- **Who joins the leadership layer.** Not every hire. The ones who will themselves hire.
- **The first serious conversation when something goes badly wrong with a client.** Not the recovery — the first conversation. It is the one people remember for years.
- **Whatever your judgment genuinely is the product.** For a lot of small firms this is real and it is the thing being bought. Naming it is not vanity, it is accurate.

> **"I like doing this one" is a legitimate reason to keep something. It is just not a business reason, so write it in the register as what it is and stop pretending nobody else could.**

The honest test

For each item you want to keep, answer one question: *if you were unreachable for two weeks, would this need to happen anyway?*

If yes, it cannot be founder-only regardless of how much you enjoy it — it needs a deputy even if you go on doing it yourself ninety percent of the time. If no, keep it, mark it kept, and stop letting it sit on the register generating guilt every quarter. Both of those are decisions. The thing that costs you is the third state, where it is neither handed over nor deliberately kept and you simply carry it while intending to sort it out later.

Six things founders say, and what is actually underneath.

All six are reasonable. Most are true. That is exactly why they survive for years without being examined.

“It’s quicker if I just do it.”

WHAT IS TRUE

Completely true, this time. It is true every time, which is how a four-minute task becomes eighty minutes a month for four years.

THE MOVE

> Compare the right numbers. Not four minutes against twenty — hours to hand over against hours a month, forever. The workbook does this arithmetic in the Leverage column precisely because nobody does it in their head.

“They’re not ready.”

WHAT IS TRUE

Often accurate. Also unfalsifiable, and it has no expiry date — there is no event that would make you notice they became ready, so the condition never resolves.

THE MOVE

> Say what ready looks like, out loud, with a date. "Handle these three without asking me and it is yours in March." Now it is a plan rather than a permanent state of affairs.

“I tried delegating that and it came back wrong.”

WHAT IS TRUE

It did. What is missing is which of the four failures it was — undefined edge, invisible standard, rescue, or half-handover. Without that, the lesson learned is "delegation does not work here", which is both wrong and permanent.

THE MOVE

> Name the failure before you conclude anything about the person. Three of the four are yours, which is annoying and also good news, because it means they are fixable.

“I’ll document it when things calm down.”

WHAT IS TRUE

Things will not calm down. You know this. The sentence is not a plan, it is a way of ending the conversation politely — including with yourself.

THE MOVE

> Document the one item where you are the only person who knows, and stop there. Knowledge dependency is the cheapest of the three to fix and the most catastrophic to leave, and it does not require anybody to be ready.

“If I’m not in the room, the client will notice.”

WHAT IS TRUE

They will. For the first two meetings. Relationship dependency is real and it is the slowest one to move, which is an argument for starting it now rather than for not starting it.

THE MOVE

> Hand it over in front of the client, explicitly, and then attend the next two meetings saying nothing. Silence in the room is the actual mechanism. A warm introduction email is not a handover, it is an announcement.

“I like doing this one.”

WHAT IS TRUE

The most honest sentence on this page and the one most worth respecting. Founders who delegate everything they enjoy end up running a company they do not want to be in, and that is a worse outcome than key-person risk.

THE MOVE

> Keep it — and give it a deputy anyway if the business needs it to happen while you are away. Enjoying something and being the only person capable of it are separate facts, and only the second one is a risk.

Ninety days, three items, no transformation.

The instinct after finishing the register is to plan a wholesale restructuring of how the company delegates. That plan has never once been executed by anybody. Take three items.

DAYS 1—5

Finish the register properly, then leave it alone for a week.

Including the small things — the four-minute approvals are where the real concentration hides. Then do not act on it for a week. The first reaction to your own numbers is reliably worse than the second.

WEEK 2

Pick three. One of each kind.

One decision, one knowledge, one relationship. Not the three worst — the three with the best leverage, which the workbook ranks for you. Picking all three from one category means you learn one thing instead of three.

WEEKS 3—10

Run the four steps on all three at once.

They are different kinds so they will not collide. Expect the decision one to move fastest, the knowledge one to feel like homework, and the relationship one to look like nothing is happening for six weeks. That is what progress looks like on that one.

WEEK 12

Redo the register. Then fill in Decision Rights.

Three items will not move the headline percentage much and that is fine — what you are checking is whether "days before your absence shows" went up. Then write the Decision Rights page, because it is the only artefact here that survives you forgetting about all of this for a year.

> **If nothing moves in ninety days, the constraint is not delegation.**
>
> It is usually that there is nobody to hand things to, which is a hiring and money problem and a completely different conversation. Better to establish that deliberately than to spend two years concluding you are bad at letting go.

The other half of the same problem.

This pairs with **The Operating Cadence**, the other toolkit download. They measure two different failures that look identical from the inside and are usually both present.

The cadence measures *coordination* — whether the record keeps up with reality, or whether the board is a description of last Tuesday. This measures *concentration* — how much of the business runs through one person. A company can be excellent at one and hopeless at the other, and the symptom in both cases is the same vague sense that everything takes longer than it should.

Worth knowing which you have. The fixes have nothing in common: coordination is fixed by a rhythm, concentration is fixed by six weeks per item of deliberate handover. Running the wrong fix energetically is how a year goes by.

Both are the operating half of **Discipline Stacking** — capability built by layering a few practices that hold each other up, rather than adopting a framework wholesale and hoping the culture shows up with it. Written up at cnnctd.work, and not required to use either file.

What we actually think

The most useful thing a small company can own is a written answer to "who decides what". Not a process, not a tool, not a transformation. One page. Almost nobody has it, everybody assumes everybody else does, and the gap between those two facts is where a surprising amount of a year goes.

Finish the register, then send the file back.

The last sheet is Snapshot. Seven numbers fill themselves in from your register — including days before your absence shows, and the total hours it would take to hand over everything only you do. Three boxes are yours to write.

Email the workbook to connect@cnnctd.work. We read it before we talk, so the first conversation starts from your register rather than an hour spent building one out loud.

The third question on that sheet — what you would do with the hours if you got them back — is the one we care most about. If the honest answer is that you would fill them with more of the same work, we will say so. That is a much cheaper thing to find out on a spreadsheet than on an invoice.

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