



THE READOUT

You already have the board. Nobody believes it.

Barrow Field Services · 38 people

Stack Assessment · run 4 September 2026

Six pages. The first number is on page two.

Worked example — invented business, real arithmetic

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THE NUMBER

FROM YOUR FILE

2 layers are being maintained on top of something that is not holding.

1 · Personal discipline 9 SOLID

2 · Visible work 4 THE GAP

3 · Operating cadence 8 ON THE GAP

4 · Foresight 2 NOT YET

5 · Distributed ownership 7 ON THE GAP

Two of these are working. Your cadence scored 8 and your delegation scored 7, and both of those are real, deliberate, well-run pieces of work that most businesses your size do not have. That is not the good news you want it to be.

Both of them are sitting on a layer scoring 4. They will keep costing what they cost and keep returning less than they should, **however well you run them**, because the problem is underneath them rather than in them.

Read the 9 too.

Layer one is solid, which rules out the explanation everyone reaches for first. Nobody here is failing to follow through. This is not a discipline problem and no amount of trying harder will touch it.

WHAT THAT MEANS HERE

FROM YOUR FILE

Your five answers on visible work, in the order you gave them:

There is one place where all active work lives.	YES
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Somebody outside the team could look at it and know what is in flight.	PARTLY
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Every item has one named owner rather than a team.	PARTLY
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It is current today, not as of the last meeting.	NO
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People check it instead of asking somebody.	NO
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You did not skip the tool. You bought the tool, you set it up properly, and then it stopped being true — so people quietly went back to asking a person.

FROM THE SESSION

The board is updated on Monday morning, in the meeting, by one person reading changes aloud while somebody types. By Wednesday it describes a business that no longer exists. Everyone in the room knew this and nobody said it until the fourth question.

So the actual system of record is Dana. Asking Dana is faster, more accurate and more pleasant than reading a stale board, which means **every individual person is behaving correctly** and the collective result is that you have one human being holding the operating picture of a 38-person business in her head.

This works. It has worked for two years. It will keep working right up until the week it doesn't, and that week is not on anybody's calendar.

WHAT IT COSTS

FROM THE SESSION

Your Monday leadership session scored 8 out of 10 and deserves it. It happens when the week is busy, somebody other than the founder owns it, and something changes in writing afterwards. It is also the most expensive hour in the business.

Six people, fifty minutes. By your own estimate in the room, roughly fifteen of those minutes are decisions and the other thirty-five are people reconstructing last week out loud, from memory, so that everyone can agree on what is currently true.

Reconstruction, per session	35 min
People in the room	× 6
Sessions a year	× 46
Spent saying out loud what a current board would show in silence	
161 hours	

Four working weeks a year of senior time, and it buys you a shared picture that is accurate for about forty-eight hours. That is the cost of the meeting being good. A bad meeting would be cheaper.

The second cost is the 2.

Foresight scored 2 because risks and assumptions are not written anywhere, and when something goes wrong it was almost never already on a list. That is not a thinking problem — your team anticipates plenty out loud. There is simply nowhere to put it that anyone reads, because the one place people might read is out of date. The 2 is downstream of the 4.

FROM THE SESSION

Three moves. All three are about the same layer, because that is the entire point.

1 The board gets updated by the person doing the work, daily.

Not in the meeting, not by a nominated typist. Two minutes at the end of the day beats thirty-five minutes on Monday, and it is the only version that is true on a Wednesday. Nothing else on this page works until this does.

2 One name against every item. A name, not a team.

“Ops” is not a person and cannot be asked. You scored Partly here, which in practice means the important items have owners and the awkward ones do not — and the awkward ones are why the board gets doubted.

3 Stop answering status questions. Point at the board instead.

Every time, by everyone, including you, including when it is faster to just answer. This is the move that actually fixes it and it is the one that will fail. Answering is helpful, it feels like leadership, and each time it happens the board loses another reader.

AND THE PART NOBODY EXPECTS

Stop investing in your cadence and your delegation. Both are above the line. No new ceremony, no agenda redesign, no fresh push on decision rights — keep them ticking over exactly as they are and put nothing into them until visible work holds. They will improve on their own when it does, without you touching them, and that is the clearest evidence available that this diagnosis was right.

DO THIS YOURSELVES

Moves 1 and 2 are a fortnight of unglamorous work and you do not need anybody in the room for them. You know what the board is, you know who owns what, and you have a layer-one score of 9, which means when you decide to do something it gets done.

If we quoted you for this we would be charging you to watch you do it.

THIS IS THE ONE

Move 3 fails alone. Not because it is hard to understand but because it asks the most senior people in a business to stop being immediately useful, forty times a day, for two months, with no visible reward until week six.

Around week four somebody will ask you something in a bad week and you will answer, correctly and helpfully, and the count resets. That is not a character flaw. It is what happens without somebody outside the room whose only job is to notice.

Eight weeks. One session a week. We hold move three and nothing else.

That is the whole engagement. At week eight you redo the twenty-five statements — it takes fifteen minutes — and if visible work is above 7 we are finished and we go away. If it is not, we have both learned something more useful than a longer contract would have taught us.

If the numbers had said you were fine, this page would have said so.

That happens more often than you would expect, and it is the reason this document is six pages rather than thirty. There is no version of this where a longer report was the valuable part.

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