



# Steer Your Business

DRIVING BUSINESS GROWTH THROUGH INSIGHT, VISIBILITY AND CONNECTION

**BUILDING A  
BUSINESS IS AN  
EXCITING JOURNEY,**

**BUT IT CAN ALSO FEEL  
OVERWHELMING PG 26**



## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- **Death by Team Building?**
- **Push Through Your Ceiling**
- **Transforming Team Understanding into Performance**



# STOP SPINNING.

# START STEERING.



THE  
**Steer Your Business**  
PODCAST

**LAUNCHING SOON**

- Real conversations
- Straight answers
- Practical move to help you take control and grow



# From the Editor



## The Team



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Creativity



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Automation



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Website



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Marketing

Below: Clare Cluer, Death on Demand Murder Mysteries



Summer is really here and with it we have a fabulous magazine for you to read. It never ceases to amaze me how much there is to learn about running a business and how it keeps changing and evolving.

Personally, I've been working on the podcast to compliment the magazine. This is something that I paused a while ago and have taken a bit of time to restart it again but now it's back!

In this issue we have an eclectic mix of articles including Dean Vinyard explaining about Facebook ads and how to get them working for you, Tony Redondo sharing how to get paid in different currencies as we expand our businesses overseas and Stephen Waugh sharing about pushing through your ceiling.

We also have articles from Scott Anderson and Steve Barrett on different aspects of franchising from recruitment of franchisees to growth.

I love Clare Cluer's article on team building using murder mystery events. This is such a great idea and something all team members can get involved in – no acting required!

Whatever stage you are at with your business, I'm sure there is an article which will be relevant to you and what you need to be looking at next. I know that in my business, there are always challenges and something new to look at or review.

Happy reading and look out for the podcast and have a listen.

Sally

“  
Whatever stage you are at with your business, I'm sure there is an article that will be relevant to you and what you need to be looking at next.

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**Next Issue 1 September**

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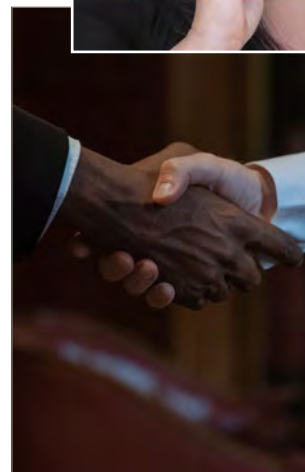
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FINANCE • Anita Pickersgill FCICM

THORNBURY COLLECTIONS



## The Benefits of Compromising and Negotiating a Settlement when faced with a Disputed Debt



**When a debt is disputed, pursuing every penny through the courts isn't always the best commercial decision. A negotiated settlement can save time, reduce costs and preserve valuable business relationships, provided it's approached in the right way.**

### Why compromise makes commercial sense

Disputed debts often arise over workmanship, pricing, damages, or as I call them “fresh air disputes”, masking cash flow issues, and they can become costly, stressful and time-consuming.

Negotiating a settlement or compromise offers a practical alternative to prolonged litigation or collection battles. Settling a disputed debt can preserve finances, reduce risk and restore control.

I often see cases where the actual amount being argued about would

not justify the amount spent in both time and money resolving it. Many still believe they will always win and recover their legal costs, when the reality is that under the fixed costs regime, full costs are seldom recovered and predetermined limits apply.

Standing on principle is all well and good, but not when it takes time and money that the business cannot afford.

### Before deciding on legal action

With every disputed case, consideration should always be given to any offers to settle already made, any payment arrangements proposed and the debtor's ability to pay. They may simply be buying time to secure funding, which at least offers the prospect of payment.

The courts will often signpost cases towards Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), a free service

## Before entering negotiations, make sure you:

- Gather contracts, invoices and supporting documentation
- Review all correspondence relating to the dispute
- Decide your ideal settlement outcome
- Establish your minimum acceptable settlement
- Consider realistic payment options and timescales

## Looking at settlement from the debtor's perspective

Settlements often resolve matters for less than the full claimed amount, saving money compared with paying in full or facing judgment after litigation.

They can also:

- Avoid accumulating interest, late fees and collection costs
- Resolve disputes in weeks rather than years
- Reduce emotional and administrative pressures
- Allow flexible payment arrangements
- Preserve valuable business relationships
- Remove uncertainty and allow financial planning
- Reduce the risk of adverse court judgments and additional legal costs

# “Standing on principle is all well and good, but not when it takes time and money that the business cannot afford.”

that can help both parties reach agreement without formal litigation. Likewise, many debt collection agents will seek to resolve matters through negotiation before court proceedings become necessary.

## Reaching an agreement

Invite your debtor to propose a settlement, making it clear that a reasonable instalment plan may be considered.

Offer a figure that allows room for negotiation. Most debtors need to feel some degree of compromise has been reached.

Always insist on a written settlement agreement that clearly records the amount, payment terms and confirms the agreement is binding on both parties.

## Every Settlement Agreement Should Include

- Names of both parties
- Reference to the disputed debt
- Settlement amount
- Payment schedule
- Payment deadlines
- Confirmation that the agreement settles the matter in full
- Default provisions if payments are missed
- Signatures and date

## When settlement may not be appropriate

Settlement is not always the correct option.

You may decide not to compromise where:

- The debtor's defence is clearly without merit and you have strong supporting evidence.
- You know the debtor has sufficient liquid funds to satisfy the debt in full.
- Settlement may expose you to further financial risk, for example where a Winding Up Petition has been presented and payments could later be reclaimed by a Liquidator.

You should also be aware that negotiating older debts may affect limitation periods, so legal advice should always be sought where appropriate.

## Conclusion

Negotiating a settlement for a disputed debt is often a pragmatic and cost-effective way to resolve conflict while minimising financial and emotional harm.

With proper preparation, clear objectives and a well-drafted written agreement, settlement can provide certainty, flexibility and a significantly faster resolution than prolonged litigation.



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**FINANCE • Hayley Kingsnorth**  
PARTNER, AZETS

## Mileage rate increase to 55p per mile announced

**The first increase to the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment (AMAP) in more than a decade brings welcome news for employers and employees alike. Here's what the new rates mean and the practical steps businesses should now consider.**

The Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, recently announced an increase to the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment (AMAP) rate from 45p to 55p per mile for the first 10,000 business miles.

The change, confirmed in the House of Commons on 21 May 2026, will be backdated to April 2026 and represents the first increase to the rate in more than a decade.

### What's changing?

Under the new rules:

- The main mileage rate increases from 45p to 55p per mile for the first 10,000 business miles
- The 25p per mile rate for mileage above 10,000 miles remains unchanged

The increase applies where employees use their own vehicles for business travel (excluding ordinary commuting), and will also be relevant for self-employed individuals using simplified expense rates.



**The first increase to the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment in more than a decade.**

### At a glance

Before	Now
First 10,000 miles	5p per mile
Over 10,000 miles	25p per mile
Effective from	April 2026
Announced	May 2026

# 45p → 55p

## Business mileage rate

**First 10,000 miles**  
Effective from April 2026

### Why has the rate increased?

The previous 45p rate had remained unchanged since 2011, despite significant increases in fuel, insurance and overall motoring costs.

The uplift forms part of a wider package of cost-of-living support measures and is intended to:

- Better reflect the real cost of business travel
- Provide financial support for workers who rely on their own vehicles for work
- Reduce the administrative burden of claiming actual costs

### What does this mean for employers?

For employers reimbursing business mileage, the updated rate creates several considerations:

#### 1. Reviewing mileage policies

Employers should review existing mileage reimbursement policies to determine:

- Whether to increase payments in line with the new 55p rate
- The financial impact on travel and expense budgets

Payments made up to the approved rate remain free of Income Tax and National Insurance, which may make this a cost-effective route for supporting employees.

#### 2. Payroll and expense system updates

Businesses may need to:

- Update payroll and expense systems to reflect the new rate
- Ensure correct treatment for mileage claims submitted retrospectively (as the change is backdated)

### 3. Managing transitional complexity

As the change is backdated to April 2026, employers will need to consider:

- Whether to adjust mileage payments already made this tax year
- How to handle employee claims for additional mileage relief

HMRC has indicated that it will use discretion during the transition, given the retrospective nature of the change.

### What does this mean for employees and the self-employed?

For employees using their own vehicles for business travel:

- Employees can now reimburse up to 55p per mile tax-free
- Where employers pay less, employees may be able to claim tax relief on the difference

For the self-employed:

- The higher rate can be used under the simplified expenses method
- This may increase the level of allowable deductions for business mileage

### We're here to help

This change presents both an opportunity and administrative complexity - particularly for businesses managing high volumes of employee travel.

Our [specialists](#) can support with:

- Reviewing mileage policies and reimbursement structures
- Ensuring correct tax treatment and compliance
- Advising on system updates and transitional adjustments

If you would like support, please get in touch.



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www.azets.com

# Why Your Website Is Losing Sales

## Your Website Has 5 Seconds to Convince Someone to Buy

Within seconds of landing on your site, your viewer decides:

"Do I *get* it?"  
"Can I *trust* it?"  
"Does this feel *easy*?"

If the answer to any of those is no, they're gone. They don't complain; they don't explain; they just leave.

This is not about tricks. It is about how your site feels.

## Pictures Do the Talking Before Words Ever Get a Chance

Let's be honest. Nobody reads first.

They look.

Product photos. Hero images. Videos. Banners.

If your visuals feel awkward or don't match your brand, trust drops fast. Even if your product is amazing.

Good images do quiet work. They explain things fast. They show real moments. They make people *feel* something.

That is why many teams lean on image and video libraries like [Shutterstock](#). Not because they can't create content, but because speed and precision matters.

When you can grab or use GenAI to create the right visual fast, you can test, update, and improve without slowing down.

Clear visuals keep people scrolling. Scrolling keeps people shopping.

## If Your Site's Hard to Use, It Doesn't Matter How Good It Looks

Here is the part too many brands skip.

Your site might *look* great. That doesn't mean it works for everyone.

Some shoppers need bigger text. Some use screen readers. Some need stronger contrast to see clearly.

If your site fights them, they leave. And that's money walking out the door.

UX and accessibility tools like UserWay fix this without breaking your design by letting each visitor customize the site to fit their needs.

The result is simple. More people who can use your site means more people can buy from it.

Let that sink in.

## Tiny Problems Feel Huge at Checkout

Patience is low.

A button that's hard to find.  
Text that's hard to read.  
A video with no captions.

Each small issue adds doubt. And doubt kills sales.

Fixing these doesn't require a full rebuild. It requires better basics.

Better visuals.  
Better user flow.  
Tools that help *every* visitor feel welcome.

Teams that invest here see real results. Lower bounce rates. Better conversions.

Not magic. Just fewer reasons to leave.

## The Advantage Most Sites Ignore

Most websites are fine. That's the problem.

When your site feels clear, friendly, and easy, it stands out. Shoppers may not know *why* they trust it. They just do.

That trust comes from care. From choosing better images. From making sure everyone can use the page. From smoothing the path from click to cart.

And when people *feel* good on your site, they *stay*.

That's how five seconds turns into a sale.

Want to see if your site is losing sales? Check it using [this free accessibility checker](#).

# STARTUP GROWTH STARTS WITH GREAT VISUALS



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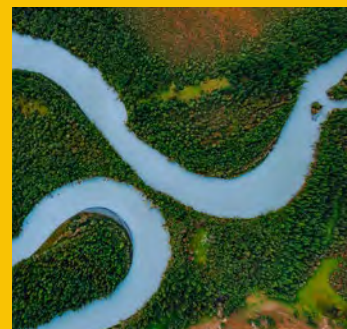
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# Overcoming the Fear Factor and Friction in Global Payments

International payments should be straightforward, yet many businesses still face unnecessary delays, hidden costs and uncertainty. Here's why a relationship-led approach can make global transactions faster, safer and more cost-effective.

For businesses managing overseas clients or suppliers, international payments should feel seamless. Too often, they don't. Volatile markets, rigid self-service apps, and traditional high-street banks create a stress-inducing "fear factor" and real operational friction — whether you're a business owner, finance director, or client navigating an overseas property deal.

The primary culprit is the tech-heavy, one-size-fits-all model. Anonymous platforms leave room for costly errors: a single typo during beneficiary setup can send vital funds into the void. Traditional SWIFT transfers compound the problem, dragging settlements out to three to five days, while retail banks and apps quietly erode



## Signs your international payments could be costing you more than you realise

- Transfers regularly take several days to arrive
- Exchange rates are fixed without discussion
- You rely solely on online platforms or call centres
- Payment fees are difficult to understand
- You have no support when something goes wrong

margins through heavy charges.

Global business doesn't need to feel foreign. At Cosmos, we reject the anonymous self-service model in favour of a relationship-first, proactive approach — delivering the kind of bespoke service typically reserved for high-net-worth individuals and large corporates.

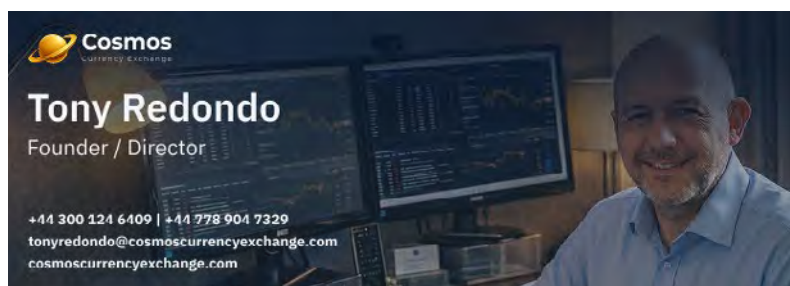
To eliminate international friction, Cosmos provides dedicated Local Client Collection Accounts across the UK, USA, Canada, Europe, Australia, Singapore,


and Hong Kong. By bypassing SWIFT in favour of local payment rails, settlements are rapid and low-cost, with same-day or next-day transfers processed through standard mobile banking apps. Our 24/7 Rate Watch service adds another layer of value, securing optimal market timing and routinely saving

clients up to \$6,000 on a single \$100,000 transfer compared to standard bank rates.

Stop letting anonymous apps or bank call centres dictate your global margins. Contact Cosmos Currency Exchange today for corporate foreign exchange backed by real human expertise

“  
Global business doesn't need to feel foreign.”





“We had it all covered. Until the Budget said we didn’t.”

BIZVAL | BIZVALGLOBAL.COM

**D**avid built a Yorkshire engineering business over thirty-two years. Sixty-eight staff. A factory he owned outright. An order book into 2028. Worth north of £6 million.

His estate plan was simple. Business Property Relief covered the inheritance tax. His family would inherit free of any IHT charge.

Then came the Autumn Budget 2024.

#### **The ground shifted.**

From April 2026, there is a new rule. The first £2.5 million of combined business and agricultural assets still qualifies for 100% relief. Everything above that gets 50% relief, an effective 20% IHT rate.

**Above £2.5 million, every pound of value becomes 20p of tax. HMRC will look very closely at how you arrived at that number.**

For David, the maths was immediate. £6 million minus £2.5 million is £3.5 million. Twenty percent of £3.5 million is £700,000. His family was looking at a six-figure tax bill on a business they had every intention of keeping.

And here is the harder question.

Where does the cash actually come from?

The factory. The machines. The order book. None of it is liquid.

To find £700,000, his family would need to remortgage, take on debt, or sell part of the company they had just inherited. After thirty-two years of building something meant to be a legacy.

#### **The valuation question just became unavoidable.**

Here is what most business owners do not realise. For a generation, you could largely ignore what your business was worth for tax purposes. Full BPR wiped out the liability. The number simply did not matter.

From April 2026, the number matters more than almost anything else in your estate plan.

If you sit comfortably under £2.5 million, you need a defensible valuation to prove it. If you sit above, you need one to calculate the liability and plan how to fund it. And if you made lifetime gifts of shares on or after 30 October 2024, the new rules can still catch your estate, provided the donor dies within seven years of making the gift, with the valuation date being the date of the gift.

### The trap most advisers are not talking about.

Many business owners gifted shares to family or into trust in late 2024 and 2025, often on advice designed to lock in the old regime. Most never obtained a updated valuation at the time of the gift, because nobody thought one was needed.

If the donor dies after 6 April 2026 and within seven years of making the gift, those transfers come under the new rules and the valuation question has to be answered retrospectively. That is a significantly harder conversation to have years after the fact than at the moment of the gift.

### What has actually changed, in plain terms:

- From 6 April 2026, 100% relief applies to the first £2.5 million of combined BPR and APR qualifying assets
- Above that, relief drops to 50%, an effective 20% IHT rate
- The allowance is fully transferable between spouses and civil partners, giving couples potential shelter of up to £5 million
- The £2.5 million allowance refreshes every seven years, in the same way the nil rate band operates
- AIM-listed shares now qualify for 50% BPR only, regardless of value and do not count against the £2.5 million allowance
- IHT on qualifying property can be paid in ten annual interest-free instalments



### Three questions every UK business owner should be able to answer right now:

- What is my business actually worth today, on a defensible basis?
- Am I comfortably under £2.5 million, close to it, or materially over?
- If the worst happened tomorrow, where does the cash to pay the tax actually come from?

### A defensible number is the starting point.

You cannot plan around a number you do not have. Valuations done for shareholder buyouts, divorce, or bank covenants are not the

same as valuations prepared for inheritance tax purposes. They use different methodologies, different assumptions, and different evidential standards. HMRC will know the difference.

The business owners who will navigate the new regime well are the ones who act now. They will get a current, independent, defensible valuation and use it as the foundation for proper tax planning with their adviser.

The ones who will struggle are the ones who assume their old plan still works. credible answer?

If not, you are exposed.



**At bizval, we provide independent, professionally prepared business valuations that give UK owners the clarity to plan around the new BPR and APR rules with confidence.**

**Visit [bizvalglobal.com](https://bizvalglobal.com) today.**

**DISCLAIMER: this article is educational in nature and does not constitute tax or financial advice**

**Vague answers do not survive contact with HMRC.**



## CHANGE MANAGEMENT • Lindsay Brown

FOUNDER, CONCORDIA NOVA

# The Hidden Cost of ‘Good Enough’ Leadership — And Why It Shows Up at Sale Time

**When a buyer starts looking at a business, leadership is one of the first areas where value is tested. Not in theory, but in practice. And what has been tolerated for years suddenly becomes very expensive.**

**M**ost business owners believe their leadership team is “good enough”.

The business is performing. Customers are happy. Problems get dealt with. From the inside, things feel fine.

But “fine” rarely survives scrutiny.

When a buyer starts looking at a business, leadership is one of the

first areas where value is tested. Not in theory, but in practice. And what has been tolerated for years suddenly becomes very expensive.

### **What Buyers Are Really Looking For**

Buyers are not just buying results. They are buying confidence that those results can continue.

One of the key ways they test this is through leadership bench strength.

They are asking questions that are rarely said out loud:

Who runs the business when the founder isn’t in the room?

Who owns outcomes rather than just tasks?

Who can make decisions without everything being escalated?

If the answers are unclear, risk rises quickly.

A business that relies on one or two individuals



## Lindsay Brown

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That can work day to day. But under due diligence, informal systems attract attention.

Buyers start to notice things like:

- Irregular procurement decisions
- Poor separation of duties
- Unclear approval limits
- Spending commitments made without authority
- Weak or non-existent conflict of interest processes

These gaps raise uncomfortable questions. Not just about efficiency, but about control. In some cases, they increase concerns around fraud, favouritism, or regulatory risk, even where no wrongdoing has occurred.

Perception matters. And perception affects price.

### The Cost Of Tolerated Behaviour

Another common issue is tolerated behaviour.

Every business has it. The high performer who is difficult to manage. The long-standing employee who ignores the process. The family member who gets away with more than others.

While the business is privately owned, these behaviours are often brushed aside. They feel easier to manage internally

## Buyers are buying what happens next, not just what happened before.

than to confront.

Buyers don't see them that way.

Under new ownership, tolerated behaviour looks like instability. It raises concerns about culture, fairness, and the ability to lead through change. Buyers know that poor behaviour becomes harder, not easier, once a transaction is complete.

The usual response is caution. And caution often shows up as reduced offers, earn-outs, or tighter deal terms.

### Why Does This Catch Owners By Surprise

Many founders underestimate how closely leadership and governance are linked to value. They assume strong financial performance will outweigh people issues.

It rarely does.

Buyers are buying what happens next, not just what happened before. If leadership capability, decision-making and governance feel unclear, value is discounted to reflect the risk.

### A Question Worth Asking Early

Rather than asking whether your leadership team is good enough today, a better question is:

*Would a buyer trust this team to run the business without me?*

If the answer is uncertain, the cost will show up eventually.

Because leadership gaps don't disappear at sale time.

They get priced in.



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to hold everything together looks fragile. Even if performance has been strong, buyers see potential disruption the moment ownership changes.

### When Governance Gaps Come Into Focus

Leadership capability is closely tied to governance, and this is where many businesses come unstuck.

In owner-led, SME and family businesses, governance often evolves informally. Decisions are made quickly. Trust replaces process. Everyone knows how things work, even if nothing is written down.

# Transforming Team Understanding into Performance

## KATE MANTON

Many organisations do not have a people problem; they have a team problem.

Despite employing talented individuals, many businesses experience challenges with communication, decision-making, accountability and collaboration. These issues often result in missed opportunities,

inefficiencies and frustration that ultimately affect organisational performance.

This is the challenge that award-winning team and leadership consultant Kate Manton set out to address when she founded Baobab Works.

Drawing on more than 20 years of leadership experience across 40 countries, Kate helps organisations understand what is really

If you are working with Kate, expect to be taken seriously, stretched, and to come out the other side with more clarity and confidence than you walked in with.

## CRISTINA JONES

happening beneath the surface of team performance. Her work focuses on identifying

the behaviours, dynamics and ways of working that either enable or hinder a team's success.

Every team consists of people with different personalities, experiences, perspectives and working styles. When those differences are misunderstood, they can create friction, misunderstanding and disengagement. When understood and

**BLACK FLAG COACHING**

### What Works at 5 Franchisees won't work at 15

Steve Barrett  
Strategic Advisor & Fractional Leader  
Gallup Certified CliftonStrengths® Coach

As your franchise network grows, founder-led decisions, informal support and close oversight stop being enough.

Steve Barrett helps franchisors put the structure in place for sustainable growth, stronger consistency and less owner dependency.

- Grow your network
- Stronger systems
- More consistent support
- A business that can grow without relying on you

Arrange a call  
[blackflagcoaching.com/franchise-growth](https://blackflagcoaching.com/franchise-growth)

**JACQUI ANSOM**

### Stress & Burnout In The Workplace Are Now Legal and Regulatory Risks Not Just People Issues.

April 2026 changed what's expected of employers.

As a business owner you're now required to actively manage workplace pressure, not just respond when things go wrong.

### The Burnout Prevention & Recovery Business Coach

Helping You To Meet The Regulatory Requirements Whilst Protecting Your Business & People

Jacqui@jacquisansom.com [www.jacquisansom.com](http://www.jacquisansom.com)



**You can't manage what you don't measure.**

improvements in how teams work together, make decisions and deliver results.

As Kate often says, "You can't manage what you don't measure."

teams are built not by avoiding challenges, but by developing the connection, understanding and resilience needed to thrive through them. Because when teams work better together, organisations perform better too.

leveraged effectively, they become strengths rather than barriers.

Through a combination of diagnostics using her V.I.B.E.™ framework, Insights Discovery® workshops, coaching and facilitation, Kate

works with leaders and teams to create greater clarity, alignment and accountability. Her approach is part insight, part reality check and part challenge. The outcome is not simply improved morale, but measurable

The name Baobab Works is inspired by the African baobab tree, a symbol that has been part of Kate's life since her childhood in Zambia. Known for its resilience and longevity, the tree reflects her belief that high-performing



To learn more, visit [baobab-works.com](http://baobab-works.com)



**If you're overwhelmed, overworked, and still not seeing the growth you want... this is why:**

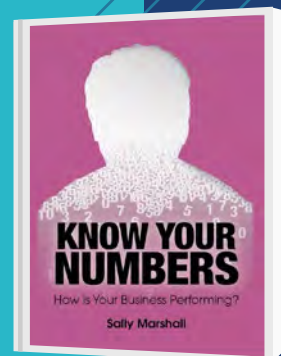


You're doing too much yourself  
You don't have clarity on your numbers

**Fix both.**

Delegate 2 Elevate — build a business that runs without you  
Know Your Numbers — make confident, data-driven decisions

**Less chaos. More control. Real profit.**



## COACHING • Russell Harvey

THE RESILIENCE COACH

## Acceptance with Good Grace: The Leadership Skill Nobody Talks About

You're probably managing someone right now who hasn't accepted something.

Maybe it's a structural change. A decision from above that they disagreed with. A reorganisation that shifted their territory. A budget cut that gutted a project they'd championed.

You can see it in the meetings. The energy. The way certain topics get revisited. The faint hum of resentment underneath the professional surface.

And here's the thing — the leader in question probably doesn't fully realise how much it's costing them. Or their team.

This piece is about a phrase I use regularly in coaching: acceptance with good grace.

It sounds simple. It isn't.



Hope becomes possible. Not manufactured hope. Earned hope.

### What acceptance with good grace actually means

Let's start with what it isn't, because the phrase can mislead.

Acceptance with good grace is not:

- Pretending the decision was right when you believe it wasn't
- Suppressing genuine frustration until it leaks out sideways
- Performing calm for the room while quietly fuming outside it
- Giving up on influencing what can still be influenced

What it actually is:

**Naming the reality of a situation honestly, clearly, and without amplification — and then choosing where to direct your energy from there.**



It's grounded. It's active. And it's one of the more difficult behavioural patterns I see senior leaders genuinely struggle with.

It's grounded. It's active. And it's one of the more difficult behavioural patterns I see senior leaders genuinely struggle with.

### Where it connects to Optimism

In my work, I define resilience as "Springing Forward with Learning." The Attitude dimension of my Resilience Wheel — the hub around which everything else turns — is our settled way of thinking and feeling about life. It's where our values and belief systems live. And it's directly connected to how we hold and process difficulty.

Real Optimism — the kind that actually sustains performance and creates hope in a team — does not skip over reality. It starts there.

Martin Seligman, the founder of Positive Psychology, made this point precisely. Optimism must be flexible, open-eyed, and reality-grounded. The alternative isn't positivity — it's avoidance. And avoidance, in a leadership context, is expensive.

The sequence matters enormously:

1. **Acknowledge the reality — honestly and at full scale.** What's actually happened here? What's the size and weight of this? Don't minimise it. Don't catastrophise it either. Just name it.



It's the slow accumulation of anchored energy across a team. Decisions get relitigated. Change fatigue sets in faster. Psychological safety takes a hit because people feel the unspoken story in the room and don't know how to respond to it. And the leader — often a high-performer who cares deeply — starts to lose influence without quite understanding why.

I've seen this pattern across organisations of every size. It's one of the more common things I work on in 1:1 executive coaching. And it responds well to the right conversation at the right time.

**The question to take away**  
**On a scale of 1 to 10 — how well are you accepting something right now with good grace?**

If the honest answer is below 7, it's worth asking what that's costing you. And whether the people you lead are carrying some of that cost too.

Acceptance with good grace isn't about letting things go. It's about choosing where your energy goes next.

**That choice is where Springing Forward begins.**



**Podcast Episode 1 Series 1 (all episodes available on website)**



**THE RESILIENCE COACH**

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**2. Identify what's genuinely working right now.** Amidst the difficulty, what strengths, capabilities, and resources actually exist? This is not toxic positivity. It's a deliberate shift of attention toward what's real and usable.

**3. Ask the forward question.** Given where we actually are, what's the best next move available to us?

When leaders move through that sequence — genuinely, not as a script — hope becomes possible. Not manufactured hope. Earned hope. And that's the difference between a team that starts to spring forward and a team that stays anchored to what should have been.

### **The behavioural reality of practising it**

Here's where it gets practical, because "accept things with good grace" as a piece of advice is essentially useless without the how.

**Name it once, clearly.** Part of what keeps people stuck is the repeated articulation of the grievance. The story gets told again. In the corridor. At the start of the meeting. Over coffee. Saying something once, plainly and honestly, is different from keeping it alive. The first is processing. The second is anchoring.

**Check your attention.** Where you focus your energy signals to everyone around you what matters. If 80% of your mental and conversational attention is on the decision that's already been made, you're not leading from here — you're leading from there. That's not where your team needs you.

**Ask "what can I influence from this point?"** Not "why did this happen?" Not "who got this wrong?" Those questions have **their place**, briefly, in reflection. But as a sustained orientation, they drain the energy a team needs to move. "What can I influence from here?" is a different posture entirely.

**Role model the shift visibly.** This is the bit that most leadership development programmes miss. It's not enough to process this privately. Your team is watching how you carry this. When you visibly settle into acceptance — not performance, actual settled acceptance — they take their cue from you. The energy in the room changes. Conversations start to move again.

### **What happens when it doesn't happen**

The cost of a leader not accepting with good grace is rarely visible as a single incident.

## DEATH BY TEAM-BUILDING? WHY WORKPLACE ENGAGEMENT OFTEN FAILS BEFORE IT EVEN STARTS

After more than 20 years working within immersive murder mystery experiences, I've become fascinated by a recurring workplace challenge: why some team events feel engaging almost instantly, while others quietly lose momentum before they've properly begun.

This isn't usually because people dislike team-building. In fact, most organisers put considerable thought into selecting experiences that will bring people together, encourage interaction, and provide value for the time and money invested. Yet despite those good intentions, many workplace events encounter the same problem: participation becomes uneven surprisingly quickly.

One reason for this is that many activities unintentionally place people under what I call "spotlight pressure". A classic example is asking groups to discuss something before inviting a volunteer to report back to the room. On the surface, this seems harmless enough. In practice, however, it often creates a subtle shift in



**Clare Cluer**

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, DEATH ON DEMAND  
MURDER MYSTERIES

**Most workplace engagement initiatives fail for a surprisingly simple reason. They unintentionally place people under pressure to perform. Clare Cluer explores why participation is often a design problem rather than a confidence problem, and what organisations can do differently.**

behaviour. The more confident personalities step forward while others become increasingly self-conscious about participating publicly.

What's particularly interesting is that this is often interpreted as a confidence issue. We assume some people

are naturally willing to contribute while others simply prefer to remain quiet. My experience suggests the reality is more nuanced. Participation is often less about personality and more about design. Over the years, I have watched thousands of people take part in

**The goal of a team event should not be to make people louder. It should be to create an environment where more people feel comfortable contributing in their own way.**

immersive experiences. One of the most consistent observations is that people engage differently when they feel comfortable. When participation is structured and expectations are clear, involvement becomes significantly more balanced. People who might never volunteer to speak in front of a room will happily contribute ideas, ask questions, and drive discussions when the environment feels less exposing.

This is one of the reasons our immersive murder mystery experiences work so well with mixed groups. Contrary to popular belief, guests are not expected to perform. The actors handle

## The Safest Way to Run a Team Event

### A FREE LIVE WEBINAR EXPLORING:

- Why some team events become awkward almost instantly
- The hidden impact of spotlight pressure
- Why participation is usually a design issue rather than a personality issue
- How to create engaging workplace experiences without forcing people out of their comfort zones
- Practical ways to fit team engagement around the working day

Attendees will receive a special invitation to a live murder mystery invitation to see how spotlight free event works.

**Register:** <https://deathondemand.webinargeek.com/the-safest-way-to-run-a-team-event?cst=steer>

the performance elements, while participants work together to investigate, discuss clues, question suspects, and solve the mystery. What frequently surprises organisers is not whether people engage, but who engages. Some of the most valuable contributions often come from individuals who would traditionally be described as quiet.

Why that happens is one of the questions that first led me to explore what I now call

spotlight pressure. Once you understand what's happening, you begin to see the same pattern repeated in meetings, workshops, conferences, training sessions, and workplace events of all kinds.

This becomes even more relevant in modern workplaces. Many organisations are dealing with hybrid working, tighter schedules, operational pressures, and the challenge of bringing people together without

significantly disrupting the business. While traditional offsites still have their place, they can be difficult to justify from a logistical perspective.

As a result, I believe the future of workplace engagement may not necessarily be bigger events. It may be better-designed ones: experiences that fit around the working day, reduce organiser risk, and make participation feel comfortable for a broader range of people.

Ultimately, the goal of a team event should not be to make people louder. It should be to create an environment where more people feel comfortable contributing in their own way. In my experience, that's where the most memorable conversations, strongest connections, and most successful workplace experiences begin.



## Experience Participation by Design

Join us for a live Murder Mystery Lunch Team-Building Taster, where you'll experience first-hand how structured participation can naturally engage a wide range of personalities, without awkward roleplay or being put on the spot. It's ideal for workplace organisers, HR professionals, and hospitality venues looking for fresh ideas.

**Book your place: Murder Mystery Lunch - Team Building Taster**

**Places are limited to just 40 guests to keep the experience immersive and give everyone the opportunity to take part.**

### About the Author

**Clare Cluer** is the Artistic Director of **Death on Demand Murder Mysteries** and has spent more than 20 years working within immersive murder mystery experiences. Since 2020, she has designed and delivered interactive team experiences for businesses, hospitality venues, charities and organisations across the UK, helping create memorable events that encourage genuine participation without awkwardness or spotlight pressure.

**Participation is often less about personality and more about design.**



“  
**The most effective businesses do not wait for growth to expose weaknesses.**

Steve Barrett is a franchise growth advisor and former multi-site operator. He helps franchisors scale from early growth to structured, sustainable expansion while reducing owner dependency.

## YOU DON'T NEED AN OPERATIONS DIRECTOR... YET

Growth creates pressure long before most businesses are ready for a full-time senior leadership team.

This is particularly true in franchise and multi-site businesses. What worked when the founder could stay close to every decision starts to become harder to manage. Communication is challenged; standards become inconsistent and too much still relies on one person.

At this stage, many business owners recognise they need support, but hiring a full-time Operations Director often feels too early, too expensive or simply unrealistic.

That is where fractional leadership can be highly effective.

A fractional leader brings senior operational experience into the business on a flexible basis, often giving growing businesses access to

a level of leadership capability that would normally sit far beyond their current structure or budget.

The role is not simply to solve problems. It is to strengthen the capability of the business itself. This may involve developing managers, supporting franchisees, improving communication across the network, implementing stronger operational systems and helping the founder transition from operator to leader.

For growing franchisors and SMEs, this approach provides strategic support without the commitment and overhead of a full-time appointment, while creating stronger foundations for sustainable growth.

The most effective businesses do not wait for growth to expose weaknesses. They build the capability to support the next stage before they arrive there.

Arrange a call



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Info@blackflagcoaching.com

# 4D RECRUITMENT: Why most franchise selection falls short

## Scott Anderson



Franchise Development  
Consultant,  
Zen Consulting

**Most franchise recruitment stops at financial qualification and a discovery call. The candidate has the funds. The conversation went well. Everyone signs.**

Six months later, the problems start.

The truth is that two of the factors that genuinely predict franchisee success are rarely assessed in any structured way. The result is wrong-fit franchisees, early exits, and a director firefighting situations that should have been prevented at selection.

The 4D Recruiter changes that. It assesses every candidate across four dimensions, each one capturing a piece of the puzzle that a single-dimension process misses.

**Opportunity.** Does this candidate genuinely fit this brand, this territory, this model? Or do they just fit a franchise?



## THE FOUR DIMENSIONS

### Opportunity

Is there a genuine fit between the candidate, territory and franchise model?

### Track Record

What does past experience suggest about future performance?

### Behaviour

How do they respond to pressure, coaching and accountability?

### Strengths

What capabilities align with your highest-performing franchisees?

**Track Record.** What does their experience actually predict about how they will perform under the demands of the role?

**Behaviour.** How do they make decisions, handle pressure, respond to coaching and operate when things get difficult?

**Strengths.** What do they bring that aligns with what your top performers have in common, and where will they need genuine support?

Each dimension is scored independently. The output is a single executive one-pager with a clear go, develop or decline recommendation,



The cost of a wrong-fit franchisee is rarely felt at recruitment. It shows up months later in performance, support demands and network disruption.

backed by a full profile and a calibrated interview question bank.

The franchisor walks into every conversation already knowing whether the candidate fits, and which questions matter for this specific person.

Less guesswork. Better franchisees. A network built on selection that works.



scott@zenconsult.co.uk





**BUSINESS MENTOR & COACH • Dave Christie**  
FLOURISH FOUNDRY

## Why One Thing at a Time Still Wins in Business

**Busy does not always mean moving forward. Sometimes the real progress starts when you stop adding more and finish the one thing that matters most.**

One of the repeated patterns I hear from clients, and see across small businesses, is not a lack of effort. It is not a lack of ideas either.

It is too many things staying open at once.

Different clients describe it in different ways. They

say the business feels heavy. They say they are working all the time but not moving enough. They say there is always something hanging over them. They say they are busy, but they do not feel on top of things.

When we dig into it, the pattern is often the same.

A new offer gets half built. A marketing plan gets started, then parked. A good conversation happens at an event, but the follow-up never gets sent. A pricing decision gets delayed. A proposal sits in drafts. A new system is introduced, but nobody really commits to it properly.

None of these things looks major on its own. But together they create drag.

That drag has an impact.

It slows decisions down. It chips away at confidence. It makes the business feel harder to lead than it should. It fills people's heads even when they are meant to be off. It creates that constant sense that you are carrying too much, yet still not getting to the work that matters most.

This is why I come back so often to a simple principle.

Focus. Finish. Move on.

I do not say that because it sounds neat. I say it because I have seen the cost when businesses do the opposite.

When pressure rises, many owners widen the list instead of narrowing it. They add more tasks. They jump between priorities. They try to keep everything moving at once. On the surface, it looks productive. In reality, it often means too many important things are left open for too long.

That is where momentum gets lost.

One thing at a time is not about pretending there is only one issue in

the business. It is about recognising that progress usually comes from finishing meaningful work, not from spreading your attention across twenty things at once.

The shift clients often need is not more energy. It is stronger decisions.

What matters most right now? What is causing the most drag? What has the biggest upside if it is properly dealt with? What needs finishing before anything else gets added?

That might be sorting an offer out so people understand what you actually do. It might be putting a follow-up process in place so opportunities stop being wasted. It might be finally addressing a pricing issue. It might be protecting time in the diary so your best hours are not constantly being given away. Whatever it is, the impact of finishing it is usually bigger than people expect.

Because once one important thing is properly finished, the business feels lighter. Decisions get easier. Confidence improves. Momentum returns.

That is what I keep seeing.

Most small business owners do not need more

ideas. They need fewer open loops, better focus, and the discipline to finish what matters before moving on.

That is where progress starts.

**Focus.  
Finish.  
Move on.**

**What needs finishing first?**

**Ask yourself:**

What matters most right now?

What is causing the most drag?

What has the biggest upside if it is properly dealt with?

What needs finishing before anything else gets added?



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**The shift clients often need is not more energy. It is stronger decisions.**

COACHING/AI • Steve Waugh

FOUNDER, GROWTHLIFT AND ISO 42001 LEAD AUDITOR



PUSH THROUGH YOUR CEILING

**OPTIMISING OWNER DEPENDENCY**  
BUILD A BUSINESS THAT RUNS WITHOUT YOU

**THE CHALLENGE**  
 • Everything depends on you  
 • Growth is limited  
 • Burnout & stress  
 • Hard to scale  
 • Business value is capped

**HIGH OWNER DEPENDENCY**  
 WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE  
 — Bottlenecks  
 — Constant firefighting  
 — Team waits for decisions  
 — No systems or processes  
 — You are the business

**THE SOLUTION**  
 Build strong systems  
 Empower your team  
 Delegate with clarity  
 Create repeatable processes  
 Focus on growth, not survival

**LOW OWNER DEPENDENCY**  
 WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE  
 Systems run the business  
 Team makes decisions  
 Scalable & profitable  
 More time & freedom  
 Business value grows

**THE BRIDGE - THE LIFT PROTOCOL™**

**L Locate** Find the binding constraint → **I Install** Build the system - embed automation & AI → **F Free** The business runs without you

**THE SHIFT** From working IN your business → to working ON it.

**THE FOUNDATION - THE SIX DOMAINS**

- 1 Owner Dependency** The master domain
- 2 Revenue & Profit** Grow profit, not just revenue
- 3 People & Capacity** Make output, same headcount
- 4 Process Maturity** Documented, not remembered
- 5 Systems & Tech** Connected - automated - AI
- 6 Compliance & Risk** De-risked, ready for sale

**THE RESULT** A business that runs without you — and is fit for exit on your terms.

GrowthLift.AI - The LIFT Protocol™ - Push through your ceiling

Most businesses don't stall because of the market. They stall because they were built around one person. Steve Waugh on the framework that moves an owner-managed business through its ceiling — and turns it into an asset worth selling.

Ask an owner-manager how things are going and you'll usually hear the same word. "Busy." Said like it's a badge of honour.

It rarely is. Busy is the symptom. The diagnosis most owners never get told is the harder one to hear: your business isn't busy — it's running through you.

Main Image: The LIFT Protocol — Locate, Install, Free. The engine that moves a business through its ceiling.

**Most owners spend years building the business and about ten minutes planning the way out. We build the exit into the business from the start.”**

When you've built something yourself, you've almost certainly built it around yourself. Every decision routes back to you. Every problem lands on your desk. The quotes wait for your sign-off, the team waits for your answer, and the whole thing moves at exactly the speed you can move. That's your ceiling. And no

amount of effort lifts it — because effort is what's propping it up.

Most owners reach for the obvious fix: hire more people. But more people means more to manage, more admin, thinner margins — and the ceiling doesn't move. It just gets more expensive to sit under.

Here's the part worth sitting with. This isn't a people problem, and it isn't an effort problem. It's structural. A self-built business caps at whatever one person can hold. That's not a flaw in the owner — it's simply what a business built around one person does. Name the pattern, not the person.

So the real question isn't "how do I work harder?" It's "how do I get the business to run without me in the room?" That's the work. And it has a method.

### THE CEILING ANALYSIS

Everything starts with a diagnosis, never a prescription. We call it the Ceiling Analysis. It scores the business across six domains — owner dependency, revenue and growth, people and capacity, process maturity, systems and technology, and compliance and risk — on a simple 1-to-5 maturity scale. The lowest score isn't a weakness to feel bad about. It's the binding constraint: the single thing holding everything else back. Fix the constraint and the whole system moves.

Owner dependency carries the most weight, because it's nearly always the first domino. When a business can't function without the owner present, every other improvement is built on sand.

### THE LIFT PROTOCOL

Once we know where the ceiling sits, the LIFT Protocol does the moving. LIFT stands for Locate, Install, Free. It maps against roughly 1,540 standard processes that run inside almost any business — the same library of process classifications used to benchmark the best-run companies in the world — and uses that map to find exactly where the load is stuck. Then, domain by domain, we redesign the workflow and install the right machinery to carry it. Sometimes that machinery is automation and AI. Sometimes it's just better structure. The diagnosis decides — never the other way round.

AI sits at the centre of how we do this — but governed, not bolted on. I hold an ISO 42001 Lead Auditor credential, which means AI gets deployed with the same discipline as anything else we touch. One of the cases I'm proudest of didn't use any AI at all; it was a structural redesign from start to finish. That's the point. We prescribe what the business needs, not what's fashionable to sell.

### FIX ONCE, BENEFIT TWICE

When it works, an owner feels six things. The business starts running without them in the room. Revenue grows — and, more importantly, so does profit. The team gets more done without headcount creeping up. The work becomes documented rather than remembered. The systems start talking to each other. And the whole thing becomes less fragile, less dependent on any single person.

Here's what most owners are never told. Every one of those fixes does a second job. The exact things capping the business today — the dependency, the undocumented process, the key-person risk, the lumpy revenue — are the same things that knock money off the price when you come to sell. A buyer pays a premium for a business that runs without its founder, and a discount for one that doesn't.

So you fix it once and benefit twice. You operate better now, and you build a runway to a business that's genuinely fit for exit later. Whether you sell in three years or thirty, you've turned a job that owns you into an asset worth something on the day you decide to walk away.

That's the real shift. From a business that runs through you, to one that runs without you, to one worth selling. Same diagnosis underneath. A far bigger destination on top.

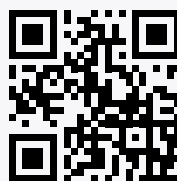
## THE METHOD AT A GLANCE

### Score → Map → Build → Grow

Measure where the business is across six domains, map the route through, build the fixes one domain at a time, then grow into the headroom they create.

### The six owner-outcomes:

- It runs without me in the room
- More work means more profit, not more chaos
- The team does more without the headcount creeping up
- It works because it's documented, not remembered
- The systems talk to each other
- It wouldn't stop if I were hit by a bus on Tuesday.



### Where's your ceiling — and what is it costing you?

If any of this sounds like your week, the first step is deliberately small. Steve runs a free fifteen-minute End Goal Review — no pitch, no follow-up sequence. Just one question worth answering honestly. [growthlift.ai](https://growthlift.ai)

# BUILDING A BUSINESS IS AN EXCITING JOURNEY, BUT IT CAN ALSO FEEL OVERWHELMING

**When business feels overwhelming, strategy gives you somewhere to begin — and a clearer way to decide what matters next.**

**B**uilding a business is an exciting journey, but it can also feel overwhelming - especially in the early stages when there are so many decisions to make. **One of the most important places to begin is with your strategy.** Before you focus on marketing, sales, or operations, you need clarity on what you actually want your business to achieve.

**Without a clear direction, it's easy to become busy rather than productive.** You may find yourself taking action but not necessarily moving forward in a meaningful way. This is why defining your goals early on is so powerful. It gives you a starting point - a foundation from which everything else can grow.

Taking the time to ask yourself, "What do I want to achieve?" may seem simple, but it is one of the most valuable exercises you can do as a business owner. Your answer doesn't need to be perfect, and it may evolve over time, but

having that initial clarity provides focus. It allows you to move forward with purpose rather than uncertainty.

Once you are clear on your goals, you can begin to plan your journey in a much more intentional way. Instead of reacting to opportunities or challenges as they arise, you are able to make decisions that align with your longer-term vision. This creates a sense of control and confidence, which is essential when navigating the ups and downs of business ownership.

A useful approach is to work backwards from your goal. Consider where you want your business to be in 12 months' time, three years' time, or even further ahead. Then break that down into smaller, manageable steps. What needs to happen this quarter? This month? This week? By doing this, your big vision becomes achievable, and you create a roadmap that keeps you moving forward consistently.

It's also important to remember that strategy doesn't have to be complicated. For many small and medium-sized businesses, the most effective strategies are often the simplest. What matters is that your plan is clear, realistic, and aligned with your goals. A straightforward strategy can help you stay focused, use your time and resources wisely, and identify what is really making a difference in your business.

## START WITH

### Ask yourself:

What do I want this

Where do I want to

What needs to hap

What needs my att

What action will m



## Sally Marshall

sally@steeryourbusiness.com



Another key part of your strategy is understanding what is working. Knowing where your leads come from, which products or services are most profitable, and what drives results allows you to make better decisions. When you have reliable information to guide you, you can focus your efforts on the areas that generate the greatest return and avoid wasting time on activities that don't move the needle.

reviewing your progress ensures you stay on track and gives you the opportunity to adjust your approach if needed. This flexibility is what allows businesses to remain resilient and continue moving forward, even in uncertain times.

Ultimately, your strategy is what connects your vision with your actions. It turns ideas into a structured plan and helps you move from where you are now to where you want to be. By starting with clarity around your goals and building a plan that supports them, you create a strong foundation for growth.

Starting a business may feel overwhelming, but with a clear strategy in place, you gain direction, confidence, and momentum. And from there, you can begin to build a business that not only succeeds but truly reflects what you set out to achieve.

Of course, strategy is not something you set once and forget.

As your business grows and the market evolves, your goals and plans may need to adapt. Regularly

**Without a clear direction, it's easy to become busy rather than productive.**

### TH STRATEGY

What business to achieve?

When to be in 12 months?

What to open this quarter?

What attention this month?

How to move me forward this week?

**A simple strategy should help you:**

- Stay focused.
- Use your time and resources wisely.
- Make better decisions.
- Understand what is working.
- Avoid wasting energy on the wrong things.
- Review and adapt as the business grows.



**Work with me**  
steeryourbusiness.com

NETWORKING • Mike Beasant

MESSAGE2MARKET



# ECHO + REFER

## Why Some Messages Travel... And Others Die

Last month, I wrote about The Referral Gap™ — the hidden space between what you think you communicate and what other people actually remember.

This month, I want to introduce two simple ideas that sit underneath it: ECHO™ and REFER™.

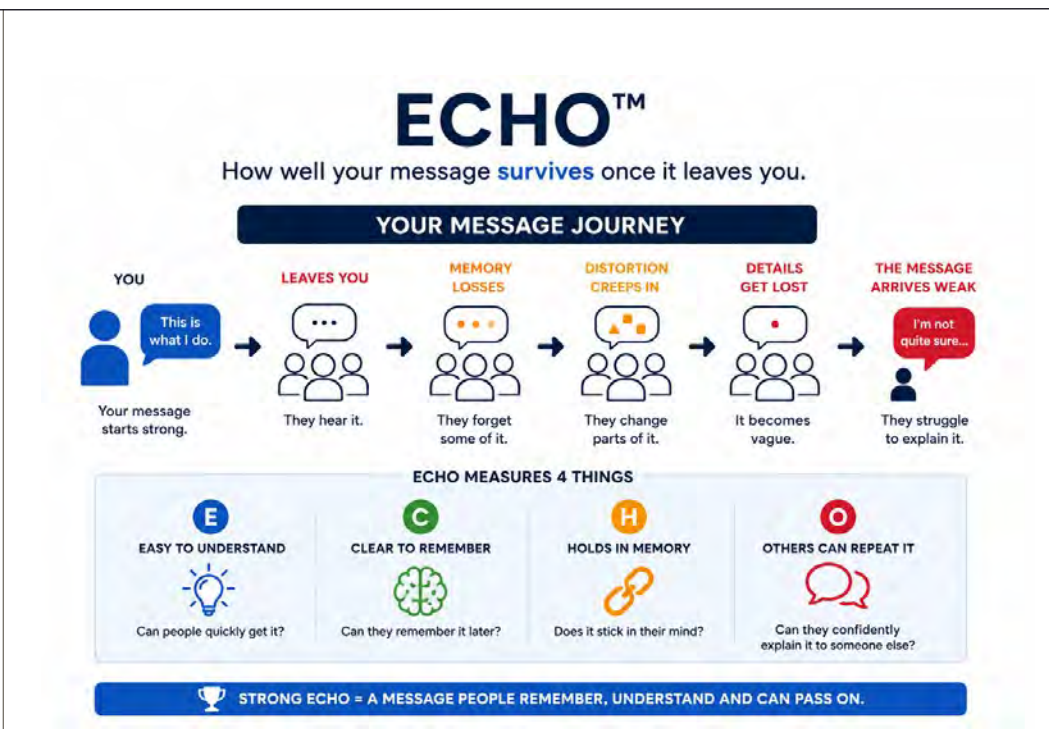
Because most businesses don't fail through lack of expertise. They struggle because their message collapses during human transmission.

Most business messages sound fine until someone else tries to repeat them.

That is the real test.

Many business owners think clarity means explaining better. It doesn't. True clarity means other people can explain you imperfectly and still get close enough.

Because real business growth does not usually happen through perfect



presentations. It happens through conversations, introductions, recommendations, networking, referrals, social proof and those everyday “you should speak to this person” moments.

And that is where many messages break.

**ECHO™**

**How well does your message travel through the minds and mouths of others?**

ECHO™ measures whether your message survives memory, repetition, distraction, paraphrasing and imperfect human conversation.

Referral partners are not marketers. They simplify, compress, half-remember and distort. That is normal.

The question is whether your message survives anyway.

Most don't.

**REFER™**

**How easily can someone recommend you with confidence?**

REFER™ measures whether your message creates conversational confidence, emotional relevance, clear referral triggers and repeatable introductions. Because vague positioning kills referrals.

Phrases like “business consultant”, “leadership expert” or “growth

# THE REFERRAL JOURNEY

When others try to talk about you, friction appears.  
That's where referrals weaken or disappear.



## REFER™ – How Easily Can People Repeat You?



“  
The strongest business message is not the one that sounds impressive when you explain it. It is the one that survives when other people repeat it.”

strategist” may sound professional, but they often create no mental picture, urgency, consequence or referral cue.

They are understandable, but they are not transferable.

That is a huge difference.

### The Modern Networking Problem

Today, your message is competing against WhatsApp, LinkedIn, inbox overload, stress, school runs, deadlines, social feeds and information fatigue.

People are overwhelmed.

This means your message is not only competing against other businesses. It is competing against human attention and human memory.

That is why so many good businesses remain invisible. Not because they lack value, but because their message dies before it spreads.

**Messages Create Access.  
Conversations Create Results.**

That is why Message2Market™ exists.

Not to create clever wording or polished marketing fluff, but to diagnose where meaning collapses, where memory breaks, where referrals stop travelling and where communication fails under real-world conditions.

The strongest business message is not the one that sounds impressive when you explain it.

It is the one that survives when other people repeat it.

### A Simple Test

Ask yourself this:

If I met your referral partners next Monday morning, what would they actually remember about you?

Not what you hope they remember.

What would realistically survive in their mind, and in their mouth, after a busy week?

That answer may tell you more about your future growth than your marketing budget ever will.

About Mike  
Mike Beasant is the founder of Message2Market™ and creator of the ECHO™ and REFER™ frameworks.

He helps founders, consultants and professional service businesses become easier to understand, remember and recommend.

Mike Beasant  
Sales Confidence  
Guy

Arrange a call



# Why your most valuable travel investment isn't the hotel

**In an age of comparison sites, online reviews and endless travel advice, finding information is easy. The real value comes from knowing what to trust, what to ignore and who to turn to when plans change. When planning a holiday, it's easy to focus on the obvious things: the hotel, the flights, the destination itself.**

But the most valuable part of any trip is often the part you can't see: the expertise behind the recommendations, the thought behind the itinerary, and the support that's there when things don't go to plan.

We live in a world where travel information is everywhere. Start researching online and suddenly you're juggling hotel reviews, comparison sites,

“  
**The challenge isn't finding information. It's knowing how to interpret it.**

destination videos and far more options than anyone realistically has time to evaluate.

Yet despite having more information than ever, many travellers feel less confident about their decisions.

A hotel might have fantastic reviews, but is it suited to your family? A flight connection may look fine on paper, but is it realistic

Most businesses measure clicks, views and leads. We measure what people remember, repeat and refer. Stop guessing. Start testing today.



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<https://message2marketpro.com>

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LMP15 is quickly developing into our main event of the month. It's your opportunity to meet new connections over a hour on your lunch break!



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Visibility, credibility and authority platform to promote businesses by showcasing knowledge and expertise and the problem you solve. Networking in print and a resource for information.



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[steeryourbusiness.com](http://steeryourbusiness.com)



when travelling with children? That highly recommended resort might be perfect for one traveller and completely wrong for another.

Travel Counsellor

**Emma West**

The challenge isn't finding information. It's knowing how to interpret it.

We seek expert advice when it comes to legal matters, finances and business strategy because experience helps us make better decisions. Travel is no different.

A great travel advisor doesn't simply make bookings. They help clients avoid costly mistakes, cut through the noise and make confident decisions. They understand the nuances that rarely

appear on a booking website and provide human support when circumstances change unexpectedly.

Because the most valuable travel investment isn't the hotel itself.

It's having someone in your corner before, during and after you travel.

emma.west@travelcounsellors.ae  
**+971 50 922 0898**



## Workplace Stress: It's Not Always What You Think



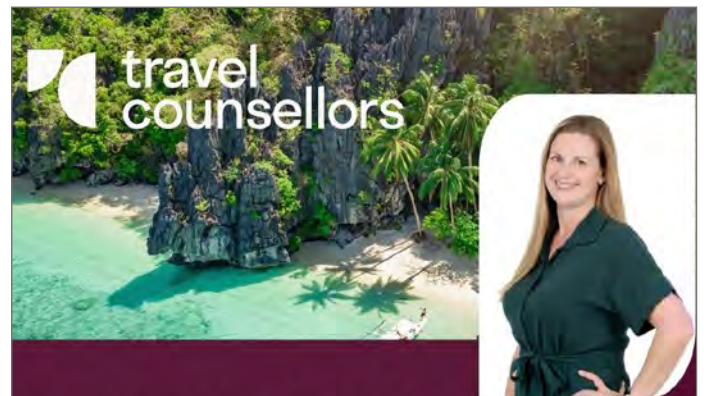
**Most business owners want to support their people. Many simply don't know where to start.**

Better Minds Better Business helps SME owners understand their responsibilities, identify workplace stress risks and create healthier, more productive workplaces.

Helping SME owners build wellbeing into their business so their people and profits thrive.



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## Expertise behind every journey.

Travel should be exciting, not overwhelming. I'm here to provide expert advice, seamless planning and human support.

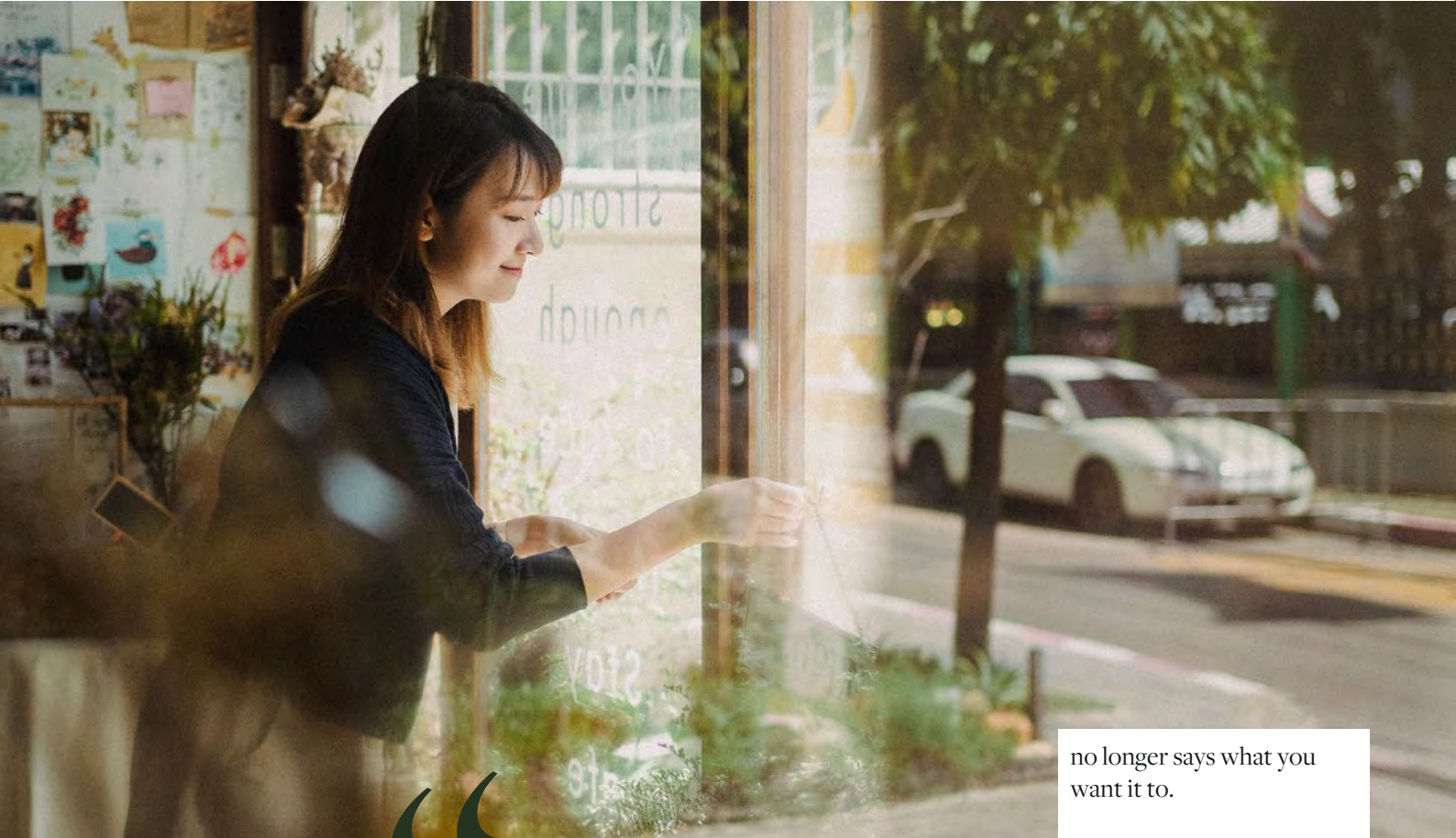
*Emma West*

TRAVEL COUNSELLOR

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# When Was the Last Time You Looked at Your Brand Through Your Customers' Eyes?



As business owners, we're incredibly close to what we do. We know the years of experience behind our decisions, the standards we've built and the care that goes into every product or service. Our customers don't. They can only judge what they see. Stepping back to look at your business through fresh eyes can reveal opportunities that are almost impossible to spot from the inside.

“  
**Your customers can only judge the business they can see, not the business you know you've built.**

**You can't experience your own business for the first time.**

Have you ever apologised for your website before sending someone the link? Or found yourself saying, “It needs

updating,” before they've even looked at it?

Perhaps you've been meaning to refresh your LinkedIn profile, replace an old brochure or finally rewrite the homepage that

no longer says what you want it to.

If so, you're in good company.

It happens because we're so close to our own businesses that we stop experiencing them the way everyone else does. We know how much we've learned over the years, why our prices have changed and the care, thought and experience behind every decision we make.

Our customers don't have that insight.

They simply experience the business we place in front of them.

Which makes one question worth asking:

If you discovered your business for the first time today, what impression would it leave?

### Every customer is filling in the gaps.

Long before someone picks up the phone or sends an enquiry, they're forming an impression.

Does this business feel trustworthy?

Does it feel established?

Can I picture myself working with them?

Can I see why they're worth the investment?

Those questions are rarely answered by one thing alone. They're answered by the experience your business creates as a whole.

Your website, photography, proposals, emails and social media all contribute to that picture. Individually they may seem like small details, but together they're telling a story about your business long before you've had a chance to tell it yourself.

The challenge is that familiarity changes the way we see our own business. You no longer notice the phrases on your homepage because you've read them hundreds of times. You

don't question the things that have become part of the furniture, and you may not realise how many gaps you're filling in on behalf of your customers simply because you already know the story behind your business.

### Looking the part isn't the same as telling the right story.

One of the biggest misconceptions about branding is that it's about looking more professional.

Of course professionalism matters, but it's only part of the picture.

A good brand doesn't simply tell people what you do. It helps people understand what makes your business worth choosing.

The businesses we remember aren't always the loudest. They're the ones that leave us with a clear sense of who they are, what they stand for and why they feel different.

The value is already there. Your brand's job is to help the right people recognise it.

### Why an outside perspective matters.

One of the hardest things to judge objectively is your own business.

You're simply too close to it.

You already know the story behind every decision, every



**A good brand doesn't simply tell people what you do. It helps them understand what makes your business worth choosing.**

improvement and every success. Your customers don't. They experience your business exactly as they find it, bringing their own expectations and assumptions along the way. That's why stepping back and seeing your business through fresh eyes can be so valuable. Before investing in a new website, a rebrand or more marketing, it's worth understanding the impression your business is already creating.

### Before you make your next marketing decision...

Before investing in a new website.

Before refreshing your branding.

Before spending more on marketing.

Pause for a moment and ask yourself:

**If someone discovered my business today, would they see the business I've worked so hard to build?**

## A Fresh Pair of Eyes

**Brand Second Opinion** is an experienced, independent review of how your business is coming across.

Together we'll look at the impression your business creates before you've even had a conversation, identifying what's already working, where expectations could be strengthened and whether the business you've become is reflected in what your customers see today.

Not every business needs a rebrand.

Sometimes a few carefully considered changes are all that's needed.



**Sam Hamlyn**

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# Why the ‘Perfect App’ Still Isn’t Fixing Your Workload

Before you download another productivity tool, take a step back. The right app can only help when the process behind it is clear.



You’ve done it. I think we’ve all done it.

You find the app, set it up on a rainy Sunday afternoon, and wait for the transformation. Six weeks later you’re feeling just as overwhelmed as you were before. So you start looking for another app. Or you start a thread on social media and get bombarded with 73 new tool suggestions...

Here’s the uncomfortable truth: the app was never the problem.

No tool can fix an unclear process. You can’t automate chaos. You can only systematise what is clear, and that process has to happen before you touch a single app.

Next time you’re tempted by a new tool, do this first:



**Running a business... or is it running you?**

- Are your days slipping away before you get the **IMPORTANT** work done?
- Is your to do list growing faster than you can tick things off?
- Is your tech costing you more time than it saves?

Simple Systems, Big Smiles. More Time.

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**INTEGRAL**

1. Map the process on paper. What actually happens in your business right now, step by step? Not what should happen. What does happen. Where does information come in, where does it go, and where does it fall through cracks?
2. Identify the real problem. Is it that tasks get forgotten? That clients don't hear from you at the right moment? That you can't see what's happening at a glance? Name the actual problem before you go looking for a solution.
3. Then (and only then) find the tool. Once the process is clear, the right tool becomes obvious. And it'll actually work, because it's been given something clear to do.

“  
**You can't automate chaos.**”

The right app in the wrong system is still the wrong answer.

Sort the system first, then finding the right app will be the easy bit.



Big Smiley Face Ltd.



Louise Purvis  
 info@bigsmileyface.co.uk  
 www.bigsmileyface.com



What are your customers seeing before they've even spoken to you?

Your brand is shaping first impressions long before you have a conversation.

**Not every business needs a rebrand.**

Sometimes a fresh pair of experienced eyes is all it takes.

**Brand Second Opinion**

An experienced, independent review of your brand, with honest, practical recommendations you can act on.



Scan to book your Brand Second Opinion.

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# 5 LESSONS IN AI THAT EVERY SMALL BUSINESS SHOULD LEARN BEFORE WASTING TIME OR MONEY

AI has the potential to transform small businesses, but only when it's applied to the right problems. Angus Hey shares five practical lessons to help business owners avoid common pitfalls and make smarter use of AI.

AI can save your business time, money and stress. But it can also waste all three.

For small businesses, there's a risk of using the wrong tools, trusting them too quickly or expecting them to fix difficult problems.

At Vereus, I've spent four years building AI systems around complex challenges for hundreds of businesses, so I've seen what works, what fails and what businesses should look out for.

Here are five lessons every small business should learn before investing time and money in AI.

## 1. Start with the business, not the shiny tool

Do not start by asking: "What AI tool should I use?"

Start by understanding what you're trying to

achieve. Are you trying to win more customers, save time, improve follow-up, reduce admin or make better decisions?

AI has the greatest impact when it works towards something that really matters to the business.

Action: List your top three business priorities, write down possible actions for each, score them by impact, effort and urgency, then ask: "Where could AI help us do this faster, better or more consistently?"

## 2. Use AI assistants as an extra pair of hands

For many small businesses, tools like ChatGPT are the easiest place to start.

They can act as a fast assistant, helping to draft applications, improve proposals, summarise documents, plan campaigns,

prepare meeting notes, analyse feedback or simply bounce ideas around.

Used well, AI assistants can speed up the work that slows you down.

## 3. Stop expecting AI to generate ROI by itself

In most small businesses, AI will not magically create revenue on its own. Its real value is usually in helping the people inside the business perform better.

**A small AI win that solves a real problem is much better than a big idea that never gets properly used.**



## Angus Hey

FOUNDER & CEO, VEREUS AI

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Example: If it takes 20 minutes of research to deliver a 20-minute sales pitch, then automating the research gives your sales team more time to make calls and create more revenue.

So rather than asking what ROI you will get from using an AI platform, a better question is: “How can AI help our people generate more ROI?”

### 4. Start small, but make it meaningful

You do not need to automate your entire business overnight. In fact, this can be counter-productive.

Instead, pick one useful problem, such as slow

enquiries, messy admin, inconsistent marketing, time-consuming research or poor follow-up.

A small AI win that solves a real problem is much better than a big AI idea that never gets properly used.

### 5. Be careful, because AI can sound right when it is wrong

AI often writes with confidence, even when it has misunderstood something, made an assumption or got a fact wrong.

So be diligent. Check important information. Review anything customer-facing. Be especially careful with legal, financial, technical or reputation-sensitive work.

At Vereus, this is exactly what we help businesses do: identify where AI can make a real commercial difference, then build practical and impactful systems around the goals, challenges and opportunities that matter most.

AI does not have to be flashy. It should help your people work better, your business move faster and your ideas turn into measurable progress.

## BEFORE YOU INVEST IN AI, ASK YOURSELF:

- ✓ What business problem am I trying to solve?
- ✓ Will this save time or improve results?
- ✓ Will my team actually use it?
- ✓ Can I measure whether it's working?
- ✓ Am I prepared to check AI's output before relying on it?

1  
big AI  
used.



## WHY YOUR FACEBOOK ADS ARE NOT WORKING!... AND IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR BUDGET

Many businesses assume Facebook ads fail because they don't spend enough money. In reality, the biggest problem is often much simpler: they're advertising the wrong message to the wrong mindset. Here's why.

FOUNDER, GOVETO

### Dean Vinyard

Every week I speak to service business owners who have tried Facebook and Instagram ads and written them off as a waste of money. They spent a few hundred pounds, got a handful of clicks and a couple of tyre-kickers, and decided that ads simply do not work for their type of business.

I understand why they feel that way. But they are almost always wrong about the reason.

It was never the budget. It was never how the ad looked. It was not even the platform. The problem was that they were advertising in completely the wrong way, and nobody ever told them.

**It is not about money or how polished the ad is**

The only thing that makes someone stop scrolling is seeing something directly relevant to a problem they already have.

You could spend five thousand pounds on the most beautiful ad your designer has ever produced, and if it talks about the wrong thing in the wrong way it will fail. Meanwhile a simple photo taken on a

phone, paired with honest and direct words, can quietly outperform it. That happens every single day.

The reason is simple. People scrolling are not looking at your ad. They are

looking at their feed. You have about one second to interrupt that, and the only thing that earns the stop is someone seeing their own problem staring back at them. Not your logo. Not your years in business. Not the fact that you are family run and fully insured. Their problem.

### Start with the problem, then the offer

Before you write a single word, get crystal clear on the exact problem your customer has right before they need you. Not a vague version of it. The real, lived moment. Speak to that moment first and you have earned the right to be heard.

Then package your solution into an offer so clear and so low risk that saying no feels harder than saying yes. Remove the fear. Remove the guesswork. Make the next step small and obvious. Problem, solution, no-brainer offer. Get those

## THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU SPEND £1 ON FACEBOOK ADS

- ✓ What specific problem is my customer experiencing?
- ✓ Does my advert describe that problem or simply list my services?
- ✓ Is the next step easy, low risk and obvious?

If you can't answer "yes" to these, rethink the advert before increasing your budget.

three right and even cheap ads start to work. Get them wrong and no budget on earth will save you.

### Or simply let someone handle all of it

That is the honest version of what works. The catch is that doing it properly takes time you probably do not have, plus a fair bit of trial and error most owners would happily skip.

That is where I come in. We run the ads, build your landing page, qualify every lead, follow them up, nurture the ones who are

not ready yet, and hand you people who are ready to buy. You just do what you do best.

Here is my offer. We work for free until we get your first appointment. Then it is just £697 a month if you wish to continue. The only thing you cover is a minimum of £35 a day in ad spend, paid straight to Facebook, never through me.

The ad that speaks directly to that moment will always outperform the ad that lists your services.

Dean is the founder of GoVeto, a done-for-you lead generation agency helping service businesses build consistent, predictable pipelines of qualified customers.

An offer for readers of this magazine I have kept a small number of spots open for readers of this magazine only. Scan the QR code and WhatsApp me the word START. We will have a quick, no pressure chat to see if it is a good fit, and if it is, we begin straight away.



Problem, solution, no-brainer offer. Get those three right and even cheap ads start to work.

# Workplace Stress: It's Not Always What You Think

Workplace stress isn't always caused by excessive workloads. For many small businesses, it stems from change, uncertainty or a lack of support. Kathy Hayman explains why recognising stress early can benefit both people and performance.

When people hear the phrase "workplace stress", they often picture an employee overwhelmed by workload. While that can certainly be a factor, stress in small businesses is often far more complex.

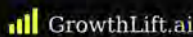
It can occur when a talented employee is promoted into a management role without the training or confidence they need to succeed. It can arise during periods of business change, when communication is

Workplace wellbeing is not about fixing problems after they occur. It is about recognising potential stressors early.

unclear or uncertainty increases. It can also happen when personal challenges outside work affect an employee's wellbeing, attendance or performance.

Many business owners genuinely want to help but are unsure what their responsibilities are or how best to support someone who may be struggling or experiencing workplace stress.

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Steve Waugh  
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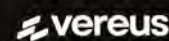
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Helping established businesses reflect the value they've spent years building, so the right customers recognise they're in the right place.



Sam Hamlyn +44 7557 278 969  
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Vereus is a growth focused AI Agency. We combine **innovation** with **strategy** to unlock new opportunities, deliver measurable impact and revolutionise your business.



Angus Hey  
angus@vereus.co.uk  
vereus.co.uk



The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recognises work-related stress as a significant workplace issue and is placing increasing

Founder, Better Minds Better Business

**Kathy Hayman**


emphasis on employers identifying and managing stress risks. Like any other workplace risk, stress should be assessed, monitored and addressed before it begins affecting people and business performance.

The good news is that managing workplace stress does not need to be complicated. Simple actions such as providing appropriate training, holding regular conversations, reviewing workloads and creating a supportive culture can make a significant difference.

The most successful businesses understand that workplace wellbeing is not about fixing problems after they occur. It is about recognising potential stressors early and putting practical support in place so that both people and businesses can thrive.



Helping SME owners build wellbeing into their business so their people and profits thrive.



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- Our telemarketing team will fill your diary with qualified appointments
- Transforming data into genuine sales conversations

No scattergun marketing. No wasted spend. No questionable data sources.

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**If your pipeline needs attention, let's talk.**  
Because consistent growth rarely comes from waiting.

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# The Importance of Up-to-Date Employment Policies and Contracts

The Employment Rights Act 2025 introduces significant changes for employers, making this the ideal time to review employment contracts, workplace policies and staff handbooks. Keeping documentation up to date isn't just about legal compliance - it's about protecting your business and your people.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 represents one of the most significant overhauls of UK employment law in recent decades. The changes materially increase employee protections and place greater expectations on employers to manage employment relationships fairly, consistently and transparently.

Against this backdrop, employers who rely on outdated contracts or policies may find themselves operating in



**Outdated or poorly implemented policies can undermine an otherwise defensible decision.**

a way that is no longer legally defensible.

Clear and accessible HR policies are vital for

every organisation. They ensure legal compliance, consistency, and employee understanding across all aspects of

human resource management.

Whether it's a bullying and harassment policy, health and safety policy or disciplinary policy, having effective HR policies in place protects your business and your people. HR consultants like Eclipse HR can support your strategy with tailored guidance and documentation.

### Contracts of Employment: Why Updates Are Essential

Employment contracts set the foundation of the employment relationship. As employee rights expand, contractual documentation must keep pace to ensure clarity, compliance and consistency.

### Shorter Qualifying Period for Unfair Dismissal

One of the most significant forthcoming changes is the reduction of the qualifying period for

ordinary unfair dismissal from two years to six months (expected to take effect in 2027).

This means:

- Many more employees will acquire protection much earlier
- Probation and performance management processes will be subject to closer scrutiny
- Poorly drafted contracts or vague probation clauses will carry greater risk

Employers should ensure that contracts clearly set out:

- Probationary periods and review processes
- Performance expectations
- Termination provisions aligned with fair process

**Statutory Sick Pay and Family Leave: Policy Alignment Is Critical**

From April 2026, SSP became payable from the first day of sickness absence and the lower earnings limit was removed, widening eligibility considerably.

- Sickness absence policies must be reviewed to ensure: Correct payment triggers are reflected
- Managers understand revised obligations
- Absence management processes remain fair and consistent

**IS YOUR HR DOCUMENTATION UP TO DATE?**

- Employment contracts
- Staff handbook
- Bullying & harassment policy
- Disciplinary procedur
- Grievance procedure
- Sickness absence policy
- Family leave policy
- Health & Safety policy

**Day-One Family Leave Rights**

Paternity leave and unpaid parental leave became day-one rights from April 2026, removing existing service requirements

Family-friendly policies must therefore:

- Reflect new eligibility thresholds
- Clarify notice requirements
- Avoid outdated references to qualifying service

**Stronger Duties to Prevent Workplace Harassment**

The Employment Rights Act 2025 strengthens employer obligations to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment and third-party harassment. Employers will be required to take “all reasonable steps” to prevent such conduct, rather than simply responding after the fact.

This has direct implications for:

- Anti-harassment policies
- Bullying and dignity at work policies
- Training frameworks for managers and staff

Outdated policies that are not actively implemented or reinforced through training may offer little protection in the event of a claim.

**Increased Tribunal Risk and Longer Time Limits**

Another important reform is the extension of employment tribunal time limits to six months for most claims (expected from 2026).

This change:

- Increases the window for claims
- Heightens the importance of accurate records and documentation
- Makes procedural fairness even more critical

Up-to-date disciplinary, capability, grievance and absence policies provide a vital framework for demonstrating fair treatment and compliance.

**Why Policies Must Reflect Practice**

Having compliant policies is only part of the picture. Employers must also ensure that:

- Policies reflect how the organisation actually operates
- Managers understand and apply them consistently
- Policies are reviewed regularly and updated as the law evolves

Tribunals place significant weight on whether employers follow their own procedures. Outdated or poorly implemented policies can undermine an otherwise defensible decision.

**How Eclipse HR Can Help**

For businesses seeking to establish clear guidelines, ensure legal compliance, best practice and promote consistency across their handbook, employment policies and practices, get in touch to talk with a member of our team today!



[www.eclipsehr.uk](http://www.eclipsehr.uk)

# Business Directory

 <p>Azets AZETS</p>	 <p>bizval bizval</p>	 <p>bluebox bluebox INTEGRATION Simplified Telecoms &amp; IT</p>	 <p>CH Accountancy Accountancy Ltd</p>
 <p>eTalent eTalent SMARTER RECRUITMENT</p>	 <p>Flourish Flourish FOUNDRY More Progress, All In.</p>	 <p>Go Beyond Travel Co. Go Beyond Travel Co.</p>	 <p>GoVeto</p>
 <p>Men Forge Forward</p>	 <p>Message2 Market MESSAGE 2MARKET</p>	 <p>Novlette Matthews MARY KAY</p>	 <p>Red &amp; White Media RED &amp; WHITE MEDIA</p>
 <p>UAC Team UAC TEAM</p>	 <p>Vereus vereus</p>	 <p>Wildsmith Studio Wildsmith STUDIO</p>	 <p>WIBN wibn WOMEN IN BUSINESS NETWORK</p>
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# UPCOMING EVENTS



SEP  
9

Eastbourne Business Show



SEP  
30

Bromley Business Show  
Oakley House



OCT  
22

ZCLive  
Maidstone, Kent



NOV  
5

Tunbridge Wells Business  
Show, Assembly Hall,  
Tunbridge Wells



NOV  
11

Great British Business Show  
Excel London



NOV  
12

Great British Business Show  
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