The Efficiency Conductor

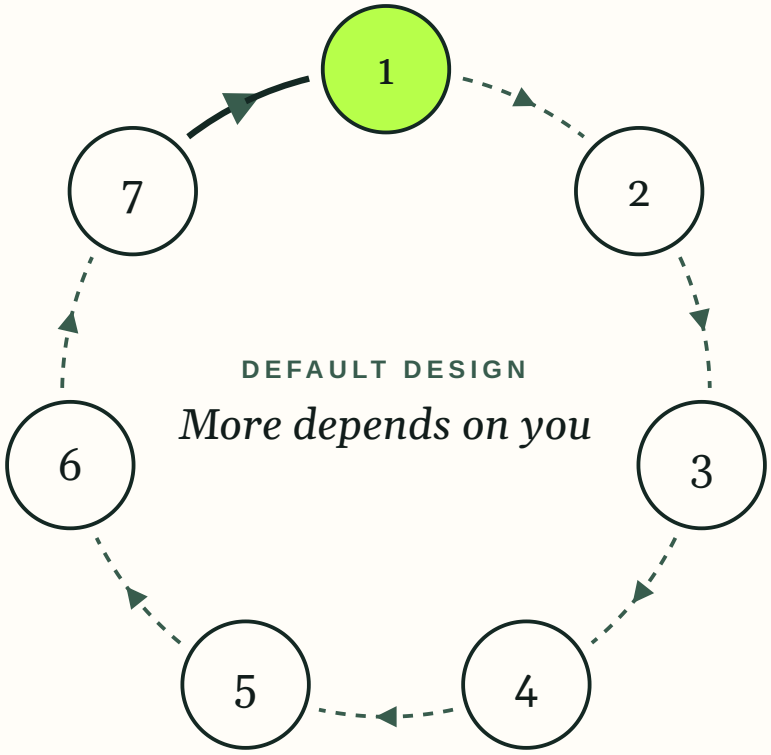
The Dependency Loop *Check*

21 questions. 15 minutes. One place to start.

For owners of established businesses who are ready for it to need less of them.

THE DEPENDENCY LOOP

Each turn makes the *next more likely.*



01 Owner says yes

02 Complexity increases

03 Decisions reach the owner

04 Owner becomes indispensable

05 Capacity shrinks

06 No room to redesign

07 Less freedom

And then the next yes comes faster.

DEFAULT DESIGN

Nobody sets out to build a business that *runs through them.*

You start with a yes. A customer wants something a little different, and you say yes, because that's how you built this thing.

Then another yes, and another, and every one adds a product, an exception or a customer who needs special handling. The more complex it gets, the more the questions come back to you. And because you're the one with the answers, you become the one everything depends on.

Then there's no time left to fix it.

That's the loop. It's the default design. If nobody designs the business differently, this is what happens.

I've sat in the seat. Over the last 10 to 12 years I've run or been second in command at several businesses, and I've worked myself out of 4 to 6 jobs by building the people, process and technology to replace me. The owners I work with now have built something good. They just don't want to be the person holding it all together forever.

This check won't fix all of it. It'll show you where your business still leans on you most, and give you one way to change that this week.

Here's the good news about a loop. You don't have to fix all 7 turns at once. *Break one link and the whole thing slows down.*

HOW TO SCORE

15 minutes. *Honest answers.*

Answer for how things actually run, not how they look on the org chart.

0	1	2
Rarely true for us	Sometimes true	That's us

Circle one number for each statement, then add up each turn. Every turn scores from 0 to 6.

If you're stuck between two numbers, pick the one you'd say with your leadership team in the room.

Some of these might sting a little. That's useful. Your feelings about it are valid. You don't always have to believe them.

> **Want a sharper read?** Hand a blank copy to one leader on your team and have them score it too. The places where your scores don't match are worth a conversation all on their own.

Took the check online? Your scores are already on your results page. Use the pages that follow for the stories and all 7 break points.

TURN 01 OF 07

01 Owner says yes

A customer wants something a little custom. Someone on the team wants to try a new service. A new opportunity lands in your inbox. You say yes, because yes is how you built this.

When a new opportunity, product or customer request comes in, I'm usually the one who decides.	0	1	2
We've added products, services, locations or customer types in the last 2 years without changing who runs them.	0	1	2
There's no written filter for what we say yes to. It lives in my head.	0	1	2

TURN 01 TOTAL (0 TO 6) ____

FROM THE SEAT

At a manufacturer I work with, the leadership team had a pile of rush orders. So many that the word "rush" stopped meaning anything. Every one of them started as a reasonable yes to a customer. Somebody did the math out loud in the meeting, and it came to about ten rush orders per manager in the room.

A manager proposed a rule: once a rush order passes 48 hours, one named manager owns it until it ships. Good rule. But we held it for one step first, and sorted which orders had a real customer waiting and which were just restocking. Then we assigned owners.

Urgency works like a budget. Spend it on everything and you've spent it on nothing.

BREAK POINT

The yes filter (10 minutes)

Write down 3 questions every new yes has to pass. A starting set: Does this fit where we're going in 3 years? Who owns it, by name, and it isn't me? What do we stop doing to make room? The next yes goes through the filter, and someone other than you answers it first.

TURN 02 OF 07

02 Complexity increases

Every yes adds something. A product line, an exception, a customer who needs special handling. Nobody went back and redesigned how work moves through the business, so the new stuff runs on workarounds and people's memory.

We have exceptions and special cases that only one or two people know how to handle.	0	1	2
When we grew, we added people and work before we added process.	0	1	2
If I asked 3 leaders to draw how an order or project moves through the business, I'd get 3 different drawings.	0	1	2

TURN 02 TOTAL (0 TO 6) ____

FROM THE SEAT

A mentor of mine runs weekends for couples who own practices and companies. He told me about one couple. One spouse was all growth, more of everything. The other was supportive, and clearly stretched. He asked her one question: *"If we doubled this, would that feel like success for you?"*

She said no.

It didn't kill the ambition. They chose 12 months of steady, deliberate work, with a real decision point at the end. So here's the question I'd ask you. If the business doubled and nothing about how it runs changed, would your life get twice as good, or would your problems get twice as big?

BREAK POINT

The two-drawing test (10 minutes each)

Pick one process that touches revenue. Ask two people who do it to write the steps on one page, separately. Compare them side by side. Every place they don't match is where the complexity is hiding.

TURN 03 OF 07

03 Decisions reach the owner

Complexity creates gray areas. Gray areas create questions. And the questions find their way to you: your door, your phone, your texts at 9 at night.

I approve spending, pricing or payments that someone else could approve with clear guidelines.	0	1	2
My team brings me problems to solve more often than decisions they've already made.	0	1	2
When I'm out for a day, decisions wait for me to get back.	0	1	2

TURN 03 TOTAL (0 TO 6) ____

FROM THE SEAT

The owner of a manufacturer I work with was still signing every check. Every week he was figuring out who to pay and when, signing printed checks, then watching receivables. No budget. No cash flow forecast. No dashboards. We had a glorified bookkeeper and an outside firm that did taxes.

So I brought in a fractional CFO I trust, and we rebuilt it. We hired an AR specialist, an AP specialist and an actual controller. We built budgets, a cash flow forecast, dashboards and controls, started cycle counting inventory for the first time, and went from compiled financials to audited ones.

Now he says, *"I don't need to be involved in that. I know you guys got that."*

BREAK POINT

The decision log (5 minutes a day for a week)

Write down every decision that reaches you for 5 working days. On Friday, sort each one into three piles: only I can make this, someone could make this with guidelines, someone should already own this. The second and third piles are your first handoffs.

TURN 04 OF 07

04 Owner becomes indispensable

You hold the key relationships, the history and the know-how. People have titles and areas, but you're still the one making sure all the parts work together.

Our biggest customer or vendor relationships run through me personally.	0	1	2
Key know-how lives in people's heads, mine included, more than in written processes.	0	1	2
If I stepped away for 30 days, something important would break or stall.	0	1	2

TURN 04 TOTAL (0 TO 6) ____

FROM THE SEAT

This loop doesn't only run through owners. At a plant I help run, we solved a production problem about 18 months ago. The fix lived in one trained operator's head and never made it into an SOP. When he left, the problem came back.

Anywhere one person is the only one who knows, the same loop is turning.

BREAK POINT

The 30-day test (10 minutes)

Write at the top of a page: "If I disappeared for 30 days, what breaks first?" List 5 things. Next to each, write the name of the person who'd need to know what you know. Pick one, and record a 30-minute walkthrough with that person this week. A recording is a fine first draft of a process.

TURN 05 OF 07

05 Capacity shrinks

Your calendar fills up with other people's problems. The work only you can do, your highest and best use, whatever that is for you, gets pushed to nights and weekends.

More of my week goes to reacting than to the work I'm best at.	0	1	2
I sit in recurring meetings where I'm not really needed.	0	1	2
There are recurring tasks that only get done because I remember to do them.	0	1	2

TURN 05 TOTAL (0 TO 6) ____

FROM THE SEAT

We had a standing leadership meeting that pulled a lot of people in every week. We cut it to 3 people and only call it when there's a single stuck problem to solve. That gave back about 9 hours a week across the team.

Another one: a CRO I work with spent about 15 minutes per report, every week, building reports and the emails that went with them. We set up an agent that builds them from a couple of key inputs. That cut 90 to 95% of the work, and one less thing depends on her remembering it.

BREAK POINT

The calendar sort (10 minutes)

Pull up last week's calendar. Mark every block: only me, could be someone else, didn't need to happen. Then list every recurring task you only do because you remember to, and ask four questions of each: What does it actually need from me? Does it still need to exist? Can a tool do it? Who else could own it?

TURN 06 OF 07

06 No room to redesign

You know the business needs to be built differently. A leadership team that leads. An actual finance department. Systems that are written down. But you're always working in the business, so there's no time to work on it. Issues simmer for too long, and they never really get solved.

We talk about the same problems in meetings month after month.	0	1	2
I don't have a protected block each week to work on the business.	0	1	2
Improvement projects start strong and stall when things get busy.	0	1	2

TURN 06 TOTAL (0 TO 6) ☐

FROM THE SEAT

When we started triaging problems at the plant, we didn't start with the biggest one. We started with the low-impact, low-difficulty fixes.

I'd rather solve 10 easy problems than 1 hard one at the start, because the momentum and the time you get back are what pay for the hard ones.

BREAK POINT

The simmer list (10 minutes)

List every issue that's been around for 90 days or more. Mark each one high or low impact, and easy or hard. Solve the 3 easiest this week. Then put one 90-minute block on your calendar, every week, for the hard ones.

TURN 07 OF 07

07 Less freedom

You can take a vacation. You're just checking your phone the whole time, wondering if something's on fire and whether it'll all be okay when you get back. Keep it, step back or sell well: right now none of those feels like a choice you get to make.

On vacation, I check in every day, or the team calls me with things.	0	1	2
If a buyer looked at the business today, they'd see a business that depends on me.	0	1	2
Some days the business owns me more than I own it.	0	1	2

TURN 07 TOTAL (0 TO 6) ____

FROM THE SEAT

I think burnout is a bad reason to sell. A business that runs through its owner is worth less to a buyer, and selling while you're worn out is the worst time to negotiate.

Fix the machine first. Then choose: keep it, step back or sell well.

BREAK POINT

The 3-day test (10 minutes)

Pick 3 days in the next 60 days to be fully off. No email, no texts. Write down what the team would need from you to make that work. That list is your roadmap, and the 3 days are your deadline.

YOUR LOOP

Add it up. *Find your turn.*

	TURN	SHADE ONE BOX PER POINT	SCORE
01	Owner says yes	☐☐☐☐☐☐	☐
02	Complexity increases	☐☐☐☐☐☐	☐
03	Decisions reach the owner	☐☐☐☐☐☐	☐
04	Owner becomes indispensable	☐☐☐☐☐☐	☐
05	Capacity shrinks	☐☐☐☐☐☐	☐
06	No room to redesign	☐☐☐☐☐☐	☐
07	Less freedom	☐☐☐☐☐☐	☐
	Total (0 to 42)		☐

Where to start: circle your highest-scoring turn. That's where your business leans on you most, and its break point is your first move. If two turns tie, start with the earlier one, since it feeds the turns after it.

HOW TO READ YOUR RESULT

Read the turns *before the total.*

Your total runs from 0 to 42. Use it as a marker to compare against yourself in 90 days, not as a grade.

A low total can still hide one turn doing a lot of the damage. That's why the check points you at a turn, not a number.

Scored 5 or 6 on a turn?

That turn is driving the business. Start there this month.

Scored 3 or 4?

You feel it on Tuesdays. This is the cheapest time to break it, before it becomes how the business works.

Scored 0 to 2 everywhere?

You've built real independence. Protect it as you grow, because every new yes is a chance for the loop to speed back up.

Every turn high?

Nobody chose this. It's the default design, and default designs can be changed. You'll want more than one break point, and probably some help.

Business performance is a separate check. Less of you in the business is progress only when the business keeps meeting its commitments: customers, quality and the numbers.

Whatever your number, you only need one link to start. Break the turn you circled, then *score it again in 90 days.*

The Dependency Loop Check is a coaching tool, not a validated assessment of business value or of readiness to step away or sell. It reflects your own answers.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LOOP

That's when the loop turns into *a flywheel.*

You now know where your business leans on you most, and you have one way to change that this week. Do that first.

Here's the harder part. Breaking one link once is the easy piece. Keeping all 7 from speeding back up, while the business keeps growing, takes the whole machine: a leadership team that actually leads, an actual finance department, sales and marketing that don't depend on your relationships, systems that are written down, and an operating rhythm that holds the team accountable without you in every meeting.

Every handoff gives you room to build the next one. The business needs less of you, and you get to spend more time in your genius zone, whatever that is for you. And you get your options back. Keep it, step back or sell well.

One next step. A Next Chapter Call is 30 minutes. We look at your score together, talk about the turn you circled and what's behind it in your business, and what keeping it, stepping back or selling well could look like for you.

Book your Next Chapter Call

scheduler.zoom.us/zachhoskins/your-next-chapter-call

Want to go deeper after that? This check looks at one thing: how much the business depends on you. The Value Creation X-Ray looks at all six connected systems (strategy, marketing, sales, operations, finance and leadership), plus a full owner-dependence assessment. You leave with the 3 to 5 priorities that matter most and a 90-day plan.

Let's talk about your options.