

NASHVILLE ENTREPRENEUR CENTER · FOUNDER COHORT

Coaches Don't Win Games Players Do

*Building a high-performance team that runs
without you.*

Dr. Michael Burcham

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Is this company run by a team, *or by a person?*

Every future investor will ask. Every future buyer will ask it too.
The answer decides whether your business can scale beyond you.

YOUR HOMEWORK

You were asked to think about two questions.

QUESTION ONE

What happens without me?

You disappear for 12 months. No calls, no decisions, no relationships, no problem-solving. What breaks first, and what does that reveal about the team you have built?

QUESTION TWO

Would you rehire the team?

You rebuild from scratch tomorrow. Same business, same customers, no obligation to keep anyone. Who comes back, which roles change, and what is missing?

Think about your answers. **We are going to test them.**

01

PART ONE

What happens without me?

Founder dependence · Enterprise value

The first thing that breaks tells you the truth about your team.

WHAT BREAKS FIRST

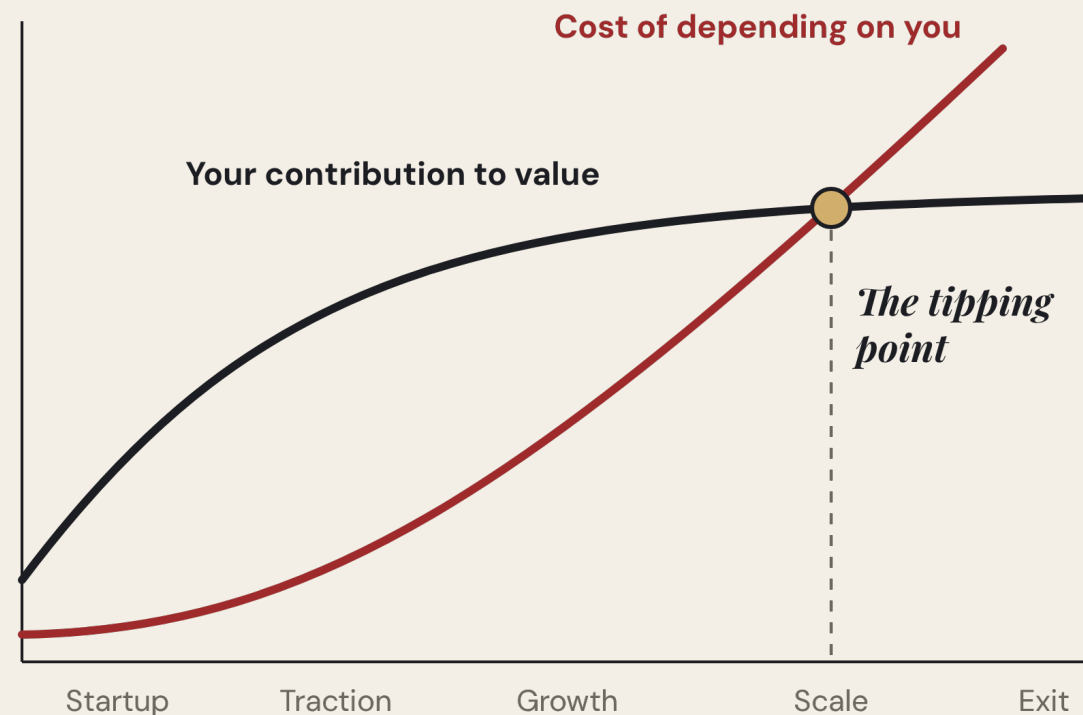
Five places founder dependence hides.

	WHERE IT HIDES	THE SYMPTOM	THE HONEST QUESTION
01	Decisions	Every meaningful call still routes through you.	<i>Who else can say yes?</i>
02	Customers	Your best accounts buy from you, not from the company.	<i>Who else do they call?</i>
03	Knowledge	The playbook lives in your head and nowhere else.	<i>Could anyone write it down?</i>
04	Problems	When something breaks, every head in the room turns to you.	<i>Who solves it at 2 a.m.?</i>
05	Succession	No one is ready to step up. Not in one year. Not in three.	<i>Who runs it next year?</i>

Whatever broke first on your list is **your next hire, your next handoff, or your next system.**

THE TIPPING POINT

When does the founder stop being an asset?



Early on, you **are** the business. Your grit, your relationships and your heroic effort are the asset.

At scale, that same dependence becomes a discount. Buyers and investors price in the risk of you.

Your importance becomes a liability the moment the business can't grow faster than you can.

Illustrative. Not drawn to data.

THE TWO LENSES

You see people. Your investors see leverage.

THE CEO SEES

Effort and potential long before any dashboard shows it.

The director six months from a bigger role.

The VP brilliant at this scale, but not the next one.

The people you know better than anyone in the room.

YOUR INVESTORS ASK

01 Can this group scale?

02 Can they integrate an acquisition?

03 Can they execute without the CEO?

04 Is there real succession depth?

05 Will this team make the company more valuable?

The best CEOs hold both. They honor the people who got them here, and stay honest about who can carry the company next.

02

PART TWO

Would you rehire your team?

The team that got you here · The team that gets you there

Loyalty is a virtue. **It is not a talent strategy.**

WHAT GOT YOU HERE

Scaling rewrites every job description.

THE TEAM THAT GOT YOU HERE

THE TEAM THAT GETS YOU THERE

Grit	→	Repeatability
Versatility	→	Specialization
Heroic effort	→	Systems thinking
Doing it yourself	→	Delegating it well
Loyalty to the founder	→	Ownership of the outcome

Early success masks this problem. Growth exposes it ruthlessly.

THE REHIRE EXERCISE

Put every name in one of three columns.

01 · KEEP

Rehire tomorrow.

Name them. Then tell them.
Your best people should
never have to guess where
they stand.

02 · REDESIGN

Rebuild the seat.

Which roles were built around
a person instead of a need?
Design each seat for the
company you are becoming.

03 · ADD

Fill the gap.

What capability is missing
entirely? A true number two.
Finance. Operations. The gaps
you have learned to live with.

Everyone you hesitated on is a conversation **you already know you need to have.**

THE TWO-YEAR TEST

If you were buying this company two years from now, would you trust this team to run it *without you?*

If you hesitate on anyone, you already know what you need to do.
The only question is when.

03

PART THREE

How great CEOs engage the team

Five laws · Four questions · One playbook

Teams do not just execute strategy. They are the strategy.

THE LAWS

Five things great leaders do.

LAW ONE

Build for the company you are becoming.

Ask what every role must deliver 12 to 24 months from now, not today.

LAW TWO

Hire for complement, not brilliance.

A team is a system, not a group of stars. Sameness multiplies blind spots.

LAW THREE

Develop leaders and own it personally.

Not an HR program. Stretch assignments, board exposure and direct coaching.

LAW FOUR

Create safety before demanding performance.

Safety is not softness. It is speed. Safe teams correct faster.

LAW FIVE

Make accountability clear and consistent.

High performers don't want control. They want to know what winning looks like.

THE THROUGH-LINE

**Design it. Develop it.
Consistently Deliver it.**

WHERE ENGAGEMENT BREAKS

We are all awesome. But are we all aligned?

01 · CULTURE

Misaligned with the culture

No sense of belonging. Out of tune with the values. Low trust in leaders. Burnout.

02 · ROLE

Misaligned with the role

Hired for résumé checkboxes over coachability, EQ, motivation and temperament.

03 · MANAGER

Misaligned with the manager

Most managers mean well but are ill-equipped to coach, communicate and manage.

04 · TEAM

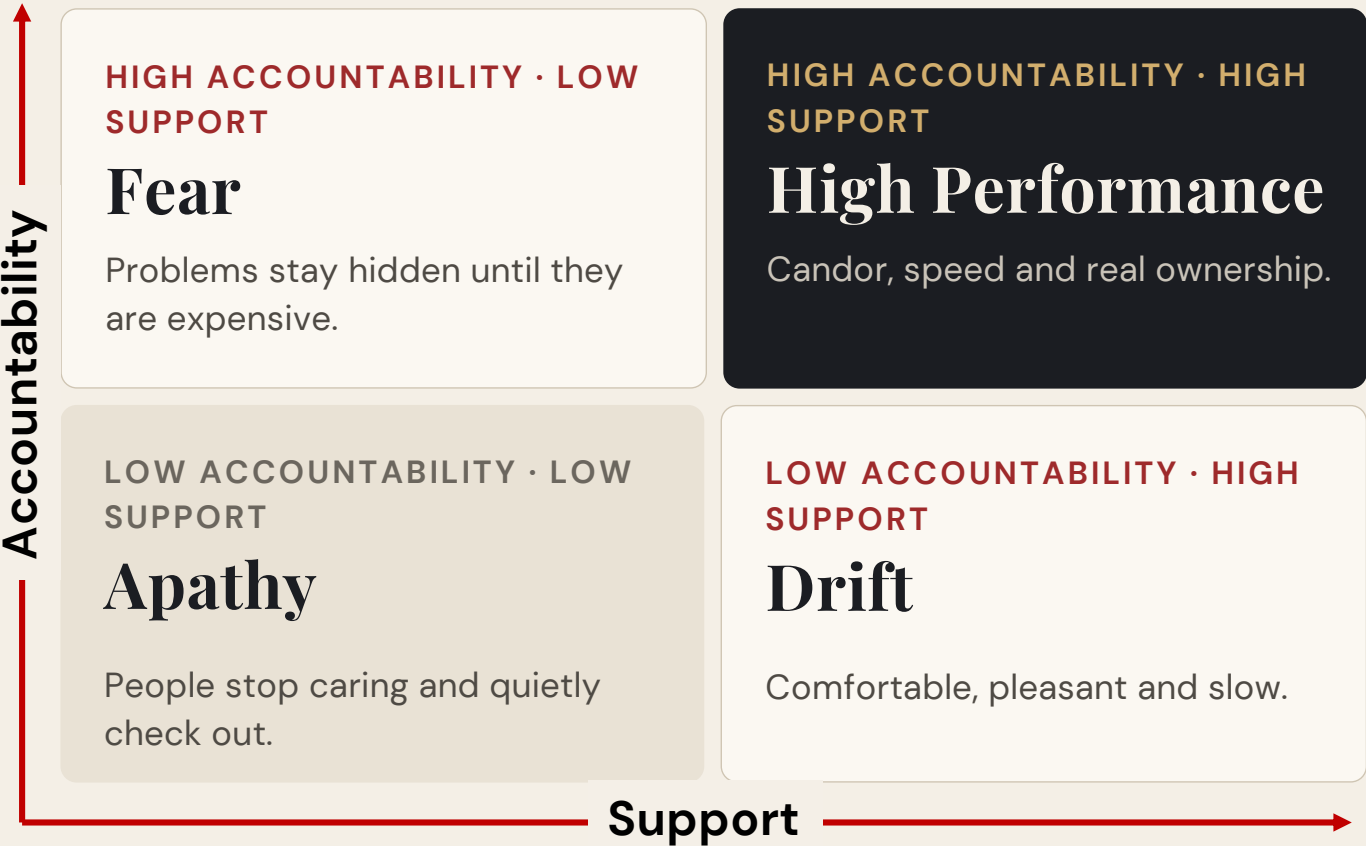
Misaligned with the team

No shared mission, vision or values. Little collaboration, support or communication.

Any one of these can crush productivity. **Two or more can cripple an entire team.**

THE BALANCE

Support and accountability are not a trade-off.



Support without accountability creates drift.

Accountability without support creates fear.

Your best leaders want clarity.
What winning looks like, and how they will be measured.

EXECUTION BEGINS WITH TRUST

Trust is like oxygen.

We don't think about it until we don't have it.
Without enough, everything takes more effort and more stress.

“Teamwork is really a form of trust.”

COACH PAT SUMMITT

WHEN PEOPLE TRUST EACH OTHER AND THEIR LEADERS, THEY WILL

01 Work through disagreements.

02 Take smarter risks.

03 Work harder and stay longer.

04 Contribute better ideas.

05 Give you their discretionary effort.

Source: Harvard Business Review, 2023

THE MIRROR

The team follows your emotional cues, not words.

01 How do I respond when someone brings me bad news?

02 Does my face say “angry,” or “thank you, let’s fix this”?

03 Do I reward truth, or do I only reward success?

04 Do I actively listen, or am I quick to judge?

Great leaders model vulnerability, invite disagreement, and reward truth-telling.
Performance follows trust. It never precedes it.

Five operating habits of great leaders.

- | | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| 01 | Design the team as a system. | Most leadership conflict is structural, not personal. |
| 02 | Over-invest in your direct reports. | They are your force multipliers and your succession bench. |
| 03 | Make development visible and normal. | A signal someone is valued, not that they are struggling. |
| 04 | Run a consistent operating rhythm. | Chaos destroys trust faster than bad news. Rhythm restores it. |
| 05 | Address mismatches early & humanely. | Clarity is kinder than avoidance. |

NEXT STEPS

Try this for the next 90 days.

01

Name what breaks first.

Take your answer to question one. Give it an owner and a date.

02

Run the individual rehire test.

Every direct report goes in a column: keep, redesign or add. Write it down.

03

Give away one decision.

Pick one call you still make that someone else should own. Hand it off for good.

04

Then evaluate your bench.

When you gave away the decision, was the outcome acceptable?

*Nothing happens on good intentions. **Put a date on it.***

THE LAST WORD

Value is not created by plans.

*It is created by people, working together, **when the founder is no longer in the room.***

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