

# When You're the Bottleneck

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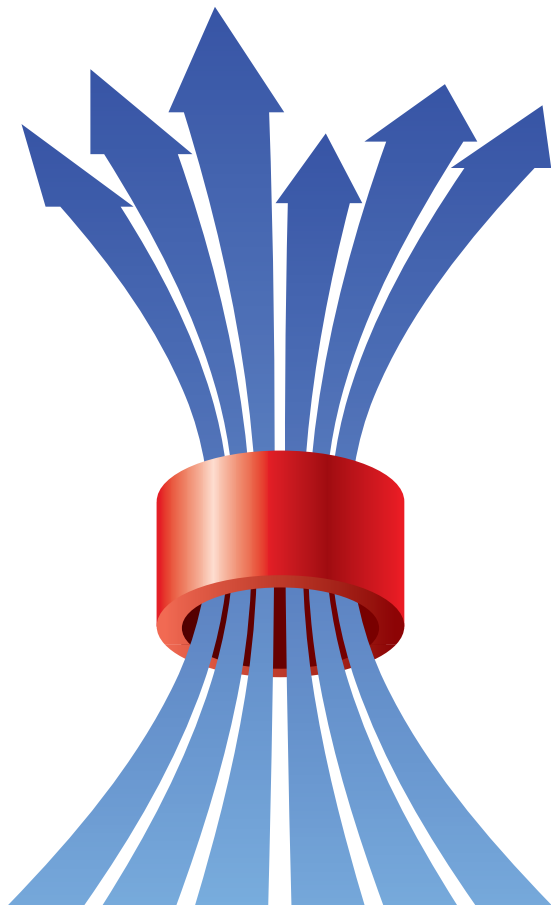
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# Are you the Bottleneck?

Companies aim to achieve the Growth or Rapid Growth stages of the Business Life Cycle. The Business Life Cycle represents the seven stages a business will go through, from Conception to Innovation/Decline. The Growth and Rapid Growth stages are the most important stages as leaders begin to reap the rewards of business ownership through business expansion and profit.

Yet, while companies in this stage enjoy financial growth, the leader faces the dilemma of transitioning their leadership style in order to continue pushing the business to the next level. Every leader encounters the Bottleneck Syndrome as they learn to let go of the reins and trust in the abilities of their team. In some cases, the owner feels they are working harder than others on their team, leading to frustration when no one else steps up to take responsibility or make decisions. The team, however, simultaneously feels unimportant as the leader micromanages their decision-making ability. As the leader questions 'Can't anyone else make a decision here?' the team wonders 'Why won't my boss let me take charge of my projects?' To succeed in creating a scalable business, leaders must first admit they're the bottleneck and then cultivate relationships and trust in their team.



## You're the Bottleneck If ...

- ▶ You solve every problem and make every decision
- ▶ You don't trust your employees to move projects forward or make the right decisions
- ▶ You have a great team but they don't take responsibility
- ▶ You work all hours of the day
- ▶ Projects or actions are delayed because you have to be involved in every step
- ▶ You micromanage
- ▶ You can't let go

# How You Became the Bottleneck

You succeeded to this point by always saying yes. However, as Greg McKeown points out in his book “Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less”, always saying ‘yes’ leads to a pattern of behavior that isn’t scalable since the company cannot thrive if you’re the sole decision-maker. The Leadership Pipeline goes hand-in-hand with essentialism — you’re simply not playing the leadership role that you should be because you’re stuck in the day-to-day tasks. The Leadership Pipeline outlines what an individual should be doing based on their position. For example, staff members must hone their skills to lead themselves and a few others, while executives must learn to lead the organization as a whole. Another way to look at it is the ‘pay-per-hour’ concept: If the leader is making roughly \$50/hour, they should not be handling any task that a staff member \$15/hour is responsible for. It simply doesn’t add up from a financial standpoint. Spend the time working on higher level tasks and leave the lower level tasks to those who are paid less. Finally, the bottleneck refuses to trust the team’s capabilities, creating a culture where leadership doesn’t trust employees and employees don’t trust the leadership.

## Leadership Pipeline

Leadership Levels	Skills Needed	Time Application	Values
Setting the Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foresight</li> <li>Oversight &amp; insight</li> <li>Consensus building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure Adequate Resources</li> <li>Planning for the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain Integrity and public image</li> <li>Past Experience</li> </ul>
Leading the Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Profit &amp; Loss</li> <li>Growth &amp; relevance</li> <li>Complexity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reserve time for reflection &amp; analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic thinking</li> <li>Being alone</li> <li>Being visible</li> </ul>
Leading a Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delegate &amp; trust</li> <li>Holistic</li> <li>Long/short term</li> <li>Strategic mindset</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delegate functional work</li> <li>Participate in management &amp; functional meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value what you don't know</li> <li>Communication &amp; relationship</li> <li>Engaging others</li> </ul>
Leading Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selection &amp; coaching</li> <li>Deploy resources</li> <li>Hold others accountable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disinvestment from individual tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selecting &amp; seeding leaders</li> <li>People decisions</li> <li>Motivating others</li> </ul>
Leading Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defining</li> <li>Planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reallocate time to help others to perform effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being available</li> <li>Results through others</li> <li>Managerial work</li> </ul>
Leading Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical</li> <li>Professional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managing own time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Results through own contribution</li> <li>Acceptance of culture, professional standards</li> </ul>

## What's Happening and How to Fix It

**Essentialism:** Decide what essential tasks you must perform and outsource the rest

**Leadership Pipeline:** Learn to lead within your pay grade and stop doing the job you hired other people to do

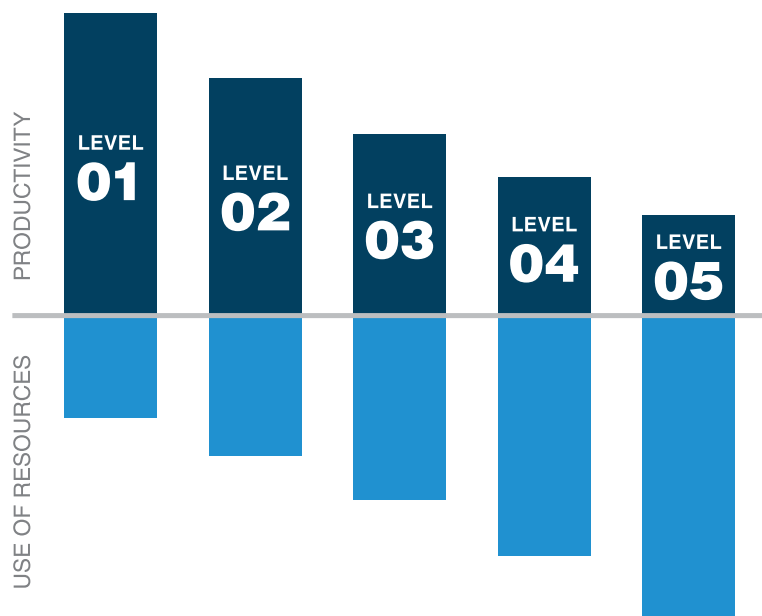
**Trust:** The team will make mistakes, but use it as a coaching opportunity

# Eliminating the Bottleneck

Becoming a collaborative leader means you will always strive to be authentic, purposeful and impactful when you collaborate with your team in an effort to achieve breakthrough performance. The entire team will be a part of the process as they also learn to take on the true meaning of their role. As you and the team go through the bottleneck elimination process together, be sure to support and empower one another. Rebuilding your relationships with your team will ensure long-term stability and sustainability of the company.

A great tool to use is the Freedom Scale. The Freedom Scale presents a delegation structure: If you find yourself at Level 1 or 2 on the Freedom Scale, you're not trusting your people to perform their jobs and you are the bottleneck. In turn, your team quickly realizes that their leader doesn't trust them -- all leading to turmoil within the organization. Instead, outline your expectations and state the freedoms the team member has, then be sure to check back in to learn from mistakes, adjust as necessary, and move on stronger than before.

## Freedom Scale



## How to Release the Bottleneck

- ▶ Make a list of items or projects to delegate
- ▶ Ask team what *they* think should be taken off of your plate
- ▶ Train your team to properly execute their job description
- ▶ Follow-up with the team to ensure they're growing in their role
- ▶ Mistakes will be made; treat them as learning moments and move on
- ▶ Use the Freedom Scale to adjust decision-making parameters
- ▶ Assess where your time is spent and make changes

# Bottom Line

Becoming an effective leader and eliminating the Bottleneck Syndrome is a long process, but one that is worth every ounce of your effort and time. You simply cannot sustainably run a successful business when you're the bottleneck. Changing your leadership style, trusting your team, and building long-lasting relationships built on trust and mutual respect will ensure the long-term success of your company as you strive to reach the next level.



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