



05

THE BROKEN HANDOFF

Everyone did their part. The work still died — in the seam between two people, where you live.

DEPENDENCY TYPE COORDINATION DEPENDENCY

HOW IT SOUNDS “I’M THE ONE CONNECTING PEOPLE AND KEEPING EVERYONE ON THE SAME PAGE.”

TIME TO FIRST RELIEF ONE WEEKLY RHYTHM MEETING YOU DON’T RUN, ON THE CALENDAR THIS WEEK

FIRE DANGER — HOW FAST THIS ONE COMPOUNDS



5.1 THE SCENE

The client email that started your Wednesday: “Just checking in — we haven't heard anything since the kickoff call?”

You go looking, already knowing roughly what you'll find. Sales closed the deal and did their part — contract signed, notes taken. Delivery is ready and did their part — templates prepped, calendar open. But the handoff between them happened by vibes: sales assumed delivery saw the deal close in the CRM; delivery was waiting for the “good to go” that usually comes from... you, actually, now that you think about it. Nine days, two competent people, zero movement. The work didn't fail. The seam did.

You know the seams well, because you live in them. You're the one who tells delivery a deal closed, tells marketing the launch date moved, tells your contractor the assets are approved, tells your ops lead what you and the client agreed on a call. You spend real hours relaying — repeating things you already know to the person who needs to know them next. Somewhere along the way you became the switchboard: information enters your company through you, gets routed by you, and when you don't route it, it just sits there, blinking.

It follows you home, too. You've caught yourself at dinner thumbing out a message that exists only to move information from one employee to another — “hey, when Marcus sends the files, make sure Dana knows the deadline moved” — and felt the absurdity of it. Two people, one company, twelve feet of Slack between them, and the message still had to change trains at your phone.

The team meetings don't fix it, because the team meeting is you at the switchboard with an audience — you asking each person for status, then personally re-distributing the updates to whoever needed them. Skip a week and things visibly wobble. Your people are good. Your seams are held together with founder.

Launch weeks are when it shows worst. Marketing, sales, delivery, and ops all have to interlock on a tight clock, and you spend the whole week as air traffic control — confirming this asset reached that person, relaying the date change to everyone it touches, catching at 11pm that the email team and the checkout page are describing two different bonuses. The launch succeeds, and you're the only one who knows how close it came, because you personally flew every plane through every handoff. That's not a launch system. That's you, sprinting between towers.

YOU KNOW THIS FIRE IS BURNING WHEN

- ◆ Work dies between people — each person did their part, and the project still sat for days in the gap.
- ◆ You spend real hours relaying: telling this person what that person said or did.
- ◆ “Did anyone tell...?” is a sentence you say weekly — and the honest answer is usually no.
- ◆ Status only surfaces when you ask for it; nothing reports to you on its own.
- ◆ Your absence breaks alignment — miss a week of meetings and people drift out of sync.
- ◆ Clients feel the seams: gaps after kickoff, repeated questions, “checking in” emails.
- ◆ Two team members discover they've been waiting on each other — each thinking the other had it.
- ◆ You are cc'd on nearly everything, because being cc'd is your only alignment system.

5.2 WHAT'S ACTUALLY BURNING

The costume this fire wears is a communication problem, and the costume comes with two popular fixes: more meetings, or a new tool. You may have tried both. The meetings multiplied and the seams stayed; the tool got adopted for three weeks and became another place where updates go to be ignored. Meetings and tools are containers. If nothing defines what flows through them, when, from whom, to whom — they hold nothing.

1

RHYTHM MEETING — THAT YOU
DON'T RUN

0

RELAYS ROUTED THROUGH YOU

100%

OF UPDATES PUSHED, NOT CHASED

What's burning is Coordination Dependency: your company has no circulation system for information, so you are the circulation system. Notice what's distinct here — this fire isn't about decisions (Fire 01), knowledge (Fire 02), momentum (Fire 03), or quality (Fire 04). Everyone knows their job and does it well. What's missing is the connective tissue between jobs: nobody defined how work announces itself when it crosses from one person to another, so every crossing depends on someone noticing — and the someone is you, because you're the only person who can see the whole board.

That last clause is the structural heart of it. Of course you're the router: you're in the sales conversations, the delivery reviews, and the client relationships, so you're the only node connected

to everything. When everything routes through you, that's just information following the only paths that exist. Every seam in the company has exactly one bridge, and the bridge is booked.

FIRE WATCH

The trap is answering coordination failure with presence — more meetings you run, more channels you monitor, more threads you're cc'd on. Every ounce of added presence makes the system more founder-shaped: now even less can move without you, because you've made yourself the confirmation step for everything. The relief you want comes from subtraction with structure — defined seams, owned rhythms, pushed reports — never from a founder with better attendance.

The cost structure of this fire is sneaky, so name it honestly: relaying feels light — each relay is thirty seconds. But the seams charge you twice. Once in your hours, and once in the client experience, because clients don't see your org chart — they just feel the nine quiet days after kickoff. Coordination failure is the founder-dependency fire your clients can feel from outside the building.

Your team pays too, in a way they probably haven't said out loud. Capable people working in isolation booths — each doing solid work, none able to see what's coming from upstream or what's needed downstream — start to feel like contractors inside their own company. Coordination is what makes a group of good people feel like a team, and right now the only coordination they've ever experienced is you.

You built a good team and became the only road between them.

FOUNDER FIRE CODES™

 5.3 THE RESPONSE PLAN

Put it out this week.

- 1

MAP DEAD WORK
- 2

TRIGGER THE SEAM
- 3

STAND UP THE RHYTHM
- 4

FLIP THE REPORTING
- 5

RESIGN THE SWITCHBOARD

1 MAP WHERE WORK DIED LAST MONTH

List every incident from the past month where work sat in a gap between two people — the sales-to-delivery dead zone, the approved-assets-nobody-collected, the client update that didn't travel. For each: which two people, what should have crossed, and how it eventually got unstuck (spoiler: you). Thirty minutes, and you'll usually find the same two or three seams account for most of the deaths. Those are your repair sites; this playbook fixes seams by name, not “communication” in general.

A shortcut for finding them: search your memory for apologies. “Sorry, I thought you had it.” “Sorry, nobody told me it closed.” Every seam failure produces an apology from somebody who did their own job correctly. That sentence pattern is the smoke.

2 GIVE YOUR WORST SEAM A TRIGGER PROTOCOL

Take the deadliest seam and define its crossing as a protocol: what event fires it, who announces, where, and who owns the catch. The test of a good trigger is that it's a fact, not a vibe — “contract signed and payment cleared” fires; “when the deal feels done” doesn't. Write it as a table so nobody has to interpret:

HANDOFF	TRIGGER (A FACT)	WHO ANNOUNCES, WHERE	WHO CATCHES, BY WHEN
Sales → delivery	Contract signed + payment cleared	Closer posts in #handoffs with the intake notes	Delivery lead confirms & books kickoff within 24h
Delivery → ops	Final deliverable approved by client	Delivery lead posts in #handoffs	Ops invoices & starts offboarding within 48h
Founder call → team	Any client call where something was agreed	Founder posts a 3-line recap same day	Named owner reacts to claim each action

Notice the third row: some of the relaying is yours to fix, because agreements made on your calls have been living in your head. A three-line recap with named owners ends your career as the message.

3 STAND UP ONE RHYTHM MEETING — THAT SOMEONE ELSE RUNS

One weekly coordination meeting, thirty minutes, fixed day and time, owned end to end by a non-founder: they set the agenda, run the room, and post the recap. The agenda is seams, not status theater: what's crossing between people this week, what's stuck in a gap, what's coming that someone downstream should see early. You attend as a participant — and for the first month, say noticeably little, because every time you jump in to route, you re-teach the room that routing is your job.

SAY THIS WHEN YOU HAND OVER THE MEETING

"I'm giving you the weekly sync — fully. You own the agenda, you run it, you post the recap. And I mean own it: if I try to take the wheel mid-meeting, redirect me, that's part of the job. The meeting has one purpose: catch the handoffs. What's crossing between people this week, what's sitting in a gap, what's coming that somebody should see early. If the meeting does its job, nothing waits nine days in a seam again — and nobody needs me to play messenger."

4 FLIP THE REPORTING DIRECTION

Right now visibility is pull: you ask, they answer, and asking is work you do forever. Flip it to push: each function owner posts a short fixed-format update at a fixed time — three lines, same thread every week: moved / next / stuck. You read in ten minutes on your schedule. The format and rhythm matter more than the tool; a status that arrives without being chased is a different animal from the same words extracted by a founder asking. One is you doing coordination. The other is coordination happening to you, which is the entire goal of this playbook.

5 RESIGN FROM THE SWITCHBOARD, OUT LOUD

The relay requests will keep coming from habit — “can you let Dana know” will land in your inbox this week. Redirect every one.

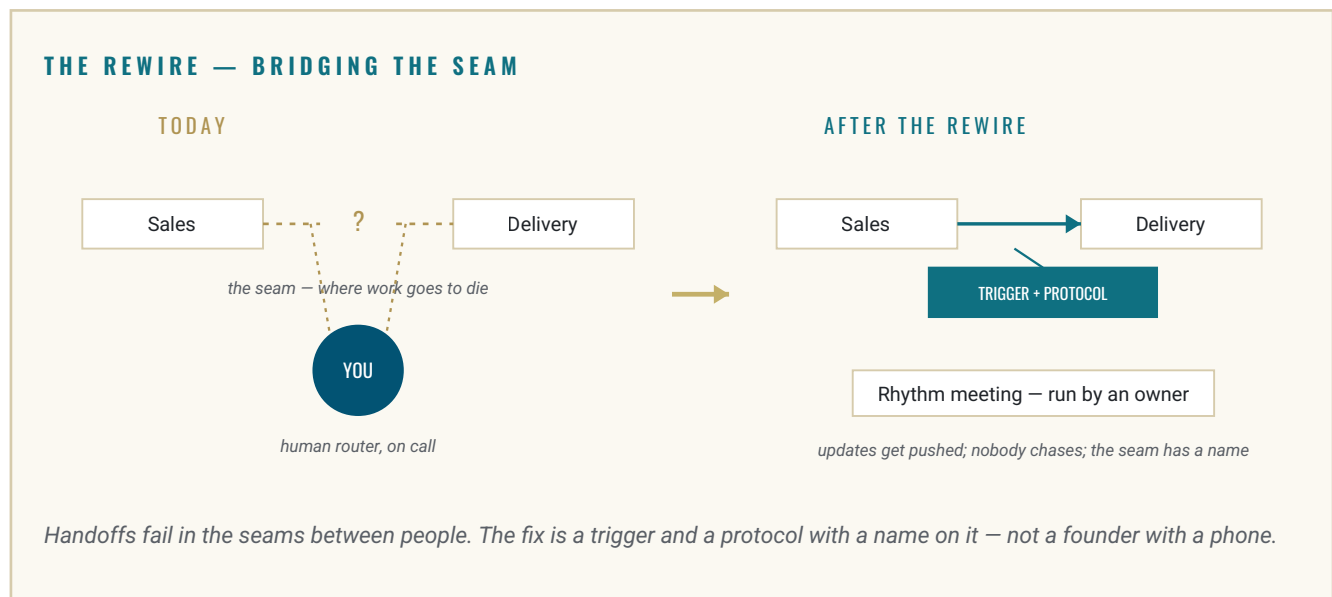
WHEN SOMEONE ROUTES THROUGH YOU

"Tell Dana directly — you two don't need to go through me. If something between you gets stuck, that's what Thursday's sync is for."

Feels almost rude the first few times. It isn't. Every relay you accept keeps a road closed between two people who should have one. Every redirect builds the road.

5.4 THE PREVENTION PLAN

Rewire it so it stops coming back.



The response plan repaired your worst seams. Prevention means giving the company a full circulation system — a defined rhythm, protocols on every major seam, and reporting that keeps you informed without keeping you involved.

STRUCTURE ONE: THE OPERATING RHYTHM

An operating rhythm is the fixed set of meetings and updates the company runs on — each with an owner who isn't you, a purpose you could state in one line, and an honest answer to whether you attend. Most businesses your size need surprisingly little:

RHYTHM	CADENCE	OWNER	PURPOSE	FOUNDER?
Weekly sync	Weekly, 30 min	Ops lead	Catch the handoffs; unstick the seams	Attends, mostly listens
Status push	Weekly, written	Each function owner	Moved / next / stuck, pushed to one thread	Reads only
Client health review	Biweekly, 30 min	Delivery lead	Every active client green/amber/red	Attends ambers & reds only

RHYTHM	CADENCE	OWNER	PURPOSE	FOUNDER?
Founder recap	Same-day, written	You	3-line recap of any founder call with agreements	You write it — your one relay duty

The whole system costs each person under an hour a week. Compare that to the hours the seams were charging, plus the client apologies, and it's the cheapest infrastructure you'll ever install.

Give the rhythm six weeks before you judge it, and expect week three to be the wobble point — that's when the novelty wears off and the old routes through you start whispering. The owner will run a flat meeting or two. A status push will arrive late. Hold the structure anyway: rhythms earn their authority through repetition, and a cadence your company has kept for six straight weeks starts keeping itself. Founders who bail at week three don't go back to nothing — they go back to being the rhythm, which is the expensive version.

STRUCTURE TWO: PROTOCOLS ON EVERY MAJOR SEAM

Extend the trigger-protocol table from the response plan until every recurring handoff in the client journey has one — lead to sale, sale to delivery, delivery milestone to client communication, delivery to offboarding, offboarding to retention follow-up. Each seam: a factual trigger, an announcer, a channel, a catcher with a deadline. If you're building Whole-Picture Handoffs™, this is the When layer working between people instead of within one transfer — the conditions under which action fires, and how the next person recognizes them without anyone tapping their shoulder. Seams with written triggers don't need a router. That's the whole trick.

While you're writing protocols, set the channel norms that keep them findable: decisions get recorded in the decision log, work requests live in the project tool, handoff announcements live in one named channel, urgent means phone. Half of what looks like coordination failure is really message scatter — the announcement happened, in a channel the catcher doesn't watch. A protocol can only fire if everybody knows where to stand.

STRUCTURE THREE: REPORTING THAT PUSHES VISIBILITY TO YOU

Design your own information diet deliberately: what you receive, when, in what format — then refuse to collect anything outside it by hand. Weekly status pushes, the sync recap, client health flags, and a small set of numbers that arrive on schedule. Chasing is the relapse behavior; if you're asking for an update, either the rhythm is missing a report or someone's skipping it — fix the

system, don't reprise the role. You'll know more about the business than you did as the switchboard. You'll just finally be reading dashboards instead of being one.

Keep the number set small and honest — five to eight figures that actually change your behavior when they move: pipeline, cash position, active client health, delivery load, whatever your version is. Each number has an owner who reports it on rhythm, and any number that arrives three weeks running without changing what you'd do gets cut from the diet. Reports nobody acts on are how rhythms die of boredom.

★ FIRE MARSHAL'S NOTE

If two people could each plausibly believe the other one owns a handoff, then nobody owns it and you do. Put the trigger in writing today — “when X happens, Y starts, and Z is watching.”

 5.5 MAKE IT YOURS

Twenty minutes. Real seams, real owners, real calendar slots.

FILL IN · MY DEADLIEST SEAMS

Where work died last month: 1. _____ → _____ 2.
_____ → _____ 3. _____ →

FILL IN · FIRST TRIGGER PROTOCOL

Seam: _____ Trigger fact: _____ Announced by
_____ in _____ Caught by _____ within

FILL IN · THE RHYTHM MEETING

The weekly sync runs every _____ at _____, owned and run
by _____. First one: _____.

FILL IN · THE STATUS PUSH

Every _____, these people post moved / next / stuck in
_____: _____. I read; I don't chase.

FILL IN · MY INFORMATION DIET

The numbers that come to me weekly, with owners: _____ (owner:
_____), _____ (owner: _____),
_____ (owner: _____).

FILL IN · MY RECAP DUTY

After any call where something's agreed, I post a 3-line recap in _____ the
same day, with each action named to an owner. That's my one remaining relay job.

✓ 5.6 PROOF IT'S OUT

Coordination proof takes a few weeks to show, because seams only get tested when work actually crosses them. Give the rhythm a full month of real handoffs, then walk this list with your sent messages and the recap thread open in front of you — the receipts are all in writing now, which is itself a sign.

- ☐ A handoff fired on its trigger — announced, caught, actioned — and you learned about it from the recap, not from being in it.
- ☐ The weekly sync ran while you said almost nothing — or better, ran once without you there at all, and the recap was solid.
- ☐ Status arrived before you thought to ask. Your “any update on...” sent-message count is near zero.
- ☐ Two team members resolved a stuck seam directly, and you heard about it after it was already fixed.
- ☐ No client has had to “just check in” to restart their own project this month.

- Your cc load is down — people stopped copying you as insurance, because the rhythm carries the visibility now.

WATCH FOR A RELIGHT

- ◆ You accept “just one” relay because it's quicker than redirecting. The switchboard rebuilds one courtesy at a time.
- ◆ The sync drifts into status theater — people reading lists at each other while the actual seams go undiscussed. Re-point the agenda at handoffs.
- ◆ A new hire or new offer adds a seam nobody wrote a protocol for, and you quietly start bridging it. New seam, new trigger row — same week.

When the seams have owners, the switchboard can finally go home.

FIRE 05 · CLOSED



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