This Is the Hidden Foundation of Leadership Success — Plus the 5 Daily Habits That Build It



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Key Takeaways

- Consistent self-discipline in personal life underpins leadership effectiveness, impacting decision-making, resilience, and team stability.
- Practical daily habits in sleep, time management, and physical health are crucial for leaders to maintain focus and model balance for their teams.
- Building intentional routines and prioritizing mental

clarity translate into authentic leadership, fostering trust and high performance within organizations.

Leadership is often thought of as managing teams, strategies or organizations. But the truth is, leadership starts with managing yourself. A leader who lacks discipline in their personal life, whether in health, time or energy, will struggle to lead others with clarity and consistency. Without personal self-management, even the best leadership strategies fall apart.

This is why self-discipline is often called the hidden foundation of leadership success. Leaders who consistently manage their physical well-being, mental focus and daily priorities create a steady base that others can rely on. Their discipline becomes visible through calm decision-making, clear communication and resilience in the face of challenges.

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The link between personal discipline and leadership performance

When leaders neglect self-discipline, the effects show quickly. Poor sleep leads to irritability and foggy thinking. Weak time management results in missed opportunities and a constant feeling of being behind. Inconsistent energy habits leave teams guessing whether their leader will show up with focus or fatigue.

A meta-analysis published in PubMed Central (2021) found that effective time management is directly linked to better job performance, stronger academic achievement and improved

psychological well-being. Leaders who master their time experience lower stress and deliver results with greater consistency.

The same principle applies to health. Leaders who neglect sleep, nutrition or exercise often pay the price in reduced focus, weaker resilience and poor emotional regulation. By contrast, leaders who take care of their bodies and minds signal to their teams that discipline and balance are not optional – they are essential to sustained success.

Building self-discipline into daily habits

Discipline may sound daunting, but in practice, it comes down to small daily choices. Leaders who consistently choose habits that support health and focus build momentum that carries into every aspect of leadership.

1. **Prioritize sleep and energy:** Good sleep is non-negotiable. Without it, decision-making suffers, emotions run high and productivity falls. Leaders who commit to consistent sleep routines not only sharpen their focus but also model balance for their teams.
2. **Structure time wisely:** Effective leaders don't just fill their calendars; they guard their priorities. Time-boxing, delegation and setting clear boundaries allow them to focus on what truly matters. Leaders with strong time management skills experience greater performance and reduced stress.
3. **Maintain physical health:** Exercise and nutrition are not just personal goals; they directly impact leadership presence. Leaders who stay active and eat well sustain the mental clarity required for long hours and tough decisions.
4. **Create mental space:** Leadership often means juggling competing demands. Practices like mindfulness, prayer

(if religious), journaling or simply scheduling quiet reflection time help leaders maintain clarity. Research in the European Management Journal shows that self-leadership training and mindfulness practices significantly boost resilience, job satisfaction, and overall performance.

5. **Build consistent routines:** Consistent routines simplify discipline by turning good choices into automatic behaviors. When leaders start the day with structure, whether through exercise, planning or quiet focus, they set the tone for productivity and intentional leadership.

The mental side of self-discipline

Beyond habits, discipline also strengthens a leader's mindset. Leaders face constant pressure, competing opinions and high-stakes decisions. Without inner discipline, it is easy to become reactive, impatient or overwhelmed.

Higher levels of self-discipline are tied to stronger motivation and less procrastination. Leaders with these traits are more likely to stay focused on long-term goals rather than being derailed by distractions.

Why it matters: Self-management as a core leadership skill

At its core, leadership is about influence. And influence starts with stability in state and results. Teams follow leaders who are consistently in a productive state, as teams unconsciously look for safety, and they find it in consistently stable leaders. This type of stability requires focus, resilience and discipline to stick to an optimal daily routine.

Leaders who consistently manage their health, time and energy

create environments of stability, accountability and high performance. Their self-discipline becomes a silent signal that leadership is not about control but about modeling the very behaviors that enable collective success.

Conclusion

Leadership success is not built only on strategy, charisma or vision. At its foundation, it is built on self-discipline. Leaders who manage themselves, through health, time, routines and mental focus, unlock the ability to manage others with clarity and consistency.

Self-discipline is not about perfection. It is about intentional choices made daily. It is about treating your daily routine as essential, not optional. It is about building habits that align personal well-being with organisational goals.

When leaders master themselves, they lead from a place of strength. They inspire trust, model resilience and create the conditions for others to thrive.

In fact, there are two types of leadership: authentic and programmed. When people act like leaders but fail to meet their daily routine, their actions are perceived as inauthentic. It’s like making an insecure person talk in front of a large audience. Despite making a conscious effort to look confident, the unconscious behaviours remain. However, when someone does the work and sticks to their daily routine, they don’t need to act like a better leader, because they have actually become that better leader.

In the end, self-management is not just part of leadership – it is the heart of it.

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A Disaster Derailed His Career — But Taught Him the 1 Thing That All Successful People Know



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Key Takeaways

- He stepped into a legacy brand not to rewrite its story, but to protect what made it special.
- He didn’t focus on chasing trends or forcing transformation for the sake of growth.
- His strategy was to grow stronger through care and less so through disruption.

Michael Palmer, CEO of McConnell's Fine Ice Creams, didn't plan to take over one of California's most beloved ice cream brands.

After years of flying around the country running branding programs for major companies, Palmer was already questioning what the next chapter of his career might look like. Then, out of nowhere, his house burned down in a massive wildfire near Santa Barbara.

"Sometimes in life you get to a certain age and you're on that train," Palmer says. "And then sometimes you don't jump. You get pushed."

The fire forced a reset. As Palmer stepped away from his old career, the now 76-year-old McConnell's Fine Ice Creams was still deeply loved, but it was struggling to find stable footing. The brand had spent decades as a hyper-regional favorite, woven into the fabric of Santa Barbara. What drew Palmer in was not the opportunity to reinvent something iconic, but the responsibility of continuing it.

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"It was always this hyper-regional, beloved brand," he explains. "There was so much love for it here that we felt like it deserved more than just fading away."

Taking over McConnell's meant understanding what not to change. Palmer knew that legacy brands do not survive by chasing trends or forcing transformation for the sake of growth. "It's hard to take something that's been chugging along for sixty years and do a 180-degree turn," he admits. "Sometimes it's easier to originate something new."

Instead, Palmer focused on preservation with intention. The product, the sourcing and the emotional connection customers had to the brand were treated as non-negotiables. "We weren't

originating a brand," he says. "We were taking the elements that made it special and turning up the volume."

That mindset became the foundation for everything that followed. McConnell's path forward would not be defined by shortcuts or quick scale, but by clarity, discipline and alignment. Palmer's background in branding gave him the tools, but the fire gave him the perspective. What began as a forced turning point became a commitment to stew.

Growth through alignment

For Michael Palmer, growth at McConnell's was never about getting bigger faster. It was about finding the right partners and letting alignment do the work. That philosophy is reflected in where the conversation took place, at the Palm Tree Music Festival in Santa Barbara, with support from eero, a system software company, and in how McConnell's chooses moments and partners that align with its values.

That philosophy comes through clearly in McConnell's collaboration with See's Candies. Instead of chasing a splashy co-branding moment, the partnership unfolded slowly, rooted in shared values around quality and restraint. "I never thought hope was a great strategy," Palmer says. "You have to find the things you can own that other brands can't."

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Both brands are California-born, family-rooted and uncompromising about their product. That common ground mattered. "When you find like-minded brands who really operate with the same goals and values, you've got something," Palmer explains. "Where they will and won't compromise matters."

The collaboration took nearly a year to develop, with flavors incubated inside McConnell's scoop shops before expanding into

retail. “We wanted to see how people actually responded,” Palmer says. “We weren’t trying to force it. We wanted the product to earn its place.”

That same discipline defines McConnell’s approach to grocery stores. While the brand has expanded nationally, Palmer has resisted treating retail as a land grab. “Our stated goal from day one was to make the finest product in the business,” he says. “That’s a different goal than making something good enough to sell quickly.”

Competing against private equity-backed brands has only reinforced that mindset. “We knew our road would be longer,” Palmer admits. “But we also knew we had a product and a story that couldn’t be replicated overnight.”

Rather than dilute the brand, grocery stores became a way to extend its identity. Scoop shops remain largely rooted in California, while retail allows McConnell’s to reach customers without abandoning its sense of place.

For McConnell’s, partnerships like See’s Candies and a measured grocery presence are not growth tactics. They are proof points of a philosophy built on patience, focus and trust in the product.

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Manage Entrepreneurial Stress with This Lifetime Art Therapy App for $40



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Running a business takes a toll on the mind, which is why it's essential for successful entrepreneurs to find tools for managing mental health. According to a UCSF study, entrepreneurs are 50% more likely to report mental health conditions compared to non-entrepreneurs, with anxiety being particularly prevalent.

The demanding nature of entrepreneurship includes long hours, financial pressure, and constant decision-making, often leading to chronic stress that can impact both personal wellbeing and business performance. That's where accessible, science-based mental health tools become essential. This LINA Art Therapy Premium Plan lifetime subscription is a great place to start, and it's available for just $39.99 (reg. $79.99).

LINA Art Therapy App offers a practical solution that is designed specifically for busy professionals who need effective stress management without time-intensive therapy sessions. Created by certified art therapists and psychologists, LINA delivers 15-minute art therapy activities that fit seamlessly into packed schedules, requiring no prior artistic skills or experience.

Science-based approach to stress relief

The app guides you through structured activities where you draw, reflect, and receive AI-powered insights based on your artwork. These sessions can help address common entrepreneurial challenges: managing anxiety, building self-esteem, quieting your inner critic, and developing the emotional resilience needed to navigate business pressures, the company says.

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The lifetime subscription means you gain permanent access to these resources for a one-time payment with no recurring fees eating into your budget. The app is compatible with iPhone, iPad, and Apple Pencil, making it accessible wherever you work.

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Solo Bitcoin Mining: Your Next Passive Income Play



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For entrepreneurs who are exploring alternative revenue streams in 2026, Bitcoin mining has traditionally required warehouse-scale investments, industrial power contracts, and a tolerance for noise and heat. That barrier has kept most small operators out. BlockChance is targeting that gap with two compact solo-mining devices — the BlockChance™ Bitcoin Ticket Miner and the BlockChance™ Bitaxe Bitcoin Miner — with entry points at $59.99 and $199.99, respectively.

The BlockChance™ Bitcoin Ticket Miner reframes mining as a low-cost probability experiment. Instead of running continuous hash power, it submits lottery-style tickets, each representing an attempt to solve a full Bitcoin block. With 1,000 KH/s of hashing power — roughly 18 times higher than many ticket-based alternatives — it submits more attempts per day while consuming under 18 watts, the company says. The

device runs silently, operates independently over Wi-Fi using NMMiner firmware, and requires no licensing or activation fees. For founders who are already paying for 24/7 office power, the marginal cost is effectively negligible.

The BlockChance™ Bitaxe Bitcoin Miner is aimed at those who want materially better odds without crossing into industrial territory. It uses the same BM1370 ASIC chip found in modern professional rigs, delivering around 1.2 TH/s while drawing roughly 18 watts. The miner runs quietly on a desk, connects over Wi-Fi, and takes continuous solo mining attempts at full block rewards. While outcomes remain probability-based and highly dependent on network conditions, the hashrate represents a meaningful step up from ticket mining, the company says.

Together, these devices map to two different mindsets. The Ticket Miner suits experimentation, education, and asymmetric upside with minimal capital risk. The Bitaxe targets founders who are willing to allocate more capital for higher statistical exposure while keeping overhead extremely low. Neither guarantees revenue, but both convert mining from a capital-intensive operation into a manageable, ongoing business experiment.

For a limited time, take advantage of these deals:

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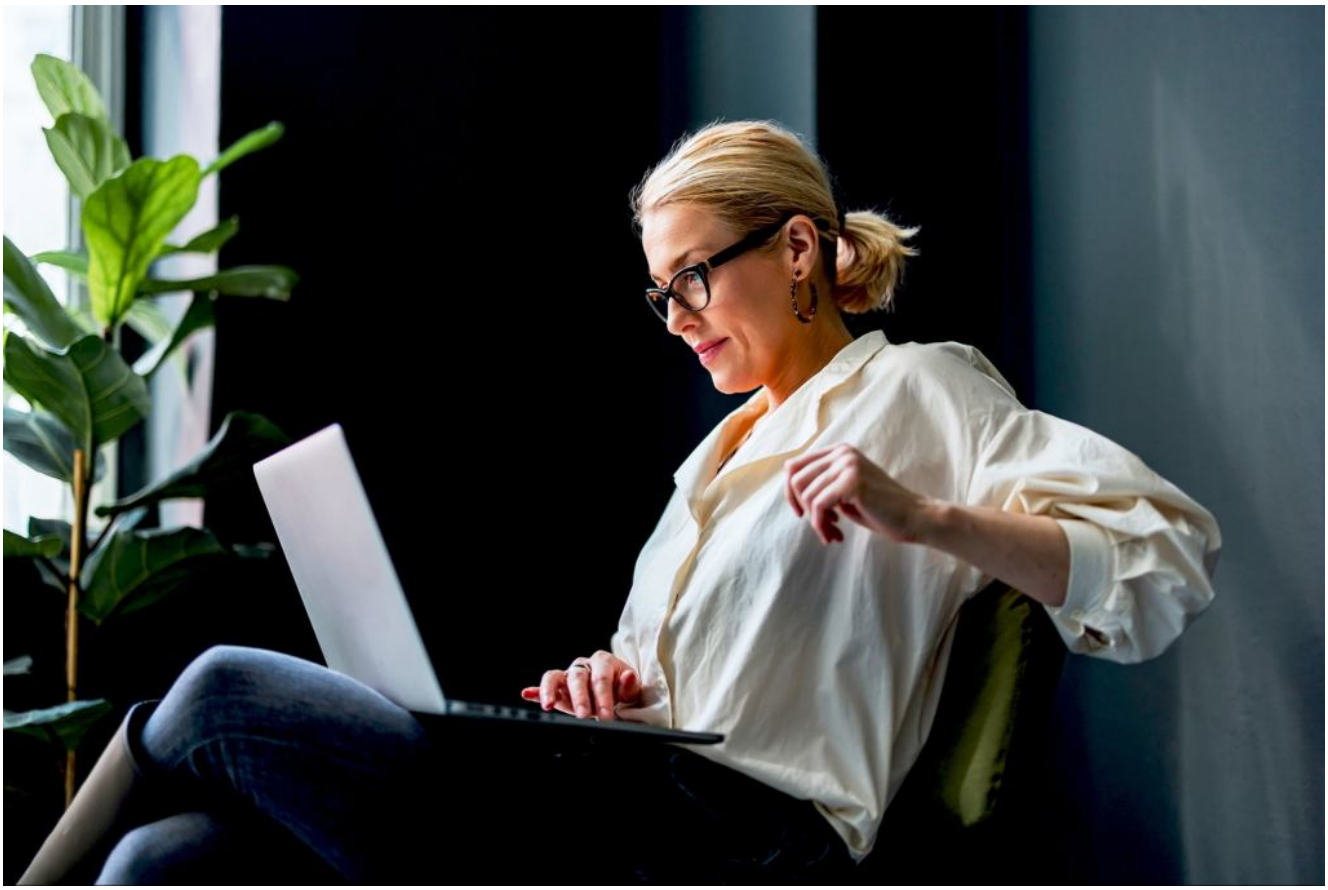
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The Personal Branding Myth That's Overwhelming CEOs — and the Reality That

Simplifies Everything



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Key Takeaways

- Platform focus creates strategic leverage. You don’t need to be on every platform. Your biggest return-on-time will come from committing to at least one platform (and likely not more than three).
- Podcast guesting grows authority beyond social media by allowing you to expand on your perspective and articulate your thoughts in a format that supports nuance. You only need to be interviewed once a month.
- Thought leadership articles add depth. They allow you to express your ideas in a different format and can directly contribute to your own credibility and the credibility of your company.

Most Gen X CEOs and founders today understand the importance of building their visibility (aka their personal brand) in order to best support the marketing function of their organizations. And yet, most are hesitant to actually do it because of one key concern: **The time-suck**.

Nearly every time I present to a group of CEOs or have a 1:1 conversation on the topic of personal brand building, this concern inevitably comes up, and it's not surprising. Firstly, Gen X'ers are typically very comfortable not being on social media or self-promoting. At all. In their ideal situation, they would have a public visibility of zero. Secondly, they are bombarded with well-meaning advice that "doing personal branding right" means creating content and posting daily, being on multiple social media platforms and being as overexposed as humanly possible.

Debunking the myth

So, allow me to debunk the myth. I will start with good news so that you feel encouraged to read the rest of this article. As CEO, you do need visibility, but it is substantially less than what you are hearing.

You see, this belief that we need to be social media posting machines comes from social media influencers. And yes, they do need to be constantly posting, multiple times per day, on every single platform that becomes available. Their revenue model is directly dependent on their following and engagement numbers. They don't typically own a business as you do; they *are* the business. And so, they are the entire marketing and sales engine of that business.

Our reality is different.

When we run businesses, we never want to be their entire marketing and sales engine. We want – and should – play a part in the overall marketing mix, but only a part. Our visibility

as CEOs of our organizations will support our companies' credibility and trust, but the brand of the business should be the core driver of its sales and marketing results.

We, instead, play an important but still merely a supporting part. And that is what the level of our visibility should reflect. When the distinction between CEO marketing and influencer marketing is blurred, we miscalculate the level of activity our visibility requires and disengage from it altogether because it costs far too much of our time and energy.

Visibility has indeed become a required tool in the modern leader's toolkit because of the impact on trust and credibility, both external and internal. And online presence shapes perception long before any direct interaction.

Let's be honest here: We all Google each other and look up each other's profiles on LinkedIn. But the good news is that as CEOs, we can prioritize strategic presence to gain that leverage. Understanding this distinction sets the foundation for choosing both the right platforms and cadence.

Platform focus creates strategic leverage

I have more good news for you here also. The myth that you need to be on as many platforms as you can is just that – a myth. In fact, opposite effects can occur: It can reduce your credibility and lead your stakeholders to wonder whether you are focused on leading your organization or are positioning yourself for a career as an influencer.

Instead, your biggest ROT – return-on-time – will come from committing to at least one and likely not more than three platforms (but really one platform is ideal). Among social media platforms, LinkedIn delivers the highest value in most

cases. LinkedIn concentrates professional networks inside one environment and is typically the most relevant platform for CEOs.

So, how often do you need to post on LinkedIn to see value? Is it daily, as you hear from so many influencers or even eager peers? No, it’s not.

Weekly.

A weekly LinkedIn post published consistently on the same day and at a similar time will bring your posts to the top of the feed of your network. You can consider adding a second weekly post to strengthen top-of-mind status while remaining sustainable, but you really don’t need more than that.

Consistency will drive top-of-mind status, which will, in turn, influence trust — and trust will strengthen your authority over time. You will become visible but not overexposed.

Podcast guesting expands authority beyond social media platforms

After establishing a steady LinkedIn presence, many CEOs look for additional reach that preserves depth and credibility. Podcast guesting offers the most effective extension.

Podcast conversations allow you to expand on your perspective and articulate your thoughts in a format that supports nuance. And beyond that, podcast guesting impacts both the SEO and the AEO (sometimes called GEO) of your organization vis-à-vis mentions on multiple platforms per episode. Your team can also repurpose these interviews into blog posts and LinkedIn posts, saving you time.

All you need is to be interviewed once a month. Even here, a higher quantity may be great for someone releasing a book or

launching a speaker tour. If that is not your current focus, a monthly interview is all you need to build visibility in a way that will not feel overdone.

Thought leadership articles add depth

And one final platform we recommend to Gen X’ers who create consistency on LinkedIn and podcast guesting: long-form written thought leadership, which often takes the form of articles. Articles allow us to express our ideas in a different format and, depending on where they are published, have a direct contribution to our credibility and, by extension, the credibility of our organization.

A bi-monthly cadence is all you need. If you can bump it up to monthly, this is really the recommended ceiling. Yes, you can build more articles, but you simply don’t need to.

A sustainable visibility cadence for CEOs

And here you have it:

- **Good enough:** One to two LinkedIn posts per week to maintain your top-of-mind status
- **Great:** One to two LinkedIn posts as noted above and one to two podcast appearances per month to impact your company’s SEO and AEO
- **Phenomenal:** LinkedIn and podcasting as above, and one thought leadership article per month, or even bi-monthly, to add depth and credibility.

I know that this is bittersweet news because most Gen X’ers I

speak with would rather have no visibility whatsoever. And yes, committing to building this level of visibility will still require discipline, consistency and time. But I hope the "sweet" part of the news came from me reassuring you that the quantity and time investment needed is far more manageable than the influencers out there will want us to believe.

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Mastered Your Craft? Now Master This One Skill That Determines Whether Your Business Thrives or Just Survives.



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Key Takeaways

- If you’re starting a business, you’ll need to learn how to sell, and mastering your craft doesn’t automatically make you a seller.
- Shift your mindset and understand it’s not about you. Ask questions that draw out the customer’s context, challenges and desired outcomes.
- Develop better questioning and listening skills, and understand that value is defined by the customer, not by you.
- Know that not every conversation is a sales opportunity. The win comes from recognizing early who you should pursue and who you shouldn’t.

When founders launch a business, they’re often propelled by confidence in their craft — deep accounting expertise, an architect’s trained eye or a passion for chemical-free lawn

care. But mastering your craft doesn’t automatically make you a seller, and in today’s competitive market, selling is *the* skill that determines whether your business thrives or just survives.

Most new entrepreneurs want to talk about their solution. They are experts on their product, their services and their vision. But success depends less on talking and more on *asking*, *listening*, *understanding* and *connecting* to the buyer’s reality. After all, selling is all about alignment: How can you uncover what matters to your customer and help them see that you deliver the outcomes they truly value?

Here’s how founders can build real selling capability as the engine that drives growth.

Shift your mindset: It’s not about you

Your business idea may be brilliant — but customers don’t buy brilliant ideas. They buy solutions to *their* problems.

Too many founders fall into what I call the “solution trap.” They start the conversation with what they *do* instead of what the customer *needs*. They lead with features, functions and how wonderful their solution is. However, customers are thinking about their pain, their challenges and their risk.

To start selling effectively, you must shift your mindset from *“Here’s what I built,” to “Tell me what’s keeping you up at night?”*

Ask questions that draw out the customer’s context, challenges and desired outcomes. This will help you to understand the problem. Then, you can determine if and how your solution connects to meaningful results. Remember, selling begins with listening.

Develop better questioning and listening skills

Although founders tend to love talking about their ideas, early-stage selling requires disciplined inquiry:

- What business problem are you trying to solve?
- What happens if nothing changes?
- How will success be measured?
- Who else is involved in this decision?

These questions sound simple – but they force you to step out of your own perspective and into your customer's world.

Listening is more than silence while someone talks. It's actively processing the response, identifying the implications and then asking better follow-up questions. Listening is not formulating what you want to say next in your head while the other person speaks. You want to hear not just *words*, but *unmet needs* and *revealed priorities*.

Too many founders fall into "show up and throw up" mode – they show up, and they throw up their pitch. Instead, make every conversation intentional. Your goal in early meetings should be to understand, not to convince.

Speak the customer's language: Value defined by them

Here's a critical insight that many founders overlook: Value is defined by the customer, not by you.

You may believe your product saves time, reduces cost, improves compliance – all good things. But customers define

value in their terms: A CFO may care about ROI in dollars; a head of operations may care about reliability or risk reduction; a small business owner may care about freeing up time for strategic work.

Successful selling requires adapting your message to the *outcomes your customer cares about*, not the features you built.

Ask yourself:

- What problem keeps them awake?
- What happens if that problem persists?
- How do they define value?

Once you understand that, you can position your solution not as *good*, but as *important* – something worth their time, focus and investment.

Do you have a real opportunity?

It’s important to recognize that not every conversation is a sales opportunity – and that’s okay. The win comes from recognizing early who you *should* pursue and who you shouldn’t.

Ask qualifying questions early and often:

- Is this a real business challenge you can solve?
- Is there a budget or willingness to invest?
- Who else influences the decision?
- What happens if they decide not to act?

If you can’t clearly answer what the customer expects the value to be – and how they’ll measure success – then you don’t

have a deal yet. And this is a good thing. As a founder, it's important to gather this type of information, not just for this specific prospect, but to better understand the buyer journey in general.

Selling is a skill – and you can learn it

In conclusion, entrepreneurship is built on passion, vision and expertise – but *selling is the engine* that turns all of that into reality. The good news? Selling is a learned discipline. You don't need to have an outgoing or persuasive personality. Instead, it's about being genuinely curious and focused on your customer and the value you can deliver to them.

Start your business with the humility to learn and the discipline to listen. With this approach, you'll be able to solve real problems, and ultimately, the way you sell will become a competitive advantage.

Customers don't buy solutions – they buy outcomes that matter to them. If you start there with your approach to selling, you'll build a business that thrives.

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- Develop better questioning and listening skills, and understand that value is defined by the customer, not by you.
- Know that not every conversation is a sales opportunity. The win comes from recognizing early who you should pursue and who you shouldn't.

When founders launch a business, they're often propelled by confidence in their craft – deep accounting expertise, an architect's trained eye or a passion for chemical-free lawn care. But mastering your craft doesn't automatically make you a seller, and in today's competitive market, selling is *the* skill that determines whether your business thrives or just survives.

Most new entrepreneurs want to talk about their solution. They are experts on their product, their services and their vision. But success depends less on talking and more on *asking*, *listening*, *understanding* and *connecting* to the buyer's reality. After all, selling is all about alignment: How can you uncover what matters to your customer and help them see that you deliver the outcomes they truly value?

https://www.entrepreneur.com/starting-a-business/why-expertise-alone-isnt-enough-to-grow-your-business/501946

Retail Expansion Isn't Scary – Here's 6 Ways to Make It

Work for You



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Key Takeaways

- Growth creates stress tests for inventory, fulfillment and forecasting — brands need systems that scale before chasing bigger retail deals.
- Saying yes to retail without defending your economics can erode margins. Retail knows numbers — you should too.

Like most founders, the early days of my company were very much geared towards solving a real problem. I wanted to create products to fill a market gap a loved one had personally experienced: finding effective, holistic and affordable solutions to common foot conditions like bunions.

Product development and direct-to-consumer sales were my initial focus as CEO, but as the brand grew and I began to recognize the inherent potential in what we were building, retail expansion became a natural progression.

For many business leaders, the path to scaling a business and expanding appropriately into retail can be daunting, but it doesn’t have to be. What really puts a brand at greater risk is relying on one retail channel, rather than an omnichannel approach. Each channel represents its own value proposition, comes with its own rules, and requires unique forethought in terms of operational backbone.

In this article, I’m breaking down the six tips I’ve found most valuable in scaling my company, ZenToes, from an initially direct-to-consumer brand to a multi-channel retail darling.

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1. Start with ecommerce to prove market fit

Ecommerce is an ideal starting point and invaluable testing ground for emerging brands. It allows founders to validate product-market fit, test messaging and gather direct consumer feedback before scaling into larger retail partnerships. Our direct-to-consumer model allowed us to build trust, refine our assortment and truly understand our customers’ wants and needs.

By starting online, we could gather feedback from customers, iterate quickly and collect data to demonstrate market demand and purchasing behavior. This became a powerful tool in our

later conversations with retailers. Retail buyers want to see traction and proven consumer demand, not just great packaging or a compelling story.

2. Familiarize yourself with the expectations of each retail channel

Every retail channel is unique and comes with its own set of expectations and challenges. Selling on Amazon, for example, looks entirely different from working with a big box retailer like Walmart or a regional pharmacy chain. Each channel comes with its own standards around pricing, packaging, supply chain logistics and marketing support.

Before committing, take time to understand the requirements and cost implications of each. What works on Amazon might not translate to a store shelf, and what moves in a boutique chain might not perform in mass retail.

Approach each channel as its own ecosystem, with its own unique demographic of consumers, and tailor your strategy and approach to suit its specific needs.

3. Be prepared to scale from an operations standpoint

As exciting as growth is, the reality is that its success is hugely dependent on operational readiness. Rapid growth can easily expose inefficiencies in inventory management, forecasting and logistics.

At ZenToes, we invested early in building systems that could support scale before pursuing major retail accounts. This meant improving fulfillment capabilities, ensuring we had the right manufacturing partners and implementing robust quality control processes. Always remember, sustainable expansion

depends on the strength of your operational backbone.

4. Don’t be scared to negotiate

Not every retail opportunity is the right retail opportunity. While new retail partnerships are exciting, don’t let yourself always succumb to the pressure to say “yes.” The right retail partnerships will be mutually beneficial and make sense both financially and strategically.

Retailers respect brands that know their numbers and can clearly articulate their value and needs. Negotiating terms around pricing, placement and marketing support isn’t just advisable, it’s necessary to ensure profitability and mutual success.

5. Use data to strengthen your retail pitch

Go into conversations understanding that retailers make decisions based on data and performance potential. The insights gathered from direct-to-consumer channels can become your strongest asset when pitching to retail partners. These data points might include conversion rates, repeat purchases, customer reviews and engagement metrics.

Combining narrative with measurable results builds confidence with buyers and sets the stage for long-term collaboration.

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6 Approach marketing holistically to support your retail relationships

Entering retail is just the beginning of a long-term collaborative process. It’s important and expected that your marketing strategy evolves to support sales specific to their channel. In short, retailers expect brand partners to drive awareness and traffic to their shelves, both online and in-store.

For my company, that translates to aligning every campaign with our retail presence and proactively driving traffic through our paid marketing and public relations efforts to our partners’ channels.

Every marketing effort should not only strengthen your brand but also reinforce your retail relationships. A cohesive, omni-channel approach ensures consistent visibility and sustained performance across all points of sale.

To sum up key takeaways from my own founder journey, retail expansion requires intention, adaptability and operational excellence. Scaling successfully means understanding where your brand delivers the most value and building the right systems to support that growth.

Remember to always step back and look at the big picture to ensure alignment in timing, readiness and fit.

Key Takeaways

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- Saying yes to retail without defending your economics

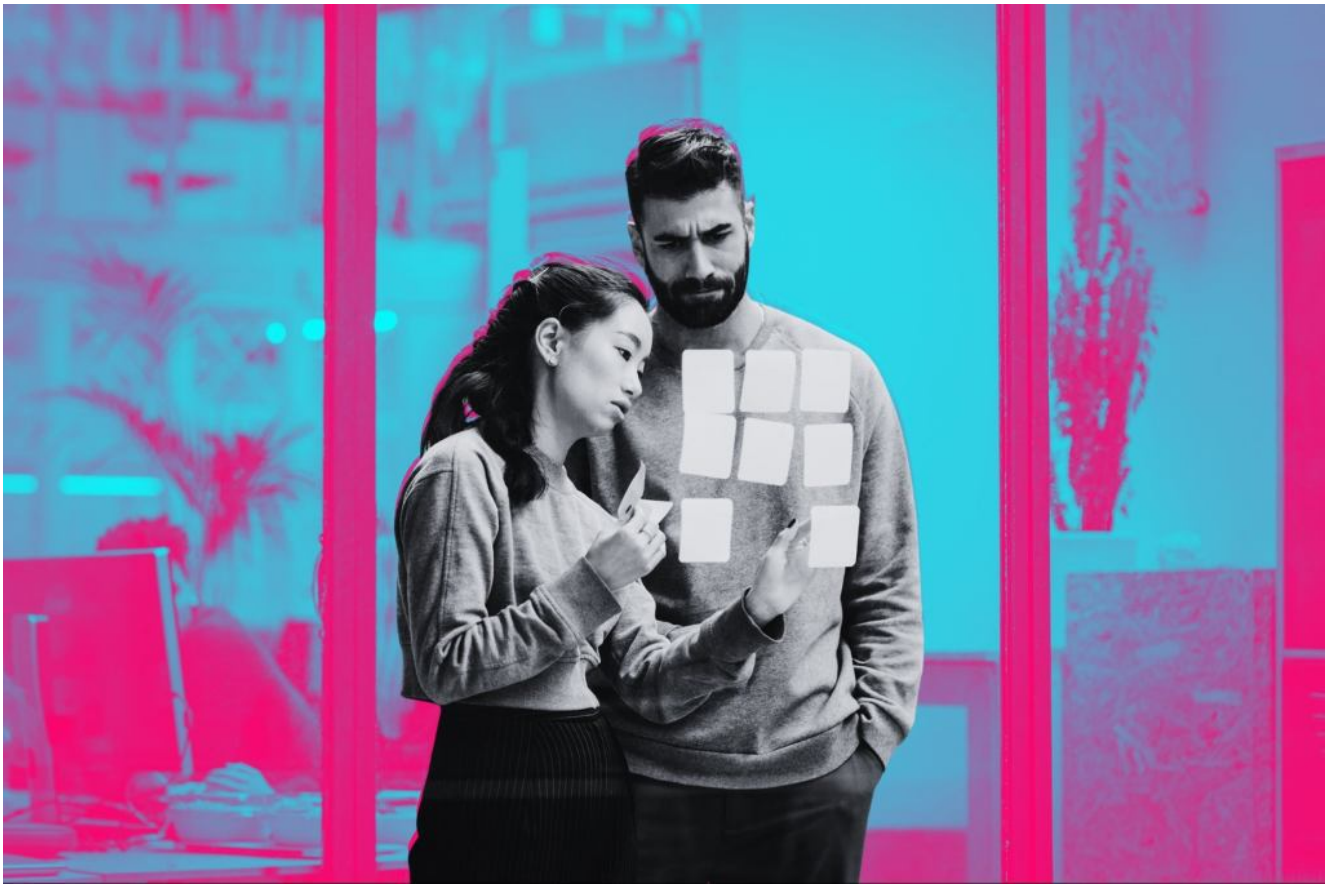
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https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/retail-shouldnt-be-scary-heres-how-to-make-it-work/502213

67% of Strategic Plans Fail – But Not for the Reason Everyone Thinks. Here's the Real Culprit.



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Key Takeaways

- Failure to execute a strategy is often referred to as an “execution problem,” but the real problem is authority.
- Companies pay millions in consulting fees to develop a strategic plan, but those plans often stall because consultants lack institutional power.
- Embedded operators drive results. They have authority to approve capital expenditures, hire executives and allocate resources — work that consultants aren’t designed or incentivized to do.

The 143-slide strategy deck looked perfect. Months of work by a top-tier consulting firm had mapped out a three-year transformation plan. The market analysis, competitive positioning, operational roadmap and financial projections were all there.

Six months later, the CEO calls me. Not one single slide has been implemented and is still sitting in a shared drive. The management team has gone back to doing things as always. And the company has spent $2 million on consulting fees for nothing.

“I know we had a good strategy, he tells me. “But we could never get enough people to implement it.”

According to Harvard Business Review, 67% of well-formulated strategies fail because of poor execution.

The problem isn’t execution. It’s authority.

While the failure of strategy implementation can often be referred to as an “execution problem,” the real problem is authority. Consulting firms assume that providing smart advice and capable management will lead to successful outcomes. But, in reality, it does not create solutions.

Why? Because consultants lack institutional power.

When a consultant states, “You should reorganize your sales unit,” this is an advisory statement. When someone who has control of your budget, sits on your board and influences how much you are compensated, says the same thing, it is a directive. Both statements may contain similar language, but the influence behind each is very different.

Most strategies fail at the “messy middle.” Middle managers kill strategies silently because they either never fully prioritize the strategy, or when the consultants leave, the middle manager reverts back to their normal routine (the old playbook) as opposed to continuing the new strategy.

There is a significant “execution gap” between the brilliance of a strategic recommendation and the ability of the

organization to successfully execute on that strategy, due to the fact that no one has the authority to push the new strategy through the organization's natural resistance to change.

Embedded leadership recognizes this dynamic. A consultant may be able to identify the problem, but they cannot override the VP of Finance, who is slow rolling the budget approvals; or the COO, who claims he is too busy to staff the initiative; or the Division President, who agrees to the new strategy in meetings, but later tells his team to ignore the new plan.

About a decade ago, the private equity industry made a major shift away from using consultants to develop strategies and instead began to embed operators with actual line authority who showed up, took responsibility, and were accountable for the results. They are the internal leaders with visibility and voice within the organization, not external advisors who check in every quarter.

Having budget control and hiring authority

I have seen operating partners have direct authority to approve capital expenditures, hire senior executives and reallocate resources. When embedded operators say "We're going to consolidate these three functions," they have the authority to pull the budget lever to make it happen.

Consulting's "success" isn't tied to operating success. Typically, operating partners will have a large portion of their equity or carry as a function of the company's performance; therefore, their incentive for the company's strategy to be successful is higher than consultants, who get paid regardless of the outcome.

Also, embedded operators have a longer time horizon than

consultants. Typically, embedded operators sign agreements for at least 2-4 years (which can include renewal options). This allows them to take a company's strategy from concept to completion, through the "messy middle" and into reality, which may not align with the original strategy.

The real work of execution is messy, repetitive, political and often draining. Consultants are not designed to operate in this environment. While consultants are excellent at diagnosing and developing solutions to these problems, they do not attend the numerous follow-up meetings necessary to implement the solution and, ultimately, to determine if the solution is viable.

I worked with one company that engaged an embedded CFO for two years. The embedded CFO's task was not to develop a financial strategy; the strategy was clear. His task was to participate in each budget meeting to question every assumption, require each division to utilize the new planning process and personally review the monthly close until the new process was fully adopted.

Was this type of work intellectually stimulating? No. Could a consultant have accomplished the same task? Yes. However, at what cost? The embedded CFO received a modest salary and ownership of the company. A consultant would have cost the company more than they could have justified. Moreover, the embedded CFO had the authority to enforce compliance with the new processes.

Why executives are hesitant

Embedded leadership provides significant benefits, but many executives are hesitant to bring in embedded operators. Why?

Embedded operators are often perceived as a threat; they can challenge the status quo, and by doing so, they may also challenge your authority structure.

While bringing in a consultant is generally viewed as low risk, as it does not challenge your current authority structure, once the consulting engagement ends, the consultant leaves. Bringing in an embedded operator, on the other hand, acknowledges that you cannot execute the strategy that was developed; it gives someone the power to make decisions, and they also have the ability to question your decisions and influence the direction of the organization.

Many CEOs state that they want execution; however, what they really want is validation for the strategic plan that they have already developed, and consultants are very effective at providing that type of validation. But if you are serious about bridging the execution gap (i.e., making the strategy work rather than simply making the strategy appear to be working), you will need to have someone with authority in the room, not just advising, but leading.

Because ultimately, strategies do not fail because the strategy was incorrect – they fail because no one did anything to make it happen.

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Key Takeaways

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The Stock Market Is at a Record High. So Why Can’t Young College Grads Find Jobs?



The Dow crossed 50,000 last week, but unemployment for college grads age 22 to 27 hit 5.6% in December, matching recession levels. Despite popular beliefe, the culprit isn’t AI. It’s a massive mismatch between what colleges produce and what employers need, reports The Wall Street Journal.

Many grads lack basic skills employers demand, having skated through credential mills that hand out A’s for minimal effort. Meanwhile, 31% of small business owners have job openings they can’t fill, mostly in skilled trades.

The labor market is top heavy with heavily credentialed workers who have less work experience and are often less productive than older counterparts. Some relied on AI tools like ChatGPT to complete coursework and struggle when those crutches disappear. Employers report continued challenges finding skilled labor in engineering, healthcare, and trades, while rote work that college grads can do may soon be replaced by AI anyway.

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Apple Is About to Release a Flood of New Products — Here's What's Coming



Apple is about to kick off a busy 2026 with a blitz of product releases over the next several weeks, according to Bloomberg. The iPhone 17e is coming in the next few weeks at $599 with the A19 chip from the iPhone 17, MagSafe charging, and Apple's newest in-house cellular chips.

Updated iPads are also imminent, including a refreshed entry-level model with the A18 chip and iPad Airs with M4 processors. The base iPad is getting Apple Intelligence support for the first time, which will be a major part of the marketing. Apple also has several Macs coming shortly, including new 14-inch and 16-inch MacBook Pros and the MacBook Air with M5 processors.

The centerpiece launch is Apple’s low-cost MacBook featuring a screen under 13 inches powered by an iPhone-class chip. It’s designed to compete with cheaper Windows laptops and Chromebooks and should serve as an enticing product in enterprise and emerging markets. Looking toward the second half of the year, Apple plans to release its first foldable iPhone and a MacBook Pro with an OLED screen and touch support.

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