The audit field manual: *stay curious*

The whole thing is: be curious. Be genuinely interested in this owner, this team, this machine. The advisor who runs the audit is not there to solve anything on the spot. You are there to build the relationship, ask real questions, and capture context so completely that our engineers and leadership can craft solutions that actually fit. You learn their story, their processes, their gaps and bottlenecks, and what they are great at. From all of that we build a narrative and a map of what this business will become, and then we build it.

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01 · THE POSTURE

Curiosity is the method

Everything else in this manual is technique. This is the job.

Problems reveal themselves to the curious

You do not find bottlenecks by hunting for them. You find them by being so interested in how this business actually works that people show you. Ask how a thing works, then how it really works, then what happens when it doesn't. The owner has answered "how's business" a thousand times. Almost nobody has ever been genuinely curious about the machine they built. When you are, they open it for you.

You capture. Engineering and leadership craft.

The advisor is the instrument. Every story, number, quote, workaround, and frustration you capture becomes the raw material our engineers and leadership use to design the solution. They were not in the room. They can only craft as well as you captured. A thin notebook produces a generic system; a rich one produces a system that fits this business like it grew there. So write down more than feels necessary: the verbatim quote, the sticky note on the dispatcher's monitor, the workaround someone is quietly proud of, the thing the owner's voice changed on.

Empathetic and intentional

Empathetic: this business is somebody's life work, and most of their net worth, and you are being trusted inside it. Honor that. Never make anyone feel audited. Intentional: curiosity is not wandering. Every conversation has a purpose in the map, every question earns its place, and you always know which of the four captures you are working on. Warm in manner, precise in aim.

What they are great at matters as much as what is broken

We are not gap inspectors. Every business that has survived to $2M+ is great at something, usually something the owner cannot see because it is the water they swim in. Finding it is not flattery, it is engineering input: the plan builds on strengths, protects them, and scales them. And it is narrative input: the story we hand back is "here is what you built, here is where it strains, here is what it becomes." A findings deck that is all gaps is both wrong and unsellable.

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02 · THE FOUR CAPTURES

What you are collecting, all day, every day

Every conversation, observation, and data pull feeds one of these four. Tag your notes accordingly. Together they become the narrative brief that engineering and leadership work from.

CAPTURE 1

The story

Where this business came from, why it exists, what the owner wants it to become, and what they are afraid of. The story is what makes the plan theirs instead of ours. Without it we are selling software.

CAPTURE 2

The processes

How work actually flows, lead to cash, hire to payday, order to install. Not the official version, the real one, with every handoff, wait, and workaround drawn.

CAPTURE 3

The gaps and bottlenecks

Where the machine slips, waits, leaks, or depends on one person's memory. Stated as numbers wherever possible, because numbers survive the scoping room and opinions do not.

CAPTURE 4

The gifts

What they are great at: the craft, the reputation, the relationships, the crew that would run through walls. The plan scales these. The narrative honors them.

The one rule of findings

A finding is a number or a verbatim quote, tagged to a lever and a capture. "Sales process is weak" is an opinion. "1,400 contacts in the CRM, 61 percent untouched in 12 months, and quotes are not tracked, so close rate is unknowable" is a finding. "I'd have to ask Dave," heard eleven times in three days, is also a finding. Capture both kinds.

The 10 Value Levers, asked with curiosity

These are not a questionnaire to administer. They are the things a genuinely curious person would want to know, organized so nothing gets missed. Work them into conversation, follow the interesting thread when one opens, and check the lever off when you have its answers. Score each lever 1 to 5 on the scorecard. Every lever ends with a gifts question, ask it every time.

LEVER 01

Financial Performance

What you are curious about: does the money story the owner tells match the story the books tell, and would a stranger's accountant believe either one.

1. **"Walk me through the last three years, month by month if you have it. Tell me what was happening in the business when the line moves."**
   Numbers and story at once. The narration around the dips is often the real history of the company.
2. **"Who does the books, on what, and when were they last reconciled?"**
   Unreconciled cash-basis books are the most common finding in this band.
3. **"What runs through the business that's really personal? Everyone has some, I'm curious what yours looks like."**
   Normalize it and the honest add-back list appears. A buyer's accountant finds it later either way.
4. **"Do the tax returns match these statements?"**
   Mismatch kills credibility in diligence and in lending.
5. **"How much of this revenue comes back on its own every year, and how much do you have to go win again?"**
   Recurring share moves the multiple more than almost anything.
6. **"Who owes you money right now, and for how long? How does that feel?"**
   AR aging, and the owner's relationship to collecting. Slow AR is recoverable cash in month one.
7. **"When did you last raise prices? What happened? What did you fear would happen?"**
   The gap between the fear and the outcome is usually free margin.
8. **"Show me the top five customers as a share of revenue."**
   Concentration reprices businesses. Two customers at 60 percent is a headline.
9. **Gifts: "What part of the money side do you have dialed that your competitors probably don't?"**
   Some owners have iron collections or brilliant job costing. Find it, protect it, scale it.

Listen for: no monthly close, commingled spending, tax mismatch, margins the owner cannot explain.

`Collect: 3yr P&L and balance sheets, tax returns, AR/AP aging, customer ranking.`

LEVER 02

Operations & Systems

What you are curious about: how work really flows, and where it waits. The gear train, drawn honestly.

1. **"Take a real job from last week and walk me through it, first call to cash in the bank. Every handoff. I want to see your machine run."**
   The most productive hour of the audit. Do it live with a real job, and draw it as they talk.
2. **"What exists only in someone's head?"**
   The missing-pieces inventory in one question. Follow every name they mention.
3. **"How long from job done to invoice out? Invoice out to paid? What happens in between?"**
   Days hiding in this gap are working capital nobody has to sell anything to get.
4. **"What gets redone? What do customers call back about?"**
   Rework rate. Nobody measures it and everyone knows it.
5. **"Show me the tools that run the place, what each costs, and where you're copying things from one screen into another."**
   The stack audit. Double entry becomes the engineering build list.
6. **"If 40 percent more work showed up next month, where does it jam first?"**
   Names the true constraint before reactivation finds it the hard way.
7. **Gifts: "What do you do operationally that makes customers come back? What would your best customer say you never get wrong?"**
   The operational gift is usually the brand. The systems we build must protect it while scaling it.

Listen for: scheduling by text, invoicing batched weekly, workarounds people are proud of (each one marks a missing system). `Collect: tool list with costs, the job trace with timestamps, any SOPs, callback logs.`

LEVER 03

Team & Organization

What you are curious about: the people who make it run, what each of them carries, and whether the structure holds without heroics.

1. **"Draw me the org chart the way it actually works, not the way it's written."**
   The gap between the two is a finding by itself.
2. **"Who besides you can quote a job? Close a sale? Calm down an angry customer? Tell me about them."**
   Key-person inventory, and an invitation for the owner to brag about their people. Both captures at once.
3. **"Who's left in the last two years, and what's the story there?"**
   Turnover pattern, told as stories, which is how the truth comes out.
4. **"How does the team know if they had a good week?"**
   Tests whether any scorecard or cadence exists.
5. **"What meetings happen every week no matter what?"**
   "None" is common, honest, and fixable in week one of the install.
6. **"How do people get paid, and what does that pay quietly tell them to care about?"**
   Comp misalignment explains most sales and quality mysteries.
7. **Gifts:** **"Who on this team would be nearly impossible to replace, and what makes them that good?"**
   The plan must protect and multiply these people, never route around them.

Listen for: everyone reporting to the owner, no second-in-command, hiring only when drowning. `Collect: org chart, comp structures, turnover list, meeting calendar.`

LEVER 04

Sales & Customer Acquisition

What you are curious about: where customers actually come from, what happens to the ones who almost bought, and the list of past customers nobody talks to anymore. This lever feeds reactivation directly, so collect the data assets, not just answers.

1. **"Tell me about your last twenty customers. Where did each one really come from?"**
   Real channel mix beats the owner's theory of the channel mix.
2. **"Walk me through a month in numbers: leads in, quotes out, jobs won."**
   The funnel math every value story gets priced against.
3. **"How many people are in your list or CRM, and how many bought something in the last 12 months? Can we pull it and look together?"**
   The dormant slice, usually 30 to 50 percent. Get the export, it is reactivation's raw material.
4. **"What happens to somebody who gets a quote and goes quiet? Show me one."**
   Follow-up is where this size of business leaks the most. "Nothing" is the common honest answer.
5. **"What do you spend on marketing, and what can you prove came back?"**
   Attribution discipline or its absence.
6. **"Is the business name on your registration, your website, and your phone listings all the same?"**
   A2P carrier registration gates every SMS campaign. Check in the audit, not after a launch fails.
7. **"Who answers the phone, and what happens after hours?"**
   Missed-call revenue is a fast visible win.
8. **Gifts: "When a customer picks you and tells you why, what do they say? What sale are you proudest of?"**
   The winning pitch already exists in the customer's words. Reactivation messaging starts here.

Listen for: CRM used as a phone book, one referral source carrying the business, review presence below local rivals. `Collect: CRM export with last-purchase dates, lead source report, marketing spend, listing consistency check.`

LEVER 05

Market Position

What you are curious about: why the market chooses them, on purpose or by proximity, and where unused pricing power is hiding.

1. **"Who do you actually lose work to, and on what: price, speed, or relationship?"**
   Each answer implies a different fix.
2. **"What work do you turn away, and why? What would it take to say yes?"**
   Turned-away demand is the growth thesis hiding in plain sight.
3. **"What's changing in your industry that worries you? What's the opening nobody local is taking?"**
   Feeds the market report and shows how far ahead the owner is looking.
4. **Gifts: "What's your reputation in this town? What do people say about you when you're not in the room?"**
   Reputation is the most undervalued asset on the balance sheet that isn't on the balance sheet.

Listen for: competing on price alone, brand that equals the owner's personal name only. `Collect: competitor set, review benchmarks, pricing versus market.`

LEVER 06

Transferability & Risk

What you are curious about: what survives the owner stepping away. Founder-dependent businesses take a 30 to 50 percent valuation haircut, so this is the most expensive lever on the board, and the most personal. Ask it gently and let silences work.

1. **"What happens here if you disappear for 30 days? Ninety? Walk me through the first week."**
   The owner-dependence question. The pause before the answer is data.
2. **"Which customer relationships are yours personally, not the company's?"**
   These need succession plans, not software.
3. **"If ownership ever changed, do your customer contracts follow the company? Has anyone ever checked?"**
   Change-of-control clauses reset revenue in a sale. Almost nobody has looked.
4. **"Whose name are the licenses and certifications in?"**
   Licenses in the owner's personal name are a transfer blocker with a long lead time.
5. **"Which supplier or sub could you not replace this month?"**
   Supplier concentration mirrors customer concentration.
6. **"Anything legal or compliance-shaped hanging around, open or likely?"**
   Better we find it than a buyer or a lender.
7. **Gifts: "What have you already built that doesn't need you? Where does the machine actually hold?"**
   Most owners have systematized something well. It proves they can, and it is the pattern we extend.

Listen for: pride in being irreplaceable (empathize first, it is identity, then quantify what it costs), handshake deals with top customers, family in undocumented roles. `Collect: contract sample with assignability check, license inventory, insurance policies.`

LEVERS 07-10

The capital stack: Capital Readiness, Working Capital, Acquisition Financing, Expansion Debt

What you are curious about: can this business fund its own next chapter, and what is it quietly paying for money today. These levers produce the capital capacity read and open the credit and funding lane.

1. **"Do you know your personal credit score and business credit profile today? Most owners don't, no judgment."**
   SBA gates are numeric: roughly 650 to 680+ FICO, SBSS 165. Below the line, credit repair is phase one, and the split-payment policy exists for this client.
2. **"What debt sits on the business? Rate, payment, personal guarantee? How did each one happen?"**
   The debt schedule, with its stories. Stacked MCAs at 40+ percent APR are a burning platform and an instant-win refinance.
3. **"All-in, what are you paying for money right now? Want to do the real math together?"**
   Most owners on factor-rate paper have never annualized it. Doing it with them, kindly, builds more trust than any pitch.
4. **"If receivables froze, how many payrolls could you cover?"**
   Working capital cushion, and the future peg baseline.
5. **"Does your banker know your name?"**
   Relationship depth predicts placement speed.
6. **"If the right competitor came up for sale at a fair price, could you move in 60 days? Would you want to?"**
   Opens acquisition financing. With history and coverage, SBA expansion rules can take an owner into a same-industry acquisition with little or nothing down, lender willing.
7. **"Does cash flow cover about 1.15 to 1.25 times the debt payments on last year's real numbers?"**
   The lender pre-screen, run in the audit so the capital plan is built on pass or fail, not hope.

Listen for: credit unknown, no banking relationship, coverage eaten by expensive paper. `Collect: credit pulls with consent, debt schedule, 12 months bank statements, DSCR calc.`

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04 · THE FIELD PROTOCOL

Two weeks of structured curiosity

The audit succeeds or fails on how it feels to their team. We enter as what we are: a growth partner, curious and useful. Nobody hears the words sale, exit, or valuation from us on the floor, ever. That vocabulary belongs to the owner's private sessions only.

DAY 0 **Before we walk in**

NDA signed. Data request sent: financials, CRM export, tool list, org chart, debt schedule. Interviews booked. And the **team announcement scripted with the owner:** "We've brought in an operating partner to help us grow: new pipeline, reactivated customers, better systems." True, and it reads as investment.

D 1–2 **Owner sessions, one and two**

Session one (90 min) is the story session: how they got here, how the money works, what they want, what they're proud of. Mostly listen. Session two (60 min, a different day): the risks, the dependencies, the credit and capital picture, the "what breaks without you" pass. **Split on purpose:** the hard disclosures come on the second sitting, after they have watched you be genuinely interested on the first. Our own meeting data says the real material arrives after 40+ minutes of listening.

D 2–4 **Department conversations**

45 to 60 minutes each, one on one, no owner in the room. Finance or bookkeeper. Sales lead plus one rep. Operations lead. The office manager or admin, who knows where everything really is. Two or three front-line people: senior tech, dispatcher, CSR. **These are conversations, not interviews.** Openers that work: "Walk me through yesterday, start to finish." "What do you fix over and over?" "What does this place do better than anywhere you've worked?" "If you ran it for a week, what’s the first thing you'd change?" The front line hands you gaps and gifts in the same sentence.

D 3–5 **Watch the machine run**

The morning huddle if one exists, dispatch, a ride-along if the work leaves the building. **Trace one real job end to end,** lead to cash, with timestamps, drawing every handoff and every wait. The trace becomes the centerfold of the narrative because the owner has never seen their own machine drawn.

D 1–5 **Reactivation launches in parallel**

CRM export in, dormant slice segmented, campaign live by end of week one with owner-approved messaging, built from the customer’s own words captured in Lever 4. **Every message approved before it sends.** Model conservatively, promise nothing numeric: benchmarks run 5 to 15 percent of recently lapsed contacts, and our own data replaces the benchmark inside the engagement.

DAILY

The debrief and the running log

Fifteen minutes with the owner at day's end: what we saw, what we're curious about tomorrow. Every observation enters the log the day it happens, tagged to a lever and a capture (story, process, gap, gift). **No saved-up surprises.** The owner should never hear a finding for the first time at the final presentation.

The craft of staying curious

- Let them talk. Silence after a question is a tool, not a problem.
- Follow up with "tell me more about that" before moving to your next question. The second layer is where the truth lives.
- Ask for the artifact, not the description: "show me the schedule" beats "how does scheduling work."
- Triangulate: what the owner says, what the books say, what the floor says. The gaps between the three are findings. Name them kindly.
- Write verbatim quotes. Their words are engineering input and narrative material.
- Never fix anything mid-conversation. You are capturing, not solving. "That's exactly what the plan will address" is the whole answer.
- Notice what they light up about. That is a gift, log it.

Never on the floor

- The words sale, exit, valuation, buyer, or multiple, anywhere outside the owner's private sessions.
- Promises to employees about roles, raises, or changes. Not ours to make.
- Criticism of the owner or any employee, to anyone.
- Data leaving client systems outside the agreed channel.
- Solving on the spot. An improvised fix on day three costs a crafted system on day fourteen.

05 · FROM CONTEXT TO CRAFT

How captured context becomes the build plan

Week two is where the curiosity pays off. The advisor hands engineering and leadership everything, and together we craft the narrative, the map, and the systems. Four sessions, in order.

01 **The narrative brief, advisor**

The advisor writes the story before anyone scores anything: where this business came from, what it is great at, where the machine strains, what the owner wants it to become, told with the quotes and the job trace. Then the scorecard: all ten levers, 1 to 5, every gap quantified in dollars where possible (the dormant list value, the AR days, the rework rate, the refinance saving, the dependence haircut recovered). **The brief is the deliverable to engineering. It is the room they were never in.**

02 **Engineering craft session**

The advisor walks engineering through the brief, story first, then findings. Engineering designs to the context: the systems that fit this team, this stack, these gifts, not a template. Each build item gets **effort, dependencies, what it needs from the client's team, and what it moves** (which lever, which number). Engineering kills what is not buildable in the window and flags what the stack makes expensive. Nothing enters the plan that engineering has not sized, and nothing well-crafted comes out of a thin brief. Capture rich, craft rich.

03 **Leadership review**

Leadership prices and sequences, and makes the calls advisors do not make alone: engagement shape (full partnership, build-and-hand-over, or stay-close), capital lane work and its order (credit repair first when the file is blocked), whether an acquisition or exit path gets scoped now or parked, and any special payment terms. **Go or no-go on every path, on the record.**

04 **Sequencing rule**

Revenue first, independence second, visibility third. Reactivation and follow-up systems first, because they pay for the engagement and buy trust. Owner-independence systems second, because they recover the haircut. Dashboards third, because reporting on a broken machine is decoration. Capital work runs parallel from day one when credit repair is in scope, it has the longest lead time. And every phase protects the gifts: nothing we install may degrade the thing customers already love.

05 **The presentation: their story, and the map**

Delivered in person at day 14, and it is a narrative, not a report: **here is what you built and what it is great at. Here is where the machine strains, in your own numbers. Here is what this business becomes, and here is the map:** phases, prices, owners, dates, capital read, valuation range now and potential. Success criteria agreed in writing before any install begins, in numbers. Book the phase-one kickoff before leaving the room.

06 · PAYMENT POLICY

Terms, and the one exception

Internal policy. Advisors quote standard terms by default and never volunteer the exception.

Standard

The audit fee is paid in full at close, before day zero. The audit credits toward the phase-one engagement when the client proceeds. No discounts on the audit fee: the ladder of options is the flexibility, not the price. Payment plans through financing partners are offered where available.

The split: half at close, half at build-plan delivery

Special occasions only, leadership sign-off required, never advertised. The split exists for one primary case: **the credit-blocked owner.** Consumer financing does not work for them by definition (Affirm and similar decline the same file the banks decline), and these are exactly the clients whose plan starts with credit repair and ends with funding. For them we take half at close, run the audit, and collect the second half at build-plan delivery, by which point reactivation is live and the value is visible.

- Qualifies: credit-blocked owner entering the capital lane, or a dated liquidity event inside 45 days. Nothing else.
- Second half is invoiced at build-plan delivery, a date in the agreement, never "when things improve."
- A split is not a discount. Full fee, two payments, in writing.
- One split per client, ever. If the second half slips, no phase-one work starts until it clears.

> SAY THIS, ONLY WHEN SAVING A QUALIFIED DEAL
>
> "Normally the audit is paid up front. Since fixing your credit file is literally phase one of your plan, I can ask leadership for an exception: half now, half when we hand you the build plan two weeks in. By then you'll have seen the reactivation campaign running. Fair?"

Omnira Partners internal training document. Companion to the closing playbook and the confidential assessment client document. Built on the 10 Value Levers Assessment Framework and the verified research files in sales-intel.