Why you can't delegate

Most advice on how to delegate as a business owner calls it a trust problem. Listen closer. You are not deciding whether they are worthy. You are hunting for a feeling that the work is real, and the feeling only shows up when your hands have been on it.

Next time you reach to re-check finished work, ask out loud what you are looking for. If the answer is proof, skip it.

If it is code or safety, check it once, in daylight, with them there. That is the floor, not a relapse.

You hand something off and then redo a piece of it "so it matches." The match is you. The piece was fine. Fine did not give you the click you wanted, so you supplied the click with your own screwdriver, your own inbox, your own Saturday.

You ask for a photo, and the photo is not enough, so you go look. You tell them the photo helps you stay out of their way. The photo is a leash with good manners.

You delegate the task and keep the decision, the customer, the vendor, and the password. You have delegated a chore. You have kept the business. Then you wonder why you are still the bottleneck, and you attend a talk about letting go, and you let go of a task that did not matter.

You praise them in public and recheck them in private. They know. They start leaving a small thing undone so you have something to find, because a found thing is how you leave them alone afterward. You have trained a crew to feed your alarm.

You say "I trust you" and then you ask three questions that are not about the job. They are about whether you can stop thinking. The questions do not work. Thinking is not the organ that is loud. The hands are.

A spouse or a partner counts what you will not count. How many times you went back. How many dinners started late. They are not nagging. They are the only person with the tally, because you experience each trip as a one-time exception.

Most owners we sat with called a second pass quality when it was a search for the feeling of having been there. The work did not need you. The alarm did. Those are different clients, and only one of them pays.

What are you looking for the fortieth time?

Sergio has re-checked finished work 40 times in a year. The facilitator asks what he is looking for. He says one word. Proof.

His wife has the number too. "Forty," Elena says. "I counted too."

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He is not a villain in this scene, and he is not a fool. The terminals were his name on a license on the wall, his name on the truck, his name on the permit. If a lug lets go in a wall years from now, he believes they will not call Wes. Some of that belief is the trade. Some of it is the alarm using the trade as a hall pass. The book lets both stand, and then it lets Wes speak. Stay out of my panel. Once it is torqued, it is torqued. Go back in and you are not checking. You are changing it.

That is the sentence to put on the visor, next to a child's drawing of a man alone with a ladder. Checking that changes the work is not a standard. It is interference, dressed as one. When the alarm runs him, the bar rises until nothing counts unless it passed through his hands. The bar feels like craft. The empty dinner feels like the cost of craft. The cost is real. The craft, past the point of torque, is theater.

The click of the tape measure is his tell. Thumb on the blade, out, snap back. He does it when the room gets close to the thing he does not want to hand over. If you have a version, it is the inbox refresh, the drive-by, the swing past on the way home. Notice the motion. The motion is earlier than the story about standards. The story is the caption. The click is the alarm.

Why does proof feel like a tool in your hand?

Trust is the word the talks use. It is the wrong word for this hour. You can trust someone and still open the panel, because trust is a verdict and proof is a sensation. Verdicts do not soothe a surge. Sensation does, for about ten minutes, until the next job.

So the check you can stop is not "the check." Some checks are the floor. Code and safety are the floor. The thing that, if wrong, hurts a person or ruins the work in a way the page cannot fix later. You do not delegate the floor into a shrug. You also do not promote every preference to the floor so that your presence remains mandatory.

Write the floor in words a tired person can use at 4:00. If it is not on that list, the check is proof-seeking. You will feel unfinished. Unfinished is the sensation the alarm told you was danger. It is not danger. It is the absence of your hands, which the job survived.

The one-page handoff, what done looks like, when to call, when you are not coming, lives on Can your business run without you?. Use it if you never made the standard visible. Use this page if the standard is visible and you go back anyway.

What does the crew learn when you reopen the work?

A crew that is rechecked learns one of two things, and neither is excellence.

They learn that their work is a draft you will finish, so they leave it drafty. Or they learn that their work is a test they can fail in your mood, so they hide the interesting decisions and only bring you the safe ones. You then say they do not think like owners, which is true, because you punished owner-thinking the last time it did not match your hands.

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Wes held that sentence a while before he said it. When he does, he is not angry, which is harder to hear. The quiet version means the relationship is still worth a true sentence. If your people have gone quiet, the quiet may be the count they are keeping.

You do not repair that with a speech about trust. You repair it by not opening the next finished thing. One skipped check, told to them in advance so it is not a trick. "I am not coming back to this one. If it is on the floor list, call. If it is not, it is yours." Then you do not come back. The speech without the absence is another photo.

Which part of the recheck is yours?

Circle 3 is whether a customer is fair, whether the market pays enough to keep the good ones, whether a mistake in a wall will ever be traced. You can recheck every terminal and still not control that. The license on the wall is a fact of the trade. It is not a command to touch every lug yourself. This page will not interpret your license, your insurance, or your contracts. The floor is the floor. The rest is a drive at 10:15.

Circle 2 is the person you are checking. You can show them the done line. You can ask what they need in order to own it. You cannot feel proof for them, and you cannot feel it through them. After the handoff, hovering is control in a polite shirt.

Circle 1 is the check you do not make, the tally you are willing to hear from the person who lives with you, and the motion you catch before the truck is in gear. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else. The worth is in the skipped trip.

What does the click feel like before you turn the key?

It helps to know the sensation so you do not negotiate with it as if it were a fact.

It is the unfinished feeling in the hands. They want the tool. Sergio's tape measure clicks when the sentence gets close. Your version might be the inbox, the camera app, the sentence "I'll sleep better if I look." You will not sleep better. You will sleep later, after the look has given you twenty minutes of relief and a new thing to look at tomorrow. Name the relief when it shows up. "This is the click." Then the choice is visible. Stay on the road home, or buy the relief.

There is a version that is not the click. A call that says the floor is involved. Water where water should not be. A customer in the driveway. A person on the crew who is scared and asking you to come. Go to those. The page is for the finished job that your body will not file as finished. On the list, you go. Off the list, the click does not get a vote. Do not amend the list at 10:15. Retroactive floors are how every preference becomes safety.

Sergio's wife had the number because she was counting dinners, not terminals. If you live with someone, ask them what they count. You do not have to agree with the number tonight. You have to hear it without explaining why this week was special. Every week is special. That is the pattern's best trick. Forty specials is a year. One skipped trip is how the number starts to move.

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What do you do with the next finished job?

Ask what you are looking for, out loud. If the answer is proof, you can stop. If the answer is a floor item, name the item and check only that, once, in daylight, with them there, not alone after their dinner and yours. Alone-after is the ritual.

Let someone else keep the tally for one week. A spouse, a bookkeeper, a notebook on the dash. How many finished jobs you reopened. Sergio's number was 40, and he did not have it until he was asked. You need a number that is not a vibe. A vibe will always say this one was necessary.

Skip one, and tell them you are skipping it. Not a secret test where you drive by anyway. A named skip. When the urge hits at the red light, the urge is the click. If your body is already in the truck, run the catch. There it is. Then one breath: in for four, hold for seven, out for eight. Once. Then turn toward home. If something on the floor list is wrong, they were told to call. Let the phone be the tool.

The same alarm at 9:40, in the rate letter, and over one star: Clients texting after hours, Afraid to raise your prices, One bad review.

The book is the fourteen Mondays around that word: the night he says proof, Elena tells him she counted too, and the later night he drives past a finished job and does not stop.

Be first to know when *Someone Else Can Lock Up* is out

More reasons

Can your business run without you?

Small business owner burnout

Clients texting after hours

Afraid to raise your prices?

One bad review

The loneliness of owning the place

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Tonight's move

Next time you reach to re-check finished work, ask out loud what you are looking for. If the answer is proof, skip it.

What to do

Ask what you are looking for, out loud. If the answer is proof, you can stop. If the answer is a floor item, name the item and check only that, once, in daylight, with them there, not alone after their dinner and yours. Alone-after is the ritual.

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