STAGE 4

Choosing what matters

5 to 9 employees

For the owner with a first real team, and one layer between you and the front line. Here are your checks.

YOU ARE HERE

Every question still lands on you

Your team has grown past the point where everyone can just ask you, and they still do. I don’t know your business. You do. What I know is that most of these questions have one answer, and once it is written down, nobody has to ask.

What you are carrying

Managing people for the first time, with one layer between you and the front line. Every question about time off, coverage and rules, and every customer promise, still lands on you.

What breaks first

The work is pulled in every direction because the company has said yes to anyone who would pay. Staff do not know the basic rules. Interviews are spent on people who were never going to fit. Everyone uses the tools a different way and customer notes are scattered. Unplanned costs keep arriving.

How it sounds

“Every job is a custom job.”

“Half my day is questions about vacation and who’s covering.”

“We hired the wrong person again.”

“Half of us use the shared drive and half keep it in their email.”

“I don’t know if a customer is happy until they complain.”

“Where did that bill come from?”

> If two or three of these sound like your week, this is your guide. This is one of the two stages most often rushed. Companies grow past it on the way to the next thing, and the paper never gets written. At thirty people it is still missing, and harder to write, because there are more people to bring along. If you are here now, this is the cheapest time to lay it.

THE STAGES

Where this stage sits

A company grows through stages by the number of people it employs. Each stage has one thing that breaks first, and one piece of ground that has to be laid before the next stage can hold. The ground is mostly paper: who does what, how the work is done, how people start, how they are reviewed, who decides what.

STAGE	NAME	PEOPLE	WHAT BREAKS FIRST	THE GROUND TO LAY
2	Doing it all	The owner, with part-time help	Quality rises and falls with your week	A checklist for the core job, paperwork for every helper, business money kept apart
3	Getting help	1 to 4 employees	More work than one person can carry	The important tasks written down, and the first two weeks for every new hire
4	**Choosing what matters** **You are here**	**5 to 9 employees**	**The work is pulled in every direction**	**The basic rules, a hiring process, one customer record**
5	First managers	10 to 19 employees	Good doers promoted with no training	Managers who know what they own, one service standard, a budget
6	Better, not more	20 to 49 employees	More people have made the work worse	One change at a time, measured performance, an operating rhythm
7	Sorting it out	50 to 99 employees	Every system is overloaded	One home and one owner for people, applicants, customers, money and data
8	A team for each job	100 to 249 employees	No one person can know every part	Specialist roles, one hiring process, a real performance system

Stages 0 and 1 come before steady paying customers and a team, so the stages here start at 2. After stage 8, stage 9 runs from about 250 to 500 people. The counts are employees; at the edge of a band, read the work, not the number.

Stage structure after Alex Hormozi and Leila Hormozi, $100M Scaling Roadmap (acquisition.com). Words and names are Delphine Group's.

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Eight pages that take the questions off your desk

Write them in this order. Each one is a page your team can use without asking you.

> Start with the handbook's first five answers. They take the most questions off your desk the fastest. While you are at it, talk to a broker about basic business insurance.

1. **The work you take, and the work you turn down**
   Which customers and jobs you take is your call. Write the choice down in a few lines the team can use: the work you take, the work you say no to, and who to ask when a job is in between.

2. **An employee handbook**
   Start with the five questions you are asked most and answer each in writing: time off, hours, conduct, who to ask, how a shift or a vacation gets covered. Have an employment lawyer read it before it goes to the team.

3. **A hiring scorecard and interview guide for each role**
   Before you post a role, write the four or five things the person must be able to do and how you will test each. Ask every candidate the same questions, score them on the same sheet, and check two references before an offer.

4. **A decision rights matrix, first version**
   One page. The decisions that come up every week down the side; who decides, who is asked first and who is told after, across the top. Start with the ten you are asked most.

5 **One record for customers**
One place for every customer note and promise. Pick one tool, put every customer in it, and stop keeping notes anywhere else.

6 **A weekly status report**
One short page from each lead each week: what got done, what is stuck, what needs a decision, and who owns each item.

7 **Three to five numbers, every week**
Pick the few numbers that tell you whether the week went well. Same day, same place, every week. If a number never changes a decision, drop it.

8 **Written procedures for the work the team repeats**
Add to the five from the last stage. Every job the team does more than once a week gets a page, written by the person who does it best, checked by you.

Your plan

THE PAGE	WHO OWNS IT	DONE BY
The work you take		
An employee handbook		
A hiring scorecard and interview guide for each role		
A decision rights matrix		
One record for customers		
A weekly status report		
Three to five numbers		
Written procedures for the work the team repeats		

Choosing your customers and your prices is your call, and the selling around it is outside Delphine Group’s lane, so this guide leaves it out. What is in the lane is making the choice stick in the work.

SIGNS YOU ARE DOING IT RIGHT

Here are your checks

Have you done these? Tick only what is true today.

- [ ] The team can say, in a sentence, what work the company takes and what it turns down.
- [ ] There is a short handbook, and the team has read it.
- [ ] Each open role has a scorecard, every candidate gets the same questions, and references are checked.
- [ ] A lead can make the everyday decisions on the matrix without asking you.
- [ ] Every customer note and promise is in one place.
- [ ] Each lead sends a short status report every week.
- [ ] The same three to five numbers are looked at on the same day every week.
- [ ] Everyone uses the same tools the same way.
- [ ] Basic business insurance is in place.
- [ ] Unplanned bills are rare, and you know where each one came from.

If you ticked them all, the ground for the next stage is laid. If not, start at the top. One a week is enough.

The one I will do first, and when

HOW YOU KNOW YOU HAVE GRADUATED

You are ready for stage 5 when

- [ ] The company chooses what work it takes, and the team knows what it says no to.
- [ ] The basic rules are written down.
- [ ] Hiring follows a set process, with real interviews and reference checks.
- [ ] Everyone uses the same tools and one customer record.
- [ ] A handful of numbers are watched every week.
- [ ] Basic insurance is in place.

> One test: a full week where nobody asked you about vacation or coverage, and the last hire was made on the scorecard.

WHAT IS NEXT

Stage 5: First managers

From 10 to 19 employees. For the first time you manage managers, usually two or three, and the best doers are promoted with no training. The ground that holds it is managers who know what they own, one written standard for serving customers, and a budget. The matrix you started here grows into it.

Want this done for your company? Book a free 20-minute call.

https://calendar.app.google/Bc2S9wSpveFS1b6c6

Everything in this guide is yours to use on your own. It is complete enough to do without me. If you would rather have it built for your company, with your team, that is what the call is for. If we're not a fit, I'll tell you and give you the path to get there.

Part of the work is coaching you through the load while the ground goes in. It is leadership coaching, not therapy. If what you are carrying is more than that, I will say so and point you to someone who can help.

> Not sure this is your stage? Take the free stage quiz: **https://tally.so/r/Zj44Ke**

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This guide rests on Delphine Group's stage model, itself a draft. The lines under "How it sounds" are common phrasings, not quotes from anyone. This is general information, not legal, tax or accounting advice; where a page says to ask an accountant or an employment lawyer, do.